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# United States Diplomacy and the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1954

RAY TAKEYH

**T**HE DISTINGUISHED MIDDLE EAST SCHOLAR, Albert Hourani once noted that in absence of the Suez Crisis of 1956, the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1954 would have been the model of Western relations with the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> However, this important episode has received scant attention in the existing historiography.<sup>2</sup> The one scholarly work that critically examined this episode has misperceived the accord as another step in the America's attempt to supplant Britain as the primary power in the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> The tortuous course of Anglo-American diplomacy and the type of an agreement that it produced is the subject of this paper. A careful examination of the motivation and basis, as well as the perception of the accord by the United States, United Kingdom, and Egypt, will help us better understand a key and neglected episode in Western-Egyptian relations.

Moreover, given the fact that the current historiography is constructed through the prism of the Suez Crisis, there is a widespread claim that the administration of President Eisenhower came to power with a determination to pursue policies independent of Britain or even to undermine the British presence altogether in the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> This paper attempts to use American diplomacy toward the Anglo-Egyptian base dispute as a case study denoting the United States' eagerness to sustain a cordial relationship with its Atlantic ally. In its first foray into Middle East politics, the Eisenhower administration betrayed its partiality toward Britain and suspicion of the Egyptian regime. The global needs of Soviet containment and the ties of the Atlantic alliance would propel the United States and United Kingdom toward a careful coordination of both their global and regional policies. Subsequent to the treaty the two powers would cooperate in conceiving an Arab-Israeli peace plan code-named Alpha and in 1956 even

devised a covert program named Omega whose ultimate aim was the overthrow the nationalist Egyptian government headed by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser.<sup>5</sup> It must be noted that at the height of the Suez Crisis the United States never disagreed with Britain's goal of toppling Nasser but merely sought to persist with the gradual Omega plan as opposed to a precipitous resort to arms.

By 1954, evolving strategic considerations and persistent financial difficulties arising from World War II induced Britain to reduce its military presence in the Suez Canal zone. The accord was a culmination of an attempt initiated by the successive postwar governments to remove all the vestiges of colonialism and remodel British presence in the Middle East. However, the British lion was hardly ready to abandon the lands it had imperiously commanded for decades. Whitehall was now to achieve its aims through cooperation with Nasser and the emerging Arab nationalist forces.

The Eisenhower administration was equally sanguine about the accord. Before the Middle East could be organized for the containment of the Soviet Union, the thorny issue of British access to the Suez base had to be resolved. This would require concessions from both the British and the Egyptians. But, once more, the overall U.S. strategic objectives, combined with a continued desire to sustain a degree of British presence, would preclude pressuring the United Kingdom. The final settlement would be the result of internal political developments in both Cairo and London. However, the Eisenhower administration, which viewed its diplomacy as instrumental in crafting the accord, expected the Egyptians to reciprocate by settling the Arab-Israeli conflict and participating in an anti-Communist area defense network.

The Eisenhower administration clearly misread Nasser and did not understand his vision of the Arab world. As the leading exponent of Arab nationalism, Egypt sought to avoid the alignment with Cold War rivals that could only mean external intervention in its affairs. The Egyptians viewed the agreement as the beginning of the reduction of external influence in the Middle East. The treaty would usher in a new era of Arab nationalist activism. This hardly implied reconciliation with Israel or adhering to a regional pact.

The Suez base dispute has its origins in the initial British involvement in Egyptian affairs. By 1882, the official start of the British occupation, over ten thousand imperial soldiers were already in Egypt. The intricate global rivalries of nineteenth century Europe and the growing importance of East Asian and Indian trade routes necessitated direct British supervision of the Suez Canal. The ostensible purpose of the United Kingdom's presence, as enunciated by Foreign Secretary Lord Granville, was to ensure "that the order of things to be

established shall be of satisfactory character and possess the elements of stability and progress."<sup>6</sup> The confluence of imperial ambitions and reformist impulses resulted in a prolonged occupation of Egypt.

The Suez Canal continued to play a vital economic and increasingly important military role in British strategic planning. Before the outbreak of World War I, Britain formalized its power by declaring Egypt a protectorate. This move was more than justified because British control over the Suez Canal partly facilitated the Allied victory in 1919. Approximately 175,000 British and Commonwealth troops moved through the canal to the various war fronts.

A new explosion of Egyptian resentment and nationalist unrest toward the British occupation characterized the aftermath of World War I.<sup>7</sup> London was compelled to move to at least a perfunctory accommodation of Egyptian nationalism by offering Cairo qualified independence. While Egypt would enjoy autonomy over its domestic affairs, Britain would guide its foreign policy and maintain its hold over the crucial Suez base. The 1922 declaration removed the anachronistic protectorate status without endangering any of Britain's essential interests. This would be the prototype of treaties Britain would subsequently offer to other Arab states.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1930s, the specter of another global conflict led both Britain and Egypt to revise the existing arrangement without disturbing its essential foundation. The 1936 Italian invasion of Ethiopia generated fears in the Egyptian ruling elite about the ultimate aims of the fascist powers. Britain's prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, was also quick to recognize that the evolving international exigencies required a friendly, cooperative Egyptian populace. The resulting Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 embodied the key provision of ending British occupation of Egypt's population centers. Egypt's sovereignty was validated when Britain's chief representative in Cairo, the high commissioner became ambassador.<sup>9</sup> Despite the statutory recognition of Egyptian independence, the British ambassador remained the most important single figure in Cairo. Moreover, Britain sustained a large military force in the Suez Canal area.

World War II completely changed the region's political calculus by introducing a new power to the Middle East, the United States. Despite its anticolonial pretensions, the United States was eager to sustain the British presence. The development of an antagonistic relationship with the Soviet Union diminished U.S. interest in autonomous regional development. By 1946, the growing Soviet moves toward domination of the Turkish Straits, Iran, and the Balkans caused a great deal of alarm in Washington and ushered in a doctrine of containment. The most important articulation of the rationale of Harry Truman

administration's came from the Moscow-based diplomat, George Kennan. In a long telegram to the State Department, Kennan outlined how the voracious Soviet global appetite was cleverly complemented by a strategy of gradually, yet relentlessly, expanding its influence. Unlike Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union would not resort to the precipitous use of force but would exploit all vulnerabilities and openings to subvert Western interests.<sup>10</sup> The revival of the traditional Russian imperial policy coincided with the perception of the Soviet Union as a predatory, expansionist power motivated by an ideology that sought world domination.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, areas such as the Middle East that had previously been peripheral to American concerns acquired new found importance.

The postwar British Labour government, beset by economic discontent and the competing demands of the welfare state, sought to reduce the cost of international obligations. Through accommodating moderate nationalism, Britain was to reclaim its empire and sustain its great power pretensions. The chief proponent of this view was Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, whose strategy of re-establishing the British presence through new treaties was one of the turning points in Western relations with the Middle East.<sup>12</sup> In the new treaties, Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan were recognized as entirely sovereign nations with advantageous economic ties binding them to Britain. Through the promotion of social and economic reforms the British hoped to become aligned with growing middle class elements. Such an approach would hopefully prevent the nationalists from turning to the Soviet Union in their quest for independence.<sup>13</sup>

To his credit, Bevin realized that postwar nationalism made blatant colonial rule unrealistic in Egypt. Where the foreign Secretary's fertile imagination failed him was in the perception that there were moderate elements willing to extend the Pax Britannica into the postwar era. Six decades of occupation had left deep-seated anger in the Egyptian masses; even the pliable ruling class could not ameliorate the mass hostilities.

Bevin's ideas, which had much merit for American policymakers, served as the basis of U.S. policy until the Suez Crisis. For the Truman administration, it was absolutely imperative that no vacuum be created in the Middle East that could be exploited by the Soviet Union. The 1947 Truman Doctrine, which formalized the anti-communist strategy, also acknowledged a partnership with Britain in the containment effort.<sup>14</sup> The British foreign secretary keenly understood that the Cold War meant that the United States would "help His Majesty's government to maintain its position in the Middle East."<sup>15</sup> The feeling that the United States and Britain must secure each other's interests was given further impulse in the Anglo-American consultations of 1947 known as the "Pentagon

talks." The Foreign Office representatives assured their American counterparts that Britain had dispelled its overweening imperial pretensions and was ready to play the role of a "benevolent senior partner developing the Middle East in order to prevent further degeneration into acute nationalism."<sup>16</sup> The National Security Council (NSC) approved of this posture, proclaiming "it would be unrealistic for the U.S. to undertake to carry out our policy unless the British maintained their strong strategic, political and economic position in the Middle East and unless they and ourselves followed paralleled policies in that area."<sup>17</sup> The interesting point is the U.S. acceptance of the British position that intense expression of nationalism was utterly hostile to Western interests. The Pentagon talks were not merely an extension of the containment strategy in the Middle East, but a U.S. partnership with Britain in stymieing the emerging forces of nationalism.

The Western sponsorship of the state of Israel and the resounding triumph of the Israeli army in the 1948 War gave further impetus to the radicalization of Arab nationalism. The nationalists no longer emphasized the glory of past Arab empires, but focused on the failure to deal with the Zionist challenge.<sup>18</sup> An all-encompassing re-examination of Arab society took place. This powerful reassertion of nationalism stressed that the Zionist threat and external machinations required a categorical transformation of all aspects of society. The economic and political stagnation that had caused the defeat could not possibly be eradicated by the existing ruling elite that was tainted by decades of collaboration with the imperial powers.

Throughout the Middle East the governing elite attempted to expropriate the nationalists' slogans. This was particularly evident in Egypt when in 1952 the Egyptian premier, Nahas Pasha of the traditionalist Wafd Party, even abrogated the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty.<sup>19</sup> But increasingly the junior army officers were assuming the political leadership of the nationalists. No other sector of society was organized enough for an effective response to public demands and aspirations for a new order. It was from this group that the charismatic Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser and the group of officers he headed, the Free Officers, emerged and overthrew the corrupt Egyptian monarch, King Farouk.

At this point, in 1953 the new Republican administration assumed control in the White House. Along with the arrival of the Eisenhower administration came rhetoric about a policy that was more independent of Britain or domestic Zionist interest groups.<sup>20</sup> However, the newly inaugurated president had a deep-seated commitment to North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European security. The rigid Cold War atmosphere of the early 1950s required British co-

operation and continued American access to its still-formidable global resources. Despite its economic problems, Britain still had military installations in many critical parts of the world. The Eisenhower administration acknowledged that the "remaining military and industrial power of the U.K. taken together surpass those of any other non-U.S. member of NATO and make its contribution indispensable to the North Atlantic alliance as a strategic position of strength."<sup>21</sup> Even in the Middle East, where the British establishment was being vigorously assailed by the nationalists, the U.S. perceived that "a rapid abandonment of the British position would leave a military vacuum that the U.S. would have difficulty in filling and which would accentuate insecurity and create further opportunities for the Soviet or local Communist exploitation."<sup>22</sup> The combination of global and regional considerations would compel the Eisenhower administration to follow the same policy as its predecessor and seek to sustain British influence and power. Despite all the rhetoric about the new, independent approach, American policy under Eisenhower would be characterized more by continuity than change.

The Anglo-Egyptian base dispute was by far the most significant obstacle blocking the development of an anti-communist orientation in the region. By 1953, domestic political factors were preventing both the Egyptian and British leaders from offering concessions designed to reach a compromise. The Free Officers' regional ambitions required the restoration of self-determination and the removal of the imperial powers which had done so much to retard the Middle East's political and economic development. This inspiring nationalistic message resonated throughout the area and offered Cairo an opportunity for regional leadership. Consequently, the new regime established as its minimum aim the reversion of the sovereignty, possession, and property of the Suez Base to Egypt. With the aid of civilian British technicians, the Egyptians would maintain the remaining equipment for an interim period.<sup>23</sup> The firm belief that the British presence constituted an illegal occupation was the essence of the Egyptian negotiating platform. Accordingly, they were not inclined to offer any concessions which detracted from this position.

Moreover, the Egyptians believed that they had already offered huge concessions by renouncing their claim to the Sudan. Since 1898, when England conquered Sudan and placed it under Egypt's dynastic control, successive Egyptian monarchies held firm to Khartoum and blocked agreement with Britain on the base issue.<sup>24</sup> After many development programs, the Foreign Office remained adamant on the issue of Sudanese sovereignty. The forces of Egyptian revolution which had removed King Farouk had no attachment to the preserva-

tion of his throne in the Sudan. The new regime quickly abandoned the domineering slogan of "evacuation and the unity of the Nile valley." The Free Officers seemed to have transcended the dogma of the past and realized their essential interest in the removal of the British forces.<sup>25</sup>

There were a number of factors which ostensibly should have propelled Britain toward a more conciliatory posture. The British Defense Chiefs' Global Strategy Paper of 1952, promulgated by the combined military leadership, signified a further shift away from the traditional concept of maritime defense and reliance on huge overseas installations. In the event of a general war, the Middle East was viewed as crucial, because once Europe was devastated, the bases in the region could be used for counterattack. However, the type of bases that this strategy required were small, mobile facilities on the periphery of the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup> The extensive Suez base would be an easy target for the Soviet air force, which was about to acquire hydrogen bomb capability. Still, the Chiefs were not quite prepared to abandon the idea of land forces in the Middle East. Such a presence would demonstrate continued British resolve and sustain Britain's prestige. The defense officials' review stressed that the "withdrawal of all combat troops from the Middle East would finally convince the world that Britain is no longer a great power and we would be classified with the French."<sup>27</sup> To avert this horrendous fate, some troops would have to remain in the Suez base. This obviously did not mean the existing eighty thousand troops, but certainly a lessened presence.

As the negotiations with the Egyptians stalled, the prospect of violence led Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden to stress that "reoccupying Egypt with all its consequences which this would entail is likely to mobilize world opinion against us."<sup>28</sup> Clearly, continued British intransigence would only damage Anglo-American relations. The NATO partnership which so modulated American pressure on Britain had an equal influence on Whitehall, propelling it toward softening its attitude.

However, the British approach to the negotiations was greatly affected by domestic political considerations, particularly the varying sentiments within the Conservative Party. For a party that had regained power in 1952, partly by criticizing Labour's handling of Middle Eastern affairs, the status of the base would present a difficult challenge. The legendary Winston Churchill who had returned to the prime minister's office with a slim parliamentary majority, was hardly a leader prepared to abandon imperial missions. The combative prime minister's obdurate inclinations were buttressed by approximately forty Conservative backbenchers, who were extremely hostile to further reduction of British



presence in the Middle East.<sup>29</sup> The right-wing Tories were already condemning the agreement leading to Sudanese autonomy as another case of capitulation to irrational native regimes. The Suez base was a far more formidable prize than anything in Sudan. One of the leaders of the rebellious Tories, Julian Amery, warned that the base was the "Clapham Junction of Commonwealth communications and the keystone of the architecture of imperial defense."<sup>30</sup> For generations the installations were the basis and symbol of British power in the Middle East. It would be extremely difficult for masters of a waning empire to capitulate to the reality of nationalism and make the necessary compromises.

Ironically, one of the leading advocates of compromise with Egypt was Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. Had Eden retired from public life in 1955 he would likely be remembered as one of the leading diplomats of his generation. Since the 1930s, Eden had displayed calm judgement and cogent analysis of international events. During 1954, Eden would prove a discerning observer of Middle Eastern political temperament and attempt to reach some kind of an accommodation with the Egyptian regime.

This is not to claim that Eden favored abandoning Britain's position in the Middle East, as he fully shared the idea that United Kingdom's world power status was contingent upon a vibrant presence in the Arab world. However, the foreign secretary perceived that a settlement with Cairo could open an opportunity to approach Arab nationalism on a more favorable basis. Not unlike his predecessor, Ernest Bevin, Eden of 1954 seemed to have sensed that the arrival of a new force in the Middle East was undeniable and required a more constructive policy.

Existing British plans included three scenarios which would guide negotiating behavior. The ideal outcome was Case A, which would leave seven thousand British troops to maintain the base. The installations would thus be immediately available in the event of an emergency. By and large, this was the only case that was somewhat acceptable to Churchill. Case B involved Egyptian takeover of the installations under the supervision of a skeleton British crew. The last plan, Case C, required complete British withdrawal while retaining the right for periodic inspection. The availability of the base in the last two cases would be delayed by sixty to ninety days, respectively.<sup>31</sup> Although each of these contingencies was elaborately devised, British policymakers viewed anything other than Case A as damaging their national security. The United Kingdom's prestige and influence required a continued presence in Egypt. However, even a reduced British presence reminded the Egyptian nationalists of their colonial past and the fact that the Suez garrison had so often been the

force behind Britain's interference in Egypt's internal affairs.

To overcome Egyptian opposition, Churchill sought American support. A unified Anglo-American stance would go a long way toward convincing the Egyptians to be more forthcoming and make the desired concessions.<sup>32</sup> Churchill expressed to Eisenhower his hope that "Anglo-American unity in Egypt would enable us without bloodshed to secure our common military and political interests."<sup>33</sup> However, the stakes were high enough that Britain might have to proceed on its own. Field Marshall William Slim of the Chiefs of Staff captured this sentiment when he declared that "we should not be afraid on matters of importance or principle to let the negotiations fail. That would be much better than weakly yielding to either Egyptian or American pressure".<sup>34</sup> Throughout the subsequent proceedings the British negotiating platform remained impervious to American suggestions. In fact, the United States continuously revised its position to conform with British predilections.

The initial review of American policy occurred when Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, traveled to the Middle East in May 1953. A careful examination of the records reveals that although the trip raised certain questions, it did not fundamentally alter the American path.<sup>35</sup> During his inspection trip, Dulles came to appreciate the magnitude of Egyptian disdain for the British presence. However, this did not imply re-evaluation of American policy on the need to cooperate with Britain and sustain its military presence. Indeed, Dulles attempted to temper Egyptian aversion to the British presence by stressing that the danger of the Cold War required compromise on the pure definition of sovereignty. Dulles even went so far as to compare the British establishment in Egypt with the U.S. military presence in Britain.<sup>36</sup> As with its predecessor, the new administration continued to misperceive the historical conflict which had so thoroughly poisoned Anglo-Egyptian relations.

To be sure, from the outset the U.S. did diverge to a certain degree from British views. President Eisenhower seemed to recognize that "defeating the Communist aims does not include objecting to national aspirations."<sup>37</sup> But American understanding of those aspirations was not consistent with the Free Officers' interpretation. Eisenhower elucidated the American view in a letter to General Mohammed Naguib, the nominal leader of the Free Officers. The president advised the general that the British intentions were merely that the "immensely costly base facilities can be readily usable by the Free World; and that Egypt herself will stand militarily with the Free World against a possible Communist aggression."<sup>38</sup> This revealing letter established the American position, which would not change dramatically. The United States continued to appreci-

ate the continued importance of the Suez base and agreed with Britain on the question of availability of the installations in case of an emergency. While the U.S. had already agreed that the principles of Egyptian sovereignty required reform of existing arrangements, those reforms were still to take note of the need for continued British access to the facilities. As Dulles informed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "Our military people attach importance to the maintenance of the base in event of general war although they do not think it necessary to hold out for the full terms which Churchill at present is holding out for."<sup>39</sup> The difference with Britain was a question of degree which still required the Egyptians to recognize the important task of containment and offer the necessary compromises.

On the crucial question of military aid, the U.S. betrayed its preference for Britain by denying the Egyptians the military hardware they most desired. For the Free Officers a steady supply of arms was absolutely critical for both internal and external security. The power of the new leadership was partly based on the goodwill of an army that was in desperate need of modern weaponry. Colonel Nasser, the architect of the 1952 coup, professed that the "revolution was spearheaded by elements from the army, that although it was a popular revolution, it was the army that led it, and with the background of the ammunition scandal of 1948, the officers are determined to have a strong army."<sup>40</sup> But U.S. policymakers withheld any aid package pending progress in the Anglo-Egyptian talks. Eisenhower assured Churchill that the United States was in full "agreement with what your government is trying to do in the Canal zone."<sup>41</sup> In this regard, U.S. policy was shortsighted. The Eisenhower administration chose not to pursue an important avenue toward gradually building up a relationship of trust with Cairo.

By July 1953, the disintegrating situation in the Middle East implied that American policymakers could not remain entirely impervious to the nationalists' demands, particularly in light of the reduced strategic significance of the Suez base. Eisenhower informed Churchill that he was "convinced it is not possible to concluded a settlement on the basis of Case A, despite its desirability from a military point of view."<sup>42</sup> The Americans seemed to have moved markedly beyond the unrealistic Case A and settled on retaining the absolute minimum number of technicians necessary for the efficient operation of the Suez base. This was essentially Case B and that was still unacceptable to the Egyptians. The administration seemed to be moving to accommodate certain Egyptian claims as a means of reversing the neutralist trends that were strengthened by the stalemate.

The U.S. position was hardly a radical revision of its previous perspective. The administration persisted with its futile attempt to reconcile the two sides and harmonize their differences. Dulles claimed that "we continue publicly to stand with the British, but that Case A is unattainable and therefore a move should be made in direction of Case B."<sup>43</sup> More importantly, the switch was not based on any far-reaching evaluation of the essence of the differences between the U.S. and Britain. Dulles merely blamed the divergence on the "fact that our official reports regarding Egyptian attitude do not agree with London's estimate of the situation."<sup>44</sup> The differences were obviously not the result of varying field assessments, but were based on a more significant disagreement.

This position was still unacceptable to Britain. The emerging differences between American and British perceptions spurred much high-level activity, culminating in an official visit to U.S. by the Lord Salisbury, president of the Council, who assumed control of the Foreign Office when Eden entered the hospital. Lord Salisbury's trip hardly signified the British propensity for compromise as Churchill advised him not to accept "any changes in principles in terms which we have decided."<sup>45</sup> The improbability of obtaining U.S. support for such dogmatic aims seemed to be an issue to be resolved through insistence and pressure. Even if U.S. support was not forthcoming, Salisbury proclaimed, "I should be obligated to make clear to them that we should retain full liberty to conduct our negotiations with the Egyptians as seemed good to us, and that we should be prepared to accept the consequences of a failure to reach agreement with them."<sup>46</sup> The point is important given the limited impact of any American pressure when the British saw their national interests at stake.

To break the impasse in the Anglo-Egyptian talks, the U.S. sought to conceive a formula that would be acceptable to the British, presenting it as an Egyptian proposal. Dulles informed the embassy of the desirability of General Naguib presenting an agreement that "might last 5 years and limit the number of technicians to 4000."<sup>47</sup> Egypt's response went slightly beyond Dulles's formula and reiterated its insistence on an Egyptian commander, limiting the duration of an accord to three years upon which the four thousand remaining British technicians would be withdrawn. While this represented a unique American intervention, the deteriorating situation required it. The U.S. was still not ready to collude against its principal ally as the State Department concluded that "it is an American objective in Egypt to convince the Egyptians that the defense against Communism can only be successful when carried out on a world wide basis and that the Suez Canal and Base as part of this world-wide pattern, must be kept in instant readiness and be immediately available to the West."<sup>48</sup> The

U.S. position cannot be seen as an embrace of the nationalists and abandonment of its ally. The persistent deadlock over facilities of dwindling importance led to a more creative diplomacy still based on existing predispositions.

The formula remained unacceptable to Britain. During the much anticipated July summit, acting Foreign Secretary Salisbury fully adhered to his cabinet instructions and contemptuously dismissed the proposal. The British government's draft reply continued to insist that "we cannot accept an agreement which does not retain essential features of what was described as Case A, namely the technical control of main installations in the Base should remain in the British hands."<sup>49</sup> The formula only elicited British hints that lack of American cooperation could induce a similar U.K. response in other critical regions, such as East Asia. The global value of the Atlantic alliance was the trump card that the British continued to play with great effect.

Precipitously, the U.S. began to abandon the proposal that it had initially inspired. The president did not need to be convinced of the value of the NATO alliance. In his reply to Churchill, Eisenhower merely stressed that the American estimation of the situation was more grave and negotiators would have to be granted more flexibility. There was no thought of parting with Britain over the issue of Egyptian sovereignty, as the president assured his ally that "you can dismiss any thought of our seeming to desert our agreed positions or exhibiting weakness."<sup>50</sup> Dulles went even further and actually criticized the plan that he had conceived. The secretary of state now stressed that "as to availability and duration our defense people fully share desirability of the British formula."<sup>51</sup> The baffled Egyptian leadership received a letter from the president stating that "in all candor I find certain points adversely affecting the security interests of my own country."<sup>52</sup> Although the administration did seem to recognize that the existing Egyptian temperament excluded an agreement based on Case A, the overall strategic objectives necessitated compromise with the British view.

By December 1953, the continuation of the impasse impelled the State Department's Near East Bureau to begin to strengthen the U.S. position. Given the administration's recent diplomacy, there seemed to be a need to take some measure to placate the Egyptians. The idea was to begin discussions on extension of economic aid to Egypt while still holding back the promise of military hardware. As Assistant Secretary of State Henry Byroade claimed, "the aid will enable us to assist more efficiently in overcoming the remaining obstacles to a base agreement."<sup>53</sup> Dulles also recognized that withholding aid to Egypt would have a "very great effect on our Arab relationships."<sup>54</sup> This issue had become particularly acute, for an aid package of twenty six million dollars for Israel had

just been announced. An administration which came to power proclaiming a balanced policy between Arabs and Jews could hardly withhold aid from a key Arab country while dispatching material aid to Tel Aviv.

The reaction from London was nothing less than apocalyptic. Fully recovered from his medical problems, an invigorated Eden stressed that such a move would "give publicity to a major divergence in British and American policies and thus have a serious effect on the Anglo-American relations."<sup>55</sup> Churchill also contributed to the fray by again warning Eisenhower that this issue "might well cause a deep and serious setback to relations between America and Great Britain."<sup>56</sup> The British policymakers' clever appeal to the delicate global balance of power was once again successful. The Americans finally agreed to postpone the aid delivery until after the allied summit scheduled to take place in Bermuda in December. Thus, by the end of 1953 the United States had made some tactical divergences from the British perspective only to be brought back into the fold by Churchill's clever use of the value of the Anglo-American relationship.

On the eve of the important Anglo-American talks, the American embassy in Cairo realized the extent of Egyptian disenchantment with the U.S. The failure of the administration to offer any evidence of support, particularly after Egyptian concessions during Salisbury's visit at the behest of the U.S., further increased the Revolutionary Command Council's already substantial reservoir of suspicion. The Egyptians had an inflated estimation of U.S. power and perceived it as the latter's responsibility to cajole Britain into abandoning some of its positions. The failure was only compounded by refusal to extend aid that had long been promised and was seriously needed.

At the Bermuda Summit, both Churchill and Eden pressed hard for American support. By this time, the essential issue of withdrawal had long been decided and the remaining questions concerned reactivation and uniforms. The British delegation appeared reluctant to concede on both these issues. Their basic strategy was to exert American pressure as a means of obtaining Egyptian agreement.<sup>57</sup> The president, attuned to Cold War requirements, was inclined to support the British on issues of availability, while viewing the prime minister's insistence on an ostentatious display of British military personnel as excessive. The neutralist trends in the region were proceeding at an alarming rate and an accord was absolutely necessary to pave the road for America's grandiose regional objectives. The administration remained reluctant to accept the British terms and intimated that it would be unable to withhold aid much longer than the beginning of January 1954. The Americans were pragmatic enough to rec-

ognize certain inevitable realities. Eisenhower may have sympathized with Churchill's imperialism, but also recognized that a failure to constructively engage the nationalists would breed "bitter conflict that would cause much damage to the Western powers."<sup>58</sup>

The Bermuda Summit cannot be viewed as ushering in a bold, independent U.S. policy, as the inevitable value of the Atlantic alliance influenced the direction of American policy. Once more, the U.S. altered its views to conform to the British perspective. Despite the initial January deadline, British protests induced Eisenhower to assure Churchill, "at your request we have not only withheld military aid, but likewise postponed the initiation of economic aid."<sup>59</sup> Eisenhower further stressed that although the importance of the Middle East required the improvement of relations with Arab countries, "this government has always refused to do so at the cost of anything we believe detrimental to Anglo-American relations."<sup>60</sup> The deferral of any deadline for commencement of aid "delighted and heartened" the British.<sup>61</sup> The Cold War restrictions and Churchill's powerful appeals prevented yet another opportunity to make a meaningful overture to the nationalist regime in Egypt.

In 1954, the convergence of a number of factors made an accord possible. Despite American diplomacy, the final agreement was the product of internal British re-evaluation and the changing political situation in Egypt. Both strategic and economic factors combined to betray Churchill and the right-wing parliamentary backbenchers. The first blow came when the chancellor of the exchequer informed the cabinet of the need to cut 180 million pounds from defense expenditures by the fiscal year 1955-56. The manpower section was the obvious place for the excisions.<sup>62</sup> The choice was between reduction in troops in the critical NATO area or in the militarily less significant Egyptian garrison.

This position was not necessarily unacceptable to the military leadership. In the early 1950s there were significant changes in British defense planning. The already extreme pressures to trim the military budget forced the Chiefs to base their deterrent strategy on less costly atomic weapons. The anticipation that any future global conflict would be waged through nuclear weapons, along with economic factors, reduced the need for reliance on conventional forces.<sup>63</sup>

The crucial turning point on the Suez question was the Chiefs' study of January 1954 which acknowledged that there would soon be two basic alternatives: to remain indefinitely in Egypt or to withdraw completely. Both options were problematic, as the former would entail violence, while the latter would seriously impair British influence. The Chiefs became convinced that given the available resources and political factors "the present plans for defense of the area

were unrealistic and that a reappraisal of the position was required."<sup>64</sup> The strategic changes made retention of a large number of troops in a base that was completely exposed to atomic air strikes an unattractive option.

Anthony Eden, who was seeking a rationale for withdrawal that would impress the cabinet on the need for a settlement, quickly grasped the military leadership's strategic re-evaluation. The foreign secretary emphasized that a "treaty with Egypt, accompanied by redeployment which would show that we have no intention of abandoning our interests, while it would release some of our forces, need not diminish our influence."<sup>65</sup> Eden's pragmatism was not based on a recognition of how Arab nationalism was altering the region's politics, but on a realization that the limited value of the base simply required a reduced presence. The foreign secretary who would later wage war over Suez was hardly inclined to abandon existing commitments.

At least Eden seemed to realistically address the question of true alternatives to Britain's negotiated withdrawal from the Suez. The Churchillian preference for confronting the Egyptians seemed futile and ineffective. There was simply no way that the base could be maintained in the midst of Arab animosity. Between October 1951 and July 1954, 47 British servicemen were killed and 3,279 thefts of British property were reported.<sup>66</sup> The morale of the forces was on a precipitous decline as they lived in fear of continuous siege. Without effective local collaboration, the operation of the base was seriously hampered as its primary function ceased to be safeguarding the Middle East and became self-protection. Failing a march on Cairo and the imposition of a military regime, Britain could not afford to sustain the status quo.

The Chiefs' endorsement of Eden's analysis was the most important factor in convincing a skeptical cabinet. The military leadership viewed the facilities in Libya, Iraq, and Jordan as absolutely essential for the defense of the Middle East and warned, "we believe that a failure to secure an agreement with Egypt will seriously affect our relations with those countries, and in particular will prejudice our ability to obtain Iraqi agreement to use their air fields."<sup>67</sup> Given the move toward advanced mobile air bases the Suez Base was no longer an absolute necessity. The military men, whose job would be to quell an Egyptian insurrection, did not welcome failure in the negotiations. Although the idea of losing the elaborate facilities at Suez seemed unpalatable, the Chiefs noted, "we consider it so important from a general strategic point of view to reach an agreement that we are prepared to accept the disadvantages."<sup>68</sup> Out-betting Churchill and the militant backbenchers, the generals stressed that "if it would tip the scales in favor of an agreement we would be prepared to a even go further on



question of uniforms."<sup>69</sup> The Foreign Office, the unified opinion of military leadership, and Britain's great ally all presented the same case for an accord with Egypt.

However, no agreement would be possible without Churchill's endorsement. The embattled prime minister seemed unable to prevent the tide leading to an accord. The event that pushed the reluctant Churchill over the brink was the 1954 American detonation of the hydrogen bomb. The prime minister conceded that the question of troops in the Suez Base "has become less urgent because of all this hydrogen business that has swooped down on us."<sup>70</sup> To the cabinet Churchill formally presented his recognition "that our strategic needs in the Middle East have been radically changed by the development of thermo-nuclear weapons."<sup>71</sup> At least for Churchill, nuclear developments seemed to have made the undesirable task of withdrawal less distasteful. The important point about the British cabinet deliberations is that the final decision to withdraw was not in any way affected by American diplomacy. Neither Churchill, Eden nor the Chiefs arrived at their positions because of American prodding or suggestions.

The Egyptian decision to compromise was equally unaffected by U.S. diplomacy. Egyptians reached an agreement as a result of the internal political factors. Since the beginning of the revolution there was an uneasy coexistence between Nasser and Neguib. As the two vied for supreme power, they embraced uncompromising platforms on the base issue in order to galvanize their supporters. By March 1954, Nasser finally succeeded in undermining Neguib, replacing him as the premier. The problem was that the regime had done much to popularize Neguib as the symbol of the revolution. The general's demise left the Free Officers in desperate need of some kind of an accomplishment to legitimize their power. An accord stipulating the final withdrawal of the British combat forces would serve as a means of reclaiming national confidence.

The mutual re-evaluation finally produced an agreement. The Egyptians compromised by offering reactivation of the base in case of an attack on the Arab states or Turkey and consultations in case of an attack on Iran. Britain compromised by agreeing to civilian maintenance of the Base during peacetime. The final Anglo-Egyptian Agreement, signed on 27 July, 1954, allowed one thousand civilian technicians to maintain the base. The duration of the accord was to be seven years.

The 1954 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was viewed as a great triumph in both London and Washington. The two powers had failed to coordinate their policy in a systematic manner as their tactics seemed propelled by the circumstances.

Nonetheless, far from using the occasion to consolidate its position in Egypt and supplant Britain, the United States revealed a penchant for siding with Britain whenever U.K.'s fundamental interests collided with the Egyptian perspective. This characteristic would resurface as the Eisenhower administration's hierarchy ranked the value of NATO alliance much higher than cooperation with local nationalists.

The process of negotiations also revealed the internal dynamic of Anglo-American relations, as Britain demonstrated a determination to act independently of the United States whenever it perceived its national interests at stake. Far from acting as a junior partner, Britain pursued its objectives tenaciously and obtained critical concessions from the United States. The resultant American attitude was the result of the convergence of the Anglo-American aims, as both powers shared a similar perspective and a common distrust of Third World nationalists.

Could the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty have served as the basis of relatively cordial relations between the Western powers and Egypt? It seems unlikely, as upon the signing of the treaty set the Middle East on a collision course in which all parties involved strove for regional hegemony.

For its part, the United States was confident that its diplomacy had facilitated the accord. The NSC staff concluded that "the mediation of the U.S. was a major factor in the successful termination of the Suez Base dispute."<sup>72</sup> Given American assistance in achieving Egypt's national aspiration, the administration naturally anticipated the nationalists' support in resolving the Arab-Israeli dispute and reorientation of the region to the great task of containment. Indeed, the president's mind was already contemplating the uses to which regional nationalism could be put to use now that the Western presence was unfettered by the burdens of the past. In a letter to Churchill, Eisenhower noted "if we are intelligent enough to make a constructive use of this force, then the results, far from being disastrous, could rebound greatly to our advantage, particularly in our struggle against the Kremlin's power."<sup>73</sup> In his view, the end of this Suez base problem and the prospect of economic aid were as sufficient to ameliorate any nationalistic qualms Cairo might have had about advancing America's agenda. The Egyptian reluctance to subordinate their objectives to the American aims would lead to much recrimination and anger.

If the Egyptians anticipated that the accord would lead to a diminished British presence in the region, they were quite mistaken. Part of the reason Britain was predisposed to an agreement was its newfound determination to shift its focus to the Northern Tier defense concept. This revised strategy, adopted as early as

May 1953, pledged that Britain's "intention is to deploy Northeast-ward with the object of holding the enemy land forces as far as forward as practical if possible in the passes leading to Persia and Iraq."<sup>74</sup> As recent converts to the "outer-ring" strategy, the British would pursue it with missionary zeal.

The ramifications of the agreement were also interpreted differently in Cairo. In a cogent article, Albert Hourani observed that the foundation of the British presence in the Middle East was power and "this fact molded the attitude of both of those who pursued power and those against whom it had been used."<sup>75</sup> For Egypt, the treaty was the final removal of that power and the beginning of a new era in the Middle East. Egypt was now finally free to pursue her regional ambitions without concern over troop movements in the Suez garrison. The aim of Egyptian foreign policy would be to assume influence over the pan-Arabist sentiments and to secure the leadership of the Arab world. Given the long struggle with Britain and resentment of foreign influence Egyptian pan-Arabism would be distinctly neutralist and not prone to serve the cause of the Great Powers. Such a policy necessitated an anti-Western stance, as Egypt had to defuse potential challenges and their attempts to reorient the region toward Cold War priorities.

The Middle East was about to enter one of its most turbulent decades. Despite the promises and potential of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, the conflicting assumptions, aims and ideologies would result in much tension. At the end, a Middle East incorporated in Western containment strategy was incompatible with Egypt's ambitions, just as an Arab world under the influence of Egyptian pan-Arabism was unacceptable to the Western cold warriors. Whatever its achievements, the treaty failed to bridge this fundamental gap.

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