CHAPTER FOUR

INDIA AND THE NATIONALIZATION OF

SUEZ CANAL, 1956

This chapter deals with India’s policy towards the 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal. It covers the following sections: the first section presents an introduction. The second section gives an overview of how the Suez crisis emerged. The third section explains India’s first reaction towards the nationalization of the Suez Canal and Egypt’s efforts to overcome the Indian hesitation in supporting its decision and section four focuses on Indian efforts to defuse the crisis through negotiations and middle-way strategy. Few concluding remarks follow at the end.

4.1 India and Suez: A Common History

The history of modern India has many links with the Isthmus of Suez and the canal that replaced it. The Suez Canal had been described as “the gateway to India” and “the lifeblood of the British Empire in India”. The strategic importance of Egypt, including the Isthmus of Suez, for India has been proven by the campaign of Napoleon Bonaparte, who invaded Egypt in 1798 to use it as a base to attack the British in India and support their enemies like Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore.  

Muhammad Ali Pasha (1805-1848), the founder of modern Egypt, resisted the proposal of constructing a canal to link both the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea together because he feared that having such canal would encourage European powers to control Egypt. Few years after the Pasha passed away, the Isthmus of Suez proved

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1See Al Dara , “Morasalat al-Sharif Ghalib Bin Mosa’d ma’ Napoleon wa Qadat Hamlatoho” [The Correspondences of al-Sharif Ghalib Bin Mosa’d with Napoleon and the Commanders of his Campaign], Al Dara , vol. 4, Rajab, Shabaan, Ramadan 1416 A.H., pp.5-28; Ahmed Hafez A’wad , Fateh Mesr Al Hadith Aw Napoleon Bonaparte fe Mesr [the Modern Conquering of Egypt or Napoleon Bonaparte in Egypt], Kawkab Al Sharq, (Cairo: n.d), pp.75-78.
to be of vital interest for British when it helped them to shorten the needful time to
send more British forces through it to suppress the Indian mutiny late 1857.²

4.2 The Suez Zone issue and Changing Reactions of India

Independent India inherited the British perception towards Suez Canal. This
influenced its early position from the ongoing conflict between Britain and Egypt over
British military base in Suez zone. Egypt wanted the British to evacuate the base in
order to recover its full sovereignty. Britain argued that the base was important to
secure the continuation of free navigation in the canal on the eve of any conflict
between the “free world” and communism. Nasser tried to get the support of India in
this conflict when he met Nehru in February 1953 but Nehru was so reticent that he
pointed out the importance of the Suez Canal for India’s trade and the trade of other
Asian countries.³ Few months later, India’s position changed dramatically during
Nehru’s visit to Cairo. He concluded his speech at the Egyptian Press Syndicate that
“I see the necessity of solving the question of the Suez Canal at the earliest, on the
basis of Egypt’s full sovereignty. If the problem will not be solved on this basis, I
cannot predict the negative consequences which will prevail in West Asia.“⁴

This policy change on India’s side was the outcome of extensive communications
between Indian and Egyptian leaderships and the efforts of Sardar Pannikar, India’s
ambassador in Cairo, to bring them closer. Meanwhile, Nehru revised India’s policy
in West Asia after he hold a meeting at New Delhi of his ambassadors in the region,
which made him completely aware of the developments in the region.⁵

4.3 The Making of a Crisis

Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal on 26 July 1956, in response to the humiliation by
the USA towards Egypt, via withdrawing the loan that was offered by the World Bank

⁴ Sawt Al Sharq (Cairo), April 1953.
⁵ Sawt Al Sharq (Cairo), July 1953.
to finance the construction of the High Dam and questioning the strength of the Egyptian economy to bear handling such loan. Nasser’s decision created a crisis that rocked the world and threatened to turn into a third world war. However, the aggression failed as the world public opinion stood against the tripartite aggression, America and Russia did not approve of the use of force to settle the dispute, the firmness of Egyptian people and their tenacity in defending their freedom.

Nehru was in the heart of the events either by personal friendship between Nehru and Nasser and on the adoption of their countries policy of positive neutrality and the fact that India was one of the main beneficiaries of the Canal. In addition, India and Egypt shared a bitter colonial legacy.

The following section will answer two main questions: How did the Suez crisis evolve? What was its historical context? The answers to these two questions are necessary to answer the third question: what was the position of India vis-à-vis the nationalization of Suez Canal?

4.5 The Road to the Crisis

The world was divided into two blocs after the Second World War. The two blocs were the Eastern bloc led by the Soviet Union and the Western bloc led by the United States of America and the conflict prevailed between the two blocs, which was termed as cold war. To begin with, the Suez crisis was not only a part of the prevailing international situation and its repercussions on the West Asia and South Asia; therefore, illuminating these repercussions will add more clarity to the picture.

Each bloc tried to extend its area of influence in the world. One of the areas that the conflict prevailed around was the West Asia, which used to be an area of Western influence. The rise of the tide Revolutionary and the national liberation movement in

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the Arab world led to the retreating of colonialism. Egypt played a pioneering role in the leadership of this tide by virtue of its location, its historical and cultural position among Arabs, and the revolution of 23 July 1952.

Initially, USA believed that it can contain the Egyptian revolution and helped in the evacuation of the British from Egypt in the hope that Egypt would join the military alliances associated with the West. Egypt did not fall in the American trap and announced its adherence non-alignment and to the Charter of Arab collective security as the only solution to defend the region. Hence, the conflict began between Egypt and other progressive Arab countries on one hand and USA, Britain and conservative Arab countries on the other hand.

The West established Baghdad Pact, which included Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran and sought to include other Arab countries, including Lebanon, Jordan but Egypt refused to join Baghdad pact and encouraged other Arab countries not to join this pact. In the meantime, Nasser focused his efforts on the domestic front to build and develop a strong and modern society based on equality. He also requested US to supply Egypt with weapons to defend itself. USA delayed its response. On February 28, 1955, the Israeli forces launched an offensive attack in the Gaza Strip, which claimed the lives of more than 38 Egyptian troops apart of civilians. This convinced Nasser to resort to the Eastern bloc to obtain weapons that enable him to defend his country. He concluded the Czech arms deal, which formed an affront to the West and its policies in the region. The arms deal led to Soviet influence in the Arab world in a big way, which further provoked the West and intensified the cold war efforts in the region.

The Americans tried to remedy the situation by offering to finance the High Dam proposal, which would need several years to be constructed. This would guarantee that Egypt remained under Western influence. The West would have a kind of control over the finance of Egypt to a degree that would not allow it to buy weapons from sources other than the West, if the West accepts to sell.

President Eisenhower saw in the High Dam proposal an opportunity to achieve another US goal and that was to get the Arab acceptance of Israel's existence in the
region and to give legitimacy to its presence there and its occupation of the Arab territories of Palestine.

Accordingly, Eisenhower sent his Personal Envoy Robert Anderson to mediate a solution between Cairo and Tel Aviv. Nasser told Anderson that he was not interested in fighting Israel and that his concerns were focused on rebuilding his country. Nasser offered to have peace with Israel if Israel accepts to give the Palestinians their minimum right; namely their state as it was envisioned in the UN resolution of partition, 1948 and that Israel must declare its international borders. Anderson rushed to Tel Aviv to convey to Ben Gurion what he thought about as good news but his endeavours were crashed on the rock of Israel’s expansionist desires when Ben Gurion, the then PM of Israel, dismissed Nasser offer. The Israeli leader saw Nasser’s decision to develop Egypt as a threat to Israel.

Failing to achieve any of its targets, US decided to withdraw its offer to finance the High Dam proposal. Meanwhile, Nasser took one more step that alienated the West i.e., his recognition of communist China. Through this move, Nasser tried to escape attempts by the United States and its allies to ban the export of arms to the West Asia through the United Nations. Nasser was aware of the fact that such ban will be imposed only on Arabs and not on Israel. Communist China was not a member in the UN and therefore it can supply weapons to Arabs in case they ask for. 8

Nasser understood what was the game about and he foresaw the possibility of the withdrawal of America and the West from funding the High Dam proposal as a normal reaction to their failure to achieve their political goals, which focused on Egypt’s joining western military alliances and Arab acceptance of Israel. Accordingly, Nasser was thinking of the alternative solution and, the idea of nationalization of the Suez Canal was occupying his mind even before his travel to attend the summit of Brioni in Yugoslavia in 1956.

He advised Egypt’s ambassador at Washington to accept all American conditions to fund the High Dam proposal. Nasser, Nehru and Tito came to know through the news

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that US had withdrawn its offer to finance the High Dam. In their flight back to Cairo, Nehru expressed to Nasser his dissatisfaction with the American decision and the way they declared it. "No limit to their arrogance" Nehru repeated twice. Immediately after their arrival at Cairo, the two leaders spent Friday together where they discussed the situation and agreed that what happened was a beginning of a policy and not the end of it.  

Nehru left Egypt at 8.00 am, 21 July 1956. It seemed that Nehru felt that it would be difficult for his friend to ignore his presence in Cairo and perhaps Nehru even feared that his presence in Cairo would put a part of the responsibility for Egypt’s reaction on him. On 26 July 1956, the anniversary of King’s leaving Egypt; Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal during his speech.  

4.6 Nehru’s Initial Reaction: A Controversy

Nasser’s decision irritated and angered London, which sought to attract its American and French allies to adopt its position against Nasser. As Nasser expected, the direct reaction of Eden, PM of UK, was to launch a military campaign against Egypt but his military asked him to give them a month and a half to prepare for war. Moreover, his French allies were involved in the Algerian war and did not have immediate willingness to enter the battle. Given these rapid developments and its seriousness, Nehru felt embarrassed in front of various international parties because he was in the company of Nasser shortly before the latter took the decision to nationalize the Canal and he was not informed about the decision in advance, and others might think that he knew it before but hid it.  

Nehru conveyed this impression to the others when he denied knowing Nasser’s decision prior to the nationalization or that he had any talks with Nasser on the Suez  

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9 Heikal, n.8, P.114.  
10 ibid, n.4, pp.447-455.  
12 Heikal, n.8, p.121-131.  
13 ibid, pp.135-143.  
14 ibid, n.4, p.486.  

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issue or the Egyptian-British relations. Even Nehru seems sincere in his denial of the foregoing; he criticized the Egyptian decision while as unfortunate reaction to the withdrawal of the financing of the High Dam. He went further to add that the way in which Egypt handled the Suez issue was not India’s way, and that India would have followed a different method. However, Nehru managed successfully to keep away the Western suspicions about his involvement with Nasser in the decision. The success of Nehru has been evident by the fact that the CIA admitted that Nehru was disturbed by the decision of Nasser. CIA evaluated India’s initial position as a good one.

The question is to what extent Nehru was disturbed by the Egyptian decision? In fact, Nehru’s denial of his knowledge of the decision of nationalization was true for the simple fact that the decision had been crystallized in the mind of Nasser only after the departure of Nehru from Cairo by at least one hour. However, both Nehru and Nasser discussed US decision to withdraw its offer to finance the high Dam in their way back from Brioni to Cairo. Nehru felt the negative impact of US decision upon Egypt, but he did not imagine that the Egyptian reaction could be so forceful.

Nehru’s annoyance was more in appearance than in heart. India’s Deputy High Commissioner in Pakistan believed that contrary to what has been rumored about Nehru’s annoyance of Nasser’s secrecy in taking the decision of nationalization; he was indeed comfortable with what happened as it lifted the great responsibility away of his shoulders and because it was the right of the Egyptians alone to bear such responsibility.

While the Indian government was hesitating to support Egypt’s decision, the Indian public and press was full of sympathy with Egypt soon after the nationalization. Even

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16 American Intelligence (SNIE) admitted in its “Estimate”, dated 31 July 1956 that Nehru was disturbed by the nationalization of Suez Canal. USA Embassy, New Delhi, reflected the same impression of Nehru’s reaction in its telegraph to the State Department, 30 July 1956, ibid, pp. 42, 84.
17 Heikal, n.4, P.455; Abu Bark, n.12, p.309.
18 This was during a meeting between the Deputy High Commissioner of India at Karachi and Mr. Adel Hasib, the First Secretary of Egyptian Embassy in Pakistan. See Efada [Report] no.76 (Top Secret) from the Egyptian Ambassador in Pakistan to the Permanent Under-Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), 5 August 1956, Malaf [File] No.30/45/15 Vol.3, Mahfaza no.1501, The Archive of MFA Seri Gadid (AMFASG).
the Indian government's reluctance was supposed to be temporary. The CIA expected this because India had a tendency to feel that Egypt has the right to the nationalization that serves Egyptian interests. 19

This Indian tendency has been described by John Thevi, India’s ambassador in Rome as a “natural position” of India, which has long suffered from the bitterness of Western colonialism”. John Thevi expressed his congratulations to the Egyptian Charge d'Affairs in Rome on the nationalization of the Suez Canal. John considered the nationalization a "great step" and an implementation of Brioni declaration and the principles of Non-Aligned Movement. He added that Nasser’s decision was “a severe blow to colonialism,” and the peace-loving countries should follow Nasser’s model. He added that the nationalization was a "hard lesson" to the United States which wanted to dehumanize Nasser but he emerged with more prestige and enhanced popular image than before. 20

On the British side, London had been in touch with New Delhi on the nationalization issue. London had requested Nehru to approach Nasser for an urgent compromise solution. 21 India had been eligible for many reasons, to play the role of mediator in resolving this conflict; not least, its strong ties with Cairo, its moral position among the newly independent States, its membership in the Commonwealth and its adoption of the five principles of Panch Sheel or peaceful coexistence in international relations.

4.7 India at the Crossroads

India’s hesitation in supporting Egypt’s decision to nationalize the Suez Canal was clear in Nehru’s letter to Nasser, dated August 3, 1956 where Nehru has revealed India’s concern over the nationalization. As one of the users of the Canal, India with unknown future scenario could not predict the outcome. Nehru suggested to Nasser himself to call for an international conference on the Suez Canal, an idea that was initially not favored by Nasser. 22

19 Moring, n.16, P.92.
20 Efada no.167 ( Secret ) from Egyptian embassy, Rome, to the Under-Secretary of MFA, Cairo, dated 28/7/1956, Malaf no. 30/45/15 Vol.3, Mahfaza no. 1501, AMFASG, Cairo.
21 Al Ahram (Cairo), 28/7/1956; 30/7/1956.
22 Heikal, n.4, P.486.
The impact of India's hesitation affected the positions of other States that traditionally adopted the same line of India's foreign policy. A clear example of that was when India's ambassador to Yugoslavia met the Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia after he learned that the Minister had shown in a clear way and without any reservation his happiness and support to Egypt's successful step. The ambassador of India asked the Foreign Minister that Yugoslavia had to lighten its strong support to Egypt, because the question of the Canal "is thorny and extremely important for India" as most Indian imports and exports are carried out through the Suez Canal on board British ships.23

India's reluctance to support Egypt's decision was the outcome of several factors, which were interrelated and interdependent. One of these is the nature of the Indian foreign policy. According to Mustafa Kamel, Egypt's ambassador in New Delhi, the genesis of India's foreign policy, despite its public idealism, was to protect the interest of India before everything else, avoid international conflicts, any political risks, and its adherence to very large extent passivity in dealing with international problems. Kamel pointed out that India preferred to work behind the scenes, than to appear in the lights of outdoor theater, with caution, assessing all the possibilities and avoid public statements, which might require official obligations.24 In this case, the interest of India was the continuation of freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal without raising fees, at the same time India did not want to lose the West or gain its enmity. Therefore, Nehru was reluctant to declare explicitly his position until the Indian public opinion forced him to declare his position.25 At this point, Nehru already shaped his position after his correspondences with Nasser, and the efforts of Egypt's ambassador in New Delhi to convince his colleagues in India's Ministry of External Affairs of the real dimensions of the crisis.

There was also a psychological factor behind India's hesitation to take a clear position. Kamel pointed out that many Indian officials who worked for a long time in the service of British India tried to avoid taking any anti-British position. Moreover,

23 Efada no. 45 (Top Secret) from Hussein Roshdi, Egypt's ambassador in Belgrade to MFA, Cairo, 9 August 1956, Vol.4, Mahfaza no.1506, AMFASG, Cairo.
24 Efada no.248 (Secret) from Egypt's ambassador, New Delhi to MFA, Cairo, dated 3/8/1956, Malaf 30/45/15, Mahfaza no.1501, AMFASG, Cairo.
25 ibid.
these officials were not ready to support any friendly state for India in case it had disagreement with Britain. This might also be because Indian officials avoided being anti-British for their fear that this may encourage Britain to support Pakistan in the Kashmiri question.

The economic factor also contributed to the indecision of India vis-à-vis the nationalization of the Suez Canal. India was concerned about the effects of the new situation on its economy. Nehru wrote to Nasser on 3 August 1956 that India’s direct concern was because it is one of the main beneficiaries of Suez Canal, like others. India feared also the possibility that Egypt might impose high fees that would adversely affect India's economy and trade with the West. In the same context, the Indian Congress Party expressed its fear that the outcome from might affect the five-year plan of India.

The Islamic or Pakistan factor was also influencing India’s hesitancy to decide its position. When Egypt nationalized the Canal, some Indian officials thought that it is dangerous for India that the Suez Canal could be controlled by an Islamic state because 80% of India’s trade passed through the Canal, and if Pakistan may agree with this Islamic state (Egypt), they may be able to obstruct the passage of Indian trade in the Suez Canal, or at least raise the fees on Indian ships, which will negatively affect the Indian economy.

4.8 Egypt Seeks Indian Support

In the face of this Indian hesitancy, Egypt had been active to remove Indian fears and to win its support. Egyptian Ambassador to India worked calmly and focally trying to transform the Indian position in favor of Egypt and Nasser contributed through his correspondences with Nehru to achieve this goal.

26 ibid.
27 Heikal, n.4, p.797.
28 See the Estimate of American Intelligence (SNIE), 30 July 1956, in Moring, n.16, pp.84, 92.
29 Al Ahram, 31/7/1956.
30 Efada no.295 from Egypt's ambassador, New Delhi, to MFA, Cairo, 31 August 1956, Malaf no.30/45/15, vol.7, Mahfaza 1505, AMFASG,Cairo.
4.8.1. Kamel: The One Man Battle

Egypt's ambassador Mustafa Kamel did his best to win India's support but he found New Delhi reluctant to declare unequivocal support for Egypt. Nevertheless, he held talks with Nehru and other top Indian officials, like VK Krishna Menon, Dutt, and CS Jha, who were in charge of implementing and shaping India's foreign policy. Kamel began his diplomatic campaign by meeting Jha, Joint Secretary, West Asia and North Africa (WANA), in Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). At the outset, Kamel was self-confident and did not appeal for Indian assistance. In fact, he thanked for the support of the Indian media and civil society for Egypt's decision on Suez. Kamel highlighted the full impact of the current situation on India and that any harm, which would befall on Egypt, will not be in the interest of India. In addition, Kamel asked Jha India's position on the issue. Johan's view was that although Egypt's decision was bold but the crisis remained dangerous. More accurately, he frankly admitted that the Indian public opinion was in favor of Egypt. He also added that the Indian leadership does not deny the right of Egypt to nationalize the Canal, but they do not favor its public declaration, which might harm Egypt than bring benefit. He also pointed out that India did not support Britain against Egypt but admitted the importance of Canal for Indian economy. Jha's views were influenced by British rumors that propagated the idea of Egyptian-Pakistani (Islamic) alliance against India. However, Kamel, who was aware of these rumors, asserted that the nationalization act was a legal decision and that Egypt had guaranteed the rights of shareholders and the freedom of navigation in accordance with its international obligations, and that Egypt's adherence to the nationalization of the Suez Canal will not relent. Interestingly Kamel pointed out that nationalization was an Indian policy, that Egypt was following the Indian model, and if Egypt succeeds in achieving its goals, this will help India to achieve its

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31 Efada no.261 from Egypt's ambassador, New Delhi, to MFA, Cairo, dated 17/8/1956, Malaf no.30/45/16, Vol. 4, Mahfaza no.1506, AMFASG, Cairo.

32 Other Indian officials tried to justify India's silence. For example, In the morning of 4th August, 1956, India's High Commissioner in Pakistan told Egypt's ambassador that India's silence was because India was searching for a solution which will not endanger the international peace. In the evening of the same day, the Deputy High Commissioner of India in Pakistan told the Egyptian Charge d’ Affairs that "India believe that the way to avoid the outbreak of world war, Britain should remain a tempered factor in case if there is any big difference between USA and Russia. India is still a member of Commonwealth because India believes that it can pressurize Britain by using the vital interests of the latter in India and making Britain the tempered factor in the world crises between Russia and USA. Top Secret Efada no.76 from Egyptian ambassador (Pakistan) to MFA, 5 August 1956, Malaf no. 30/45/15 vol.3, Mahfaza no.1501, AMFASG, Cairo.
full economic independence. At last, Kamel told Jha that the idea of Egyptian---Pakistani coalition was just a British rumor. However, Kamel persisted in exploring the Indian position towards the crisis. He concluded that despite the seriousness of the situation, the success of Egypt to win the dispute is possible. Later, he had a meeting with Dutt on this issue. In the meeting, Kamel thanked him for the support of Indian public for Egypt's cause. Dutt showed his gratitude for these thanks and expressed his sympathy with Egypt. Kamel told his Indian friend that India should be aware of the situation to enable it to take a position as a friend and ally of Egypt, based on the full awareness of the situation. Kamel told Dutt that the withdrawal of the financing of the High Dam was just a step towards war, as also to intimidate the non-aligned states and the pursuit of tough policy against them. He argued that if the non-aligned countries are not united in supporting Egypt and if this attack in intimidating Egypt succeeds, they would go after every non-aligned country. Kamel argued that since early June 1956, UK-US had been adopting extremism in dealing with the non-aligned bloc, especially Egypt, India and Yugoslavia, and that this trend had become increasingly evident after Dulles called neutrality as immoral. This statement was followed by US decision to withdraw Ambassador Cooper who was known for his policy of friendliness towards India. Even the American Press had started attacking India and Egypt. In addition, the US Congress had stopped military assistance to Yugoslavia. He presented the threat to Egypt as a threat to the entire non-aligned bloc and that it came in the wake of the Brioni summit. He also felt the West had created this crisis to deprive Egypt of its economic and political independence, and to have a strong military to defend itself. He added that the Western powers were intimidating the non-aligned countries and other countries that may think to join them and to prevent the implementation of the policy of full cooperation between non-aligned States, which was decided in Brioni. He added that the West want to exploit the poor Afro-Asian countries to use them as a market for its products. Kamel argued that Egypt was not the crisis maker but its victim and warned that the West cannot use its military to solve the crisis and mentioned Russian intervention, danger of an oil embargo from Arab countries, and the differences between USA on one hand and Britain and France on the other. Dutt listened to Kamel's assessment and mentioned that India is fully aware of the real causes of the crisis posed by the West and that

33 Efada no.248, n.25.
India was studying all the options to help Egypt get out of the crisis safely. He expressed his appreciation for the skill and courage of the Egyptian act and asked Egypt to exercise self-restraint.34

Kamel continued with his efforts during August to eliminate any hesitation on the part of India. With the passage of time, Kamel was able to persuade Indian officials that the current crisis threatens the independence of India also and that the obsession of the Islamic/ Pakistani Group does not represent a danger to India in the same way which an international management board of the Canal will do. Gradually, Indian officials became convinced that the Western goal behind the crisis was to topple Nasser. India perceived that if the West did succeed in achieving such goal, this would lead to the collapse of the Arab front headed by Egypt and the West would dominate the region once again. If this were to happen, India will be surrounded by Western military alliances. Then, India will have two options only, either to join the Western bloc or the Communist bloc. In both cases, India will lose the freedom of action and its independence will be compromised as the international prestige, which India gained lately.35

The Egyptian ambassador succeeded in convincing Indian officials that the British propaganda, about possible Pakistani influence on Egypt, against India especially to prevent passage of Indian ships in the Suez Canal. Kamel reassured India that Egypt will allow such an eventuality and argued that it was not in the economic interest of Egypt to do so. He also argued that even if Egypt for the sake of argument were to ally with Pakistan on Islamic ground to prevent India from using the Canal, the latter could seek the support of the Christian West, but incase the West took over the Canal and used it as a tool to control the whole of Asia, including India, then India can hardly do much in such a dispute with the Western powers.36

Fortunately, Pakistan’s position towards the nationalization was not in favor of Egypt as Pakistan came to support the Western powers. This convinced India that the idea of Pakistani-Egyptian coalition was a mere rumor. Under the situation, India saw an

34 ibid.
35 Efada no.295, n. 31.
36 ibid.
excellent opportunity to strengthen its influence and shape its image in the Arab, Islamic and Third World as a defender of the oppressed and suppressed states and came out as the defender of their freedom. India’s assessment was that Pakistan’s pro-western position would isolate it in the Islamic world.\textsuperscript{37} Subsequently, India’s expectation proved to be true.\textsuperscript{38}

In general, the Indian position has been characterized by the gradual shift from hesitation in supporting Egypt to declaring this support timidly and in an indirect way. Finally, India declared its outright support. The development of the Indian position coincides with the energetic efforts of Mustafa Kamel and the sustained correspondence between Nehru and Nasser. In these correspondences, Nasser requested Nehru’s advice and informed him about the recent developments. Nasser’s approach made Nehru happy and this has been reflected in Nehru’s letter to Nasser, dated 5 August 1956, wherein Nehru praised the Egyptian position and asked Nasser to follow a compromise approach despite Western provocation. At the same time, Nehru pledged not to attend the London conference without reservations of the trilateral statement and on all procedures and Nehru pledged that India will not accept any attempt to weaken the Egyptian position.

On 6 December 1956, Nehru urged Nasser not to take the issue to the UN, as this will mean acceptance of the idea of international control over the Suez Canal. Nehru asked Nasser to counter the British invitation for London Conference with an Egyptian proposal for another conference. Nehru also suggested that Egypt should protest how Britain can arrange such a conference and decide whom to invite without consulting Egypt.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, Egypt succeeded in removing whatever doubts Nehru had about Egypt’s decision. Soon India, the press, and other bodies began to support Egypt in an unprecedented way.\textsuperscript{40} India strongly criticized the conduct of Britain in freezing Egyptian financial in the British Banks, considering such step as a dangerous

\textsuperscript{37} ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} For example, Nasser refused to receive the PM of Pakistan. He also refused Pakistan’s participation in the UN peacekeeping forces, which was going to replace the withdrawing aggressive forces.
\textsuperscript{39} See the text of these correspondences between Nehru and Nasser in Heikal, n.4, pp. 486-487, and 797-801.
\textsuperscript{40} Efada no.248, n.25.
precedent that might be applied to others in future and that this will damage the financial reputation of Britain.41

On 2 August 1956, Nehru commented on the Suez crisis and said it was a sign of the weakness of European hegemony over WANA and much of Asia, and such domination, which lasted for more than a century is ending. He asserted that India must understand the new system and the changes that are taking place everywhere in the world if India wants to evolve.42 For all practical purposes, Nehru was endorsing the Egyptian decision on nationalization. However, the lack of an explicit declaration of Indian support to Egypt criticized by Times of India and other Indian newspapers. They asked Nehru to issue an official statement in support of Egypt. In addition, Indian Members of Parliament joined the call of these newspapers who expressed their dissatisfaction with Nehru’s lack of explicit reference.43 On 8 August 1956, Nehru delivered another speech on the issue but this time in the Indian Parliament.44 Nehru declared that “the Canal itself is in Egypt and [it is] an integral part of Egypt. The sovereignty of Egypt is thus beyond question”. Nehru blamed the Anglo-American decision to withdraw the financing of the High Dam without prior consultation with Egypt, for the Suez crisis. He told the Lok Sabha: “We also much regret that, in the steps that have led up to this crisis, there has been no exercise by one side or the other of their respective or common initiative to inform or consult one another. We have great respect and regard for the sovereignty and dignity of Egypt and for our friendly relations with her. The decision of the United States Government and United Kingdom Government not to fund Aswan Dam precipitated the Egyptian nationalization decision. More than the decision, the way it was done hurt Egypt’s pride and self-respect, and disregarded a people’s sentiments.”45 Nehru criticized the Western powers for creating the crisis, as Egypt in any case would take over the Suez Canal in 1968 instead of 1956. Nehru warned that these measures might lead to dangerous results. He noted, “The French and the United Kingdom reacted to the

41 ibid.
43 Al Ahram, 7 August 1956.
45 ibid.
Egyptian announcement quickly, sharply and with vehemence.” He stated that such reaction disappointed the Asians and revived their bitter memories of colonialism. He added that “Threats (by France and UK) to settle this dispute or to enforce their views in this matter by display or use of force, is the wrong way.”46 Nehru told the Lower House that India’s participation in the London conference is conditional. The condition is that India’s participation will not “injure the interests or the sovereign rights and dignity of Egypt”. Based on the previous points, Nehru set the goal of India at this crisis as: “averting [the] conflict and obtaining a peaceful settlement before it was too late... this settlement of this problem, on the basis of the sovereignty and dignity of Egypt, by agreement amongst all concerned, and the abandonment of postures of threats and violence and on unilateral action by either party, are of the utmost concern to India”.47

Nehru’s speech was warmly welcomed in Egypt; Anwar al- Sadat wrote an editorial on Al Goumhoryia, entitled "A Giant and A Dwarf ". He was referring to Nehru as the giant and Eden as the dwarf. Sadat criticized the speech of Britain's Prime Minister and praised the speech of Nehru, considering it as a historic document based on the facts. Sadat had criticized Eden for his speech and described it as stateless argument and weak conclusion. Having reviewed the content of the two speeches, Sadat concluded his editorial by saying: "I wanted to ... feel proud of this lesson which a giant from the East taught to the rulers of the West who became dwarfs today ... Regards for you Nehru, the giant of my home, the East”.48

Al-Ahram also considered the speech of Nehru as proof of the success of the Egyptian foreign policy based on non-aligned policy, which gave Egypt an international weight and increased their supporters. It praised Nehru’s support for Egypt and his condemnation of Britain and France and attributed the Indian position in favor of Egypt to the strong bilateral relations, which are aimed at the consolidation of world peace.49

The influence of Nehru’s speech was visible in Nasser’s speech of 12 August 1956, where he called for a broader conference with the help of the UN. The idea of

46 ibid.
47 ibid.
48 Al Goumhoryia (Cairo), 10 August 1956.
49 Al Ahram, 9/8/1956.
organizing such conference was suggested by Nehru in his letter to Nasser, dated 6 August 1956.\textsuperscript{50} Moreover, Egypt refused to participate in the London conference and cited India’s absence. Furthermore, Nasser considered Anglo-French measures against Egypt as

not only a threat to Egypt but also a threat for all the nations that are striving to get rid of the colonial domination and to maintain its sovereignty and independence…It is a threat to the international peace and security … all Asian, African and peace-loving nations condemn these acts, which violate the United Nations Charter and the norms of international law.\textsuperscript{51}

India welcomed Nasser’s statement was welcomed and considered the agreement of all states to attend the conference, proposed, by Nasser was the best way to settle the Suez crisis.\textsuperscript{52} India noted that the Egyptian statement softened the severity of the crisis. It also weakened the Anglo-French position.\textsuperscript{53} An Indian diplomat commented at the absence of Egypt in London conference saying that the conference was “a weeding without bride”.\textsuperscript{54} He noted that if the conference were to succeed, it would reach a solution, which may have convinced Egypt to participate in negotiations.

At this point, the Suez crisis became the main concern for Nehru and his favourite issue to talk about in every meeting and include it in his speeches. In his speech on 15\textsuperscript{th} August 1956, Nehru hoped that London conference might succeed in reaching a peaceful solution for the Suez Crisis, which he described as great danger for the world. Nehru asserted that the world should try to resolve the problem peacefully even if London Conference failed. Nehru identified his goal at this stage as “mediation for peace”. He added the motivations of India are its friendship with the conflicting parties, its commitment for the implementation of Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, its fears that the crisis may turn into a world war that may reach India regardless of India’s liking or disliking. Nehru warned any country of trying to settle the crisis by force as this would lead to bad results, which might affect the

\textsuperscript{50} Heikal, n.4, pp.800-801.
\textsuperscript{51} See the Text of Nasser’s speech to the Arab nation, in Mustafa El Hefnawi, \textit{Qanat El-Suez was Moshkelateha Al-Moa sra : Horvat El- Milaha} [ The Suez Canal and its Contemporary Problems : The freedom of Navigation in the Canal ], ( Cairo, n.d) p. 591.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Al Goumhoryia}, 14 August1956; \textit{Al Ahram}, 14 August1956.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Efada no.261}, n.32.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Al Goumhoryia}, 14 August 1956; Al Ahram, 14 August 1956.
whole world. Nehru concluded his speech by inviting all concerned parties to solve the problem through adopting the spirit of mutual confidence and respect. He added that every party should avoid abusing or disregarding the other parties. He also asserted that the permanent solutions could only be achieved on the basis of friendship and understanding.55

Nehru’s pessimism in this speech was the result of India’s awareness of the real intentions of France and Britain. This awareness has been reflected in the meeting between India’s High Commissioner in Karachi and Egypt’s ambassador there on 15th August 1956. The Indian High Commissioner told the latter that: “Both Britain and France are insisting on toppling the current regime in Egypt and removing President Gamal Abdel Nasser, whom they do not consider as only dangerous for their interests in the Middle East but also dangerous for their entities as big countries. They also succeeded in convincing USA of their views…” 56 This fact enforced Nehru to stand on the other bank of the river to the extent that Al Ahram’s special reporter in New Delhi described Nehru’s speech as a turning point which put India in an opposite position to Britain and France because the two countries were insisting on using violence if it is necessary to settle the crisis.57

India’s fears of Anglo-French intentions encouraged Nehru to advise Egypt to follow a cautious approach in dealing with the situation and to avoid inflaming the West in order not to give them an excuse to attack Egypt. Nehru wanted Egypt to balance its position. He told Mustafa Kamel “I dare to recommend that we should be cool and kind at the same time”.58 Kamel himself recognized the new changes in India’s position in this stage of the crisis. He wrote to his Ministry that: “Both the Indian government and people are supporting Egypt very strongly and they are doing their best to save the situation in a way that satisfy Egypt…the behavior of the Indian government in this regard has no precedent in the history of the Indian diplomacy and this makes us feel full satisfied…”59 Kamel identified India’s goal as finding “a middle way solution” and explained further the dimensions of this solution as India is

55 Sawt Al Hind, 7 September 1956.
56 Efada no.82 (Top Secret) from Egypt’s ambassador in Pakistan to MFA, Cairo, dated 15/8/1956, Malaf no. 4/52/30 Vol.1, Mahfaza no.1420, AMFASG, Cairo.
57 Al Ahram, 16/8/1956.
58 Efada no.261, n.32.
59 ibid.
working: “to prevent the crisis reaching the extent of having an armed conflict between the West and Egypt and saving the face of the West, who has been entangled in its statements and actions to a far extent, which make it practically impossible for Egypt to have a full victory?”

India’s support to Egypt’s position helped to a great extent in lightening the severity of the crisis as well as being considered a diplomatic victory for Egypt against Britain as the latter could not afford to anger India because that was going to put whole Asia against Britain and even risk the membership of India in the Commonwealth. Moreover, India’s position influenced morally the position of USA towards the crisis. This was evident by President Eisenhower’s decision not to attend the First London Conference after he came to know that Jawaharlal Nehru would not attend the conference.

4.9 India at the London Conference 1956

Nominally, USA proposed the invitation of India, Pakistan and Ceylon to the first London’s Conference (1956) ostensibly based on commercial interests and benefits, but the real motivation behind inviting these countries was the personal feelings of Mr. John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State, that these countries can pressurize Nasser. Meanwhile, the Eastern Economist forecasted that India as a member of the Commonwealth and a close friend of Egypt could play a pivotal role in London conference and come with an acceptable results. On the other side, New Delhi had already identified its position in the conference. Mrs. V. L. Lakshmi Pandit, Indian High Commissioner to the U.K, had told the British Foreign Secretary that India will not be bound or abide by any decision of the conference, though taken by the majority, in the absence of the concerned party namely, Egypt. Nehru and Menon had emphasized the foregoing matter several times in their statements. Furthermore, Mrs. Lakshmi asked the British Foreign Secretary to invite the Arab countries to

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60 ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Moring, n.16, p.164.
63 ibid, p.104.
64 ibid, p.191.
65 Al Ahram, 7 August 1956.
66 ibid.
attend the conference and give them the opportunity to express their views freely. She also asked for changing the venue of the conference. However, Britain did not invite the Arab countries and kept London as the venue for the conference. Nevertheless, other Indian demands were accepted, as the acceptance of the invitation to attend the conference does not necessarily mean acceptance of the principles of internationalization. This made it easy for India and its neighbours in Asia to accept the invitation.

Moreover, Britain demonstrated to Nehru that it was convinced by his opinion that it would be absurd and shortsighted attempt on the part of London and Paris to continue threatening to use armed force to compel Egypt to accept the terms of the Trilateral Statement. This was an incentive for India to attend the conference. On the other side, India had tried to pressurize Britain to show flexibility in dealing with the crisis. For example, an Indian diplomat voiced concern that he would withdraw from the conference if Britain and the West were going to insist on adopting the Trilateral Statement.

The Indian delegation to London conference constituted under the chairmanship of V. K. Krishna Menon and the membership of Lakshmi Pandit, N.R.Pillai, C.S. Jha, A.S. Lal and J.S. Mehta. Indian public expected Menon to play a significant role at the conference considering his skill in developing and drafting conciliatory and diplomatic formulas, and his friendship with Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, the then British Foreign Secretary. That friendship provoked the Russian ambassador in New Delhi to disembosom his skepticism to his Egyptian counterpart of the validity of Menon and Pillai to play a significant role that might be of any benefit to Egypt in the conference. However, the Egyptian ambassador expressed his belief that Nehru would help and assist Egypt and that neither Menon nor Pillai could deceive Nehru regardless of their personal preferences. In general, Menon began expressing his

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67 ibid.
68 Spectator (London), 10 August 1956.
69 Al Ahram, 16 August 1956.
70 ibid.
71 See the Provisional list of Delegations to The Suez Canal Conference, Malaf no. 4/52/30 vol.1, Mahfaza no. 1420, and AMFASG, Cairo.
72 Efada no.82, n.54.
73 Efada no.261, n.32.
positions before his arrival in London when he confirmed that since hundreds of years the nations of the world recognized the Suez Canal as an integral part of Egypt, and therefore, this is not a cause of disagreement and appealed to the United Nations to calm the situation. ⁷⁴ Before going to London, Menon and his delegation reached Cairo on 12th August and had talks with Nasser, which was attended by the Indian Ambassador to Egypt, Ali Yawar Jung. Both discussed the Indian proposal, which was subsequently submitted by the Indian delegation to the London’s conference. ⁷⁵ On the Western objections on issues such as Canal profits and discrimination among its staff, duties and the interests of the beneficiaries, now, the head of the Indian delegation emphasized the possibility of resolving those issues through negotiation and cooperation with Egypt. He suggested that the results of these negotiations must be recorded in an international treaty, whereas Egypt should implement it. Menon refused any proposal of financing and establishment of an international body to manage the Canal. He scoffed at the proposal of putting the Canal under the control of the United Nations. ⁷⁶ Menon asserted that Egypt has its independent decision. He warned that any political pressure on Egypt would be a return to the colonial style. He suggested that the first step that must be taken, to get out of the current impasse, is calming the situation by stopping military measures, and slashing down the propaganda and counter-propaganda. He added that Egypt’s participation is a condition for the success of any endeavour to reach a final solution. ⁷⁷

Subsequently, Menon presented the draft of the Indian proposal to resolve the crisis. The Indian proposal was on recognition of sovereignty of Egypt and that the canal is an integral part of Egypt. It also recognized the interests of the beneficiaries, and the Canal as an international waterway, where the freedom of international navigation is in accordance with the Convention of Constantinople in 1888. The proposal suggested that the Canal’s tolls must be fair to all countries without discrimination and that the Canal must be maintained always in a good condition to be used. It also suggested reviewing the treaty of 1888 to confirm its principles and modify it through a conference to be held for this purpose where all beneficiaries should participate. ⁷⁸

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⁷⁴ *Al Ahram*, 14 August 1956.
⁷⁵ *Al Ahram*, 11, 12, 13 August 1956.
⁷⁶ ibid
⁷⁷ ibid
⁷⁸ ibid.
Indian proposal recommended the establishment of an advisory board where the beneficiaries could be represented on geographical basis. The role of this board was to be a link between the beneficiaries and the Egyptian company of Suez Canal. The advisory board was not going to challenge the Egyptian property of the Canal or sovereignty over it. It also demanded the Egyptian government to submit an annual report to the United Nations on the Egyptian Suez Canal. After the presentation, Menon appealed to the President of the conference not to resort to steps, including the spirit of dictation, because this was going to panic the Asians and was going to be seen as an attempt of imposing domination and suppression of the national aspirations of peoples in Asia and Africa. He also stated that India is convinced of the possibility of reaching a solution if the opportunity will be given to follow the right direction by having negotiations. Such settlement will not give a victory for one party over the other because according to Menon, this was not the way to solve the problem. Menon warned that any attempt to seize the Suez Canal from Egypt, will lead to a war with very serious consequences and that this matter would lead to terrible consequences and change the relationship upside down between Western countries and the peoples of Asia and Africa. He added that India did not want to see such a development and appealed to the West to take into consideration the aspirations of Afro-Asian people. He concluded his speech by inviting the conferees to behave and follow the principle of reconciliation and not the principle of dictation. The reactions of conferees towards the Indian proposal were positive with Russia along with Indonesia, Ceylon supporting the Indian proposal.

As expected the British Foreign Secretary criticized the Indian proposal, saying an Advisory Board, will be without any effective authority. John Foster Dulles, the Secretary of State, also criticized the Indian proposal, which does not include any guarantees that Nasser would not use the canal as a tool of the Egyptian policy or ensure that the canal will be separated from the political interests of Egypt. Dulles countered the Indian proposal by presenting an American proposal at the same day in

79 ibid
80 ibid.
81 Spectator, August 31, p.277.
83 Message no. 8109 from the Secretary of State (Dulles) to Eisenhower, 20 August, 1956, in Moring, n.16, p.245.
which the Indian proposal was tabled. The American proposal was an attempt to internationalize the Suez Canal under the claim of keeping it away of the politics of a specific country. The proposal also provided for the establishment of beneficiaries board for Suez Canal, which was going to oversee the management and collection of tolls there.  

Turkey, in cooperation with Iran and Pakistan, tried to introduce some amendments to the American proposal. This was an implicit acceptance of the American proposal by Turkey and as a way to promote it among the conferees. India, in cooperation with the Soviet Union, exercised great political pressure on the three countries to break the Turkish attempt, but to no avail. 

Pakistan joined the Western camp when Hamid-ul-Haq Chowdhury, Pakistan's Foreign Minister and head of his country's delegation at the conference, suggested amendments to the American proposal, on behalf of Pakistan, Ethiopia, Iran, and Turkey, and his pro-forma of amendments did not affect the essence of the American proposal. 

Selwyn Lloyd, Dulles draft to vote. This was not supposed to take place because UK promised India that the conference was not going to conclude resolutions in the absence of Egypt.

However, the American proposal won 18 votes against five votes for India’s proposal. At this point, Dulles suggested sending a delegation to Egypt to present what has been considered as the resolution of the eighteen countries to manage the Suez Canal. 

India’s reaction to US proposal was very strong. Krishna Menon launched a vicious attack on the US proposal for closing the door of negotiations with Egypt. He stressed that Egypt has the right to exercise sovereignty over the Canal. The British attempted to contain the Indian anger. Eden called Krishna Menon to a meeting but Menon insisted that his country proposal was the only one that could engage Nasser in negotiations. 

Menon carried out his attack beyond the closed doors. In his statement to the BBC, he warned that the imposition of any decision on Egypt could lead to a conflict. He argued that the conference should be a tool to bring about negotiations and not to block it and he saw the Suez crisis as a crisis of confidence. He repeated his position that the conference could not reach a final solution without Egypt consent. For him, US proposal was defective because it focused on sub-problems while leaving

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84 See the text of American proposal in Safwat, n.80, p.144-149; Heikal, n.4, p.493.  
85 Moring, n.16, p.245  
86 Mohamed Safwat, n.80, pp.341-351.  
87 Heikal, n.4, p.493.  
88 Al Ahram, 22 August 1956.  
89 Sawat El Hind, 23 September 1956.
the main problem without a solution. He demanded the conferees to reject the Dulles’ proposal because it was going to jeopardize the cooperation of Egypt. Menon scoffed of the contradictions of Dulles’s proposal because in one way it denied Egypt its sovereignty over the canal by internationalizing it, while recognizing Egypt’s right of sovereignty over the Canal and possessing it. He called it “a new political theory” that differentiates sovereignty and its exercise. Menon reasoned that such situation could not function unless Egypt deputizes other entity to exercise this sovereignty and this was not the case.

Accordingly, he criticized the American proposal for appearing as a tool of coercion and imposing the will of others upon the Egyptian nation. He denounced the Paragraph on penalties, which had been included in the American proposal, because India could not accept imposing sanctions but under Article 51 of the Charter of the UN. Article 51 allows sanctions only if there is an attack. Menon called for the West to consider the sensitivity of new Asia, and its pride of its sovereignty and nationalism in the background of its colonial past. He insisted that the only way to deal with the newly liberated countries is to persuade them of having benefits in cooperation. Menon refused Hamid-ul-Haq Chowdhury’s claim that the American proposal represents a consensus on the core issues. Menon argued that the issue is not how much difference between Dulles’s proposal and India’s one but that the two proposals are representing different directions. He gave an example how Dulles wanted to replace the existing Suez Canal Council with an international board. He predicted that Egypt would not accept such an idea. Menon declared that Dulles’s proposal would not be acceptable as basis for negotiations, but India’s proposal could be accepted. He attacked the American proposal and predicted that Egypt would reject it. He dismissed the idea that Egypt may give up its sovereignty over the Canal due to the threat, which has been encapsulated in the American threat. Regarding the reported ban by Egypt on the passage of Israeli ships through the canal, Menon commented that this was a legal

90 ibid. 
91 AlAhram, 22August 1956. 
92 Safwat, n.80, p.150.

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question and a complaint by Israel against Egypt is a plausible case; but the Dulles's proposal will not solve this problem.  

Menon denied allegations that the Indian proposal was presented on behalf of Egypt. He rejected the idea that a commission of five or six members can decide a solution based on Dulles's proposal without the presence of Egypt in such committee.  

Krishna Menon insisted on a meeting with Dulles where he maintained his announced positions with regard to the American proposal inside and outside the halls of the conference. He told Dulles that the Egyptians would refuse his proposal because it violates their sovereignty and that the Indian proposal provides the only solution to the problem. Dulles tried hard to win over India by telling Menon that the US proposal was merely what the Western countries saw as suitable foundations to solve the problem and that this proposal would be submitted to Egypt not as a warning. Dulles was trying to persuade Menon of his opinion that the problem could be solved and that the delay will not lead to damage. He told Menon that the most important thing is to find a satisfactory solution. Dulles demanded India play a role in paving the way for a fruitful negotiations and this role will be determined based on India's position and statements that could affect Egypt's readiness to negotiate. It was obvious both failed to influence the position of each other. Krishna Menon has told one member of the American delegation, that the US proposal is not the right path, "I tell you, Mr. Rountree, that if this thing [American Proposal] is pushed, it will lead to a holy war." That day Ceylon had sided with India threatening Britain that the two countries will withdraw from the Commonwealth if Britain insisted on its rejection of the Indian proposal. This action forced the British cabinet to be convened to confront this threat.  

As the Indian position was strongly favouring Egypt, the Americans considered it very rigid. Eisenhower suggested to Dulles, on the 22 August, that he thought of sending an appeal to Nehru in hope that this will lead to an improvement in the Indian position to favour USA and the West. Dulles welcomed the idea and requested the

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93 *Al Ahram*, 22 August 1956.  
95 Memorandum of a conversation between Dulles and Menon, USA Embassy (London), 22 August 1956, in Moring, n.16, pp.254-256.  
96 *Al Ahram*, 23 August 1956.
President to send him a copy of the appeal through the telegraphic wire. The motive of Eisenhower was to capture the cooperation of Nehru in a way that could help the West. Nehru had great hopes and expectations from US role to defuse the crisis. He hoped early, in one of his letters to Eisenhower on the crisis, that the great influence of the US would save the world of the tragedy of the failed efforts of solving the problem peacefully.\textsuperscript{97} It’s clear US pressure and manoeuvres had little success in the last few hours of the Conference. Dulles had succeeded on 23 August in dismantling the front that favoured Egypt. Dulles succeeded in persuading India, Indonesia and Ceylon to agree for issuing an official statement on behalf of the conference despite Russian objection to the idea. This created a rift between the three countries on the one hand and Russia on the other. Dulles, following cold war mentality, considered this as a victory against the Russians\textsuperscript{98}. On the same day, India softened its position towards the American proposal. Menon now proposed that all proposals be sent to Egypt so that it can see which proposal will suit its interests for negotiating on that basis.\textsuperscript{99} The changed position was also due to India’s contacts with the Saudis during which Indians did not show any clear objection to the US proposal.\textsuperscript{100}

Now, Menon seemed pessimistic because the West insisted on its position. He told Indian reporters that anything might occur after imposing the economic sanctions, like freezing of funds and provoking the feelings.\textsuperscript{101} Menon indicated some flexibility when he announced that in the context of the Western pressures on India he would be disappointed if the Egyptian government did not welcome the mission that seeks negotiation. He also added that India would be very pleased if it is possible to start negotiations between Egypt and the concerned countries based on any proposal and it deserves the support of India. Before leaving London, Menon confirmed that he had no desire to put obstacles in the way of acceptance of Dulles’s proposal.\textsuperscript{102}

In the meantime, the Egyptian Ambassador in New Delhi noted that India’s position relatively moved back in its support for Egypt. This was clear in the tone of both

\textsuperscript{97} Telegram from the Department of State (USA) to the Secretary of State, 22 August 1956, in Moring, n.16, p. 258.
\textsuperscript{98} Message from the Secretary of State to the President, 23 August 1956, ibid, p. 280
\textsuperscript{99} Telegram from Dulles to the Department of State, 23 August 1956, ibid p. 271.
\textsuperscript{100} Memorandum of a Conversation (Riyadh), 24 August, 1956, ibid, p.286.
\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Al Ahram}, 26 August 1956.
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Spectator}, 31 August, 1956, p.227.
Menon and Nehru’s statements. They reassured repeatedly that Nehru did not discuss the question of Suez with Nasser neither in Brioni nor in Cairo. Kamel argued that this change in India’s position was because India felt that it crossed its limits in the nature of diplomatic practice. Moreover, India declared its position clearly and publicly in an international problem, which involved the West and might substantially affect India. This situation was against the tradition of Indian politics, which is known for its soft nature; its preference to avoid taking risks; and giving first priority to India’s interests.\textsuperscript{103}

Internally, the Indian press agreed that India’s reasonable proposal was the only basis for negotiations with Egypt to progress and reach a peaceful settlement of the problem.\textsuperscript{104} In spite of the fact that Indian public opinion had been unanimous that Egypt would not accept any proposal which approved the internationalization of the Canal, it did not rule out the possibility of talks to exchange the different viewpoints, provided the Committee of Five (Menzies) must be flexible enough to allow them to negotiate on other basis, which may be different than the basis of Dulles’s proposal. For example, \textit{The Times of India} opined that the committee would not receive a warm welcome from Nasser unless it believed that the peaceful negotiations are the only way to resolve the dispute. While, \textit{Hindustan Standard} believed that if the committee of five had no flexibility, its role will not go beyond delivering an ultimatum.\textsuperscript{105} On his way back to New Delhi, Menon met President Nasser in Cairo. Huge crowds welcomed Menon at Cairo airport and it was clear the Egyptians had come to express their deep appreciation for Menon’s positive and heroic role at the London conference and their gratefulness for India’s role.\textsuperscript{106} He discussed his London proposals. He also held meetings with Ali Sabri and Mahmoud Younis\textsuperscript{107} during which they discussed some of the technical issues relating to navigation in the Canal.\textsuperscript{108} In Cairo, Menon said that India aimed at converting the situation from conflict to negotiation. He predicted that if negotiations begin, it would be possible to move forward to a new agreement. He added that this was the case for India’s proposal while the reverse is

\textsuperscript{103} Efada no.295, n. 31.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Al Goumhoryia}, 23 August 1956.
\textsuperscript{105} ibid, 30 August 1956.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Al Ahram}, 30 August 1956.
\textsuperscript{107} Mahmoud Younis was the man who implemented Nasser’s plan to nationalize the Suez Canal and manage it later for international navigation.
\textsuperscript{108} ibid, 1 September 1956; Al Akhbar, 1September 1956.
true for the Western proposal because it represents the ultimate end. Reacting to the landing of French troops in Cyprus, Menon said that he did not understand the meaning or reason for these moves. In India, Menon expressed his feelings that Egypt is firmly desirous for reaching a peaceful settlement. He added that he had no doubts that Egyptians will defend their dignity and legitimate rights. These views have been included in Menon’s report about the London Conference and his talks at Cairo and London, which he tabled to the Indian cabinet. In his report, Menon praised Egypt’s flexibility in dealing with the crisis.

Internationally, India’s position was generally welcomed. On 26 August 1956, Chou En-Lai, Prime Minister of China, praised the position of India, and said has played a great role in defending the rights and sovereignty of Egypt. Even Spectator magazine was doubtful and skeptical of the wisdom behind the British rejection of the Indian proposal in light of the worldwide public opinion that refused the proposal of Dulles. Andre Jomari, the Hungarian writer, considered the conference as a diplomatic and political defeat for the West, which failed to achieve its objectives of isolating Egypt and Russia. He stated that the West faced the opposition of four countries with a total population of 660 million people and two of them are members of the Commonwealth. Some Egyptian sources considered it as a victory of Egypt because; it led to closer coordination between Cairo and New Delhi through direct contacts between Nehru and Nasser and through coordination with pro-Egypt countries such as USSR, Indonesia and Ceylon.

At this moment, India’s estimate was that Egypt had won the battle politically until that moment. One reason was the lack of action against the decision of the nationalization. The continuation of such a situation will create a shift in the world public opinion in favour of Egypt. Another reason was the appeasing of the Western

109 Al Ahram, 26 August 1956
110 ibid, 2 September 1956; Al Goumhoryia, 2 September 1956.
111 ibid, 3 September 1956.
112 ibid, 27/8/1956.
113 Spectator (London), 24/8/1956 , p.252
countries of France and Britain which was more apparent than real. A third reason was that the nationalization had shaken the influence of Europe in the Middle East and Asia. In spite of all the foregoing, India believed that the crisis was still boiling. Therefore, India advised Egypt the following:

- To follow the policy of open-door tactic so as not to give Britain and France a pretext for military harassment.\footnote{Efada no.295, n. 31.}
- To keep closer relations with its friends (such as USSR, Indonesia and Ceylon etc ...) in order not to stand alone in its conflict with the West.
- To keep a moderate position and avoiding the radicalization of its position as this may embarrass its friends.
- To befriend with US to prevent it from giving Britain and France unrestricted support.
- To strengthen its diplomatic representation in Ethiopia as a tool to change Ethiopia’s unsatisfactory position vis-à-vis the nationalization of Suez Canal.
- To change its political policies and tactics in the Arab region by shifting from a blatant propaganda and an overt attack against the West to adopting a peaceful and continuous diplomatic activity that does not rush to urgent results but depend on the evolution of circumstances.\footnote{ibid.}

India expected that in the event of Egypt’s safe exit from the crisis, especially without war, it would empower Egypt as the heart of Pan-Arabism, and subsequently, the rupture of the Baghdad Pact, and the possibility of Pakistan turning to a hostile policy towards the West because of the pressure from the Pakistani people. India did not expect this to happen so soon because of the hostility between India and Pakistan.\footnote{ibid.}

In the meantime, (late August), Britain surprisingly continued its threat to use force against Egypt. Before the arrival of the Menzies commission to Cairo, Britain surprisingly asked Egypt to withdraw its diplomats from London. The Times of India considered this threat an indication of the spirit of anger and revenge, which shaped Britain’s approach in handling the crisis. The Indian newspaper commented on the
timing of the British action as the wrong time. In coping with such developments, India warned London that any military action against Egypt would lead to the withdrawal of India from the Commonwealth. London tried to absorb the Indian anger through its request to Nehru to mediate in finding an acceptable settlement to both parties.

On the other hand, Nehru continued to be in contact with Eisenhower in an attempt to prevent military action. He wrote to him, on 8 September 1956, emphasizing the need to establish a basis for negotiation that will be acceptable to Egypt. He expressed his hope that the US with its great influence may find a peaceful solution to the problem and prevent any attempt to resolve it by force. The Indian refusal to the use of force in resolving the dispute had its resonance, in the Spectator, a local British newspaper, which warned London and Paris against launching military action against Egypt in the light of US refusal for military solution as also Indian opposition, which might lead to the disintegration of the Commonwealth in such an event.

Simultaneously, Menzies’s committee after eight day’s talks failed in its mission as Nasser refused any international supervision or management of the canal. Nasser passed the details of his talks with Menzies to Nehru; and explored his views on the steps that Egypt had taken in the following days. Nasser also asked Nehru’s advice regarding Egypt’s intention to appeal to the Security Council to discuss the Anglo-French threats and military manoeuvres as a threat for Egypt’s security.

Nasser was careful to inform Nehru of the developments of the situation and expressed Egypt’s views and suggestions. Nasser implemented many of Nehru’s advices. One of which was to continue maintaining contacts with countries that supported Egypt, so as not to stand alone in this conflict with the West. However, some Indian circles expressed their regret at the failure of Menzies in his mission and requested the resumption of talks on the crisis by another way, which might be through organizing another conference to discuss the problem. Inspite of that, India

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119 Al Ahram, 1 September 1956.
120 ibid, 3/9/1956; Al Goumhoryia, 2 September 1956.
121 Moring, n.16, P. 395
122 ibid, p.502.
123 Spectator, 7 September 1956.
124 Heikal, n.4, p.506.
did not comment officially on the failure of the talks, but its ambassador in Cairo expressed his optimism soon after having a meeting with Nasser. He remarked, “The water-current is still on”. 125 The Times of India called for discussing the problem at the UN after the failure of Menzies. The newspaper dismissed the fears of Mr. Eden regarding control of Canal by Egypt, in spite of the guarantees that had been presented by the latter. 126

Egypt had invited India and other concerned countries on 10 September to form a board of negotiations where the different viewpoints of all countries could be represented. India positively responded to the Egyptian invitation and requested other countries to accept the invitation of Egypt 127. Thus, Nehru sent a letter to Eisenhower on 11 September in which he defended Egypt’s memo as offering ways for a peaceful solution, which must be discovered. 128 In the following days, the Indian Ambassador in Addis Ababa made his efforts, in coordination with the Egyptian ambassador Osman Tawfik, to convince the Ethiopian Emperor and his Foreign Minister to support the Egyptian proposal. 129

On 12 September, Mr. Eden announced the idea of establishing the beneficiaries’ society of Suez Canal. Eden secured Dulles’s acceptance of the idea before declaring it. 130 The Second London Conference has approved the British idea. Nasser considered this society as a tool of usurpation of the Egyptian sovereignty and a declaration of war against Egypt. 131 India’s response was that the society is an individual decision that violates sovereignty of Egypt and closes the door for negotiations. He added that such an idea carries with it a risk of bitter conflict and a formula for an imposed solution.

125 Al Ahram, 9, 11, 12 September 1956.
127 MFA (Cairo), The List of the Replies of Different Countries for Egyptian Memorandum, 10 September 1956, Malaf no. 4/52/31, vol.1, Mahfaza 1453, AMFASG, Cairo; Al Ahram, 15 September 1956.
128 Moring, n.16, p. 502
129 Efada no.105 (Top Secret) from Osman Tawfik, Egypt’s ambassador to Ethiopia to The Permanent Under Secretary of MFA (Cairo), 16 September 1956, Malaf no.4/52/31, vol.2, Mahfaza no.1453, AMFASG, Cairo.
130 Safwat, n.80, p.205.
131 Fawzi, n.3, pp.77-78.
On the other hand, Nehru defended the Egyptian proposal saying it opens the door to further negotiations, which would settle the crisis peacefully, including satisfying the needs of the international community and preserving the sovereignty of Egypt. Nehru called for the resumption of negotiations and declared his readiness to make efforts for its success. Soon Menon informed the American charge d'affaires in New Delhi, that Nehru was very disappointed by the content of Mr. Eden’s proposal. Menon expressed the hope that the US was going to put her great weight behind the solution of the crisis through negotiation. He argued that his government could not imagine how Egypt could accept the British proposal and retains its position as a sovereign state. Eisenhower responded to Nehru by agreeing with him on the need to resolve the crisis peacefully. At the same time, he rejected the view of Nehru on the Egyptian proposal. He asserted that the US adheres to the eighteenth’s proposals that ensure the practical basis of any negotiation. Eisenhower stressed his belief that the good intentions and the rapid containment of the crisis are enough in achieving a peaceful solution.

In the meantime, India continued its support of Egypt and sought to gain international public opinion favouring Egypt. Nehru called on Egypt to bring the matter before the Security Council. In a meeting between Mustafa Kamel and Mr. Dutt, Kamel expressed Egypt's pride and appreciation towards the position of Nehru, the Indian government and the people of India for supporting Egypt in its crisis. Kamel had considered Nehru’s statement on 13 September 1956, as a heavy attack on Mr. Eden. He read Nehru’s statement as a threat to withdraw from the Commonwealth if London insisted on resolving the crisis militarily. During the meeting, Dutt asked Kamel, “What should India do to support Egypt in that stage?” Egypt’s ambassador proposed that India might offer, in coordination with other powers, to mediate to resolve the conflict. According to Kamel, this was going to counter the Western accusation that both were being negative. Kamel further explained that the West was claiming that Egypt used to reject every proposed solution and India was only criticizing the Western attitudes. Kamel believed that such mediation was going to serve two purposes. The first purpose was to embarrass the West internally and externally in

133 ibid, pp.502-4.
case it refused the mediation. The second purpose was to remove the spectre of war, if the West accepted the mediation. On September 15th, Nehru met the delegates of the Colombo countries, and conveyed his position as expressed in the statement of 13 September 1956. He also discussed with them the British idea of establishing the Suez Canal Users Association (SCUA) and other developments. The Hindustan Times commented that the meeting aimed to provide the Arab world much needed moral support and to show Asia’s interest in the crisis. Soon after the Colombo meeting, Nehru decided to send Menon in a new mission to Cairo and London. The target of the mission was to improve the political atmosphere and bridge the gap between the two conflicting parties. Menon reached Cairo on 17 September 1956, where he held talks with Nasser and Mahmoud Fawzi, and Ahmed al-Shuqairi, the then Assistant Secretary-General of the Arab League. He met the ambassadors of Russia and China in Cairo. Ali Yawar Jung accompanied Menon. Menon tried to convince Nasser to adopt more compromising attitude because Nehru believed that the main target of Britain was to overthrow Nasser out of power. It appeared that Menon succeeded in his mission at Cairo. In his statement to the press before leaving Egypt, Menon hoped that the parties would agree on a satisfactory solution based on spirit of give and take. On 23 September, Menon arrived in London to complete the second part of his task. Upon his arrival, he praised the atmosphere of peace that prevailed in Cairo. He also noted that Cairo is still enjoying the support of Arabs for its firm position. Menon denied any new Indian or Egyptian proposals. He stated that the purpose of his visit was to talk to his British friends with a view to resolve the crisis peacefully. The talks of Menon continued until 29 September 1956. After that, he left to Beirut and met Ali Yawar Jung there to brief him on the results of his London’s talks. It seems Menon used his meeting with Jung to forward his message to Nasser.

134 Efada no.328 (Secret and Very Urgent) from Egypt’s ambassador (New Delhi) to The Permanent Under Secretary of MFA (Cairo), 14 September 1956, Malaf no.30/45/15, vol.8, Mahfaza no.1512, AMFASG, Cairo.
135 Al Ahram, 15, 16 September 1956
137 Heikal, n.4, p.858.
138 Al Ahram, 19,20,21,22 September 1956.
139 Moring, n.16, p.541.
140 Al Ahram, 24 September 1956.
141 ibid; Sawat El Hind, 15 October 1956.
Soon after, Menon flew to New Delhi to present his report to Nehru. In New Delhi, Menon met Mustafa Kamel who saw more optimism. Menon argued that the danger of war is unlikely and that the road to a peaceful solution became the only way to solve the problem. He reminded Kamel that India’s proposals placed at the first London conference had a reasonable basis for negotiations to take place.

While Menon was trying a rapprochement between Cairo and London, New Delhi did not stop for a minute its support for Cairo. The former Governor-General of India and a veteran Congress member, C.R. Rajagopalachari had criticized the withdrawal of pilots from Suez by Britain and France. Many Indian pilots volunteered to work with the Egyptian Board of Suez Canal. The Indian government supported this initiative by allowing them leave from their jobs for one year, starting at the date of their travel to Suez. Nehru declared on the 23 September 1956, before his trip to the Saudi Arabia, that the only way to solve the crisis was the negotiations with a purpose of a peaceful settlement. He refused the Western threats of using war as tool for solution. The Indian premier said that any international dispute should not be settled in a spirit of humiliation for a country. Nehru emphasized that the Suez issue should not be settled on “the wrestling ring”. Nehru alluded to the fact that the West is suffering from self-contradiction, where, the West planned a crisis with the excuse that the nationalization of the Suez Canal will suspend the oil supply to the West via the Suez Canal but the West forget that the occurrence of war will destroy the oil fields themselves.

On the following day, Nehru visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for five days. He conducted talks with King Saud, which was primarily focused on the Suez crisis. Nehru asserted to King Saud that India supports the right of Egypt in nationalizing the Canal, along with the preserving of the interests of other countries in having free transit and moderate charges. Nehru suggested that these matters could be discussed with a consultative advisory body. He also added that if there are any differences, an international court could settle such differences. Nehru considered that the current

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142 Al Ahram, 26, 30 September 1956.
143 Efdan no.351 from Egyptian Embassy (New Delhi) to MFA (Cairo), 3 October 1956, Malaf no.30/45/15, vol.6, Mahfaza no.1505, AMFASG, Cairo.
144 Al Ahram, 19, 22 September 1956.
145 Al Ahram, 21 September 1956; 6 October 1956.
146 Sawat El Hind, 5 October 1956.
crisis was the result of the decline of the European influence in the East. He saw this as a source of pain for the hearts of Europeans. Therefore, Nehru suggested that the people of the East should allow the Westerners to withdraw with face saving.\textsuperscript{147} At the end of the visit, the joint statement was devoid of any reference to bilateral issues. Instead, it asserted the international importance of the Suez Canal as a water passageway, which every country may use as a free passage. Nehru and Saud confirmed the possibility of settling the issue of Suez peacefully through negotiations. They refused the use of political and economic pressure as means to settle the dispute because those things will delay reaching a peaceful settlement, and will have serious consequences.\textsuperscript{148}

In its quest to mobilize the world public opinion to support Egypt, New Delhi became the centre to coordinate the positions of Asian countries. Another goal of this mobilization was to denounce any military action against Egypt. New Delhi was successful in playing this vital role because of its close contact with Cairo,\textsuperscript{149} including the diplomatic coordination among both the Egyptian and the Indian diplomats in different capitals in the world and the correspondence between Nasser and Nehru. Those correspondences were so important to the extent that they became the target of espionage by a Western intelligence - probably the British intelligence.\textsuperscript{150} India influenced many Asian countries by declaring its support to Egypt. As a result, many Asian countries followed India’s position. In the wake of statement of the 13\textsuperscript{th} September 1956 in which Nehru declared his country’s position, Indonesia announced in a joint statement with Yugoslavia adopting the same Indian position.\textsuperscript{151} On 21\textsuperscript{st} September, Roslyn Abdul-Ghana, Indonesian Foreign Minister, in Vienna, announced, “Indonesia will not stand away if the Suez crisis turned into a war”.\textsuperscript{152}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{147} Heikal, n.4, P.858.
  \item \textsuperscript{148} MFA, n.117 ,pp.10-11 ; Boutros Roufael , \textit{Al Hind Wa Qanat El Suez [India and The Suez Canal] } , ( Cairo: Matbaat Labatri, 1957) , pp.64 ,67.
  \item \textsuperscript{149} Efada no.328, n.138; Al Ahram, 7,13,16,22 September 1956.
  \item \textsuperscript{150} Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) discovered on 20\textsuperscript{th} September 1956 that MEA employee called Shadi Lal Kapor and his wife has stolen the file of Nasser and Nehru correspondences on Suez crisis. The couples sold the information for a foreign agent who succeeded to escape. Indian Express expected that the information has been sold for two countries who are concerning of knowing the secrets of Nasser and Nehru correspondences .The newspaper might referred to UK and France . \textit{Al Ahram}, 21, 24 September 1956; \textit{Al Gounhoryia}, 22 September 1956.
  \item \textsuperscript{151} \textit{Al Ahram}, 18 September 1956.
  \item \textsuperscript{152} ibid, 22 September 1956.
\end{itemize}
the British naval and air bases which exist in Ceylon in any operations against Egypt on a par with what was happening in Cyprus.\textsuperscript{153} On 21 September 1956, the Prime Minister of Nepal denounced the project of SCUA because it is based on means of pressure and coercion and denies the sovereignty of Egypt.\textsuperscript{154} At the annual conference of farmers, Burmese Prime Minister announced his country's support to Egypt in nationalizing the Suez Canal as a legitimate act and that the canal is an integral part of Egypt. Soon after, the foreign undersecretary had summoned the ambassadors of Britain, France and USA to warn them that any breach of security in the Canal area will have a serious impact on all Asian countries in general and Burma in particular. The Burmese supported Egypt inspite of the harsh pressure that Britain exercised on Rangoon to stop it from declaring this support.\textsuperscript{155} Cambodia and North Vietnam also supported Egypt's policy towards the Suez Canal.\textsuperscript{156}

India's support to Egypt and its endeavours to enlist the support of other Asian countries was natural in light of the India's understanding of the real picture of the crisis. This picture became dominant on the decision-making centres in New Delhi and India understood the plan and what lay beyond it. It also estimated that the success of the West in his plan would harm Egypt and India. This made Nehru shed his political weight beside Egypt.\textsuperscript{157} Nehru mobilized the Indian people and convinced them that the problem is directly affecting India politically and economically. He went to the extent of expressing fear that the evolution of the crisis could threaten India by a famine.\textsuperscript{158} Mr. Escott Reid, the Canadian diplomat in New Delhi during the crisis reached the same conclusion. He had written to Ottawa, after weeks of talks with Menon and Pillai that the Indian government was certain that the armed conflict between Britain and France on one side and Egypt on the other side cannot remain a local conflict, and even a local war will lead to the closure of the Suez Canal. This will increase freight costs and hamper the arrival of goods to India as well as their exposure to risk during its circulation around the Cape of the Good Hope. This was

\textsuperscript{153} ibid, 21 September 1956.
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Al Ahram}, 22 September 1956.
\textsuperscript{155} Efada no.45 (Secret) from Egypt's Minister Plenipotentiary (Burma) to the Permanent Undersecretary of the MFA, 24 September 1956, Malaf no.4/52/31,vol.2 Mahfaza no.1453, AMFASG, Cairo.
\textsuperscript{156} Efada no.352 (Secret) from Egypt's ambassador (New Delhi) to the Permanent Undersecretary of the MFA, dated 3/10/1956, Malaf no. 4/52/31,vol.2, Mahfaza no.1453, AMFASG, Cairo.
\textsuperscript{157} Efada no.328, n.138.
\textsuperscript{158} ibid.
also going to threaten the five-year plan of India. He also pointed out that the Indians are convinced that the closure of the canal would be an imposition of economic sanctions on India more than Egypt.\textsuperscript{159}

India’s fears that Britain and France could use violence to achieve their political goals proved to be true. On October 29, 1956, Israel attacked Egypt. This attack was a part of a secret plan for aggression against Egypt. Three months after Egypt's nationalization of the canal company, a secret meeting took place at Sèvres, outside Paris. Britain and France enlisted Israeli support for an alliance against Egypt. The parties agreed that Israel would invade the Sinai. Britain and France would then intervene, instructing that both the Israeli and Egyptian armies withdraw their forces to a distance of 16 km from either side of the canal. The British and French would then argue that Egypt's control of such an important route was too tenuous, and that it needed be placed under Anglo-French control. Soon, the British air force bombed Cairo and the French and British forces landed on Suez and Port Said. Nasser declared the Jihad from Al Azhar and the Egyptian people insisted on the resistance of the Tripartite Aggression. India stood by Egypt in the second chapter of the Suez crisis and fought defending Egypt diplomatically inside and outside the UN. The Indian support continued until the evacuation of the aggressive forces from all the occupied territories. India contributed to the peacekeeping forces that replaced the invading forces and the Indian forces role was highly welcomed by the Egyptian people.

**Conclusion**

India position towards the nationalization of Suez Canal was another case to find out what were India’s calculations behind its political support for Egypt. The Suez Canal has a special relation with modern India economically and strategically. The Indian strategic perception towards the Canal has changed drastically after 1953 favouring Egyptian sovereignty over the Canal Zone. The politics of cold war and Israeli-Arab conflict implications paved the way for the nationalization of the Suez Canal. This nationalization was seen as a challenge for the imperial hegemony over West Asia

and the act led to a crisis. Having a strong friendship between Nasser and Nehru as well as their meeting at Bironi just before the nationalization decision showed India as it was involved in the matter. The historical analysis proves that India was not involved in any way. Moreover, the Indian leadership hesitated in supporting the Egyptian decision of nationalizing the canal. India’s reluctance to support Egypt’s decision to nationalize the Suez Canal was the outcome of several factors, which were interrelated and interdependent at the same time. The genesis of India’s foreign policy, despite its public idealism, was to protect the interest of India before everything else, avoid international conflicts, any political risks, and its adherence to very large extent passivity in dealing with international problems. Indian diplomats tried to avoid taking any anti-British position.

Some Indian officials thought that it is dangerous for India that the Suez Canal could be controlled by an Islamic state because 80% of India’s trade passed through the Canal, and if Pakistan may agree with this Islamic state (Egypt), they may be able to obstruct the passage of Indian trade in the Suez Canal, or at least raise the fees on Indian ships, which will affect negatively the Indian economy. In the face of this Indian hesitancy, Egyptian diplomacy and leadership had been active to remove the fears of India and to win its support. It was due to the success of Mustafa Kamel in convincing the Indian officials that it was in the interest of India to support Egypt. Nasser’s correspondences with Nehru contributed to shift in Indian position from hesitancy in supporting the Egyptian decision to publicly supporting it and even coordinating with the Egyptian leadership about steps Egypt could follow to defuse the crisis.

At this point, the Suez crisis became the main concern for Nehru and his favourite issue to talk about in every meeting and include it in his speeches. Soon, India realized that both Britain and France are insisting on toppling Nasser, whom considered as not only dangerous for their interests in the Middle East but also dangerous for their entities as big countries. They also succeeded in convincing USA of their views. This fact enforced Nehru to stand in the other bank of the river and extend his support to Egypt. This helped largely in lightening the severity of the crisis as well as being considered a diplomatic victory for Egypt against Britain. Moreover,
India’s position influenced morally the position of US towards the crisis. India’s goal was to find “a middle way solution”.

India’s support to Egypt and its endeavours to enlist the support of other Asian countries was natural in light of India’s understanding of the real picture of the crisis. This picture became dominant on the decision-making centres in New Delhi and India understood the plan and what stood beyond it. It also estimated that the success of the Western plan would harm Egypt and India. This made Nehru shed his political weight beside Egypt. Nehru the Indian people and convinced them that the problem is directly affecting India politically and economically. He went to the extent of expressing fear for his people that the evolution of the crisis could threaten India with a famine.

However, India’s policy towards the nationalization of Suez Canal reflects the strong nature of Indo-Egyptian relations during years that followed the 1952 revolution and asserted the fact that both forged an “alliance for freedom”. India’s role was crucial in mobilizing the support of Afro-Asian countries for Egypt and even influencing to great extent the position of the US. India also denied Britain and France any success in isolating Egypt. The crisis proved that the bonds of fraternity and friendship with Egypt were deeply rooted among the different sections of Indian society and was not merely the invention of the leadership. Both Egyptian and Indian people were well connected emotionally in their struggle for freedom and independence. Egyptian people and leadership felt grateful for Indian support and realized that India was a genuine partner in this victory over colonialism.