CHAPTER VI
THE SUEZ CRISIS - A TURNING POINT

The Suez crisis in 1956 was an important landmark in British foreign policy as well as in post-war Commonwealth history. Though the crisis originated in a dispute between Egypt on the one hand, and Britain and France on the other, it eventually, and among other things, endangered the Commonwealth association. The crisis occurred at a time when Britain was closely identified with the Commonwealth, but she adopted a course contrary to the tide of official and public opinion in the majority of Commonwealth members. Consequently, a major confrontation between them and Britain took place over the Suez policy.

When President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company, on 26 July 1956, among the first things Britain did was to get in touch with the Commonwealth countries. On 30 July 1956, Prime Minister Anthony Eden stated that "the Governments of the Commonwealth countries were given early information of the situation as it affects this country and the Commonwealth and


close touch is being maintained with them". 3 Though this friendly and obligatory gesture was extended to them at the beginning, she counted upon the unity of the Western Big Three - the United States, France and herself - for any possible action against Egypt. But right from the beginning, strong opposition to the use of force against Egypt was expressed by public opinion in Britain. The leader of Opposition, Hugh Gaitskell, wanted a peaceful solution under the auspices of the United Nations. 4 Similarly, 24 leading Labour MPs in a statement on 8 August, warned Britain that to attempt to carry out "internationalization of the Suez Canal by force against the resistance of the Egyptian Government and people would be an act of aggression under the United Nations Charter". 5

On 2 August 1956 Britain, France and America jointly proposed a conference, of parties to the 1888 Convention, and other nations concerned over the use of Canal, 6 with the object of creating an international body to control the Canal. 7 But events took a new course when Prime Minister Eden, in a broadcast on 8 August 1956, stated that "our quarrel is not with Egypt, still less with the Arab world; it is with colonel Nasser". 8 This

---

3 Ibid., cols. 918-19.
4 Hugh Gaitskell in the House of Commons on 2 August 1956. Ibid., cols. 1609-17.
5 The Times, 9 August 1956.
6 Cmd 9853, pp. 3-4.
8 Ibid.
provoked widespread criticism in the rest of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth reaction and the British response to it were important aspects of how this crisis turned out to be a turning point in British foreign policy.

COMMONWEALTH REACTIONS

Commonwealth governments received the news of various British moves in Suez with mixed reactions. The two Commonwealth countries, which gave full support and sympathy for Britain, were Australia and New Zealand. At the time of Nasser's declaration, nationalizing the Canal, Australian Prime Minister, R.G. Menzies, was in Washington. Instead of proceeding to Canberra, he rushed to London. In a provocative broadcast from there, on 13 August 1956, he said: "The fact remains that peace in the world and the efficacy of the United Nations Charter alike require that the British Commonwealth and, in particular, its greatest and most experienced member, the United Kingdom, should retain power, prestige and normal influence... We are about to try to deal, by negotiation, with a matter which is vital to the trade and economies of a score of nations. To leave our vital interests

to the whim of one man would be suicidal". 10

When the 22-nation London Conference, opened on 16 August 1956, on the Suez problem, decided to send a five power delegation to Nasser, to discuss the 18-power proposal on the international control of the Canal, 11 Menzies was chosen as the leader of the delegation. But his earlier unequivocal stand identifying himself with the British and the French, favouring use of force against Egypt did not keep him in discussions in Cairo. Though the Menzies mission was in Cairo between 3 and 9 September, it could not meet Nasser and discuss the proposal because the President was uncompromising on the issue of Egyptian ownership and control of the Canal. The unwelcome aspect of the mission was hinted by an Egyptian newspaper which

10 R.G. Menzies, Speech is of Time: Selected Speeches and Writings by the Right Honourable Robert Gordon Menzies (London, 1958), pp. 81-86. While the Prime Minister Menzies favoured use of force Casey, Foreign Minister, was of the view that "recourse to force against Egypt ought to be avoided, because it would severely strain Anglo-American relations and create grave tension within the Commonwealth with Asian members refusing to participate in drastic measures". The Times, 11 September 1956. India's elder statesman, C. Rajagopalachari, characterized the speech as "The true voice of British colonialism, speaking from the grave". The Hindu, 20 August 1956. In Australia, the Opposition Leader Dr Herbert Evatt criticized the Prime Minister that in supporting Britain, he was pursuing a policy of "gunboat diplomacy". Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, Parliamentary Debates, 1956, 2nd period, pp. 826-35.

11 The American plan proposed a convention for the creation of a Suez Canal Board, for operating, maintaining and developing the Canal, to which Egypt would grant all rights and facilities "appropriate to its functioning". For further details see Cmd 9853 (1956), p. 11. The Commonwealth members who supported the plan were Australia, New Zealand and, interestingly enough, Pakistan.
warned: "The Menzies Committee should realize that it will deal with a nation which is fiercely conscious of its rights and is tenacious of its hardwon independence". The mission failed in toto.

At the UN Security Council, Australia strongly supported Britain. In fact, Prime Minister Menzies was one of those few who supported British military action in Egypt to determine the future of the Suez Canal. However, despite Australia's intimate relationship with Britain, she did not have advance intimation of the military operation at the Canal Zone. Though this experience was a bitter pill, Menzies had no other way open but to swallow it by echoing what Anthony Eden said in defence of non-consultation with other Commonwealth countries. In the Australian House of Representatives, he defended this British failure by asking himself:

Is the United Kingdom at fault in not having engaged in a pre-consultation with the other British Commonwealth countries? Our answer to this question was not at fault at all. The circumstances were those of great emergency... Effective consultation - and I say 'effective' because a mere 'form of consultation' would have been quite useless - would plainly have occupied considerable time and the urgent position might have fallen into irretrievable disaster. In our opinion, therefore, Great Britain, whose Canal and other Middle East economic interests are so vast, is correct in proceeding upon her own responsibility. (14)

12 "Next Step", Egyptian Gazette (Cairo), 29 August 1956.
It is clear that in explaining the omission, Australian official circles were talking with British official tongue and termed the aggression as "police action". 15

When the UN Security Council met in an emergency session at the instance of the United States to consider the worsening situation in the Suez Canal Zone, the Australian delegate, Ronald Walker supported the British delegate, Sir Pearson Dixon, in asking the Security Council not to take action until the fulfilment of Anglo-French objectives in their "police action". He commented that proposals in the draft resolution submitted by the United Kingdom and France were fair and reasonable. 16

But when the American representative Henry Cabot Lodge rejected this request and pressed his resolution for vote, the Australian representative just abstained. 17 But so far as British policy was concerned, the abstaining of Australia from the Security Council was significant in that it was the first occasion, during the crisis, in which Australia became a prisoner of indecision in a tug-of-war between the United States and the United Kingdom. But her loyalty to Britain remained undiminished. She was one of those few who cut the diplomatic relations off with Egypt, early in November 1956, which prevented her from

15 Ibid.

16 SCOR, yr 11, mtg 737, pp. 15-19.

17 At the House of Commons Opposition Leader Hugh Gaitskell, commented: "It is a remarkable and most distressing fact that Australia was unable to support us in the United Nations Security Council". UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 558, Session 1955-56, col.: 1455.
offering men or material for the functioning of the UN Emergency
Force. 18

New Zealand also was unreservedly on the British side
during the crisis. She criticized the Egyptian seizure of the
Suez Canal. 19 On 7 August 1956, Prime Minister Holland told
the House of Representatives: "Sir Anthony Eden and the
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr Selwyn Lloyd,
telegraphed me a great deal of information which I had to study...
I was able to tell Sir Anthony Eden and Mr Selwyn Lloyd that
Britain could count on New Zealand standing by her through thick
and thin... Where Britain stands, we stand; where she goes,
we go, in good times and bad". 20 When Britain intervened in Suez

18 See the statement of Australian Prime Minister R.G. Menzies
on 8 November 1956; Australia, House of Representatives,

19 On 2 August 1956, acting Prime Minister Holyoake stated that
"the manner in which the Egyptian Government has taken its
decision, as well as some of its actions in the past, are not
convincing evidence that it will necessarily display the
wisdom called for". See External Affairs Review (Wellington),
vol. VI, No. 8, August 1956, pp. 26-27.

20 New Zealand, House of Representatives, Parliamentary Debates,
vol. 309, Session 1956, pp. 889-90. External Affairs Minister
T.L. Macdonald said: "Anything which carried the promise of
harm to Britain carries the problem of harm to us". Daily
Telegraph, 15 August 1956. In a sarcastic comment on this
attitude of New Zealand, a newspaper editorial said: "It is
one thing to say that our sympathies are with Britain and that
we regard our interest in this matter as practically identical
with hers; it is quite another thing to suggest that whatever
the British Government thinks or may think, should be done, will
have New Zealand's assent. If that were New Zealand's
'policy' we should spare ourselves the expenses of maintaining
an External Affairs Department and ambassadors abroad; all we
should need would be some one to decode messages from the
British Foreign Office". Auckland Star, 8 August 1956.
with arms following the Anglo-French ultimatum to Egypt and Israel, he supported Britain stating that he had full confidence in the British intention in moving forces into the Suez Canal Zone. Sir Leslie Munroe, New Zealand representative at the United Nations, was emphatic: "My Government does not accept any charge or imputation of insincerity in the motives of the Government of the United Kingdom." But she too felt hurt by the British failure to consult her before initiating military action in Suez Canal Zone.

Other Commonwealth countries, except South Africa opposed Britain's moves in Suez. In the forefront of the opposition was India, who was strongly against using force on Egypt to settle the dispute. In August 1956, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru warned that "threats to settle this dispute, or to enforce their views in this matter by the display or use of force, is a wrong way. It does not belong to this age, and it is not dictated by reason. It fails to take account of the world as it is today and of Asia today". India participated at the

21 The Times, 2 November 1956.

22 GAOR, First Emergency Special Session, 1956, 1 November 1956, p. 34.

23 South Africa remained neutral. The Union thought that taking active interest in the crisis might incur enmity of nations of the Middle East and therefore it was "best to keep our heads out of the beehive". See Prime Minister Johannes Strijdom's statement on 27 July 1956. Cape Times, 28 July 1956.

24 India, Lok Sabha Debates, series 1, vol. 7, Session 1956, cols. 2536-44. Also see his statement on August 15, 1956. He said: "If any effort is made, even by mistake of any Power, to settle the Suez issue by force or by threats, then the result will be disastrous". The Hindu, 17 August 1956.
22-nation London Conference only after getting an assurance from Selwyn Lloyd, British Foreign Secretary, that the Conference would not be a 'rubber stamp Conference' and that it would have full freedom to negotiate a satisfactory settlement. At the Conference, India sponsored a resolution recognizing Egypt's sovereign rights on the Canal, while considering it a waterway of international importance. But the Conference rejected this proposal, but approved the American sponsored resolution favouring international control of the Canal and decided to send the Menzies mission to Cairo for negotiation with Nasser. Prime Minister Nehru was opposed to the proposal of the Canal Users' Association also. He called it an instrument of force.

India was most outspoken in condemning Anglo-French military intervention in Suez. Nehru warned that self-respecting nations in Asia and Africa would not tolerate the "clear and naked aggression" of the British and French in Egypt. He said: "That is not only an affront to the Security Council

25 Manchester Guardian, 9 August 1956. Also see The Hindu, 8 August 1956.


27 India, Lok Sabha Debates, series 1, vol. 8, Session 1956, cols. 6963-67.

28 A leading Indian daily called the Anglo-French intervention in Egypt a "dubious strategy". See "British Ultimatum", The Hindu, 1 November 1956.
and a violation of the United Nations Charter, but also likely to lead to the gravest possible consequences all over the world".\textsuperscript{29} Therefore, on 31 October 1956 itself he informed Malcolm Macdonald, the British High Commissioner in Delhi, India's intention to stand by Egypt.\textsuperscript{30} In a speech in Hyderabad, on 1 November 1956, Nehru said: "After fairly considerable experience in foreign affairs, I cannot think of a grosser case of naked aggression than what England and France are attempting to do, backed by the armed forces of the two great Powers. I deeply regret to say so, because we have been friendly with both the countries and in particular our relationship with the U.K. has been close and friendly ever since we attained independence. I realize also that the U.K. has made many liberal gestures to other countries and has been a force for peace, I think, for the past few years. Because of this, my sorrow and distress are all the greater at this amazing adventure that England and France have entered into".\textsuperscript{31} Further, he observed: "In the middle of the 20th century, we are going back to the predatory methods of the 18th and 19th centuries. But there is a difference now. There are self-respecting independent nations in Asia and Africa which are not going to tolerate this kind of incursion by the colonial Powers".\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Christian Science Monitor}, 1 November 1956.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{The Times}, 2 November 1956.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{The Hindu}, 2 November 1956.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
He found Sir Anthony Eden's explanations for the Anglo-French action in Egypt "totally unconvincing and unsatisfactory".\textsuperscript{33} India was the only Commonwealth country which sent a formal protest also against the Anglo-French bombing of Egypt "as being against all considerations of humanity".\textsuperscript{34} At the United Nations, India criticized Britain and France for their self-imposed role of policemen in the Middle East. Her permanent representative, Arthur Lall, urged that the aerial and sea bombardment and other operations against Egypt should be stopped immediately.\textsuperscript{35}

Ceylon also was critical of Britain on her Suez policy. Like India, she too disapproved the proposed solution of international control of the Suez Canal.\textsuperscript{36} Ceylon reacted sharply against Anglo-French military intervention in Egypt. Her permanent representative at the United Nations, R.S.S. Gunawardene, told the General Assembly: "As a member of the Commonwealth, an association dedicated to the cause of peace and international harmony, it is with profound sorrow that I express my Government's strong dissent and disapproval of the action of a fellow member of the Commonwealth with whom we have traditional ties of

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{The Hindu}, 3 November 1956.


\textsuperscript{35} GAOR, First Emergency Special Session, 1956, 1 and 3 November 1956, pp. 30-31 and 53-54.

\textsuperscript{36} See the statement of Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. \textit{Ceylon Daily News} (Colombo), 7 August 1956.
friendship". He appealed to Britain not to risk the goodwill and admiration she earned, from giving freedom to the Indian sub-continent, in the pursuit of an objective that was fraught with disaster. Prime Minister Bandaranaike remarked that the British intervention in Suez "might be a resurgence of the spirit of Imperialism and Colonialism, which we hoped was respectably buried".

Pakistan was generally opposed to what Britain was doing in Egypt. It was against the use of force to solve the problem. On 16 September 1956, the Pakistan Foreign Minister, Piroze Khan Noon, declared: "We cannot, in any case, associate ourselves with the use of force or with any solution imposed on Egypt against her will". Pakistan was opposed to the Suez Canal Association also, and declined membership in it when it was formed on 1 October 1956. Anglo-French military intervention in Egypt, according to Prime Minister Suhrawardy, was "a threat to the entire Muslim world", and therefore urged immediate

37 GAOR, First Emergency Special Session, 1956, pp. 4-5.
38 Ibid.
40 Dawn, 23 August 1956. Interestingly enough, at the 22-nation Conference, Pakistan supported the American plan which called for international control and operation of the Canal.
41 Dawn, 17 September 1956.
42 Daily Telegraph, 18 September 1956.
43 Dawn, 4 November 1956. In the British intervention in Egypt, a leading Pakistani newspaper saw "the rise once again of begoted and perverted Christendom against the world of Islam in alliance with the Jews". "Hitler Reborn", Dawn, 1 November 1956.
cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of all foreign troops from Egypt. He declared that if Britain and France refused to accept a UN directive, then, the rest of the world would combine and use force against the aggressors until the rule of law was again restored and the nations agreed to settle the dispute peacefully.

Unlike other Commonwealth countries, Canada played a distinctly delicate role throughout the crisis. Because of her careful handling of the situation, she was able to help Britain ultimately to get out of the mess created by Britain and France. Ever since President Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, Canada was in constant diplomatic contact with Britain "with a view, not only to ascertaining what United Kingdom policy is in this matter... but also to doing what we can to concert our attitude and policy with other Commonwealth countries in this matter". Despite repeated calls to give public encouragement to the stand taken by Britain, France and the United States, she had refrained from doing so, holding that the dispute should be settled "using the good offices of the United Nations". Like the Union of South Africa,

44 Dawn, 2 November 1956. It was reported that, earlier, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Subrahmany suggesting that Asian countries should make concerted efforts to meet the "naked aggression" of Israel, Britain and France. The Times, 2 November 1956.

45 Dawn, 3 November 1956.


47 For e.g. see J.G. Diefenbaker's statement in the Canadian House of Commons on 1 August 1956. Ibid., p. 6793.

48 Ibid., p. 6608.
Canada was also not a participant of both the London Conferences on Suez question because, as per the criterion adopted, she was not qualified for an invitation.49

But the Anglo-French military action against Egypt broke her self-restraint. She reacted sharply to the British failure to consult other Commonwealth countries in advance, when Britain contemplated that course of action against Egypt. Lester Pearson, External Affairs Minister, complained that "there was no consultation with other members of the Commonwealth... and no advance information that this very important decision, for better or for worse, was about to be taken".50 He regretted that, "at a time when the United Nations Security Council was seized of the matter, the United Kingdom and France felt it necessary to intervene with force on their own responsibility".51

49 The criterion of selecting invitees to the Conference of the principal users of the Canal was on the basis of tonnage of their shipping and the extent of their trade through the Canal. However, since Canada and South Africa were Commonwealth members, Britain felt it obligatory to explain to them the circumstance in which they were not invited. In a personal message to Canada, Anthony Eden explained the difficulties in settling the list of invitees to keep the Conference within reasonable limits, and assured the Canadian Government that during the Conference, she would be kept in closest touch with what took place at the Conference. Ibid., p. 6920.

50 Canada, House of Commons Debates, 1956 (Special Session), p. 53. South Africa, though neutral, was also felt offended, when Britain failed to consult her before using force in Egypt. According to the Union's Foreign Minister Eric Louw, "The action of the British Government has relieved South Africa of responsibility in the present crisis". Cape Times, 3 November 1956.

51 The Times, 5 November 1956.
As soon as the news of military action came in, Canada imposed a ban on arms shipment to Israel,\(^{52}\) which, according to Husseini el-Khatib, the Egyptian Ambassador in Ottawa, was an act of "condemnation" of Israel, France and Britain.\(^{53}\) There was shock and distress in Canada over the British action. On 5 November 1956, Canadian Prime Minister, St. Laurent sent two messages to Eden, which contained "passages which were probably the most outspokenly critical expressions of opinion on British international actions passed to Whitehall from Ottawa for many years".\(^{54}\) This "blistering telegram", according to Patrick Gordon Walker, "forced Sir Anthony to climb down".\(^{55}\)

In the face of widespread adverse reaction of Commonwealth opinion against Britain's display of military prowess in Suez, Britain could not just proceed, right from the beginning, on the line which she wanted to pursue. Giving due weight to Commonwealth opinion, despite the mobilization of troops in the Canal area, Britain together with France and the United States, convened the 22-nation conference of the principal users of the Canal, in August 1956, thinking that such a conference would help

---

\(^{52}\) *Daily Telegraph*, 1 November 1956.


\(^{54}\) *Daily Telegraph*, 9 November 1956. It is believed that the Canadian Prime Minister's strongly worded message to Eden contained a call for immediate cease-fire and expressed his Government's shock at Britain's taking resort to force without proper consultation and urged the British Prime Minister to seriously weigh the consequences for the Commonwealth and Western alliance. See *New York Times*, 18 November 1956.

\(^{55}\) *News Chronicle* (London), 9 November 1956.
to appease public opinion in the Commonwealth (and the rest of the world) against the use of force. But with the failure of the Menzies mission to Cairo, Britain went ahead with the plan of a showdown with Egypt. She tried to get the approval of the UN Security Council to the 18-Power proposals, so that it would ultimately justify her use of force against Egypt. The Canadian Secretary of State, Lester Pearson, and her High Commissioner in London held discussions, with the British Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, on 3 September 1956, with the object of dissuading Britain from using force, without the authorisation of the United Nations. But Britain was not in a mood to listen to them, hoping that the United States (and perhaps some at least of the Commonwealth nations) would ultimately stand by Britain against Egypt.

THE SUEZ CANAL USERS' ASSOCIATION

The British expectations of the United States were heightened by a proposal of the American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, to form a club of the principal users of the Canal, called the Suez Canal Users' Association, for the purpose of operating the Canal on their own. Believing that the United States was

56 Canada, House of Commons Debates, 1956, Special Session, pp. 52-53.

57 Times of India (Bombay), 14 September 1956 called the decision "political bankruptcy for which it would be difficult to discover an adequate parallel". Nasser called it "an association for waging war" and said that the 18-Powers who constituted members of this proposed association were guilty of "international thuggery and imperialism". See Nasser's statement on 15 September 1956.
serious over the plan, Britain thought it worth trying, hoping that it would give an added lever, either to exert pressure on Egypt to come round for an agreement, or to use force. In a speech to the House of Commons, on 12 September 1956, Anthony Eden stated that the Canal Users' Association would seek to exercise their rights and accordingly prepare their way for a permanent system which could be established with the full agreement of all interested parties. He declared that in the event of Egypt's refusal to co-operate with the Association, Britain and others concerned would be "free to take such further steps... either through the United Nations or by other means, for the assertion of their rights".58 The Parliamentary correspondent of the Manchester Guardian wrote that Parliament heard an Eden "who would not shrink from using force if he decides there is no alternative".59 However, the question of using force against Egypt was not there in American thinking.

Britain honestly believed that in a confrontation with an extremely difficult situation America would actively support Britain and France. If the belief was genuine, it would have put Britain militarily and politically in an advantageous position. But the acid test came, when Britain and France mounted


their armed attack on Egypt. To quote Harold Macmillan:

British Cabinet certainly made a profound miscalculation as to the likely reaction in Washington to the Franco-British intervention. It has been argued that Eden should have told Eisenhower beforehand of the decision to deliver the ultimatum to Israel and Egypt. On the other hand, to be 'informed' rather than 'consulted' may be almost as wounding as to be kept in the dark. Moreover, since such information could not have been kept secret, there were strong military objections... I believed that the Americans would issue a protest, even a violent protest in public; but that they would in their hearts be glad to see the matter brought to a conclusion. They would therefore content themselves with overt disapproval, while feeling covert sympathy.... But our hopes were to be rudely dashed to the ground. The Secretary of State and, to a lesser degree, the President, seemed to regard the action of Britain and France as a personal affront. They particularly resented the fact that we had acted on our own without American permission or concurrence.... In any event, we and our French allies were now to face an attack, skilfully devised and powerfully executed, in which the protagonists were the Russian and American Governments, acting together in an unnatural coalition. (60)

The United States kept up this hostile posture throughout the rest of the crisis. This posture was redemonstrated when President Eisenhower refused an interview to the British Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd.61

All on a sudden, Britain found herself in hot waters. It was the assumption of the strong American support that led her to disregard the voice of protests of the majority of the Commonwealth nations. But soon, the hope of American support faded out. Since the changing of cards by Dulles, the Users' Association had the look of an abandoned child. When the


61 Ibid.
18-Powers assembled in London on 19 September for a second conference, Anglo-American solidarity was in the doldrums. Many eyebrows were raised in London over the American indecision over the stand to be taken if the London Conference failed to find an answer to the problem. Pessimism prevailed at the 18-Power Conference took them to no definite conclusion. Though the Users' Association was formed with effect from 1 October 1956, the negative attitude adopted by certain countries were more than enough to scuttle the objectives behind it and erode its effectiveness. Of the 18 participants, three - Pakistan, Ethiopia and Japan - declined membership of the Association. Therefore, at the end of the Conference, on 21 September 1956, only two Commonwealth countries - Australia and New Zealand - were officially there to support Britain. Coupled with the new American attitude against the British scheme, the lack of general Commonwealth support considerably weakened the British position in the diplomatic chessboard.

When the Menzies mission to Cairo failed, Britain took up the matter to the UN Security Council. She approached the Security Council with the hope that if the Council proved to be "incapable of maintaining international agreements, Britain would not stand aside and allow them to be flouted. If necessary, we would be prepared to use whatever steps, including force, might be needed to re-establish respect for these obligations". 62

Therefore, sanctity of treaties and respect for international relations were the main arguments of the British representative, Selwyn Lloyd, in the Security Council. 63 Australia, the only other Commonwealth member of the Security Council at that time, supported Britain, saying that the proposals in the draft resolution submitted by Britain and France were fair and reasonable. 64 But the Soviet Union vetoed part two of the resolution, which dealt with the Users' Association. The Soviet veto deadlocked the Security Council. In the opinion of Prof. Northedge, the Soviet veto "echoed the protest of India and other neutralist states", that Egyptian sovereignty would be infringed if an international body was imposed for the management of the Canal. 65

In the face of opposition from the Commonwealth and the lukewarm attitude of the United States, Eden committed the supreme blunder of attempting to use force to seize the Canal. It may be recalled that right from the beginning of the crisis, Britain was looking for an opportunity to use force on Suez. In a message to President Eisenhower at the end of July 1956, Eden made it clear that: "My colleagues and I are convinced that we must be ready, in the last resort, to use force to bring Nasser to his senses. For our part, we are prepared to do so.

63 SCOR, yr 11, mtg 735, pp. 7-14.

64 See the speech of Australian representative Ronald Walker on 8 October 1956. SCOR, yr 11, mtg 737, p. 19.

I have this morning instructed our Chiefs of Staff to prepare a military plan accordingly". Immediately after the crucial and confidential meeting between the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of France and England on 16 October 1956, the movement of British and French troops and ships and aircrafts was expedited.

BRITAIN ACTS

The Israeli attack of Egypt on 29 October 1956 provided Britain the opportunity to enter into Egypt as a self-appointed policeman. It is widely believed that Britain had sneaking knowledge of Israeli attack, (if France and Britain did not also give positive encouragement to Israel). On the very next day of the Israeli attack Britain and France gave an ultimatum to Egypt and Israel to cease-fire and withdraw their forces to a distance of ten miles from the Suez Canal. All the Commonwealth High Commissioners in London were duly informed of the terms of the ultimatum. In the House of Commons the British Prime Minister

66 Quoted in Harold Macmillan, n. 60.

67 Labour Party, The Truth About Suez (London, 1956), pp. 3–5. On 6 December 1956, Hugh Gaitskell asked the Government that was it not true that before October 29, possibly on October 16, or 23, discussions took place with France about Anglo-French intervention when Israel attacked Egypt? There was no reply. See UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 561, Session 1956–57, col. 1564. But on December 5 the British Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd admitted that "It is true that we were well aware of the possibility of trouble". Ibid., col. 1254.

68 See the text of the ultimatum in the United Nations, SCOR, yr 11, mtg 749, pp. 3–4.
stated: "In order to separate the belligerents, and to
guarantee freedom of transit through the Canal by the ships
of all nations, we have asked the Egyptian Government to agree
that Anglo-French forces should move temporarily - I repeat,
temporarily - into key positions at Port Said, Ismailia and
Suez".69 He also stated that if both countries failed to
comply with these requirements "British and French forces will
intervene in whatever strength may be necessary to secure compliance".
Further he stated that "We have ... kept in close consultation with
the Commonwealth Governments, but the responsibility for the
decision was that of the French and British Governments owing to
the information reaching us of the situation in the neighbourhood
of the Canal. I do not believe that any other course would have
been open to any Government".71 Israel accepted the terms of
the ultimatum, while Egypt did not, (as expected by the Anglo-French
governments). As per schedule, on 31 October 1956 British
Canberra bombers began their attacks on Egyptian airfields near
Cairo and Suez Canal Zone.72

The Commonwealth opinion resented strongly the British
failure to consult them before she went into military action
against Egypt. According to Professor Rajan, it was the only

69 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 558,
Session 1955-56, cols. 1275, and 1290-91.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 See supplement to the London Gazette, 12 September 1957,
pp. 5329-30.
obligation all members had in the Commonwealth association and its violation by Britain, the primus inter pares of Commonwealth nations was "the most outrageous".\textsuperscript{73} The Labour Party assailed the Government's failure to do so.\textsuperscript{74} The amount of time that consumed to hatch the plan hardly justified the Government's argument that there was no time sufficient enough to consult the Commonwealth before her sending bombers to Suez.\textsuperscript{75} However, it provided a fresh opportunity for the Commonwealth to mount attacks on Britain's Suez policy.\textsuperscript{76} Many people believed that the absence of consultation between Britain and other Commonwealth members was a "grievous blow" to the concept of the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{77} After touring India and Pakistan, a former Prime Minister, Attlee, said in London, on 6 November 1956: "There is a general feeling that the kind of reputation we have established in the last decade that the British always stand by their word has been broken with the United Nations. There are voices clamouring to leave the Commonwealth". In his opinion India and Pakistan felt bitter over Britain's putting Nasser


\textsuperscript{74} Labour Party, n. 67, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{75} For a detailed discussion on the British failure to consult other Commonwealth countries and its implications, see M.S. Rajan, n. 73, pp. 345-46.

\textsuperscript{76} According to Philip J. Noel-Baker, if Britain consulted the Commonwealth, the protest of the Commonwealth would have been seen, that it would have been impossible for Britain to begin the armed attack. Philip J. Noel-Baker's interview with the author on 29 September 1970, in London.

\textsuperscript{77} Philip J. Noel-Baker's letter to \textit{The Times}, 19 November 1956.
"on a pedestal".\textsuperscript{78} Many feared that the Commonwealth would disintegrate at this juncture.

The question of disintegration of the Commonwealth was never a point Britain relished. Therefore the demand for leaving the Commonwealth, in protest against Britain's Suez policy, evoked deep anxiety, both in official and unofficial circles in Britain. Every word uttered in favour of it at that time had its impact on British thinking. The \textit{Manchester Guardian} in an editorial on 7 November 1956 wrote that India would not entertain the idea of leaving the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{79} It said:

"Mr Rajagopalachari, for years one of our best friends in Asia, has even urged India to leave Commonwealth. Mr Nehru might indeed have been tempted to do so. Let us earnestly hope that the temptation will be rejected. The building of the Commonwealth is a slow work of time. It would be an unmitigated tragedy if it were to be destroyed now.... We have come desperately close to forefeiting them \textit{[Commonwealth members]} for ever".\textsuperscript{80} A leading Opposition MP, Aneurin Bevan, said that there was a grave danger that as a consequence of the British Government's policy, the Commonwealth might disintegrate. He continued: "I want to say to Mr Nehru – for heaven's sake do not allow yourself to be influenced too much by what the Tories are

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{The Times}, 7 November 1956.

\textsuperscript{79} This might have been in view of Jawaharlal Nehru's statement in New Delhi on 17 September 1956 that "India would not like to leave the Commonwealth". \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 18 September 1956.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 7 November 1956.
doing in Whitehall. Do not turn your back on the Commonwealth because of Anthony Eden. He does not represent us or the Commonwealth.81

When the American representative, Henry Cabot Lodge, rejected the British plea for delay in action when the UN Security Council met in an emergency session at the instance of the United States to consider Suez question, Britain was put to an embarrassment. The American representative rejected the British explanation and demanded instantaneous action which forced Britain to use her veto power for the first time in the United Nations.82

The intense and widespread opposition of influential Commonwealth countries indeed undermined the British strategy, with a crippling effect on her ability to continue war in Egypt. This had its impact on British thinking. The propriety of the military measures in Suez was severely criticized. In the House of Commons, on 31 October, the Leader of Opposition, Hugh Gaitskell, called the British action a 'positive assault' upon the solidarity of the Commonwealth.83 He assailed the Government for not giving adequate attention to the opinion of the members of the Commonwealth in Asia. He said, in view of the maintenance of the Commonwealth institution, the Labour Opposition would use every constitutional means to oppose the Government's policy.84 On 3 November, he characterized Britain's

81 The Statesman, 5 November 1956.
82 Eden, n. 62, p. 530.
83 Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 5 November 1956.
84 Ibid.
military intervention in Egypt as an "example of independent aggressive actions under the guise of police action - an excuse nobody believes". It was demanded that Anthony Eden should resign to save the Commonwealth. In a speech in Warwickshire, Patrick Gordon Walker suggested the resignation of the Prime Minister "to save the Commonwealth". He said: "We cannot re-knit the links of the Commonwealth under a Prime Minister who has sent a shudder of abhorrence through the Commonwealth. The Prime Minister now stands personally in the way of the national interest".

Undoubtedly, the strong opposition from the majority of the Commonwealth nations, and its echo in the British Parliament, was a major factor that compelled Britain to halt the use of force and settle the problem through peaceful means.

UNITED NATIONS EMERGENCY FORCE

Thus, Britain was on the verge of suffering a diplomatic disaster, when Lester Pearson of Canada advanced the idea of the United Nations Emergency Force for Egypt. The idea originated in the Canadian mind, though the British Prime Minister Eden claimed its authorship. What Pearson had in mind was the

85 Ibid.
86 Hindustan Times, 13 November 1956.
87 At the United Nations many delegates favoured branding Britain and France as aggressors under the UN Charter.
proposal to convert the Anglo-French forces into a UN force. But after observing the mood of hostility in the General Assembly to such an idea, he abandoned it without a second thought. When the American cease-fire resolution came up before the Assembly, he argued for delay and abstained from voting. The resolution was carried by 64 votes in favour, 5 against and 6 abstained. Canada was among those who abstained. In explaining the reasons for the abstention, Lester Pearson stated: "I regret the use of military force in the circumstances which we have been discussing, but I regret also that there was not more time, before a vote had to be taken, for consideration of the best way to bring about that kind of cease-fire which would have enduring and beneficial results.... I therefore would have liked to see a provision in this resolution... authorising the Secretary-General to begin to make arrangements with member Governments for a United Nations force large enough to keep these borders at peace while a political settlement is being worked out".89 This was the beginning of a tactical step that saved the face of Britain in Suez. In the meantime, he succeeded in convincing the UN Secretary-General of the need for the creation of a UN force to supervise the cessation of hostilities in the Suez Canal. For further consultations, he went to Ottawa, from where he sought the opinion of the United States and

89 GAOR, First Emergency Special Session, 1956, 1 November 1956, pp. 35-36.
Similar approaches were made to other important nations, including India. Pearson observed no opposition from any quarter. On 4 November 1956, the Canadian resolution for the creation of a UN Emergency Force was passed in the General Assembly by a vote of 57 to 0 with 19 abstentions. Among the absentees were the United Kingdom and Australia. Britain accepted the formula of replacing the Anglo-French forces with the UN Emergency Force in the Suez Canal Zone.

Most of the Commonwealth countries offered contribution to the United Nations Emergency Force. At the beginning, India had some reservations in supporting the UNEF. In a letter to the UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, on 6 November 1956, India's permanent representative, Arthur Lall, made it clear that (1) the UNEF should not be a successor to the Anglo-French forces; (2) it must obtain Egyptian Government's consent in its functioning in Egypt; (3) it must be a temporary one for an emergency; and (4) it should be a balanced one in its composition. Subsequent events showed that the Indian opinion had telling influence on the formation and functioning of the UNEF. As a result, India took greater interest and the Indian component in the UNEF was quite substantial.

90 Canada, House of Commons Debates, 1956, Special Session, pp. 57-58.

91 It may be recalled that at every stage of the Canadian move, India was invariably consulted, in view of the extent of influence India had on Egypt. This made the close co-operation between India and Canada more natural and effective indicating an "Indo-Canadian entente". M.S. Rajan, "Indo-Canadian Entente", International Journal (Toronto), vol. XVII (1962), pp. 358-84.

However, the Canadian proposal for the UN peace force was with an intention to take the steam off the conflict and save Britain from a humiliating situation, a factor which even staunch pro-British scholars would not dispute. According to the Canadian Prime Minister, St. Laurent:

This move of ours, ... had, I know, a considerable influence on the decision of the United Kingdom and France to agree to a ceasefire and to undertake to withdraw their forces from the scene of the battle.... I have been most heartened at the reaction amongst the members of the Commonwealth to our initiative in the United Nations and deeply relieved that, through this method, the means have been found whereby we all can take an active and positive contribution to the cause of peace together with all our Allies in NATO and so many other members of the United Nations. It was for a time a sad spectacle to see, at the United Nations, the United States and many of our European Allies with the Soviet Union and its Satellites on the one side, and France and the United Kingdom and other of our Commonwealth partners on the other - a spectacle which we, as Canadians, hope never to see repeated. (93)

In a statement in the House of Commons on 27 November 1956, Canadian External Affairs Minister, Lester Pearson remarked: "It is bad to be a chore boy of the United States. It is equally bad to be a colonial chore boy running around shouting 'Ready, aye, ready' ". But, "We were also anxious to do everything we could down there to prevent any formal condemnation of the United Kingdom and France as aggressors under the Charter, any demand that sanctions be imposed against them.... Then also,

93 Canada, Department of External Affairs, Statements and Speeches, No. 56/26, 15 November 1956, pp. 3 and 5.
and this was a matter which was very much on our minds, we were anxious to do what we could to hold the Commonwealth together in this very severe test. It was badly and dangerously split. At one stage after the fighting on land began, it was on the verge of dissolution, and that is not an exaggerated observation.... If the United Kingdom and French forces had continued fighting at that time, after the Egyptian and Israeli governments had accepted the ceasefire, I suggest that the Commonwealth might not have been able to stand the strain; that the Asian members of the Commonwealth might not have been able to remain in it in those circumstances. There is evidence from New Delhi, Karachi and Colombo to support that statement".95

British influence was at the lowest ebb when the UNEF was formed. Though Australia stood by her firmly, her support was not of much significance, diplomatically or militarily. Conscious of this fact and satisfied with the good intentions of the Canadian proposal to form the UNEF, and perplexed at the lack of support from the Commonwealth and the United States, Britain thought it best to withdraw from the Suez gracefully. In the circumstances, British official circles began to interpret the Anglo-French military intervention as a service to the world. Britain's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Selwyn Lloyd, claimed in the UN General Assembly, on 23 November 1956, that Britain had stopped a small war from spreading into

95 Ibid., pp. 55 and 60.
a larger war. This new interpretation of aggression on Egypt indicated the change of mood in Britain. Once, the psychological foundation for a new approach was laid, it did not take much time to Britain to reconcile to the situation. In this, the greatest influence was exerted by the Commonwealth countries. On 3 December 1956, Britain agreed to the withdrawal of troops from Egypt. The final British troop withdrawal from the Suez was completed on 22 December 1956. On 6 December 1956, the Opposition Leader, Hugh Gaitskell said in the House of Commons: "We have managed now to force the Government to ceasefire. They have, after some weeks, and very reluctantly, agreed to the withdrawal of their troops from Egypt. The next stage must be a return to the principles from which they have departed, namely, Commonwealth unity, understanding with our allies, and obedience to the United Nations". The Labour Party demanded immediate steps to fortify the Commonwealth, and pointed out the need for an early meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, and also Commonwealth Finance Ministers, to normalise the relationship between Britain and the Commonwealth.

EDEN'S FIASCO

No doubt, Britain's Suez policy was mainly intended to uphold her vital national interests. But, as Gordon Walker has

96 GAOR, plen. mtgs, Session 11, 23 November 1956, p. 259.
98 Ibid., col. 1569.
observed: "The final settlement was less favourable to Britain than the proposals originally put forward by India at the London Conference".\footnote{Patrick Gordon Walker, The Commonwealth (London, 1962), p. 321. V.K. Krishna Menon also expressed similar views. He said: "What we got the Egyptians to agree to, and which the British spoiled, was very much better than what the Anglo-Americans finally got". Michael Brecher, India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World (London, 1968), p. 65.}

This ignominious defeat signalled radical changes in the British political scene. On 9 January 1957 Sir Anthony Eden submitted his resignation as Prime Minister (though ostensibly on grounds of health), after leaving a permanent gash in Britain's prestige.\footnote{According to Macmillan, Eden resigned because of illness and on the advice of his doctors. In his diary he wrote: "Although Eden's illness is real, it will be thought in most countries to be 'diplomatic' ". Harold Macmillan, "Riding the Storm: The Memoirs of Harold Macmillan, 1956–1959", The Times, 3 November 1970.}

Harold Macmillan succeeded Eden as Prime Minister. By now, the relationship between Great Britain and the rest of the Commonwealth had been pressed to the breaking point. One of the immediate tasks of the new Prime Minister was the speedy restoration of the Commonwealth bonds. On the prevalent atmosphere, Harold Macmillan wrote some years later:

Finally, there was the future of the Commonwealth. In the Suez crisis, so far as I could judge, the old Commonwealth countries had stood splendidly firm with loyalty and understanding. India, inspite of her natural dislike of force as an instrument of policy, had shown sympathy and good sense. So had Pakistan and Ceylon. There would have to be a meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in the next few months, and it would need careful handling. But what of the future? I reflected that in the coming year both Ghana and Malaya were due to become independent. This process was bound to continue. Could it be resisted? Or should it be
guided as far as possible into fruitful channels? Was I destined to be a remodeller or the liquidator of Europe? (102)

Fear of India's exit from the Commonwealth was one of the first main tasks that caught attention of Macmillan as Prime Minister. The other task was to restore the normalcy in her relationship with Canada. One of the main objectives of Macmillan in the Bermuda Conference of March 1957 was to achieve this objective. There he played host to three members of the Canadian Government - St. Laurent, Lester Pearson and Howe, who came there to hold discussions with the British Prime Minister. Later, the British delegation at Bermuda expressed great appreciation in Britain for all that Canada had done for the mother country at the United Nations during the Suez crisis. Macmillan described his discussions in Bermuda with the Canadian leaders as valuable and useful. As Gordon Walker writes: "The United Kingdom, whose Suez policies had largely been frustrated by the other members, never for a moment set this against the general and continuing value to her of the Commonwealth connexion".

The Commonwealth survived the shock of the Suez crisis largely because Britain agreed to pull out of Egypt. This timely

102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
106 Gordon Walker, n. 100.
British response helped to keep the organization intact. As Pearson remarked, if fighting was allowed to continue in Egypt, "the strains and stresses on Asian members of the Commonwealth would have been so great that they would not have been able to withstand them". He later confessed that Canadian objective was to help Britain ultimately. On 27 November 1956 he said:

Believe me, the Arab and Asian countries, including the Asian members of the Commonwealth, were watching us, as they were watching others, very carefully to see if... we were just following automatically any other Power. If we had given any evidence that would have justified the impression that we were supporting without reservation the United Kingdom and France in all their tactics and attitudes towards this matter, we would not have been able to play the part which we at least tried to play... Our purpose was to be as helpful to the United Kingdom and France as we possibly could be. Believe me, that attitude has been appreciated in London... Far from criticising us in private or in public in London or Paris for our gratuitous condemnation of their course, we have had many expressions of appreciation for the line we have been trying to follow and which has been helpful in the circumstances to the United Kingdom and France. (108)

NO WITHDRAWAL FROM COMMONWEALTH

Despite the public hue and cry for withdrawal from the Commonwealth, none of the three Asian Governments entertained the idea. Rejecting the demand, the Indian Prime Minister,


Jawaharlal Nehru stated on 25 March 1957: "We are not going to act in a huff or in a spirit of anger, merely because we dislike something that has happened. I feel, as I said here, that inspite of these occurrences that have happened and that have distressed us, it is right for us to continue our association with the Commonwealth for a variety of reasons... among them being primarily the fact that our policies, as is obvious, are in no way conditioned or deflected from their normal course by that association". In the Pakistan Assembly, Prime Minister Suhrawardy echoed the same view:

We are fortunate, I maintain, in being part of this great comity of nations. The fact that we have adopted the Republican form of Government in March 1956, has not altered our position as a member of the Commonwealth. You may remember, Sir, during the wave of anger which swept through Pakistan, there was a demand that we should secede from the Commonwealth. Personally I do not think it proper that we should cut off our nose to spite our face and I am glad to say the moderation and the cautious attitude which we adopted at that time has proved correct. A similar wave of resentment went through India and it must be said to the credit of the Prime Minister of India that he too set his face against any severance of relations from the Commonwealth, as he too realized the advantages that it brings to a country to be a member of a body which compromises so many important nations. The role which the Commonwealth is playing may not be spectacular but it is constructive and definite... If member countries maintain their faith in the noble purpose underlying the concept of Commonwealth and we faithfully practise them, we are bound to exert strength, and moral influence, on international affairs. (110)


A TURNING POINT

The two important points to be noted in the whole episode were the role of India and the United States, which made Britain sore. The Indian role was very effective and annoyed Britain throughout the crisis. India, with the help of Canada, and also with the tacit support of the United States and the Soviet Union, fought the diplomatic battle for Egypt against Britain and France. The Soviet Union in fact warned Britain about the "dangerous consequences of aggression" against Egypt. 111 In fact, it was the Indian role during the crisis that partly caused disenchantment in Britain towards the Commonwealth. This was so, not because of the vehement Indian opposition to British policy during the crisis, but because of the feeling that India was not as vehement in criticizing the Soviet invasion of Hungary as it criticized the Anglo-French intervention in Suez. The Times criticized Nehru: "Mr Nehru said that Indian policy at the United Nations had been to resist all attempts 'to distract attention from the Egyptian question by harping on the events in Hungary'. This monstrous perversion of values could be inspired only by constructive malice against Britain and France or calculated patronage of Soviet Russia". 112 However, after the withdrawal announcement from Suez during the first week of December 1956, the general view in Britain was that her

111 The Hindu, 9 November 1956.
112 "Knowing our Friends", The Sunday Times, 9 December 1956.
forced retreat from the Suez was due to the "unholy alliance" of the United States, India and the Soviet Union in the United Nations. 113

The hostile American attitude towards Britain during the crisis had its repercussion on Commonwealth countries like Australia and New Zealand - two staunch supporters of Britain right from the beginning. They became less enthusiastic in their support to her when they saw that British policy was endangering the Anglo-American solidarity. They were more keen to play the role of bridge building between the conflicting stands of Britain and the United States. Australia's abstention at the Security Council when the American representative pressed his resolution for voting was the culmination of this new attitude. This made the support of these Commonwealth Dominions to Britain more restrained and to some extent less effective. However, the attitude of the Commonwealth countries, besides that of the United States, had a great impact on the British decision to withdraw from the Suez Canal. It is true that Britain did not openly acknowledge this pressure, but on the other hand, went out of the way to acknowledge openly that the views offered, both individually and collectively, by the Governments of Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, "weighed heavily in the decision to bring an end to military action in Egypt". 114 Nevertheless, it seems likely that

113 The Hindu, 5 December 1956.
the equally important factor was the absence of material and diplomatic support from most of the Commonwealth countries. At the beginning, Britain was not much worried over the Indian and other Commonwealth Asian countries' opposition to her Suez policy. But she was shocked to see 26 Asian and African nations lined up behind India at the United Nations to bring pressure on Britain.115

If Britain openly admitted that the views of the four Muslim members of the Baghdad Pact had an influence upon the British decision to cease-fire and withdraw, it goes without saying, how important it must have been the views and attitudes of the Commonwealth - one of the pillars of British foreign policy then - in influencing British policy in the Suez crisis, especially after the American "betrayal" of Britain. The weighty attention Indian views received in Britain during the crisis was thus recorded by Anthony Eden: "The Indian Government... were constantly urging a negotiated settlement upon us. As we repeatedly explained to them, this is what we were seeking... Her Majesty's Government considered fully and at length all suggestions put to them by India, but Delhi did not then share our view of the importance of keeping international agreements in the interests of all nations, or of the need to restore them when broken".116 According to Philip J. Noel-Baker, the demand

115 The Australian Prime Minister himself admitted that he himself was baffled by the pressure of the UN General Assembly. Australia, Current Notes on International Affairs, vol. 27 (1956), pp. 748-50.

of the Commonwealth to stop the war to keep the organization intact "was one of the most powerful factors in stopping the British and French attack and in bringing them out of Egypt". The pressure the Commonwealth exerted through the United Nations General Assembly and through the Labour Opposition in the House of Commons was also immensely powerful.\(^{117}\)

The military action in Suez was the first important step that Britain took in the post-war period, without the support of the Commonwealth. And it happened, it was also the first open and humiliating defeat Britain suffered in post-war diplomacy. The British disregard of Commonwealth views and opinions at the beginning of the crisis was a costly mistake she committed in handling the Suez situation. Hugh Gaitskell, Leader of Opposition, thus assailed British policy: "This notion that we can 'go it alone', and that we have the power to do so, regardless of the attitude of our allies and the rest of the Commonwealth, in the world as it is today is nothing short of lunacy".\(^{118}\) He said: "We must reaffirm our principles in the three essentials of our foreign policy - a united Commonwealth, support for the Charter of the United Nations, and the Anglo-American alliances. We must not only reaffirm these, but we must base our foreign policy upon them too, for only in that way


and by abandoning the path down which the Government strode last autumn, can we hope to regain some of our lost influence and prestige in the world. Only in this way can we recreate the confidence between ourselves and our allies and unity in the Commonwealth. No doubt, if Britain gave sufficient attention to the Indian suggestions, as Aneurin Bevan stated, "the art of diplomacy would have brought Nasser to where we wanted to get him, which was to agree about the free passage of ships through the Canal, on the civilized ground that a riparian nation has got no absolute rights over a great waterway like the Canal."

The British failure in Suez was her own creation, emanated from miscalculations and mishandling. It constituted a turning point in British foreign policy. It marked the last stage of British idealism about the world and the Commonwealth. The absence of support from important members of the Commonwealth to Britain's Suez policy led her to heart-searching. Britain realized that she could not expect a blind following from Commonwealth nations in important international situations. The alleged 'double-standard' adopted by certain Commonwealth countries in criticizing Britain in Suez, and in not criticizing the

---

119 Ibid.


121 According to the Labour Party, Australia and New Zealand supported Britain at the U.N. "only with misgiving". Labour Party, n. 67, p. 2.
Soviet Union in her intervention in Hungary, was the last straw that broke the camel's back. As Professor Northedge rightly points out, it played a part "in estranging Britain from African and Asian countries". It may be seen that, in the course of the crisis itself, official circles in Britain began to interpret Anglo-French collaboration as a happy turn towards European Union. In the words of Sir Anthony Eden, "one happy consequence of all this has been to increase the sense of partnership between nations of Western Europe. The truth is, we all have a common interest in this, as in so many other matters". This statement of the British Prime Minister was one of the first indications of a fresh turn in Britain's attitude towards Europe as well as against the Commonwealth. The Times commented that it was the beginning of European unity. As observed by two informed British writers, "most people felt, however confusedly, that a turning-point had been reached in Britain's relations with the outside world, necessitating fundamental changes of policy. And it was instinctively to Europe, rather than the Commonwealth, that people turned". Indicating the new trend, the questions of


123 The Times, 14 October 1956.

124 "A beginning", The Times, 29 August 1956.

European Common Market and the creation of a European Free Trade Area figured prominently in the meeting between Prime Minister Macmillan, and Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, and their French counterparts M. Mollet and M. Pineau in Paris on 9 March 1957. It was reported that at the meeting "a deeper intimacy of feeling was evident" on the European policy. Hence followed, the question of how to reshape her policies towards Europe began to be given increasing attention in British scheme of things, though, for the time being, the Commonwealth still continued to be an important factor in British foreign policy and relations.

---

126 *The Observer*, 10 March 1957.