Chapter V
CONCLUSION
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President Harry S. Truman supported the creation of the State of Israel and within days of its creation recognised it. The entire Arab world rose in protest against this act and its perception of the United States as a state friendly to the Arabs dramatically changed. They viewed the United States with intense suspicion and dislike. The war that immediately followed the creation of Israel turned thousands of Palestinians into refugees who lived in neighbouring Arab states and profoundly influenced their politics and policies. They could not be ignored by the host governments. Even the Truman Administration realizing the adverse effects of its policy on the Arabs, tried to redress the pro-Israeli tilt somewhat by offering financial assistance for the return and rehabilitation of the Palestinian refugees. But that could never materialise. The existence of a hostile Israel in the midst of the Arab states generated a feeling of nationalism. Gradually one man rose high over others as the voice of Arab nationalism—Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Along with the rise of Arab nationalism, the United States was concerned with the prospect of the Middle East being penetrated by Communist influence. President Truman had proclaimed his doctrine and the policy of
containment governed its overall approach. It was realized that the United States could be the leader but it could not contain Communism without the cooperation of other Western colonial powers, which stood in opposition to the rising tide of nationalism. While it sympathised with nationalism, it went along with the colonial powers. In fact the United States at the time was keen to guide Arab nationalism into, "...channels friendly to the Western powers and aligned against Communism."¹ And to fulfill these aims it, "...favoured collective measures."² The colonial powers were, however, weakening and in no position to withstand the pressure of the nationalist forces. Realizing this, President Eisenhower tried to lessen the links between the United States and Britain in order to impress upon the Arabs that it did not share the latter's colonialist tendencies. One way out of the dilemma was to declare the all powerful and militant nationalism as Communist. Merging the two together resolved the ideological dilemma of opposing nationalism waging a struggle for self determination and independence.

With little variations the United States faced the same problem in several regions of the world. The

Middle East was no different. By the time President Eisenhower came to office—moving away from containment was not a feasible alternative. There was consensus in the United States that the Soviet Union was an expansionist power determined to dominate the world. It was seen as exploiting every opportunity to expand its power and influence by overt aggression or covert subversion. The United States in alliance with other Western powers felt the obligation to prevent the Soviet Union from attaining its objective. There is no doubt that Eisenhower did not disagree with the consensus. The world by that time had not become used to the reality that Communism was not a monolith with its head in Moscow. It was the growing Sino-Soviet schismism that finally impressed this point.

As pointed earlier this study is not an analytical account of the United States policy towards Egypt, the most populous and most important country of the region. It takes the high point of United States relations with that country— the Suez crisis and the subsequent declaration of the Eisenhower Doctrine. What is the picture that finally emerges? One conclusion that is unmistakable is that when big leaders sit down to write
their memoirs, they do not necessarily tell the truth. If one does not want to accuse them of deliberately lying, one can say that their desire to justify themselves in history plays tricks with their memories. This study shows Anthony Eden to be the worst offender in this regard. Also this study reveals Eisenhower in a better light. One of the important revisionist historians Fred I. Greenstein has written of the "hidden-hand" presidency of Eisenhower. In the light of recently released material this view holds true.

Restoration of the balance in the United States-Middle East policy by be-friending Egypt was an important part of Eisenhower's foreign policy agenda. The lack of trust in Nasser prevented him from accepting his agenda and helping him to achieve it. The desire to win Egypt to the Western side in the looming contest with the Soviet Union prevented him from going any length to remove him. The United States policy, therefore, was precariously poised between these two options. And as is often the case, the United States under Eisenhower-Dulles believed that this posture could be sustained by dangling the carrot of economic assistance. It offered assistance for Egypt's biggest
and most prestigious project—the Aswan dam.

The United States policy ran counter to the British and French policies. Although it was Britain's decision to withdraw from its Bases in the Suez, it was desperately anxious to reassert its dominant position in the Middle East. It saw the rising tide of nationalism as the most serious setback in the attainment of this goal. It did not see any possibility of cooperation with Nasser. It was he who had forced it to withdraw from the Suez Base. Then the British had proposed the formation of the Baghdad Pact which too had been opposed by Nasser. The United States on the other hand had not only pressured the British in reaching the Base agreement which required the withdrawal of their military presence from the area, but it also refused to join the Baghdad Pact unless Egypt joined it. This reduced it to a British venture instead of an allied one. The British, therefore, as new sources indicate, planned to reoccupy the Canal Zone. They found in the French and the Israelis more than willing partners. The French had their own reasons to be angry with Nasser. They were facing a revolutionary upsurge in their colonial empire in northern Africa and believed that
these revolutionaries were actively being supported by Nasser. They too wanted to see his downfall. Israel has its own reason to join in the Suez plot. Its territory was under attack by the Fedayeens, the Palestinians guerrilas living in Egypt. It wanted to put an end to these night raids by occupying the Egyptian territory upto the Suez and teaching Egypt and Nasser a lesson. The Suez crisis was the result.

Most of this was known at the time of the crisis. Conventional wisdom was that the United States withdrawal of the offer to assist Egypt in the construction of the Aswan Dam triggered a chain of events. Angered by the decision, Nasser took the counter measure of nationalizing the Suez Canal which in turn brought about the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt. The declassified documents convincingly show that the withdrawal of American offer was not the factor which led to the nationalization of the Canal. Nasser was already planning the nationalization and used the American announcement to time his own announcement to give the impression that it was his response to an extreme act of provocation. Had not Secretary Dulles announced the withdrawal of the offer in an abrupt
manner, perhaps the events would have followed a different course. More recent writings on the subject find the act of withdrawal justified but do not absolve Secretary of State Dulles of all guilt. They are still critical of the manner of cancellation.

Egypt was constantly being attacked by Israel. Finding itself without adequate arms, it asked the United States for more. The request was turned down. Egypt then bought arms from Czechoslovakia, not by paying cash but by pledging its cotton crop. The United States should have expected some move, because no one should have expected Nasser to see Egypt being humiliated and to do nothing about it. The arms deal with Czechoslovakia was followed by the cancellation of the Aswan Dam offer by the United States. This again led many contemporary writers to connect these two events in a cause-effect relationship. The better deal was seen as providing evidence that Egypt was moving closer to the Soviet bloc. The new material shows that the United States was worried equally, if not more, by the financial implication of the better deal. It was viewed as weakening Egypt's capacity to repay. Said Sherman Adams former Assistant to the President, "we didn't think the Egyptian economy would stand it with the commitments they had already made."\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{3} Sherman Adams interviewed by Richard D. Challener, Lincoln, New Hampshire, August 15,1964 \textit{John Foster Dulles Oral History Collection}, Princeton, USA. Henceforth cited as JFD-OHC.
The Eisenhower library has a very large number of documents to show the intense planning that had gone into preparing for an invasion of Egypt. It was nothing less than a conspiracy. But as the then Prime Minister of England Anthony Eden had come to understand that the foreign policy aims of Britain in the Middle East ran counter to the policy that was being pursued by the United States towards Egypt. The United States was not only not going to join the conspiracy but more likely to take preventive action. This led Eden to keep the entire planning and preparation for the war he was going to unleash on Egypt a secret from the United States. But even this was not sufficient because the United States through its own intelligence could get to the bottom of things. Therefore, Eden and his Government lied to President Eisenhower and misled him into believing that no action was being taken. Before launching of the operation the United States was not consulted. England, France and Israel, so dependent on the United States, at no point of time discussed their plans with President Eisenhower. This was a deception that the records now prove conclusively.

But when the war broke out and this deception came to light the President's reaction too was on
predicable lines. It was the response of a man who had been cheated by a friend, in whom he has placed trust. Allen W. Dulles, brother of John Foster Dulles and then director of CIA remarked that Eisenhower,".... was really very deeply hurt that the British and French had gotten together on this, secretly." He completely disassociated himself from the invasion. His anguish as well as his anger comes out vividly in his diary entries and his letters and in conversations with other members of the State Department. Even more importantly the documents show that he was for peace in the Middle East and this was another reason for his opposition to the Anglo-French-Israeli action in invading Egypt. For the first time since the cold war began, the United States and the Soviet Union both sponsored resolutions in the United Nations critical of the invasion and asking for the restoration of status-quo-ante. It was also for the first time that the United States broke rank with two of its closest Western allies.

President Eisenhower was criticised for not supporting its allies. The New York Times and The Washington Post, the two most important newspapers in the United States and part of the liberal establishment,

wrote sharp editorials. Subsequently, they did not deviate from this line. But Eisenhower rightly pointed out that the United States could not have two different standards of international behaviour— one for its allies and one for others. If the United States supported the principle of alliance, it also supported the United Nations and the principles on which it was based. His public stand at the time stands corroborated by the new documents.

But why did Britain, France and Israel did what they did? Did they think that when their deception and lies would come out in the open Eisenhower's reaction would be any different? The Suez crisis occurred when the President was in the midst of the 1956 Presidential elections. Israel had calculated that the President would not dare oppose Israel because that would alienate the Jewish vote. Under similar circumstances in the Presidential elections in 1948, Harry S. Truman had ignored the advice of the State Department that recognition of Israel would be against the United States in the Middle East and had gone ahead and recognised it. Eisenhower was made of different stuff. He was willing
to pay the price. If pursuing policies which he believed to be right and in the interest of the United States meant retirement to private life, he was ready even for that. The record shows this clearly. Presidential elections are rarely won or lost on a single issue. In 1956 Eisenhower won a landslide victory.

Even after the United States deserted its allies its relations with Egypt did not become close. It had no plans to support President Nasser or encourage Arab nationalism. Indeed, both these ran counter to American interests. Arab nationalism was a revolutionary force whose strength was rooted in the feeling and sentiments of the Arab people. It was against the status-quo. One of its prominent aims was to undo the injustices which had been done to them by setting up the state of Israel. Thus the United States and Arab nationalism's objectives were not compatible.

This contradiction could be resolved only if Egypt's policies were not guided by its narrow national interests and if its attention could be devoted primarily to its economic developments. That was not possible so long Nasser remained at the help of Egypt's
affairs. And the United States policy had strengthened Nasser. He was a hero for the Arabs as he had successfully stood against the combined might of Britain, France and Israel. New evidence points to the efforts of Eisenhower to accommodate Arab nationalism with the interests of the Israelis. He emphasized:

...expect for Israel we could form a viable policy in the area... the question is how to take a sympathetic position regarding the Arabs, without agreeing to the destruction of Israel....

Basically he wanted to support Arab nationalism, while ignoring Nasser. The first was looked upon by the United States as an emotional outburst, the effect of which was necessary to reduce by putting, "...sand bags..." around it. And the latter was considered an irritant, essential to win over without giving the impression that they were, "...bootlicking a dictator." Eisenhower did not want to resign:

...the United States to an acceptance of the inevitability of Nasser's undiputed hegemony, over the whole of the Arab world. His response to the

5. Memorandum of Conference with the President, July 23,1958 Ann Whitman Diary Series -Dwight D.Eisenhower Diary Series, File; Staff Memos July 1958(1),Box 35. Henceforth cited as AWDS-DDEDS.

6. Memorandum, n.5.

7. Letter from Eisenhower to Dulles, November 13,1957, John Foster Dulles, White House Memorandum Series, File; Meetings with the President 19571 (1) Box 5. Henceforth cited as JFD-WHMS.
post-Suez new reality was the proclamation of the Eisenhower Doctrine.\(^8\)

The Doctrine focussed its attention on the prevention of covert subversion or open aggression against the Middle East by the Soviet Union. Under the overall policy objective of containment of Communism Eisenhower wanted to win back the American allies who had been alienated by the United States policy during the Suez crisis. The proclamation of the Doctrine, however, left the allies cold. Nor was it greeted with enthusiasm by American friends like Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. The Arabs did not feel that there was any immediate and serious threat from the Soviet Union to the security of the region. After suffering aggression from England, France and Israel, they regarded the threat from the West much more real. It was, therefore, totally unrealistic for the United States that so soon after the Suez crisis, the Arab countries would have been eager for American assistance to meet a presumed threat from the Soviet Union. The prospect of economic aid that the Doctrine held was too meagre in view of the enormity of the developmental needs of the region. The Doctrine failed to address the

more fundamental problems of the region. There was not much support for it in and outside the American Congress either. Many Congressmen who finally decided to vote in favour of the Middle East resolution did so because they believed that the President's position vis-a-vis other world leaders would be weakened if his major foreign policy initiative failed to get Congressional approval.

Ending the Arab-Israeli dispute after 1956 was another major aim of the Eisenhower presidency. The withdrawal of the British, French and Israeli forces from the occupied areas and the clearing of the Canal were essential to secure that objective. In order to facilitate the process of withdrawal, the General Assembly of the United Nations agreed on November 7, 1956 to set up a United Nations Police force. The first contingents of the force arrived in Egypt on November 15. Consequently the British and the French forces began withdrawing and the entire process was completed by December 22.

Israel and Egypt, however, proved a hurdle to the smooth process of withdrawal and clearing of the Canal. Eisenhower felt frustrated. Israel insisted on
retaining control over the police and civil administrations in the occupied areas (the Gulf of Aquaba and the Gaza Strip), and freedom of passage through the Straits of Tiran, before it withdrew. Eisenhower was not pleased and emphasised.

I would, I feel be untrue to the standards of the high office to which you have chosen me, if I were to lend influence of the United States to the proposition that a nation which invades another should be permitted to exact conditions for withdrawal.9

Ben Gurion, then leader of Israel, refused to withdraw. On the insistence of the United States, the United Nations finally adopted a resolution in February 1957 seeking to enforce economic sanctions against Israel.10 Ultimately on February 26, Israel announced its decision to withdraw.

Nasser, on the other hand had blocked the Canal, when the war had begun, by sinking 50 ships. And later when Israel had shown reluctance to withdraw, he had obstructed the clearing process. Defence Secretary, Charles E. Wilson, member of the 305th meeting of the National Security Council angrily remarked:


10. These sanctions were to include; suspension of assistance by the government of the United States to Israel and elimination of tax credits and prevention of private assistance to Israel. The last amounted to roughly $100 million annually, including $40 million in gifts and $60 million in the form of Israel bonds purchased by the Americans.

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...somebody would have to tell Nasser to quit throwing his weight around. Particularly we have got to insist that the Suez canal be cleared of obstruction and opened up at once.... in all essentials the monkey was presently going to come off the back of the British and be put on our own back. It would be our job in short—not the Anglo-French job to compel Nasser to behave himself.11

In the end Nasser too relented. Recourse to the United Nations for an end to Arab-Israeli dispute, the best at the time, brought hostilities to an end for the moment. The Canal was finally reopened for traffic on March 25, 1957.

There is enough evidence in the new documents to reappraise the contemporary opinion and historical analysis based on then available record. However, it is important that not all aspects of contemporary understanding stand revised. Some in fact find corroboration and confirmation. What emerge undoubtedly in the recent material is Eisenhower's 'fair-to-all' policy towards the various protagonists in their relations with the Middle East. From the crisis of 1956, Eisenhower now stands out from the rest. Townshend Hoopes observed:

...if there was in the whole inglorious spectacle any major figure who emerged with his reputation more or less intact.... it was surely the President of the United States.12

11. 305th Meeting of the National Security Council, November 30, 1956, p. 6, Ann Whitman Diary Series, National Security Council Series, Box 8. Henceforth cited as AWDS - NSCS.

However, it is also true that Eisenhower's 'fair-to-all' policy prevented his contribution to the area from rising above the ordinary. But as all evidence confirms, rising above the ordinary was not his goal in the first place. He was primarily interested in initiating a new policy towards the Middle East, a policy that would take the Arabs into account as well.