One

JERUSALEM AND CAIRO

Gamal abd al Nasser! Gamal abd al Nasser! GAMAL ABD AL NASSER! The crowd marching down the road in front of our house in the Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem rhythmically chanted the name of their handsome thirty-seven-year-old hero. The Egyptian president was the most revered man in East Jerusalem, the man Palestinians believed would deliver them from their misfortunes and unite the Arab world from "the ocean to the gulf." Americans, on the other hand, had already begun to vilify the Egyptian leader as a pro-Soviet revolutionary and enemy of the West.

Jordan in December 1955 was at the center of the storm about Nasser. Only seven years earlier it had annexed the West Bank and East Jerusalem to Transjordan and created the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Its twenty-year-

old king Hussein bin Talal had ascended to the throne less than three years before. The country was dependent on aid from the United Kingdom, which provided the leadership for its army. It was under pressure from the United Kingdom and the United States to align itself with a pro-Western alliance called the Baghdad Pact, which united Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, and Iran with the West against the Soviet Union and its allies. Britain was at the head of the Baghdad Pact; it had organized its creation. The United States was a partner but preferred to let England take the lead in the Middle East and was not a formal treaty member. Among many Jordanians the Baghdad Pact was seen as an imperialist and reactionary *entente* intended to stifle Egypt and its charismatic leader.

Jerusalem had been a divided city since 1948. Jordan controlled the east while Israel controlled the west. Jordan held the old city where three religions had sacred sites: the Western Wall for the Jews, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher for the Christians, and the Dome of the Rock for the Muslims. Travel across the armistice line was prohibited except for a few individuals. My family was among the few allowed access, since my father worked for the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, which monitored the armistice. We were allowed to drive back and forth through the Mandelbaum Gate, which was the opening in the lines.

The riots that broke out in Jordan on December 16, 1955, followed a visit to the country by the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Gerald Templer,

Gamal Abd al Nasser, Egypt's president and America's nemesis.

whose mission was to "push Jordan over the brink" into joining the Baghdad Pact. He offered the young king an increase in financial aid and the honorary title of Air Vice Marshal in the Royal Air Force to sweeten the deal.[1] Templer was a hard man with little sense of nuance or decorum. His timing was also bad; Nasser had just sent his loyal lieutenant Anwar Sadat to urge the king to reject the pact, and Jordanians had cheered this hero of the Egyptian revolution.[2] "By all accounts, the Templer mission was a complete failure," notes one expert.[3]

The Baghdad Pact riots shook the fragile foundations of the Hashemite Kingdom and were the worst in Jordan's history. The entire country was engulfed. The worst unrest was in the Palestinian cities and towns of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, but violence also broke out in the East Bank. Even in remote Aqaba on the Red Sea a mob sacked the American Point Four aid depot. In Jerusalem the consulates of the pact countries were attacked and the French and Turkish consuls wounded. In the capital, Amman, a general strike was declared.[4]

The king was so shaken by the riots that he asked his cousin, King Faisal II of Iraq, to prepare to send a division of troops to Jordan to help quell the unrest. The British quickly deployed two battalions of paratroopers and a battalion of Highland infantry to Cyprus, still a British colony, to be ready to act. When the British became aware that the Saudis were moving troops toward Aqaba, perhaps to seize the port, they warned them off. Jordan's armed forces were poorly prepared to deal with the extent of popular unrest.[5]

King Hussein summoned the British ambassador on December 19 to inform him that accession to the Baghdad Pact was impossible; he then dissolved the parliament and called for new elections. The Egyptian media crowed about Hussein's decision. In January Hussein canceled the plan for new elections, and the riots resumed with redoubled violence. This time the king ordered British General Sir John Glubb, the commander of the Jordanian army, or Arab Legion, to put down the unrest with brute force.

In the violence that ensued there were casualties on both sides, including one British officer who was killed in Zarqa on the East Bank.

Our street in the Shaykh Jarrah quarter of Jerusalem witnessed heavy fire by the army as it suppressed the crowds. My family watched the fighting from the comparative safety of the roof, behind high walls. The British army reinforced its strategic reserve in its colony of Cyprus with more paratroopers, and the Royal Air Force base at Mafraq in northern Jordan was reinforced by troops from the RAF Regiment in Iraq.[6] The British feared that if Jordan sank into chaos Israel would take Jerusalem and the West Bank.[7] The Saudis wanted Aqaba and Ma'an.

The unrest was unquestionably abetted by propaganda from Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Nasser was a clear enemy of the pact. The Saudis, too, were opposed to the pact, which they saw as reinforcing their historic rival—the Hashemite family, which ruled in Jordan and Iraq—as well as the British, which were also Saudi enemies. King Saud ibn Abd al Aziz told Hussein that Saudi Arabia was opposed to the expansion of Iraqi influence in the region.[8]

Hussein was at first ambivalent about Nasser. The Egyptian call for Arabs to throw off the colonial yoke resonated with the young man despite his dependence on Britain. His first wife, Dina Abdul Hamid, whom he married in April 1955, was Egyptian born and raised. She came from the Egyptian wing of the Hashemite family, and she was passionately for Nasser. Faisal was the best man at the wedding. So Hussein tried to placate Nasser.[9]

Jordan never joined the Baghdad Pact or its successor organization, the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Within a year Hussein sent Glubb back to England, with only one day's notice, to try to shake the image that the king was a puppet of London. In 1956, Nasser emerged as the winner of a crisis over control of the Suez Canal against a conspiracy of Britain, France, and Israel. His popularity was immense across the Arab world, while he had become the bogey man for America in the Middle East.

Nasser, Egypt, and America

It is ironic that Nasser became the villain, because he started out very much as America's man after the July 1952 coup that brought him to power. Nasser was the first native Egyptian to rule his country in the two thousand years since it was conquered by the Roman Empire. His military coup ousted an Albanian monarchy that had been imposed on the country by the Ottoman Empire.

Born January 15, 1918, in Alexandria, Nasser began participating in protests at an early age against the British domination of Egypt. In 1935, he was grazed on the head by a bullet fired by the police to break up a demonstration. He was turned down for admission to the Royal Military Academy in 1937 because of his political activities, but he was admitted on a second application after Nasser used family connections to gain the backing of a senior defense official. He graduated from the academy in 1938 as a second lieutenant. In the academy Nasser made friends

with Sadat and other officers who would become the Free Officers movement that toppled King Farouk.[10]

Great Britain controlled Egypt and maintained a large military presence in the country. During World War II the British army defended Egypt from the German and Italian Afrika Korps, which had invaded from Libya. The Egyptian army was sidelined. Sadat was involved in clandestine contacts with the Germans, hoping they would drive the British out of the country.

In May 1948, Egypt joined the Arab coalition fighting Israel. Nasser served in the infantry, and his unit was surrounded by the Israelis at Faluja, north of Gaza, in August 1948 but refused to surrender. Nasser was lightly wounded in the fighting. Only when Israel and Egypt signed an armistice agreement in February 1949 was Faluja occupied by the Israelis, and the 4,000 Egyptian troops, including Nasser, repatriated to Egypt. The siege of Faluja made Nasser a hero in Egypt. Upon their return to Egypt, the country's top singer, Umm Kulthum, gave a concert for the heroes of Faluja.[11] The Palestine war was a watershed for Nasser; according to one of his biographers, it "bolstered his commitment to Arab nationalist principles."[12]

Egypt was ruled by King Farouk, who had ascended to power in 1936. The British forced him to appoint a government favorable to the allies in 1942 after surrounding his palace in Cairo with their tanks. Nonetheless, Egypt was officially neutral in the second world war, until 1945, despite being invaded by Italy and Germany. Farouk was known for his lavish lifestyle, and his regime was corrupt.

The failure of the Egyptian army to save Palestine in 1948 from Israel added to the discontent.

Americans were generally unimpressed by Farouk. When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt visited Egypt in February 1945, his main purpose was to meet the king of Saudi Arabia, Abdul Aziz al Saud, who had impressed FDR greatly. Farouk did not. In the CIA in the early 1950s, Farouk was derisibly nicknamed FF, or "fat fucker."[13]

On July 23, 1952, the Free Officers, a conspiracy of Egyptian military officers, staged a military coup, and Farouk was sent into exile in Monaco and Italy, where he spent the rest of his life. The titular head of the Free Officers was General Muhammad Naguib, but the power rested with Nasser. The Free Officers gave the U.S. embassy in Cairo several hours advance notice of the coup, to help gain American friendship.[14]

The CIA did not help the coup, but it was quick to recognize that the Egyptian revolution was a very important development in the Middle East and one it needed to understand and influence. The CIA's top man in the region was Kermit Roosevelt, a scion of the famous Roosevelt family who was born in Argentina. In February 1952, months before the coup, Roosevelt visited Cairo with the purpose of exploring if "peaceful revolution" was possible under Farouk; that is, could he reform his government? Roosevelt concluded it was not possible. He also held talks with some Free Officers in secret.[15]

After the coup in October 1952, Roosevelt visited Cairo as chief of the CIA's Near East Division, C/NE. When he

met with Nasser at the famous Mena House Hotel near the pyramids, each man was "thrilled" with the other, and the CIA began a quiet but not always discreet courtship of the new Egyptian regime.[16]

Nasser was first and foremost an Egyptian nationalist, though he also adopted other leadership roles.[17] His understandable obsession was to break Egypt free of the British and any other foreign power. He was also an Arab nationalist who saw that the mantle of leadership in the Arab world was up for grabs in the 1950s. Until Nasser, Egypt had been a reluctant Arab state; many Egyptians looked down on their fellow Arabs as unsophisticated nomads. Nasser, instead, made Arabism his road to greatness. Nasser also claimed a leadership role in Islam, not in a fundamentalist way, but as another mechanism to establish Egypt's importance and, hence, his own. Finally, Nasser also claimed a leadership role in Africa. He was eager for Egyptian independence to be a harbinger for the independence of the rest of Africa, especially Algeria.

After Dwight David Eisenhower was inaugurated in January 1953, the CIA got new leadership with Allen Dulles, brother of the new secretary of state John Foster Dulles. Both were well-traveled and educated men with years of experience in foreign policy. Allen Dulles had served in the CIA's predecessor organization, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). During the war he was the OSS chief in Switzerland, where he acquired a reputation for espionage that was probably overrated, but nonetheless widely held.[18] Allen was a man who enjoyed the good life,

but he was also smart, pragmatic, and determined to give the president what he wanted. John Foster Dulles was a more ideological man who saw the Cold War with Russia in black-and-white terms, without shades of nuance. He was determined to build an alliance structure extending NATO around the world to contain the Soviet Union and China. Foster Dulles also promised to "roll back" communism, especially in Eastern Europe, which the Soviet Union saw as a threat to control of its allies in the Warsaw Pact.

In May 1953, the secretary of state traveled to Egypt and met publicly with Naguib and, privately, with Nasser. He offered to help quietly arrange an "orderly departure" of British military forces from Egypt, especially from the Suez Canal zone. The British Empire was financially broke after the huge cost of World War II; it had already given up India, the "jewel in the crown" of its empire. Kermit "Kim" Roosevelt Jr., grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt, handled the difficult task of working with London to close its base in Egypt. Prime Minister Winston Churchill was initially against any deal with Cairo, wanting to preserve the British hold on Egypt, but economic factors, especially Britain's huge debts, forced him to accept the closing of the expensive Suez base.[19] A new Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1954 sealed the deal.[20] Britain agreed to withdraw its garrison in the Suez Canal zone, 80,000 strong, over the next twenty months. The Suez Canal Company would remain in British hands until 1968.

Miles Copeland was the CIA man in Cairo. At Kim's direction, Copeland often lunched with Nasser, frequently

in Nasser's office. Allen Dulles wanted "to harness Arab nationalism" for American purposes, to align the United States with the forces of anti-colonialism that were sweeping Africa and Asia.[21] The agency helped the new regime set up its intelligence service and its propaganda apparatus.[22]

Nasser's allure was boosted enormously on October 24, 1954, when, as he was speaking in Alexandria to a large audience, eight shots rang out. Nasser paused only for an instant and then continued his speech, more eloquent and passionate than ever. The would-be assassin was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Israel watched nervously as Nasser gained power and influence, especially leery of his ties to Washington. The Israeli Secret Intelligence Service, Mossad, tried to disrupt those ties with a poorly conceived covert operation. Egyptian Jews were recruited to put bombs in the American libraries in Cairo and Alexandria. Others targeted cinemas and post offices. Operation Suzannah was quickly uncovered by the Egyptians, and two of the bombers were executed.[23]

The United States, United Kingdom, and France imposed an arms embargo on Israel and the Arab states in 1950 to discourage an arms race. The Tripartite Declaration was initially successful in calming tensions. In February 1955, the Baghdad Pact was signed in Iraq, which seemed to open a door for Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and Iraq to get access to Western arms. Nasser, as noted earlier, denounced the pact. Just days later Israel carried out a major cross-border raid into Egyptian-occupied Gaza in

response to terrorist attacks staged out of Gaza. On February 28, 1955, the Operation Black Arrow raid killed thirty-six Egyptian and Palestinian soldiers. It was a major turning point in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Nasser was determined to get arms.[24]

In 1955, the CIA gave Nasser $3 million to use for purchasing arms. Nasser saw the offer as insignificant and more bribe than help. He secured a much better arms deal, worth $250 million, with Czechoslovakia, a Soviet puppet state. The arms included 150 MiG-15 jet fighters and 230 T-34 tanks, blowing a hole in the tripartite arms embargo. The CIA team in Cairo tried to portray the deal as an understandable reaction to the Gaza raid and even persuaded Nasser to emphasize that the weapons were Czech, not Soviet. John Foster Dulles did not buy it, and he turned against Nasser.[25]

Ironically, Nasser used the CIA money to build a tower in Cairo for his Voice of the Arabs radio station. The tower became famous in Egypt, variously called "Roosevelt's Foundation" or "Roosevelt's Erection."[26] The Czech arms deal signaled the end of the CIA honeymoon with Nasser, although on March 26, 1956, Eisenhower awarded Kim Roosevelt the National Security Medal in a secret ceremony in the White House for his role in Egypt and his more famous role in the 1953 coup in Iran that firmly installed the Shah in power.[27]

Relations between Egypt and the Western powers quickly deteriorated after 1955. The Czech arms deal was one reason. Egypt was also supporting the Algerian strug-

gle for independence from France and pushing for more control over the Suez Canal from Britain. Nasser supported the Palestinians against Israel, and attacks into Israel accelerated from both Gaza and Jordan's West Bank.

The 1956 Suez Crisis

Nasser was unwittingly pushing his enemies into a conspiracy against him. The first cabal was between France and Israel. Egypt's support for the Algerian independence war persuaded Paris to begin selling arms to Israel even before the Czech deal; after the deal, Israel was desperate for weapons and France was eager to help. A major arms deal was signed in April 1956.

Events in Jordan pushed Great Britain into the emerging conspiracy against Egypt. Shaken by the Baghdad Pact riots, King Hussein dismissed Sir John Bagot Glubb, known as Glubb Pasha, from command of the Jordanian military on March 1, 1956. Glubb had loyally served both the British and Jordanian crowns since the 1920s as a soldier in the British-run Arab Legion in Jordan. In 1939, he became the commander of the Arab Legion and made it the best military formation in the Arab world; it helped London control much of the Middle East in World War II. In 1948, Glubb led the Jordanian Royal Army, as it was now called, in the war against Israel, and he succeeded in acquiring the West Bank and East Jerusalem for Jordan.

Glubb Pasha had also quelled the Baghdad Pact riots. But King Hussein increasingly resented the role played by

the much older general in the Kingdom. Moreover, Hussein realized that British control of the army only reinforced the Arab nationalism that fed the riots. Britain controlled Jordan through Glubb Pasha. The king gave the general only one day to collect his family and his possessions, and expelled him and many other British officers from Jordan permanently, replacing them with Jordanian officers. Among those sent back to London was Colonel Patrick Coghill, the chief of intelligence for Jordan. The king effectively took over his job.[28] Glubb Pasha never returned to Jordan, but the king would later deliver the eulogy at his funeral in Westminster Abbey in April 1986, praising his service to "his second country, Jordan, at a crucial moment in its history and development."[29]

In London, Prime Minister Anthony Eden was furious. He blamed Nasser for the ousting of Glubb Pasha. It was true that the Voice of the Arabs had called for the removal of British officers from command of the Jordanian army, but that was Hussein's decision, not Nasser's. Hussein assured the British that he was still a friend (he needed their financial subsidies). Eden was convinced it was Nasser who had ended Britain's domination of Jordan—just as it had ended London's control of Egypt—and he began to seek Nasser's demise. It became an obsession for him.

The 1956 Suez Crisis has been well covered in several excellent histories. It was a crucial turning point in modern Middle Eastern politics and in the decline of the European colonial empires. It is also a fascinating study in conspiracy. Three close American allies—Israel, France,

and the United Kingdom—secretly plotted to attack Egypt. They were especially determined to keep the secret of their conspiracy from the United States and, especially, the American president. Eisenhower, the liberator of France who had led the Anglo-American invasion of D-Day, was to be kept in the dark.

It was Jordan and its conflict with Israel that most hampered the development of the tripartite conspiracy against Nasser. Throughout much of 1956, firefights along the cease-fire line between Jordan and Israel threatened to provoke a broader conflict. Terrorist attacks by Palestinians inside Israel led to Israeli retaliation, often with high Jordanian casualties. The conflict seemed to be escalating all summer and into the fall.

Great Britain had a defense treaty with Jordan. Even after the departure of Glubb Pasha, Prime Minister Eden and his cabinet felt obligated to defend Jordan from attack. London was convinced the Israelis wanted an opportunity to seize the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, leaving the Hashemite Kingdom much reduced. British military planners developed a contingency plan to come to Jordan's assistance to stop the Israelis. Operation Cordage was being contemplated even as the British began planning Operation Musketeer, the code name for the invasion of Egypt.

In May 1956, Nasser officially recognized the communist People's Republic of China as the legitimate government of China. The Eisenhower administration was dedicated to supporting the nationalist government in

Formosa as the legitimate Chinese government with a seat at the United Nations Security Council. In response to the Egyptian move, Eisenhower withdrew an offer for American financial aid to Egypt to build a dam on the Nile River at Aswan. The dam project was the centerpiece of Nasser's plan to improve the living standards of the Egyptian people.

In a dramatic response on July 26, 1956, in a speech to 100,000 Egyptians in Liberation Square in Alexandria, Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Egyptian troops took control of the canal, and all the assets of the British Suez Canal Company were seized. Nasser also announced that the canal would be closed to Israeli shipping and that Egypt would also close the Straits of Tiran to shipping bound for the Israeli port at Eilat.

Nasser had deftly struck at what London believed was the jugular vein of the British Empire. For almost a century the canal had been the lifeline of the empire, from London to India and beyond. A third of the ships that transited the canal each year were British, and the British government held a 44 percent stake in the Suez Canal Company, making it the largest stockholder (France was second). Seventy percent of Western Europe's oil passed through the canal from the Persian Gulf.[30] Nasser now controlled Europe's oil.

Prime Minister Eden was hosting a dinner in London for Iraq's King Faisal II and his prime minister Nuri al Said when the news of Nasser's announcement arrived. The Iraqis urged Eden to strike back; they wanted their

nemesis destroyed by the British. Eden denounced the nationalization of the canal as aggression and labeled Nasser a new Hitler. The French and Israelis agreed secretly to take military action against Egypt in late July.

For the next three months, the United States tried to devise a diplomatic solution to the crisis around the canal, but to no avail. Meanwhile the French and Israelis secretly began devising a plan to attack Egypt. The British were reluctant to work with Israel, preferring an Anglo-French operation without the Israelis. Concern about the future of Jordan was the principal British concern. But by October 1956, Eden was won over by the French to a tripartite operation that would be kept secret from Washington.

The plan would begin with an Israeli attack on Egypt in the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. Israel would open the Straits of Tiran by seizing all of the Sinai. As Israeli troops approached the canal, the British and French would intervene and seize the canal, allegedly to protect it from the war between Egypt and Israel but, in fact, to take it from Nasser. The plan was based on the assumption that Nasser would fall from office if the canal was seized, a dubious assumption at best.

What the Americans knew about the plot is a matter of much historical investigation. Recent scholarship suggests that the CIA had some warning of the plot. The American Defense Attaché in Tel Aviv reported the massive mobilization of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on October 26. Director of the CIA Allen Dulles learned of the tripartite plot sometime in late October from a French source, and CIA

U2 aircraft monitored the British and French navies, loading men and supplies in Marseilles, Malta, and Cyprus. At the same time, James Jesus Angleton, the head of counterintelligence in the agency as well as chief of the Israel desk, told Allen that his Israeli counterparts denied any attack was coming.[31]

Eisenhower reacted to the tripartite attack harshly, no doubt angered by a sense of betrayal by his allies. His reelection was imminent, and another crisis was underway in Eastern Europe, where Russia was facing an uprising in Hungary against its puppet government. Eisenhower believed the Anglo-French-Israeli plot undermined any effort to stop Russia from restoring its control of Hungary. Certainly it weakened the moral position of the West as the defender of liberty.

At the end of October 1956, the Israelis launched their attack on Sinai, Operation Kadesh, and they quickly prevailed over the Egyptians. The Israel Defense Forces overran Gaza, seized Sharm al Shaykh, and advanced on the canal. In early November, the British and French began their military operations around Port Said, the northern terminus of the canal. The United States advanced a resolution in the Security Council demanding an immediate cease-fire and the withdrawal of the Israelis from Egyptian territory. The British and French vetoed it. On November 2, 1956, the United Nations General Assembly voted 65 to 5 to demand a cease-fire; full withdrawal of all Israeli, French, and British forces; and the reopening of the canal, which had been closed due to the fighting. Only

Australia and New Zealand joined the tripartite plotters in voting no.

The closure of the canal resulted in oil tankers going around Africa to carry oil from the Persian Gulf to Europe. The Syrian government shut down the Trans-Arabia pipeline that brought Iraqi oil to the Mediterranean. Oil prices spiked in Europe, putting economic pressure on Paris and London. King Saud of Saudi Arabia then announced a total embargo on oil sales to France and England.

Eisenhower spoke to the nation virtually on the eve of the November election and called for full withdrawal by the three American allies from Egypt. He also applied financial pressure behind the scenes. British Chancellor of the Exchequer Harold Macmillan told Prime Minister Eden the British economy was on the verge of disaster, and on November 6 the United Kingdom accepted a cease-fire without consulting its two partners. France and Israel followed soon after. Eden resigned in January 1957 and was succeeded by Macmillan, a longtime Eisenhower friend and colleague.

Macmillan recognized the urgent need to mend fences with his old friend, but he was just as hard on Nasser as Eden had been. He had labeled Nasser "an Asiatic Mussolini." Macmillan believed that if Nasser won the Suez Crisis, it would mean, according to historian William Hitchcock, "the destruction of Great Britain as a first-class power and its reduction to a status similar to that of Holland." But Eisenhower, Hitchcock adds, believed Nasser had positioned himself as the embodiment of indepen-

dence and had the Muslim world "from Dakar to the Philippines against us."[32]

The United Nations, at Canada's initiative, created a peacekeeping force to replace the British and French troops in the canal, which was reopened. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjold, put together the force and equipped the troops with distinctive blue helmets to underscore their neutrality. Then the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) was used to monitor the Israeli-Egyptian armistice line. It took months and significant American pressure before the Israelis finally, and grudgingly, completed a full withdrawal from the Sinai and Gaza.

During the Suez Crisis, the Soviet Union crushed the uprising in Budapest. The Eisenhower administration was unable to do anything to assist the Hungarian revolution against communism, and John Foster Dulles' promises that the United States would roll back communism in Europe were exposed as empty rhetoric. Eisenhower believed the tripartite attack on Egypt had materially aided the Soviets in Hungary by diverting attention, especially in Asia and Africa, from the Russians' brutality.

The Soviets also intervened in the Suez Crisis directly. Soviet Premier Nikolai Bulganin sent letters to his counterparts in London, Paris, and Tel Aviv, threatening rocket attacks on their cities if they did not withdraw their forces from Egypt. The letter to Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion warned that "Israel is playing with the fate of peace . . . which will place a question upon the very ex-

istence of Israel as a State."[33] The threats quickly became public, and Moscow would take credit for the cease-fire and withdrawal as the result of its rocket rattling.

At the time, Washington did not know if the Russian threats were real or bluffs. The American intelligence community had insufficient information on the status of Russia's ballistic missile capability, and Eisenhower had to worry that the threats were real. We know now that they were not; Moscow was bluffing. But in the late 1950s, Moscow looked to be winning the missile race and the space race. Just a year after the canal crisis, in October 1957, the Soviets launched the first ever satellite into orbit, Sputnik.

Nasser was the big winner from the 1956 crisis. For the first time in centuries an Egyptian leader had stood up to the imperial powers of Europe and emerged victorious. Nasser had evicted the British from Egypt, taken control of the Suez Canal, and humiliated a British prime minister into resignation. Nasser had rebuffed the French, as well, dealing them a defeat that would help inspire the Algerian people to continue their war for freedom. Nasser had also thwarted Israel's attempt to seize and keep the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip. UNEF seemed a small price to pay for victory. Nasser could also point to his *entente* with Russia as having played a role in his victory. Of course, the United States had been crucial to his success, but Nasser did not give Eisenhower any credit, at least in public.

Nasser was not only the undisputed leader of Egypt, he was the charismatic leader of the Arab peoples, from

Morocco to Oman. At least that was the image he sought to portray. Moreover, he had emerged as one of the key leaders of the newly independent states of Asia and Africa, along with India's Nehru and Indonesia's Sukarno. No Egyptian had played such a role on the world stage since Cleopatra.

The Eisenhower Doctrine

President Eisenhower was probably the greatest American hero of the twentieth century. He was also the last great general elected to the White House. Before Ike, his nickname, generals were a common feature of presidential politics, from George Washington to Zachary Taylor and Ulysses Grant. Since Ike, no general has successfully run for the Oval Office.

Ike's hero status was well earned. After studying at West Point, Eisenhower served with distinction in the U.S. Army. He was commander of the allied forces that invaded North Africa in 1942, when he first began to work with Macmillan. In June 1944, he was commander of the allied invasion of France, D-Day, the largest amphibious operation in history. He commanded the 3 million-man-strong allied armies advancing across France and the low countries into Germany. As his memoir described it, this was a crusade in Europe and he was the leader of the allied forces that defeated Nazi Germany. After the war, he was commander of the NATO military command in Europe. In short, he was a consummate leader of allies embodying

the idea that America is strong because it has strong alliances.

He was also a religious man. Ike is the only American president ever to have been baptized while in office; in fact, just a few days after his inauguration. He also began National Security Council (NSC) meetings with a prayer. He was close to the great religious leaders of America of his time, such as men like Billy Graham.[34] Ike's religious faith helped underscore his interest in supporting American allies in the Middle East who shared his aversion to atheism.

Eisenhower also understood that the days of imperialism were over. America needed to reach out to the Third World, a phrase that had been coined in 1952 to describe the newly emerging nations in Asia and Africa. In December 1956, Ike invited the leader of India, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to Washington for three full days of discussion. In an unprecedented gesture of welcome, Ike hosted Nehru for an overnight visit in his home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where Nehru gave his account of how the Suez and Budapest crises had played out in the Third World.[35]

By the beginning of 1957, it was apparent to the president that America's relationships with its key allies were in considerable disrepair. The Suez Crisis, especially the deliberate decision of three close allies to conceal their plans from Washington, had gravely damaged the West's position in the Middle East. Most important, the special relationship with the United Kingdom was in trouble.

Crucial to the new strategy was to find Arab alternatives to Nasser; that is, Arab allies that could confront Egypt. This was a daunting task after Suez. Saudi Arabia was America's preference, given the longstanding close ties in the oil industry and Franklin Roosevelt's successful meeting with King Saud in February 1945. But the Kingdom was militarily weak, the economy suffered from King Saud's mismanagement, and the country was sparsely populated. Iraq was a stronger alternative to Egypt, with a larger army, more advanced economy, and a larger population. But the Saudi-Hashemite divide was still intense, so Washington would need to work with both Arab monarchies and the British to try to fashion a new alternative to Nasser.[36]

Eisenhower responded with a speech to Congress in January 1957 in which he laid out what would be called the Eisenhower Doctrine for the Middle East. He did not revisit the quarrels of 1956; the speech did not assign blame for the events of 1956 or seek to humiliate any U.S. allies. Nor was it a diatribe against Nasser.

Instead, Eisenhower tried to explain in his speech why the Middle East mattered to Americans and the threat that was posed by the Soviet Union and communism to the region. He laid out a strategy for defending Western interests in the region, the most detailed and specific explanation for American intervention in the Middle East any president had ever provided. It would also form the basis for the Marines' intervention in Beirut in July 1958.

On January 5, 1957, Eisenhower told Congress that

"the Middle East has abruptly reached a new and critical stage in its long and important history."[37] The Suez Crisis had brought the region to a new level of instability, which, Eisenhower explained, "at times is manipulated by International Communism."[38] The president noted that "Russia's rulers have long sought to dominate the Middle East."[39]

Eisenhower laid out in his speech to the Congress America's key interests in the region. First and foremost was oil. Two-thirds of the "presently known oil deposits of the world" were in the Middle East, he noted, which was crucial to the economies of the world's nations, but especially to Europe. If a hostile power controlled the region's oil, the "free nations would be placed in serious jeopardy." Second were "other factors which transcend the material" because the region is the birthplace of "three great religions—Moslem, Christian, and Hebrew. Mecca and Jerusalem are more than places on a map. They symbolize religions which teach that the spirit has supremacy over matter." The three great religions affirm that the "individual has a dignity and rights of which no despotic government can rightfully deprive him." The president said it would be "intolerable if the holy places of the Middle East should be subjected to a rule that glorifies atheistic matters." Eisenhower did not place the survival of Israel itself as a vital American security interest.

To prevent Soviet domination of the Middle East, Eisenhower asked Congress to give him the authority to "cooperate with and assist any nation or group of nations" to

maintain their independence, including by the "employment of the armed forces of the United States to secure and protect the territorial integrity and independence of such nations" if they request American help against "overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism." He thought Congress should also authorize economic and military assistance programs to threatened nations in the region who requested aid.

The speech emphasized the "authority to employ the armed forces" of the United States in the Middle East. It was the first time a president had identified the region as a vital American interest that needed to be defended by American combat troops. The Eisenhower Doctrine is a crucial milestone in America's engagement in the Middle East. The president understood he was expanding America's global footprint and taking on a role that "involves certain burdens and indeed risks for the United States."

Congress voted to support the president. The House of Representatives endorsed the doctrine in late January by a vote of 355 to 61 and the Senate on March 5, 1957, 72 to 18. Eisenhower had broken new ground. The United States was now on record committed to the defense of the Middle East. As William Hitchcock, his preeminent biographer, later wrote, "in January 1957 Eisenhower declared that the United States would fight to protect its interests in the Middle East; more than six decades later it is fighting still."[40]