

Anthony EDEN, *Full Circle*, London: Cassell, 1960

The factor which must now always remain unknown is the effect of a rapid advance down the canal, and its clearance, upon Nasser's position in Cairo. Militant dictators have more enemies at home than the foreigner ever dreams. It may be that even the Soviet entry into the lists would not have sufficed to save the regime in Cairo, humiliated by defeat and lacking the Voice of Egypt to call disaster victory.

5 I had seen the chain of failure in the nineteen-thirties from Manchuria to Danzig and had tried in vain to break it. This time we had the opportunity and responsibility. What we did was only partially effective, but it moved the United Nations to action. It led to later Anglo-American intervention in the Lebanon and Jordan, after the opposition of the United States to our Suez action had been seen to have brought disaster in Iraq. The consequences there may even have taught a little prudence in Cairo. Some
10 of these checks to totalitarian plans may be judged late and feeble, even so they had their impact and their warning message, in revealing contrast to the fatal drift of the nineteen-thirties.

Much of the subsequent controversy over the Suez decision has been about the trees and not about the wood. The main question is whether inertia would have brought better results for the peace of the world than action. I think not. I thought and think that failure to act would have brought the worst of
15 consequences, just as I think the world would have suffered less if Hitler had been resisted on the Rhine, in Austria or in Czechoslovakia, rather than in Poland. This will be for history to determine.

Suez was a short-term emergency operation which succeeded, and an attempt to halt a long-term deterioration, whose outcome is still uncertain. A clash between Israel and Egypt was inevitable, given Nasser's declared intentions. Whenever this took place, it could bring grave danger to the general
20 peace. It was far better that it should not happen at a moment of Egypt's choosing, and the explosion could not have occurred in circumstances less damaging, given the speedy action of Britain and France. On balance the world stood to gain by the fact that the conflict took place then and not some months later, when the consequences in relation to world events might have been infinitely graver.

We were not successful in our wider objective; we did not bring about Arab Israeli peace or restore international control over the Canal. It is true that some successes were gained. The military weakness of the Egyptian forces was exposed and duly noted, in particular by neighbours. This had important consequences. From the day of Egyptian defeat in the Sinai desert the chances of a Nasser empire were scotched, not killed. Even so, the Sudan did not hesitate to resist the grasping demands which Nasser later made upon her northern boundary. It is unlikely that Nasser or any other Arab leader will readily
30 undertake a war of extermination against Israel in the immediate future, without support from the outside. As against this, Nasser remains ruler of Egypt, his ambition still dangerous. The Canal is under his control, Syria has become part of his empire. Our intervention at least closed the chapter of complacency about the situation in the Middle East. It led to the Eisenhower Doctrine and from that to Anglo-American intervention in the following summer in Jordan and the Lebanon. It helped to show
35 that the West was not prepared to leave the area wide open for infiltration and subversion by others. But these were only partial gains. The uneasy equipoise still continues.

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