Pearson's Peacekeepers

Michael K. Carroll

Pearson's Peacekeepers
Canada and the United Nations Emergency Force, 1956-67

Foreword by Robert Bothwell

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To Tara

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Foreword: Pearson's Ambiguous Legacy

Robert Bothwell

In the spring of 1945, a Canadian delegation took its place in the San Francisco opera house, under the careful supervision of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King. They were there as members of "the United Nations," the title given to the coalition of countries that was fighting Germany and Japan. They had come to the Pacific Coast city to celebrate the end of the Second World War, not by concluding a peace treaty, but to found an international organization that would prevent another war. Mindful of the importance of the occasion, King had carefully included representatives from the opposition parties, who would be symbolically useful in signifying the unity of the Canadian people behind this new effort to secure the peace. But the politicians – those from the opposition, anyway – would not be doing the real work of the conference. That was reserved for the civil servants who, with civil servants from other countries, would hammer out the details, prepare the speeches, and advise their political masters on what to do, how to do it, and when. Prominent among the civil servants was Lester B. Pearson, the Canadian ambassador in Washington, one of Canada's most effective and experienced diplomats.

For Pearson the stakes were high in San Francisco. Bitter experience – the disunity and drift to war in the 1930s, and the failure of the League of Nations – drove him to embrace the new UN organization. Yet at the same time, Mackenzie King issued strict instructions as to how far the UN could or should go – reserving absolute sovereignty (with Canada in mind). Consent and consensus ruled, in King's mind, and the actions of the UN should be made as non-automatic as possible. And, it should be said, King's view was in the overwhelming majority at San Francisco. The UN would be a collection of *sovereign* nations, but simultaneously, and officially, it was also an organization designed to prevent war – the ultimate sovereign act.

That was a significant power, but as one early observer of the UN put it, "The greater the power which is prematurely given to an international organization, the more severe will be the checks which the Member states

impose by way of escape from the excessive powers thus granted." Thus, the UN in the 1950s "looks nobly towards the beginnings of a super-State, the other looks grimly back towards the anarchic self-help of the old world."[1]

Fast forward to 1956. The UN had by then been paralyzed by the division of the world into Communist and anti-Communist blocs, led by the Soviet Union and the United States, respectively. Great powers both, they – and the British, French, and Chinese – held a veto in the UN's executive arm, the Security Council. Since the anti-Communist bloc held the majority of UN seats, it was the Soviet Union that most frequently wielded the veto. The result was paralysis, or anarchy, according to taste.

Inside the anarchic UN, the great powers could do little. China was only by courtesy a "great power," at least in UN terms, for its delegation represented only the non-Communist fragment of that vast country, located on the offshore island of Taiwan. Britain and France were powers in decline, preoccupied with colonial wars in their dwindling empires. The Soviet Union and the United States orated at each other across a chasm of misunderstanding.

Some parts of the British and French empires had been freed, granted sovereignty, and, sometimes, endowed with seats in the UN. Most prominent among these countries was India, in population terms a giant, but in terms of standard of living and economic power relatively weak. Sensing the future significance of countries like India, Canadian diplomats paid attention to ex-colonial sensitivities and attempted to cultivate a closer relationship with them. At the UN, the Canadian delegation led by the external affairs minister, Pearson, moved between the Western camp and the ex-colonial nations – what would soon be labelled the "Third World." In 1955, Canada was instrumental in securing the admission of sixteen new members (and four more the next year) to the world body, unblocking some of the paralysis that had afflicted the organization. As a result, in 1956 the UN had eighty members, significantly more than the fifty-one countries that had founded the organization in 1945. The Canadians were more forgiving than the Americans of the Third World's desire to remain (mostly) neutral in the great Cold War issues that dominated diplomacy in the 1950s. And, interestingly, Canada had established a position as an interlocutor in the UN system.

Yet, while Pearson and Canada paid attention to the emerging Third World and kept an eye to the future, Canadian diplomacy remained firmly rooted in the Cold War present. The Cold War had thawed a little after the death of the Soviet dictator Stalin in 1953, but the Western and Eastern blocs remained deeply suspicious and antagonistic. Canada in the 1950s maintained a large garrison in Europe, guarding against (or more likely deterring) a possible Soviet attack, and Canada prized its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Through the 1950s, Pearson was constantly looking for ways to strengthen the alliance and to maintain harmony among its members.

Images of the present and the future warred within Canadian diplomacy and contributed to a certain ambiguity in Canada's performance in international diplomacy. Yet, as Pearson well understood, ambiguity need not be a weakness, but an advantage – especially for an interlocutor, listening to all sides and, up to a point, trusted by all.

It is at this point that Michael Carroll takes up the story.

The Suez crisis of 1956 marked a transition between two stages of Canadian history. That year, Canada left behind a world where Great Britain dominated Canada's political universe, and launched on an uncertain course of self-definition and self-realization. In the crisis, Canada took centre stage in constructing an international institution that preserved peace, and avoided war – "peacekeeping."

For fifty years after Suez, Canadians would place "peacekeeping" high among their nation's diplomatic achievements. There was a basic understanding as to what peacekeeping was – under UN auspices, Canada and other countries would send elements of their soldiery to distant lands where they would stand between combatants and, somehow, by their presence, keep the peace. Ideally, the soldiers represented the international commitment to peace; seldom did commentators reach behind the stalwart image and document how those soldiers were paid for, because to do so would have revealed how very shaky the peacekeeping enterprise really was. As Julius Stone might have put it, behind the orderly lines of UN soldiery lurked the spectre of international chaos – disagreement and disharmony. That was a fact well known to the protagonists on all sides. But for public consumption, they attributed a magical quality to peacekeeping, as if the invocation of the name and the mission would be sufficient to avert harm.

And so, in many senses, peacekeeping was a myth, and myths require detailed examination. This is Michael Carroll's central point. Before historians can explain "why," they should tackle "what." What was peacekeeping? Where did it come from? How did Canada get involved? How was it paid for? And what, actually, did peacekeepers do? Were they one big happy peaceable military family? Or, as Carroll shows, not?

Peacekeeping bought peace, all right, but what then? No one in 1956 expected the peacekeepers still to be in the sands of the Sinai eleven years on, but they were. No one in 1956 seriously thought that peacekeepers would be threatened and endangered, but they were. Nor did Canadians in 1956 expect that, eleven years on, their troops would be unceremoniously bundled out of Egypt, and the UN mission terminated, so that the nations of the region could give war a chance.

Yet peace of a kind returned, and so did peacekeeping. The Canadian public got over its shock at the unkind treatment of Canada's military peacekeepers. Indeed, the fact that the Canadians were singled out for quick removal meant that they escaped entirely the 1967 war; other peacekeepers,

with lower priority for departure, were stuck while Arabs and Israelis battled. A later version of peacekeeping profited from the experience of 1967, as Carroll shows, and in many different forms, peacekeeping is still around today.

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One of the most interesting parts of my research was the opportunity to interview former peacekeepers and diplomats. I was astonished by the

enthusiastic support I received, and I am extremely grateful for the willingness of these dedicated individuals to share their time and memories with me. It was my privilege.

Last, but certainly not least, I need to acknowledge the support and patience of my family. My parents, brothers, and perhaps most importantly, my in-laws, have all held back asking when this would finally be done. I appreciate this. My wife also knows more about UNEF than any spouse should be asked to bear. Her patience, support, clarity, and gentle prodding have enabled me to finish this task.

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Acronyms

ADL	Armistice Demarcation Line
ATU	Air Transport Unit
CBUME	Canadian Base Unit, Middle East
CFB	Canadian Forces Base
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
ES-I	First emergency session
FLN	Front de libération nationale
GA	General Assembly
HMCS	Her Majesty's Canadian Ship
HMS	Her Majesty's Ship
IDF	Israel Defense Force
IF	International frontier
LE	Egyptian pound
MP	Military Police
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ONUC	Organisation des Nations Unies au Congo
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RCEME	Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
S-IV	Fourth special session of the General Assembly (1963)
UAR	United Arab Republic
UNEF	United Nations Emergency Force
UNMOGIP	United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization

Introduction

The presentation ceremony for the Nobel Peace Prize is short and dignified. Seated comfortably in the impressive auditorium at the University of Oslo, the 1957 winner, Lester B. Pearson, listened to Gunnar Jahn, chairman of the Nobel Committee, commend his "powerful initiative, strength, and perseverance ... to restore peace in situations where quick, tactful, and wise action has been necessary to prevent unrest from spreading and developing into a worldwide conflagration."[1] Pearson then responded with a formal oration, which he had carefully prepared, conscious of one of Alfred Nobel's astute observations: "long speeches will not ensure peace."[2]

The 1957 Nobel ceremony cast long shadows, especially in Canada. Canadians at the time were impressed, but not enough to reward Pearson with their votes when, a few months later, he became leader of the Liberal Party and faced his first general election in that capacity. Pearson and the Liberals were soundly beaten, and they, and he, would pass the next five years on the opposition benches in Parliament. Yet the Nobel Prize – and Pearson – rose above political lines. Most Canadians liked Pearson – admired him even – for persevering in the face of adversity. In 1956, at the time of the Suez crisis, he had given the world pause – more than that, he had given the world *a* pause. He had worked to stop a war in the Middle East and had brought about, not peace, but not war either. His actions following the Suez crisis are what Canadians later tended to remember about Pearson, and when they thought about peacekeeping, the Nobel Prize was not far behind. One writer, discussing the events of 1956-57, called his account "A Nobel Prize for Canada."[3] But it wasn't; it was a Nobel Prize for Pearson. It was not a validation of peacekeeping, but formal recognition that Lester B. Pearson, in a difficult time and with limited space in 1956, had found a way out of a particular international crisis.

Pearson's mentor, Canada's longest-serving prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, would have applauded the concept of peacekeeping, although he would have had his doubts about Canadian participation. King

was time's master, and he hated to be hurried; haste made for poor judgment and worse decisions. King even had a conveniently elastic doctrine to describe and justify his approach. Dredged up from the political science literature of the day by one of his diplomats, Hume Wrong, it bore the title "functionalism." Functionalism meant that you did what you were best suited to do – and not one lick more. The term *functionalism* sounded much more impressive, which of course was the point.

In the wake of the Second World War, King ensured that Canadian foreign policy abided by the dictates of functionalism. This allowed Canada to seek active representation in organizations such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and in the domain of civil aviation, but nothing more controversial or entangling. Considered a drain on resources and a thankless task, issues of global security were shunned. King doubted that the Canadian public would support military operations in distant countries. He also feared that, judging from the divisive nature of Canada's participation in the First and Second World Wars, peacekeeping would exacerbate problems of national unity. The world, however, had changed dramatically since King first came to power in 1921, and Canada had changed along with it.

Peacekeeping was not a new idea in the late 1940s. The modern concept of using third-party armed forces to maintain peace was first tried in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These forces, however, acted at the behest of the great European powers and were self-serving. In the twentieth century, the idealism of the League of Nations held out great hope for the concept of collective security. The League proved itself capable of handling minor disputes where member states were interested in negotiating. There was, unfortunately, little that could be done when faced with determined opposition. While collective security was a laudable goal, member nations in the 1920s and '30s were too concerned with economic troubles and social unrest in their own countries to uphold the League's role as a global police officer.

The United Nations, like the League, had the capacity to further "peace" on its own, at least according to its charter. Canada's contribution to this particular aspect of the UN Charter, however, was to reserve the right to be consulted if the UN actually wanted to do something involving Canadian forces or resources. When the first UN observer mission, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), was organized in 1948 to oversee the situation in Palestine, Canadians were nowhere to be found. The following year, when the UN requested Canadian support for the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), Cabinet, in the words of one senior official, was "allergic" to the idea. By 1949, however, King had retired and his ironclad grip on Liberal policies had been loosened. The issue was eventually referred to the new prime minister, Louis

St. Laurent, and the secretary of state for external affairs, Lester B. Pearson. St. Laurent, a former secretary of state for external affairs, and Pearson, a seasoned diplomat, were a new breed of Canadian politician – internationalists – and were more than happy to expand Canada's role in the world. Four officers were duly dispatched to UNMOGIP in 1949.[4]

Canada slightly increased its peacekeeping efforts in 1954 when four observers were assigned to the UNTSO, and in August of that year Major-General E.L.M. Burns was assigned as UNTSO's chief of staff. While Pearson and some members of the Department of External Affairs favoured an increased role for Canadians around the globe, the Canadian military perceived peacekeeping as a distinctly unmilitary endeavour. In their view, walking up and down a demarcation line with a pair of binoculars was hardly a dignified military activity. But while the military might not have found it exciting, Canada, and Canadians, became enamoured with peacekeeping after international recognition was lauded upon the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in 1956.

When Lester Pearson stood before the UN General Assembly and suggested the idea of a peacekeeping force as a stopgap measure to end the conflict in the Middle East, nobody knew whether it would work. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld certainly had his doubts. Peacekeeping, as a means of containing conflicts, was never envisioned by the architects of the United Nations, and there is no formal mention of peacekeeping anywhere in the UN Charter. The founders of the UN assumed that the international order would be governed according to a system of collective security, to be overseen by the great powers. The advent of the Cold War, however, erased any illusions of postwar co-operation. Peacekeeping evolved in an ad hoc manner because of the deadlock of the Security Council and its inability to discharge its primary function as outlined in Article 1, Paragraph 1, of the UN Charter: "to maintain international peace and security." As one UN official noted, peacekeeping was based on the concepts of "consensus, voluntary agreements, and cooperation because it became clear that attempts to enforce peace were not ... realistic in the context of contemporary political and military circumstances."[5] Often referred to as "Chapter Six and a Half," peacekeeping goes beyond the peaceful resolution of disputes outlined in Chapter 6 of the UN Charter, but falls short of the enforcement mechanisms of Chapter 7. The consensual and voluntary nature of peacekeeping was one of the keys to UNEF's success. It was also the cause of much of its troubles. The desire for consensus led to a weak initial mandate, vague financial accountability for member nations, and challenges on the ground.

Just four short days after Israel's invasion of Egypt on 29 October 1956, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of all troops in the Suez region. Canada was one of six notable abstentions in this vote, with Pearson reasoning that the

resolution was inadequate in dealing with the essence of the crisis. Yet the Canadian resolution that passed twenty-four hours later, and which was to be the base upon which UNEF would be built, had little more bite. Designed to be ambiguous in order to garner maximum support, the resolution gave the secretary-general latitude in the creation of a peacekeeping force. The wording laid out a vague idea of the means – a peacekeeping force to "secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities," but presented no clear vision of the end – a political settlement for the problems in the Middle East. It was in the wording of UNEF's mandate that its impotence began.

In February 1957, with the withdrawal of the Israelis on the horizon and little political movement toward peace, UNEF's mandate was amended to include the patrolling of the Israeli-Egyptian border. The force was newly charged with creating a situation "conducive to the maintenance of peace." Despite the fact that this amendment to UNEF's operational instructions noted the need to address the root problem of the Arab-Israeli conflict, there was no mandate given to oversee this important task.

Pearson himself later recorded his regret at not insisting on a stronger mandate, specifically acknowledging the difficulties that arose from the need to respect Egypt's sovereignty – a provision that resulted from the "details" worked out by the secretary-general. Even those on the ground felt the futility of their task without a strong movement toward a political settlement. General Burns, the most visible Canadian after Pearson to be intimately involved in the conflict, thought that Canada's troops should be withdrawn unless a permanent solution to the problem were sought.[6] Nonetheless, as long as UNEF was able to maintain peace along the Israeli-Egyptian border, there was little impetus for diplomats to delve into the centuries-old debate at the centre of the Arab-Israeli crisis, and nothing in the mandate of the peacekeeping mission required movement toward such a goal.

Despite the difficulties resulting from the lack of a strong mandate, the creation of UNEF alone seemed cause for celebration. The General Assembly had taken matters of international security into their own hands and come up with a solution that was accepted by all parties. The fact that peace was achieved in the immediate term became the basis by which to judge UNEF's success. UNEF saved lives in the Middle East, and this was a good thing.

Laudable as UNEF's creation was, there was little inclination on the part of most UN members to pay the costs associated with peacekeeping, bringing the UN to the brink of bankruptcy in the early 1960s. Canadian representatives at the UN and around the world consistently preached the concept of collective financial responsibility, yet few heeded the call. It was only through ad hoc remedies that troops were kept in the field. Amid rancorous debates filled with Cold War bravado, peacekeeping expenses were consistently cut to appease the increasingly cost-conscious UN General Assembly. UNEF felt the crunch as its budget was reduced from $25 million

to $15 million with some missions being cancelled outright and others scaled back in scope.[7] By the time of the UNEF withdrawal in 1967 – ten and a half years into the mission – a permanent solution to the financial predicament had yet to be found.

Lacking the resolute support of all members of the Security Council, there was little that Canada – or the UN as an organization – could do to force recalcitrant states to financially support peacekeeping operations not perceived to be in their national interest. As a result, peacekeeping in the 1950s and early ’60s was necessarily reactionary and extemporized. Today’s leaders still struggle to find a balance between peacekeeping mission requirements around the globe and the fiscal realities of deployment. They can take little solace in knowing that theirs is a struggle that has been with us since the blue helmets first landed in Egypt.

While diplomats at the UN were concerned with how to pay for peacekeeping missions, they had few thoughts about the difficulties facing the troops on the ground. In the rush of events in November 1956, there was no time for such details. The resolution that initially created UNEF was passed in the General Assembly on 4 November 1956. By 12 November, a temporary headquarters for UNEF had been set up in Cairo, and troops from contributing nations started to arrive on 15 November. In less than two weeks, the UN’s first major peacekeeping endeavour went from talk in the halls of New York to military operations on the ground.

Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, India, Indonesia, Norway, Sweden, and Yugoslavia all contributed troops to this pioneering mission. With limited resources, conflicting cultures, and only moral authority backing them up, the odds were not in UNEF’s favour. Each of the contributing countries came to the task with varying levels of professionalism and preparedness. Although all contingents were requested to arrive with supplies to cover the first two weeks in Egypt, only the Canadian and Yugoslav troops were self-sufficient in their first days on the ground. The need to quickly set up a consistent and reliable supply chain and to organize these disparate contingents was a challenge, and efforts were hampered by language barriers, sovereignty issues, and, of course, financial constraints. Despite having to make do with less and less, the forces on the ground performed admirably as they worked to fulfill UNEF’s mandate. It was not, however, an easy assignment, given the climatic conditions and their curtailed resources.

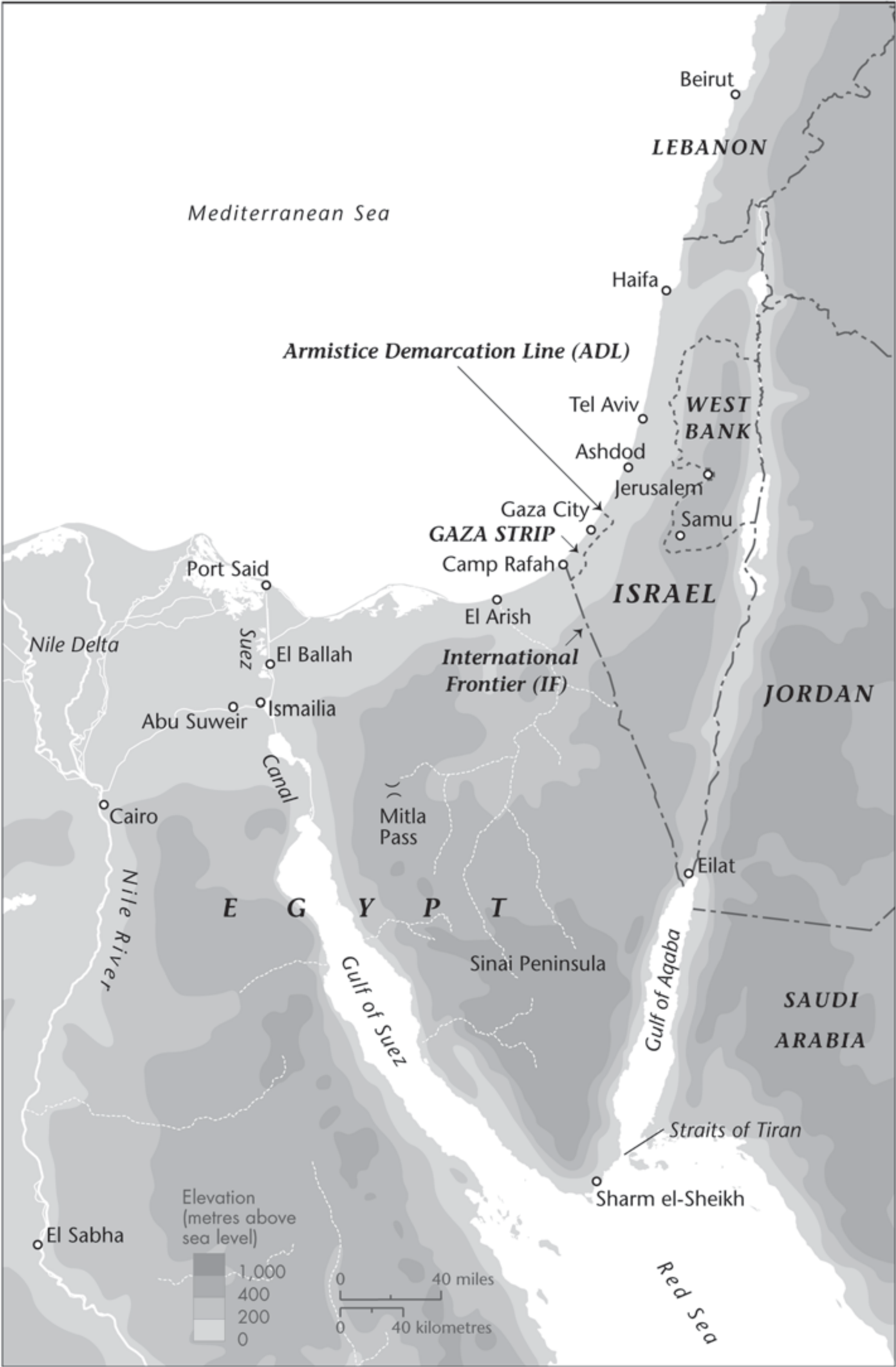
Once the initial excitement surrounding UNEF subsided, the force was, for all intents and purposes, forgotten. Pearson believed that a key function of diplomacy was to gain time, but he had no idea of just how much time they had gained. As peace regained a foothold in the Middle East, and civil disturbances erupted elsewhere around the world, UNEF was quietly left to languish in the Egyptian desert. Precisely because they were fulfilling the mandate of keeping the peace, few people outside the force were aware of

the sacrifices UNEF contributors were making. With the exception of those individuals in New York directly involved with peacekeeping, or military liaison personnel in national headquarters, the only people who thought about UNEF personnel on a daily basis were the families of those serving in the Middle East.

It came as a shock, then, even to those close to the situation, when the call came for UNEF to withdraw from Egypt in May 1967. Even more disturbing for officials in Ottawa was that Canadian troops were singled out by Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser for accelerated withdrawal. Though widely publicized in Canada at the time, this public humiliation has conveniently been forgotten and omitted from subsequent nostalgic accounts regarding Canada's golden era of peacekeeping. The legacy of Canada's first great peacekeeping exercise is, therefore, more ambiguous than most Canadians, even most Canadian historians, believe.

Peacekeeping is inherently difficult, and it always has been – both in policy circles and on the ground. UNEF's deployment in 1956 was no small miracle, and it was only due to the dedicated efforts of people like Dag Hammarskjöld, E.L.M. Burns, Lester Pearson, and numerous members of the UN Secretariat and diplomatic corps, that the first major UN peacekeeping mission came to be. Whether consciously or not, UNEF became the model upon which future peacekeeping missions were based, but it faced tremendous challenges in its creation, its ongoing funding, and its day-to-day life in the Middle East. For Canada, the initial achievement in defusing the Suez crisis, and Lester Pearson's subsequent Nobel Prize, equalled "success." This was the genesis of Canadian support of, and justification for, participation in future UN peacekeeping initiatives. But was Canada's faith in peacekeeping well founded? Canada and the UN's first major peacekeeping effort overcame tremendous challenges, yet the mission needs to be examined in its entirety, and not just through the rose-coloured glasses of Nobel's prize. Simplistic arguments, or even complex ones, over the question of UNEF's success or failure miss its true value. It is in the details of UNEF – the details of its inception, of its financing, and of life on the ground – that the lessons of peacekeeping's history lie.

Pearson's Peacekeepers


Beirut
LEBANON
Mediterranean Sea
Haifa
Armistice Demarcation Line (ADL)
Tel Aviv
WEST
BANK
Ashdod
Jerusalem
Gaza City
Samu
GAZA STRIP
Camp Rafah
Port Said
ISRAEL
El Arish
Suez
Nile Delta
El Ballah
International
Frontier (IF)
Ismailia
Abu Suweir
JORDAN
Canal
Cairo
Mitla
Pass
Nile River
Eilat
E G Y P T
Gulf of Suez
Sinai Peninsula
Gulf of Aqaba
SAUDI
ARABIA
Straits of Tiran
Sharm el-Sheikh
Elevation
(metres above
sea level)
El Sabha
1,000
400
200
0
0
40 miles
0
40 kilometres
Red Sea

1
Prelude to Suez

The Suez crisis is one of those events that rightly or wrongly is remembered as a turning point. It defined the inability of Britain and France to reclaim their status as great powers, and it signalled the approaching end of Britain's moment in the Middle East. Britain's inability to mount a successful military campaign to unseat a tinpot dictator in Egypt was an inglorious end to the majestic empire upon which the sun, at one time, never set. For France, Suez was yet another failed attempt to hold on to its colonial territories, bookended by the loss of Indochina in 1954 and the granting of independence to Algeria in 1960. For Britain and France's allies, however, what was perhaps more disturbing than those countries' blatant reversion to colonial ideals was their break in relations with the United States. The chasm opening between Britain and the United States alarmed the Canadian government and brought Canada into the Suez crisis.

The Anglo-American quarrel over Suez had deep roots and a long history. Before getting to Canada's involvement, it is necessary to review some of the history that led to the debacle of 1956. The Suez crisis began in its acute form when two nearly simultaneous events took place. First, the British finally removed their armed forces from Egypt after seventy-three years of occupation. Second, the government of Egypt, in what was its most important autonomous action to date, sought funding for what was called the Aswan High Dam in 1955 and 1956. The original Aswan Dam was built by the British at the beginning of the twentieth century and was enlarged with two subsequent additions completed in 1912 and 1933. At one time an impressive achievement, the dam by the early 1950s was no longer sufficient to meet the irrigation needs of Egypt's growing population. A new High Dam, a replacement for the aging original structure, was planned; the Aswan reservoir was to be the world's largest. The cost estimates for the dam, ranging from 1.1 to 1.3 billion US dollars, were prohibitive, necessitating that Egypt secure outside funding.[1]

In June 1955, the World Bank announced that it was willing to float a $200 million loan to aid in the construction of the Aswan High Dam, contingent upon the resolution of any territorial considerations and on Egypt securing additional funding for the project. Recognizing the need to curtail the Soviet Union's influence in the Middle East, British and American officials discussed possible financing plans for the Aswan High Dam, though interest in the United States was lukewarm at best. The British, for their own part, would have preferred a funding plan that would have awarded the majority of outside contracts to UK firms. However, President Nasser's announcement on 27 September 1955 of a cotton-for-arms deal with Czechoslovakia drastically altered the perceived balance of power in the Middle East, and forced these Western nations to open their pocketbooks or risk the consequences. The arms deal, according to American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, was "the most serious development since Korea, if not since World War II."[2]

Having gained power as the result of a military coup, Nasser considered strengthening the armed forces to be of great importance in order to preserve his base of power. Egypt's military inadequacy, however, was highlighted by a devastating Israeli raid on the Gaza Strip in February 1955 that left thirty-eight Egyptians dead. In order to redress this issue, Nasser immediately approached the United States to secure $27 million in small arms. Not wanting to upset the status quo in the Middle East, let alone the Jewish lobby in Washington, the State Department required that any military exports to Egypt had to be paid for with cash in hand, effectively putting Nasser off for the foreseeable future. With the American rebuff, Nasser then looked to Moscow for support.

The Egyptian arms deal with the Soviets, brokered through Czechoslovakia, should not have come as any great surprise to the West. Nasser had been very open with the American ambassador in Egypt, Henry Byroade, about the possibility of Soviet assistance. It was, perhaps, the immensity of the deal that caught the West off guard. The White House estimated that the arms shipment was worth between $90 and $200 million, and the State Department pegged the value at $250 million, while other sources estimated its value at up to $450 million.[3] Israeli sources reported that the Czech arms deal consisted of "530 armoured vehicles – 230 tanks, 200 armoured troop-carriers and 100 self-propelled guns; some 500 artillery pieces of various types; almost 200 fighter aircraft, bombers and transport planes; and a number of warships – destroyers, motor-torpedo-boats and submarines."[4] Regardless of the size of the arms shipment, Nasser attempted to assuage Western fears, assuring officials that this was a one-time deal with no strings attached. From an Egyptian point of view, their course of action had been simple: they needed arms to protect themselves, and if the United States and Britain were unwilling to supply weapons, they would deal with whoever

would. Nasser defended his actions as purely pragmatic, stating that "we would have preferred to deal with the West, but for us it was a matter of life and death."[5] An added effect of the Soviet arms deal, however, was that it raised Nasser's image within the Middle East and gave him considerable credibility with other Arab leaders. Almost overnight, Nasser went from being a minor and disliked opportunist to the premier Arab nationalist leader in the Middle East. Apparently, reputation was something that money could buy.

American and British leaders both recognized and resented the fact that Nasser was playing the West against the Soviets. Cold War realities nonetheless dictated that Western officials deny the Soviets any increased entry into the Middle East – even if it meant financing the Aswan High Dam. According to Dulles, Western financial support for the dam would all but ensure that Egypt would not become a Soviet satellite state. After nearly four weeks of negotiations in Washington, American, British, World Bank, and Egyptian officials arrived at a tentative financing package for funding the Aswan High Dam on 16 December 1955.

The basis of the proposed agreement was a $200 million loan from the World Bank, in addition to which the United States and Britain would provide a $70 million grant and would give "sympathetic attention" to a further $130 million loan to cover the remaining hard currency needed to complete the project. Egypt was left to cover the estimated $900 million worth of local labour and supplies. The Egyptian delegation felt confident that Nasser would approve the deal, even though Nasser feared the supervisory role the World Bank would play in overseeing Egypt's economic development.

Eugene Black, president of the World Bank, travelled to Cairo in late January 1956 in an attempt to allay Nasser's fears regarding the conditions attached to the loan. Such clauses were, in fact, standard for any World Bank loan. At his meetings with Nasser, Black was faced with reopening many issues that had supposedly been settled at the Washington negotiations. What Nasser wanted, in effect, were firmer commitments on the part of the World Bank, the United States, and Britain, with fewer conditions to be fulfilled by Egypt. Having successfully blackmailed the United States and Britain into financing the Aswan High Dam with the Czech arms deal, Nasser presumably had no reason to think that holding fast to his hard line would not produce better terms on the loan. When Black left Egypt on 11 February 1956, he did so without any tangible results, though a joint statement with the Egyptian finance minister characterized the negotiations as "very fruitful."[6] British and American officials, however, had somewhat less optimistic impressions of the talks.

Despite the initial support of President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles, the Aswan High Dam project was not particularly popular in American political circles. George Humphrey, the influential treasury secretary, never

liked the idea of supporting the Egyptian project, nor did he like the way Dulles "used money as a tool of his trade."[7] Cotton lobbyists representing Southern US interests grumbled about the Aswan High Dam project and the Jewish lobby objected to any project that would benefit an enemy of Israel. To make matters worse, Nasser announced to an American reporter in early 1956 that he was still considering Soviet funding for the dam. Eisenhower did not take kindly to Nasser's implied threat, and Egypt's decision to recognize Communist China on 16 May 1956 did little to further endear Nasser to the president or to Congress. Faced with determined opposition, it is not surprising that, without conciliatory measures from Egypt, Eisenhower and Dulles were hesitant to make a concerted effort to gain congressional support for the Aswan project.

The British, for their part, were also having second thoughts about financing the dam. Relations between Egypt and the United Kingdom were not particularly warm after King Farouk, the pro-British Egyptian monarch, was overthrown in 1952, and Nasser's frequent tirades about British policy set off a war of words with British Prime Minister Anthony Eden that continued to intensify in early 1956. From the British perspective, events reached a crisis point in March 1956, when Lieutenant-General Sir John Glubb was removed from his position as chief of staff of the Jordanian armed forces. Glubb commanded great respect through much of the Arab world, and the new Jordanian king worried that in a time of crisis, Glubb's influence might outweigh his own. The fact that Radio Cairo continually denounced Glubb and alleged that he was the de facto leader of Jordan did nothing to assuage the young monarch's fears. The British news media seized upon the issue of Glubb's abrupt expulsion from Jordan, and the backlash against Nasser – the supposed instigator – was fierce. Eden was furious, as Evelyn Shuckburgh, Eden's former parliamentary secretary, recorded in his diary: "Today both we and the Americans really gave up hope of Nasser and began to look around for means of destroying him."[8]

Despite the declining relations between Egypt and the West, the decision to withdraw funding for the Aswan High Dam project was not formally made by the Americans until 19 July 1956. The writing, however, had been on the wall for quite some time. With the end of their fiscal year on 30 June, American financial support for the Aswan project was reallocated, and two weeks later the Senate Appropriations Committee reported on the foreign aid bill and stipulated that no funds be used to support the Aswan High Dam project without its approval. While both Eisenhower and Dulles doubted the constitutionality of the directive, it was indicative of an attitude within Congress that opposed US co-operation with Egypt. While the Senate's rider on the foreign aid bill forced Dulles' hand to a certain extent, so too did Nasser's postponed acceptance of the conditions associated with the Anglo-American funding package. As time wore on, it became increasingly

difficult for administrations in both Washington and London to justify the high level of aid given to Egypt, only to be met with open hostility.

In early July 1956, Ahmed Hussein, the Egyptian ambassador to the United States, was given authority to accept without reservation the conditions associated with the Anglo-American funding for the Aswan dam project, though Nasser was under no illusion that the Americans would still be willing. A meeting was arranged with Dulles for 19 July 1956, and what remained to be decided was not whether or not funding for the dam would be provided, but rather the manner in which the offer would be rescinded.

Dulles had two main options available to him: he could agree to the funding knowing full well that Congress was unlikely to expropriate the necessary funds, or he could take responsibility for revoking the funding himself. Dulles preferred the latter course, not wanting to set a dangerous precedent whereby Congress wrested control of foreign policy decisions from the president and the executive branch of government.[9] Dulles surmised that the reason Egypt was now ready to accept the conditions associated with the Western aid was that they had been rebuffed by the Soviet Union. As such, Dulles believed his actions would put Nasser in his place but not open the door to international Communism. At the end of their meeting, Hussein was handed an aide-mémoire outlining the American rationale, which was duly transmitted to Cairo.

Upon learning of the outcome of the meeting in Washington, Nasser recalled that he "was surprised by the insulting attitude with which the refusal was declared. Not the refusal itself."[10] The apparently innocuous aide-mémoire caused great offence to Nasser, who interpreted it as an attempt to undermine his leadership. Nasser responded on 24 July with a vitriolic attack, berating the United States for its arrogance: "When Washington sheds every decent principle on which foreign relations are based and broadcast the lie, smear, and delusion that Egypt's economy is unsound, then I look them in the face and say: Drop dead of your fury for you will never be able to dictate to Egypt."[11]

Britain's financial difficulties, combined with Nasser's bellicose denunciations of British foreign policy in the Middle East, led officials in London to the conclusion in late March or early April 1956 that support for the Aswan project was no longer desirable.[12] Eden, however, was in no particular rush to inform the Egyptians of this change in policy and had told the Americans that Britain would prefer to "play this long."[13] By July, however, the Americans had waited long enough. The American withdrawal of funding for the Aswan High Dam came as no surprise to the British or, for that matter, the Egyptians. However, when the British rescinded their offer of financial support one day after the Americans on 20 July 1956, they believed that Washington would bear the brunt of any diplomatic reaction by Nasser. Less than a week later they learned how wrong they were.

On 26 July 1956, Nasser announced to a cheering crowd in Alexandria that he had signed a presidential decree nationalizing the Suez Canal Company. Loyal soldiers and officials were at that very moment taking control of the canal and its offices. While the threat of force loomed, an effective and efficient transfer of power was achieved without gunfire and without disrupting passage through the canal.

Officially known as the *Compagnie universelle du canal maritime de Suez*, the company that owned and administered the Suez Canal was chartered in Egypt but was predominantly owned by British and French investors. The Suez Canal was instrumental in linking the various parts of the British Empire, and the British government itself owned 44 percent of the company. In 1956 it was still a major conduit for British trade, and with 25 percent of all British imports and 54 percent of oil to Britain transported through the canal, it was considered to be the "lifeline of the Empire." By 1956 the idea of nationalizing the Suez Canal Company was not new – it had been considered and advocated within Egyptian nationalist circles since the Suez Canal Company concession was renewed in 1909. However, the retraction of Western financial support provided Nasser with the necessary pretext to nationalize the canal company. Fees collected from canal operations, Nasser maintained, would be used to finance the Aswan High Dam. To provide a legal basis for the action, shareholders were, in theory, to be compensated for the market value of shares.

Reaction in the United Kingdom to the Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal was swift and virulent. All Egyptian assets in the United Kingdom were immediately frozen, the export of war material to Egypt was banned, and within a week twenty thousand reservists were called up and military reinforcements were sent to the Mediterranean. The press and opposition ardently condemned Nasser and called for strong British action in the Middle East. Eden likewise favoured an immediate response, believing that Nasser must not be allowed "to have his thumb on our windpipe."[14] According to Anthony Nutting, a British cabinet minister and Eden protege who resigned over the crisis, "this was the challenge for which Eden had been waiting. Now at last he had found a pretext to launch an all-out campaign of political, economic and military pressures on Egypt and to destroy forever Nasser's image as the leader of Arab nationalism."[15] The declining state of Britain's military preparedness, however, precluded an immediate response, as did counsel from Washington and Ottawa.

From a legal point of view, the British Cabinet recognized that Nasser's nationalization "amounted to no more than a decision to buy out shareholders." The Foreign Office legal advisor concurred with this assessment and stressed that however annoying the actions of the Egyptian government, Nasser had done nothing that justified the UK government responding with

force.[16] This was not what Eden wanted to hear. According to one account, Eden retorted, "I don't care whether it's legal or not, I'm not going to let him do it ... He's not going to get away with it."[17] Eden's preoccupation with Nasser in the previous months now became an obsession as he increasingly started to link the nationalization of the canal to the appeasement of Hitler in the 1930s – he later admitted that the parallels with Mussolini were closer. Drawing on what he perceived to be great moral and public support, Eden felt confident when he wrote to Eisenhower informing him of the British concerns and calling for a concerted Western approach to the Middle East crisis. What alarmed Eisenhower, however, was Eden's concluding statement: "My colleagues 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. I have this morning instructed our Chiefs of Staff to prepare a military plan accordingly."[18]

While the Americans expressed regret over Nasser's precipitous move, Eisenhower preferred to adopt a wait and see attitude, rather than seeking immediate redress. Eisenhower stated that the magnitude of the crisis was immediately understood in Washington, though comments by Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson, that he believed the nationalization of the canal to be of little consequence, a mere "ripple" in international affairs, did little to assuage British fears.[19] Washington only started to grapple seriously with the problem, according to British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, after American envoy Robert Murphy met with senior British officials and reported on their inclination to settle the issue forcibly.[20] The French, for their part, were even more vehement in their denunciation of Nasser than the British. The root of France's ire lay in Nasser's support of the revolutionary *Front de libération nationale* (FLN), which advocated unrest in Algeria. French Prime Minister Guy Mollet and Foreign Minister Christian Pineau called for an immediate strike against the Egyptian dictator. It was at this point that Dulles was sent to London to mediate.

The international reaction to the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company was not unexpected in Egypt. Nasser was a shrewd tactician, and while not averse to taking risks, he preferred to do so in a very calculated manner. Before embarking on the nationalization of the canal, he had attempted to anticipate the likely reactions of the major players – Israel, France, and the United Kingdom. Interestingly enough, there was no mention of an American reaction. Immediate Israeli concern was expected to be minimal, as Israeli passage through the Suez Canal had been blocked for years. There was the possibility that Prime Minister Ben-Gurion would try to capitalize on the opportunity, though co-operation with France, and particularly Great Britain, was deemed extremely unlikely. Nasser assumed that France would want to pursue action, but would be unable to do so on their own due to

their preoccupation with the situation in Algeria. Eden would also favour a forceful settlement, but as Nasser's intelligence reports confirmed, there was not a significant enough number of British troops available in the Middle East to undertake an immediate military strike. The closest troops available were in the British Isles and would take time to transport to the Middle East – and for Nasser, time was a very important factor. Nasser did not underestimate the enmity that expropriating the Suez Canal Company would evoke, but he gambled that as time tempered initial reactions, the probability of military action would subside.[21] Other leaders around the world also hoped the crisis could be resolved peacefully, despite the British and French call to arms.

News of Nasser's seizure of the Suez Canal Company came to Canada while Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent and Pearson were hosting an official visit by Robert Menzies, the prime minister of Australia. For Menzies, the Suez Canal was not a distant, if interesting, piece of geography but the most direct sea link between Australia and Great Britain. Menzies found the situation most disturbing and, after a brief trip to Washington, he was off to London where he hoped to temper any immediate British response. Meanwhile, St. Laurent and Pearson were left to wait for an official pronouncement from Britain.

How did Canada react? How could it react? In 1956 Canada did not have a refined Middle East policy. Canada had few representatives in the region and had only recently opened an embassy in Cairo. Nor did it appear, at first glance, that Canada was directly affected by Egyptian actions. As Ralph Campney, the minister of national defence, put it on 3 August 1956, "it is primarily a European matter ... not a matter which particularly concerns Canada. We have no oil there. We don't use the Canal for shipping."[22] The secretary of state for external affairs, Lester Pearson, knew better.

Pearson was acutely aware of the international ramifications; he knew from a lifetime in diplomacy that what affected the great powers, particularly Britain, sooner or later affected Canada. According to an internal Department of External Affairs memo, it was recognized that "the world today makes it impossible to disassociate ourselves effectively from the problems of any area. If war should break out in the Middle East between Israel and Egypt, say, we are just as likely to be involved as we were in Korea and Indo-China."[23] Some officials also felt that Canada had a moral obligation to help the Middle East because of the role Canada played in the creation of the State of Israel, and, on the domestic level, the Jewish lobby was not an insignificant factor.

However, with the Cold War raging, decolonization and the rise of neutralist nations such as Egypt provided a natural point of conflict for the superpowers. The growing disillusionment within the Commonwealth and

the apparent divergence of Middle East policy between Canada's most important allies, Britain and the United States, weighed heavily on Pearson's mind. While the United States was primarily concerned with the issue of free and unhindered navigation of the canal, officials in Ottawa understood that, for Britain and France, freedom of navigation would only be guaranteed by reasserting full ownership of and control over the canal. From the Canadian perspective, Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company opened a Pandora's box, unleashing competing interests among Canada's most important alliances.

The British received their first indication as to Canada's position on 27 July when Norman Robertson, the Canadian high commissioner in London, counselled patience, international co-operation, and bringing the issue of Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal before the United Nations. The Oxford-educated Robertson was among Canada's most senior and ablest diplomats, and he had unparalleled access to the British government. He characterized the initial briefing of Commonwealth representatives by the secretary of state for Commonwealth affairs as "brief and desultory," and Robertson expressed his hope that in the ensuing chaos, "the United Kingdom would not be too quick to gather too many spears to its own bosom."[24] This was a view wholeheartedly supported in Ottawa.

When Prime Minister Eden's letter – aimed at explaining the British point of view and rallying support – arrived in Ottawa on the morning of 28 July, it provoked unexpected reactions: St. Laurent was offended by the presumption of Canadian support while Pearson was concerned by the potential use of force to solve the issue. Later that day, Pearson sent a cable off to Robertson in London, in which he lamented the probable British resort to force and the lack of American support that such a move would garner. Pearson was also worried about the implications for the UN, stating, "any effort to use force, in fact, would in all likelihood result in an appeal by Egypt to the UN. That would be bringing the UN into the matter with a vengeance, and by the wrong party." On an uncharacteristically fatalistic note, Pearson concluded that "these observations, which are sent to you in haste, may all seem pretty negative, but at the moment I am less worried about being negative than about being rashly positive."[25] Reports from military sources in London only added to Pearson's uneasiness a few days later by suggesting, "it is not a question of whether military action will be taken but rather a matter of how and when."[26]

Despite hounding by the official Canadian Opposition to rally behind the United Kingdom, the Liberals were very careful in their public statements on events in Egypt not to endorse the use of force to settle the situation. While Conservative external affairs critic John Diefenbaker was criticizing the government for its inaction and comparing Nasser to Hitler and Mussolini,

St. Laurent and Pearson were very conscious of the adverse effects bold statements could have on Commonwealth unity. Fissures were already apparent among the dominions, with Australia and New Zealand endorsing Britain and India, Pakistan, and Ceylon being sympathetic toward Nasser. Talk of "bashing Nasser" by Australian diplomats at the UN also did little to help soothe Commonwealth relations.[27]

More troubling for the Canadian government, however, was the growing divide between Britain and the United States. Despite false British assumptions regarding Dulles' intentions, it became increasingly clear to Canada that the United States would never sanction the use of force to settle the Suez crisis. Circumspection was much needed by the British, a point driven home to the Canadian ambassador to the United States, Arnold Heeney. After meeting with the British, Deputy US Secretary of State Robert Murphy confided to Heeney:

> The British and French mean business. Regardless of the legal position of the canal, they are determined to get it back and place it under international control. Nasser will resist, and God knows where the mess will end. Perhaps you people in Canada can do something to urge caution on them.[28]

The possibility of a split between Canada's two most important allies threatened dramatic repercussions for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the UN – cornerstones of Canadian foreign policy.

In the immediate aftermath of Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal, Canada pursued a proactive policy aimed at resolving the situation peaceably. Pearson early on made it very clear to the High Commissioner of the United Kingdom to Canada Sir Archibald Nye, that the use of force would be counterproductive to resolving the situation in the Middle East.[29] Like Robertson, Pearson's first inclination was to turn to the UN. However, Britain and France had no desire to bring the issue before the UN at such an early stage, so Pearson instructed Robertson to instead press for Suez to be discussed by the NATO Council before the London conference was held in August 1956 to deal with the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Britain, once again, declined, saying that they did not want to offend the Indians, who were using their good offices in an attempt to resolve the crisis, though they were not part of NATO.[30] Pearson, at a bit of a loss for ideas, finally suggested that Robertson should informally sound out the Foreign Office on the possibility of some of the ambassadors in Cairo being constituted to oversee Egyptian control of the Suez Canal.[31] It was not presumed that any of these solutions would immediately be considered ideal by the British, but it was hoped that they would provide alternatives to the use of force. Pearson and diplomats at the Department of External Affairs worked tirelessly in Ottawa, London,

Paris, New York, and Cairo in an attempt to gather information and temper British reactions.

As Canada struggled with Britain's belligerent tone, some British officials were not particularly impressed with the Canadians. In Sir Archibald Nye's view, "the Canadian reaction to the Suez situation hasn't been very satisfactory from our aspect. I think at first they failed to grasp its importance; when they did their reaction – instinctively and perhaps subconscious – was 'how do we keep clear of this mess' and *not* 'what can we do to help.'"[32] Expecting the dominions to immediately fall in line with imperial policy, Eden and his supporters should have realized that Canada was no longer content to chime "ready, aye, ready" and support British foreign policy unequivocally. For Pearson, in retrospect, "the Suez episode was perhaps the most dramatic indication up to that time that Canada had really come of age ... [it] set the seal on the development of our independence in foreign affairs."[33] The British government, however, was less enamoured with Canada's independent course. Having urged Ottawa to follow the British lead in blocking Egyptian bank accounts overseas, Nye was disappointed to find out from Pearson that there were no legal measures with which to restrict foreign financial transactions. The only way Egyptian assets could be seized in Canada was under the War Measures Act, which for obvious reasons the St. Laurent government was unwilling to apply. Assets of the Suez Canal Company were not seized, though a compromise of sorts was reached; the government advised the Canadian Bankers' Association that financial institutions may wish to keep in mind the questionable legality of Egypt's actions if any requests were received to release assets held in Canada.[34]

By 10 August 1956, British officials believed reactions in Canada to be "satisfactory." That word coded a certain confusion. Canadian news coverage and attitudes of the media were considered to be positive and statements by the Canadian government helpful, yet the Canadian government's predisposition to shun the use of force was perplexing to the British. It was presumed that the Canadian aversion to force arose from "a general psychological attitude which shys [sic] away from anything so unpleasant."[35] There was, however, the very real concern in Canada that hostilities in the Middle East could lead to a Third World War. On 15 August 1956, Norman Robertson met with Lord Home, the secretary of state for Commonwealth relations, and "expressed his grave concern" over the possible use of force to regain control of the Suez Canal. When questioned directly, Robertson intimated that Britain would not be able to expect Canada's support, should such a situation arise. Feeling that this was "far worse than anything the United States Government has ever said," Eden directed that the British high commissioner in Ottawa should take up the issue directly with Pearson.[36] However, upon reflection, Lord Home professed,

> I feel some doubt as to whether it is wise to try to get a precise definition of their attitude from the Canadian Government at this stage. May there not be some danger of their giving us an answer which they might be sorry for later if and when some new aggression by Nasser or his complete failure to respond make the use of force the definite and immediate issue?[37]

Two days later, Eden concurred with Home's assessment and noted, "Very well we will not follow up. But I see no advantage in asking Robertson his opinion anymore."[38] There was no question as to where Canada stood on the use of force, and it was a view that Eden did not wish to hear. Canada's subsequent efforts to defuse the Suez crisis in London fell on deaf ears.

The only encouraging news to come out of the United Kingdom in early August was the announcement of a Suez Canal users' conference in London to discuss an international system – "consistent with legitimate Egyptian interests" – to oversee control of the canal.[39] Invitations for the conference were issued to those nations that were either signatories to the 1888 Constantinople Convention, or whose trade significantly depended upon the canal. Canada was not asked to attend and had no great desire to do so. In response to Diefenbaker's demand to know why Canada was not going to be represented at the London conference to lend support to Great Britain, Pearson merely replied that Canada had not been invited. Pearson had, in fact, been sounded out by the British high commissioner in Ottawa as to whether or not Canada would like to attend. As the third or fourth largest trading nation in the world, a case could have been made for Canada's attendance, but Pearson was of the mind that Canada should not attend "unless it was felt that we could make a useful contribution." Stating that Canada "would not refuse to take part" if invited was hardly the ringing endorsement the British were looking for.[40]

While tripartite talks between Britain, France, and the United States in early August alleviated some fears in Ottawa, there was still concern that the UK and France might resort to military action if the London conference did not produce favourable results. Pearson also seriously doubted that the Egyptians would ever agree to international control of the canal, which was the ultimate and plainly stated goal of the Eden government. The associated costs of this line of British diplomacy were high, with Pearson reiterating trepidation about strains forming in the Commonwealth as well as the Anglo-American alliance. "As you will have gathered from the above," Pearson wrote to Robertson in London, "we are not very happy here about developments and where they are leading. But we have no desire to be critical unless and until we can come up with some constructive ideas of our own."[41]

The London conference convened on 16 August 1956 with twenty-two of the twenty-four invited nations attending. Only Egypt and Greece declined

to participate. An inflammatory speech by Eden motivated the Egyptians to boycott, though Nasser did send Ali Sabri, director of the office of the president, to London as an observer, where he was regularly briefed after each session by the Russian and Indian delegations. An Anglo-American-French proposal was used as a basis for discussion, and it quickly became apparent that the preferred outcome for most conference attendees involved international control of the Suez Canal. For Britain and France, nothing less was acceptable. The conference adjourned on 23 August with the endorsement of eighteen nations for an amended American proposal. The Soviet Union, Indonesia, India, and Ceylon championed an alternative plan that supported Egyptian ownership and control of the canal, to be overseen by a group of user nations. While the Indian plan would have undoubtedly been more agreeable to Nasser, neither proposal was by any means legally binding. A full record of the proceedings, eight hundred pages in all, was sent to Egypt for Nasser's perusal, though it was decided that a "Committee of Five" would travel to Cairo to explain and discuss the finer points of the conference conclusions with Nasser.

Some delegates hoped that Dulles would head the mission to Egypt, but the American was too canny for that. He also had some health problems, which would later become apparent. Robert Menzies, the prime minister of Australia, was chosen to take the lead in negotiating a settlement to the Suez dispute. Menzies was an able and experienced politician, but because of his outspoken criticism and condemnation of the nationalization of the canal he was hardly the ideal candidate – at least in Pearson's mind – to deal with Nasser.[42] On the other hand, the British government could be confident that Menzies would faithfully represent London's line to the Egyptian government. To round out the mission, Menzies was accompanied by delegates from Ethiopia, Iran, Sweden, and the United States. Arriving amidst a media barrage, they held a preliminary meeting with Nasser on 3 September 1956, though the committee did not put forward its formal presentation until the following day.

Accounts of the Menzies mission vary. Naturally, Menzies later recalled his Egyptian mission with equanimity, stating that he and his colleagues were extended "complete courtesy" and "parted [from Nasser] in a most amicable way."[43] Nasser's advisor, Mohamed Heikal, paints a very different picture of the talks, whereby Menzies initiated a crisis by threatening Nasser with "trouble" should he not comply with international pressure.[44] Regardless of how the message was presented, Nasser had little desire to return the canal to international control, which is essentially what the eighteen-power proposal had in mind. Even at his most optimistic, Menzies thought the proposal had no better than a hundred-to-one chance of being accepted by Nasser. Nonetheless, any hope of a negotiated settlement was dashed on the

morning of 5 September when Eisenhower's statement from a press conference landed on the front page of the Egyptian press, stating "We are committed to a peaceful settlement of this dispute, nothing else."[45] By renouncing the use of force to settle the Suez Canal issue, Eisenhower ostensibly removed any need for Nasser to carry on negotiations – a fact understood by both Nasser and Menzies. Responding to the Committee of Five's final report, Nasser reiterated Egypt's objections to the eighteen-power proposal, though he did repeat his willingness to sponsor a conference of all users of the canal to renew the Constantinople Convention of 1888. While a renewal of the convention would have ensured free and unhindered access to the canal on paper, participation at the conference would have been substantially enlarged, including the entire Soviet bloc, and the British had no interest in such a move.

Pearson doubted that the Menzies mission ever had much chance of success. It served a purpose by keeping discussions going, and that was a factor Pearson always valued. For the time being, he was optimistic, reporting to Cabinet at the end of August that tensions over the Suez Canal had "eased a great deal" and that it was doubtful if "really serious trouble" would occur.[46] This was not to say, however, that the potential for trouble in the future did not remain. Even though Canada had not been a party to the London conference, it was agreed by Cabinet that a statement should be given in support of the eighteen-power proposal. Before leaving for NATO talks in Europe, Pearson stated that the Canadian government believed the majority opinion from the London conference formed "a solid basis for a peaceful settlement of the Suez Canal question." However, somewhat more foreboding was the following caveat: "It is devoutly to be hoped that President Nasser will accept this invitation to negotiate a peaceful and permanent solution of this serious problem ... A failure to do so would involve a very heavy responsibility indeed."[47] While such a statement was no doubt interpreted by Nasser as a threat, it is unlikely that Pearson had intended it as such. Rather, since Eden's first communication regarding the nationalization of the Suez Canal in late July, the British recourse to force had always been of great concern to Pearson. While Pearson the idealist liked to believe that a peaceful solution to the problem could be arrived at, Pearson the realist was not so sure.

A meeting with Selwyn Lloyd, the British foreign minister, on 3 September provided Pearson the opportunity to re-evaluate British thinking on the Middle East. During a "wide-ranging discussion of the canal crisis," Lloyd repeated the British rationale for the use of force, stating, "the chances may be ten to one against us using military force against Egypt on this issue, but if Nasser only felt the chances were ten to one that we would, he would be more reasonable and a settlement could be reached." Pearson pointed out

"the obvious weakness of this kind of reasoning based on the efficacy of bluff, and the danger of tactics designed to put it into effect,"[48] though to little effect. Lloyd even wondered aloud whether an Israeli pre-emptive strike against Egypt wouldn't be such a bad thing for Britain, which did little to allay any of Pearson's fears. Reporting to St. Laurent, Pearson wrote,

> the UK government are not being very skilful in their management of these international problems, even when the policies they may be pursuing are the right ones ... There seems to be a lack of imagination and skill on the part of those who are concerned here with the public relations aspect of UK policy moves. The results are often perplexing for friends of the UK and indicate, it seems to me, a lack of direction and no sureness of touch ... my impression is that events in the international field are pulling the British Government with them rather than being influenced and directed by that government.[49]

Despite recognizing and sympathizing with the problems faced by the British, Pearson's critical assessment of UK policy elucidated the divergent and independent nature of Canadian foreign policy. Unwilling to support aggressive actions in the Middle East, Canada preferred to use the UN as a vehicle to reconcile the conflicting interests of its allies.

While the Menzies mission was negotiating in Cairo, military officials in London were busy revising their timetables, and Dulles was sketching out his ideas for a Co-operative Association of Suez Canal Users (later to become known as the Suez Canal Users' Association, or SCUA) at his cabin on Duck Island. From the beginning of the crisis, British officials had maintained that military preparations were purely precautionary, though, in Dulles' mind, the British efforts to find diplomatic solutions seemed somewhat half-hearted at best. In the absence of any alternative solutions to the Suez problem, Dulles advocated his users' association, which admittedly was not perfect, but which provided a starting place for negotiations.[50] The association would be responsible for overseeing the pilots, regulating traffic through the canal, and collecting the transit tolls. Based on the premise that traffic through the canal would grind to a halt without the assistance of foreign pilots and technicians, the users' association was designed to prove to Nasser that he did not, indeed, hold all the cards. Trade could also potentially be rerouted, and larger oil tankers constructed, allowing for Europe's needs to be supplemented from Latin America. It was hoped by Dulles that the wrath of other Arab leaders resulting from a reduction in oil sales and the decline in canal users' tolls would make the value of negotiating clear to Nasser.

While some have cast doubts on whether Dulles' users' association was ever intended to work – Pearson doubted that it was – it was hoped that it

would at the very least act as a delaying technique, forestalling conflict. The more time that passed after the nationalization of the canal, the less probable it was that Britain and France would resort to force – at least without what Dulles considered to be just cause. The British, conversely, embraced the users' association idea not because it would resolve the underlying problems in the Middle East, but rather because it would tie the United States closer to Britain and France. Dulles, regardless, looked to anything that he believed would prevent conflict over the Suez crisis, or at the very least delay action until after the American presidential election on 6 November 1956.

Against American advice that foreign pilots should be encouraged to remain in the employ of the canal authority, France and Britain remained silent when their pilots walked out *en masse* on 14 September 1956. To prove that the Egyptians were up to the task of operating the canal without Western assistance, a convoy of thirteen ships was guided through the next day. By the end of the week, the canal had transited 254 ships, well above the normal average.

Eden's announcement of Britain's support for the Suez Canal Users' Association did little to foster Egypt's acceptance of the plan. Eden passionately stated in the House of Commons,

> I must make it clear that if the Egyptian Government should seek to interfere with the operations of the association, or refuse to extend it the essential minimum of co-operation ... In that event, Her Majesty's Government and others concerned will be free to take such further steps as seem to be required either through the United Nations, or by other means for the assertion of their rights.[51]

Nasser, never one to take kindly to threats, of course denounced the entire program as yet another colonial plot to regain control of the canal, for which Egypt would not stand. In a message to Dulles, Nasser very clearly stated his views on the subject: "The scheme which Prime Minister Eden wants to impose is an open and flagrant aggression on Egypt's sovereignty and its implementation means war."[52] While Nasser's reaction was not entirely unexpected, Britain and France were dumbfounded by Dulles' acquiescence to the Egyptian dictator's rhetoric. Dulles removed any force from the users' association when he stated, "we do not intend to shoot our way through. It may be we have the right to do it, but we don't intend to do it as far as the United States is concerned."[53] When the nations associated with the eighteen-power proposal met for the second London conference on 19 September 1956, the differing expectations and potential for conflict were obvious.

The idea of the Suez Canal Users' Association had originally appealed to the British because it appeared to them a way of undermining Nasser. Their

understanding of the association, however, differed greatly from that of the Americans. At the outset of the conference, Dulles shocked Eden and Pineau when he stated that the association would not "involve the assumption by any member of any obligation," and that the payment of canal dues would be "voluntary."[54] Without binding mechanisms to ensure that payment went to the association, and not to Egypt, Dulles' plan lacked any of the force hoped for by the British and French. Dulles further diluted the users' association, from the British and French point of view, when he stated that "there is no thought on the part of the US of trying to impose any of the facilities of the Association upon Egypt by force." As one Foreign Office official interpreted the conference, "Dulles pulled rug after rug from under us and watered down the Canal Users' Association till it was meaningless."[55]

Instead of lamenting the breakdown in Allied solidarity, the British would have been better off listening to Dulles' statements, which had not changed significantly in the two months since the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Hanging on to Dulles' ill-chosen phrase on 1 August 1956, that "a way has to be found to make Nasser disgorge what he was attempting to swallow," Eden and his colleagues heard only what they wanted to hear and grossly miscalculated the American opposition to a military solution for the Suez crisis.[56] While Dulles may not always have been as straightforward and forthcoming as Eden and Lloyd would have liked, the British should have realized that Eisenhower, not Dulles, was the true author of American foreign policy. Eisenhower's public statements, as well as his correspondence with Prime Minister Anthony Eden, consistently warned against a forcible solution and sought a peaceful outcome to the crisis. The British and French were not particularly interested in what the Americans were saying. Rather, they were just going through the motions to ensure that all peaceful means had been exhausted. The next step on this path was to put the issue before the UN.

The British had been inclined to go to the UN Security Council after the failure of the Menzies mission, but they were dissuaded by Dulles and agreed only to inform the Security Council of the problems regarding Suez. However, with the stillbirth of the users' association, Britain and France formally requested a meeting of the Security Council to consider "the situation created by the unilateral action of the Egyptian government in bringing to an end the system of international cooperation on the Suez Canal which was confirmed and completed by the Suez Canal Convention of 1888."[57] The United States declined to co-sponsor the question before the Security Council, and the French did so only under duress, though not because they didn't support military intervention. The French, already at war with Arabs in Algeria, had no moral qualms about embarking on a similar action in Egypt, because Nasser's support of the Algerian FLN was considered the root of their Algerian problem. However, the French viewed the UN as an "alibi to do nothing"

and had no great desire to involve the Security Council. British officials considered recourse to the UN necessary to solidify domestic and international public support, because evidence of flagrant violation or mismanagement of the canal was lacking; only after all peaceful means had been exhausted would force be an acceptable option. The French consented in order to mollify their ally.

Dulles was reluctant to have the Suez issue put before the UN for a number of reasons. First, he was unsure whether the Security Council had the authority to force Egypt to make concessions regarding the canal, and if such an effort failed, Britain and France would feel justified embarking on more forceful measures, citing Egypt's refusal to co-operate within the terms of the UN Charter.[58] Dulles also felt that going through the motions, only for Britain and France to cast aside the UN as a failure, would be an unmerited abuse of the institution. Perhaps more importantly, Dulles was trying to avoid a situation in which the Western powers would come into direct conflict. In a meeting on 7 September 1956, British and French officials tried to pin Dulles down on whether the United States would support Anglo-French resolutions put forward at the UN. Dulles was unwilling to give any such assurances and preferred to speak only in general terms.[59] One suspects that the parallels between the Suez and Panama canals may also have hit a bit too close to home, as the last thing the United States wanted to deal with was UN precedents. Regardless of American objections, the Anglo-French request to the Security Council was sent to New York on 21 September 1956, before Dulles had even arrived home from the second London conference.

American policy in the Middle East, according to some members of the Canadian Cabinet, was "most unfortunate."[60] Dulles' users' association was interpreted as a US initiative forced upon the United Kingdom and France, but one that the United States was unwilling to enforce. Pearson, himself, was extremely skeptical of the users' association and became increasingly concerned about a split between Canada's two closest and most important allies. While sympathetic to British aims, Pearson did not agree with the way in which they were pursuing their policy. Thus, on 17 September 1956, he cautioned in his report to St. Laurent, "I think ... we should be very careful in this interim period in saying or doing anything which would give the impression that Canadian association or support is something that can be taken for granted."[61] Remaining above the fray and not being too closely linked with British policy would make it easier for Canada to act as an arbitrator at the UN, if and when the opportunity arose. Pearson and the Canadian diplomatic corps continued to monitor events in the Middle East and Europe very closely, though they did their best to distance themselves from British initiatives. Toward the end of October, it appeared as if all was for naught, and that things were quieting down in the Middle East.

The Suez question came before the UN Security Council on 5 October 1956. With much behind-the-scenes negotiation, it appeared as if some genuine progress were being made. On 12 October, Britain, France, and Egypt reached agreement on a set of principles upon which to base their negotiations, which prompted Eisenhower in his address to the nation on 12 October to announce, "it looks like here is a very great crisis that is behind us."[62] As it was only the framework for negotiations that had been agreed to, Lloyd denounced Eisenhower's pronouncement as somewhat premature, but it was progress nonetheless. With an apparent break in the diplomatic impasse, the Suez question was overshadowed at the end of October by a rash of incidents along the Israeli-Jordanian border and the revolt in Hungary. While negotiations continued at the UN, Eden remained unsure of committing troops to action in the Middle East. The French, however, had no such qualms. Talk was cheap as far as the French were concerned and decisive action was required to stem the tide of public opinion which had continued to seethe after Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal. Thus, it was under intense pressure from the French that the British were impelled to act.

On 30 September and 1 October, French and Israeli military and political officials met secretly to discuss the possibility of formalizing a military alliance to act against Egypt. While progress was not as forthcoming as the Israelis might have hoped, enough ground was covered for Major-General Moshe Dayan to begin preparations for Operation KADESH – in all probability to take place before the month was out. The French intimated that they would prefer to take action in concert with the British, but if push came to shove, they were prepared to go it alone. As the Israelis returned to Tel Aviv to begin their planning, the French went off to London to convince the British of the need to take immediate action. General Maurice Challe, deputy chief of staff (Air) of the French armed forces, and Albert Gazier, the acting foreign minister, were sent to broach the idea of Anglo-French-Israeli cooperation with Sir Anthony Eden.

The pairing of Britain and Israel as allies initially seemed ill-fitted. With Britain under treaty obligation to support Jordan, and the tensions with Israel along the Jordanian border at an all-time high, it appeared more likely that Britain and Israel would be fighting each other, rather than fighting alongside one another. Nonetheless, it was suggested that Israel would attack Egypt in the Sinai peninsula. After the Israelis had occupied considerable territory, Britain and France would call upon Israel and Egypt to retreat from the canal area. When Egypt refused to withdraw from the canal zone, as it was assumed would happen, Britain and France would have the pretext they needed to send in their troops to regain control of the Suez Canal.

The British gave no immediate decision to the French, but the idea obviously appealed to Eden. Selwyn Lloyd was recalled from New York to confer

with the Cabinet and returned to London on 16 October. Initially opposed to the idea of collusion, Lloyd gave in to Eden's ardour, and the two travelled to Paris to confer with Mollet and Pineau. Over the course of three days, the details of the attack were coordinated among French, Israeli, and British officials, culminating in the Protocol of Sèvres, signed on 24 October 1956. True to their word, five days later, on 29 October 1956, the Israelis dropped a battalion of paratroopers over the Mitla Pass in the middle of Egypt's Sinai desert, officially turning the Suez crisis into a hot war.