

***Globalization Über Alles:***  
**Framing the 1956 Suez Crisis within America's Economic Project**

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## **Abstract**

The 1956 Suez Crisis has been seen as the turning point in which the old empires of France and Britain fell and a postcolonial “self-determination” spread throughout the Middle East. While there is no doubt that the military operation against Egypt was a failure of colonial policy, historians have not fully explored this event as a piece of a larger American globalization project. This paper, using the framework developed by Neil Smith, will explore the Suez Crisis as a furthering of US policy that started with Woodrow Wilson. I will also work with a Foucauldian approach to history that avoids a linear explanation of events. It is my argument that US intervention in the crisis was not about the furthering of democracy, but rather an opening of economic markets once held by colonial forces. Egyptian regimes are second to the continued movement of capital in and out of the region.

*Keywords: Suez Crisis, US foreign policy, globalization, Egypt, Michel Foucault, Neil Smith*

## **Introduction**

In the latter half of 1956, Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal in a display of a new anti-colonial movement in the Arab world, which was met by military action and occupation by Britain, France, and Israel. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Nations all contributed to a removal of Western forces and the return of the canal to Egyptian control. One of the main implications of the crisis was that the old Western empires had fallen and were replaced by the US during a push for postcolonial “self-determination.”<sup>1</sup> Others have viewed it

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Schulzinger, “The Impact of Suez on United States Middle East Policy, 1957-1958.” In *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956*. Eds. Selwyn Ilan Troen and Moshe Shemesh. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, pp. 251-273., Steven Z. Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez: The Rise of American Power in the Middle East, 1953-1957*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992.

as having less drastic effects on the British Empire, US foreign policy, and Egypt as popular thought suggested.<sup>2</sup> Still others have focused on what a successful military campaign this was for Israel.<sup>3</sup>

One of the facets of the crisis that these studies agree on, was that US involvement could be seen as part of a nascent Cold War policy of containing the communist presence around the world. The event happened around the time of conflict with Korea and Cuba and fits nicely into the paradigm of liberal democracy versus authoritarian communism.<sup>4</sup> While it does fit in such a context, scholars have failed to fully analyze the Suez Crisis as being part of a larger American globalization project. This paper, using the framework developed by Neil Smith and adapting it into a much more Foucauldian approach, will explore the Suez Crisis as a furthering of US policy that started with Woodrow Wilson at the end of World War I.<sup>5</sup> It is my argument that US intervention in the Suez Crisis should not be viewed as a furthering of democracy, independence, or fighting communism, but rather an attempt at an opening of economic markets once held by colonial forces. It, and the rest of US foreign policy in the Middle East, should not be seen as a failure to maintain peace, but as a process in creating new economic possibilities for the United States. I also want to stress that the US is not acting in terms of a democratic ideology, but in a much more pragmatic and self-serving way.

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<sup>2</sup> Simon C. Smith, *Ending Empire in the Middle East: Britain, the United States and Post-War Decolonization, 1945-1973* (New York: Routledge, 2013).; Hugh Thomas, *Suez* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> Chaim Herzog, "The Suez-Sinai Campaign: Background." In *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956*. Eds. Selwyn Ilan Troen and Moshe Shemesh. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 3-14.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, *Suez*.

<sup>5</sup> Neil Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

## The Endgame of Globalization

In Neil Smith's 2005 book, *The Endgame of Globalization*, he presents a materialist account of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. While critics of the war claimed it was less about global security and more about access to oil, Smith skillfully presents an argument that it goes much deeper than that.<sup>6</sup> There really was no need to overthrow Saddam Hussein; the United States could have easily worked with him, either overtly or in a much subtler way, to ensure access to Iraq's oil supply. Operation Iraqi Freedom was about the greater economic market. Capitalists, American capitalists specifically, could benefit from it at a much grander scale than simply pumping oil.<sup>7</sup>

While George W. Bush and the Second Iraq War are the main focus of Smith's book, he situates Bush within the legacy of another US President, Woodrow Wilson. Wilson, president from 1913-1921, can be seen as the "self-ordained savior of Europe after WWI."<sup>8</sup> It was Wilson's "Fourteen Points" speech that was to lead the war-torn continent into peace, though both supporters and critics of the president saw his idealism as being no match for the politics of the European nations.<sup>9</sup> While Wilson did not succeed decisively in Paris talks after the war, Smith argues that he should not be seen as a progressive acting against conservative congressional interests at the time, but rather he was a "nationalist internationalist" who reflects a developing policy of twentieth century American economic liberalism.<sup>10</sup> Wilson entered WWI in order to partake in economic spoils to be had by defeating Germany and the Ottoman Empire.

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<sup>6</sup> For a lead up to the globalization project, see also Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> N. Smith, *Endgame*, 184.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-81.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

A key component of Wilson's stated vision of a post-WWI world, was not only that of a League of Nations working together, but he "came to Paris an unprecedented champion of self-determination for the so-called smaller peoples, and made no small rhetorical flourishes about the need to free people all over the globe from the shackles of external control."<sup>11</sup> This was a bold stance to take, though his vision did not become fully realized in the rebuilding and restructuring of the world after the war. Smith argues, however, that Wilson was not truly committed to a postcolonial world.<sup>12</sup> After all, important figures ranging from W.E.B. Dubois to Ho Chi Minh failed to get meetings with Wilson to actually discuss independence for these "smaller nations." This should come as no surprise in light of recent public discussion of Wilson's racist attitudes.<sup>13</sup> What Smith is arguing, is not that Wilson was interested in democracy or independence for colonial territories, but rather he wanted to expand economic markets for the US. The problem was the colonial map:

The traditional strategy of geopolitical power and control was blocked for US capitalists. With the strongest economy in the world at the turn of the Twentieth Century but with a world map already painted British pink all over, blue for France, and a series of other colors for various European nations – the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Germany – there was little interstitial geography left for American territorial expansion.<sup>14</sup>

This meant that self-determination needed to happen, not for the freedom and liberty of the colonized, but to ensure that resources could be extracted and American products could be sold. Colonization as a means of gaining territory was irrelevant after WWI; it now was a matter of gaining economic markets. "US capital would refocus on controlling the flow of productive and finance capital into and out of sectors and places that could remain technically independent –

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 67-68.

<sup>13</sup> Dick Lehr, "The Racist Legacy of Woodrow Wilson," *The Atlantic Monthly*, November, 27, 2015, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/wilson-legacy-racism/417549/>

<sup>14</sup> N. Smith, *Endgame*, 71.

self-determining – but that would, by dint of US economic power, be controlled, for all intents and purposes, by US interests.”<sup>15</sup>

This new global economy was only partially realized after WWI, but it would be further developed after the second World War. Again, we saw a restructuring of world markets, this time with more success at creating new international organizations to facilitate peace and trade, such as the United Nations, International Monetary Fund and World Bank. While these organizations were global in scope, Smith rightly argues that they were designed with US interests in mind.<sup>16</sup> This was, according to Smith, a new form of globalization, one that could not have happened without Wilson’s earlier groundwork. The Bretton Woods conference in 1944, a meeting of the Allied forces, “did not bring a complete deregulation of finance markets; rather, it put in place a global apparatus of financial regulation where none had existed previously.”<sup>17</sup> The continued with President Truman’s 1949 Point IV program which was focused on industrializing developing nations in order to open up new trade opportunities.<sup>18</sup>

This, Smith argues, is why the US went to war in Iraq in 2003. The “War on Terror,” securing oil supplies, spreading democracy, none of these by themselves were a good reason for the invasion. The rest of Smith’s book highlights what he considers to be the real reasons behind the war. Various US policy decisions in the Middle East in the late twentieth century had weakened American influence in the region. Islamic reform movements and anti-Western attitudes made the real threat not terrorism, but rather “the perceived threat that the ‘Greater Middle East’ might consolidate a competing globalism that could obstruct the liberal democratic

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 114.

globalization emanating from Washington and New York, Tokyo and Frankfurt, London and Milan.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, the US had to act to ensure that their brand of capitalism and globalization remained active in the Middle East.

My only real issue with Smith’s argument is his use of the term “endgame.” Referring to Iraq, he states “It is not a ‘war on terrorism’ so much as it is a war to finish off a larger and longer term project.”<sup>20</sup> Claiming the end of something like this global project is too simple a proposition. This should really be seen as a node in a path with no apparent end. To borrow a phrase from Stuart Hall, this is American Globalization “without guarantees.”<sup>21</sup> After all, what seemed to be an easy march towards democracy and a new ally in the Middle East descended into a quagmire that has still not stabilized. What Smith calls the “endgame” appears to more of yet another “opportunity” to reshape global economies. It did not unfold into the easily accessible markets the Bush administration had hoped for, but with the events of the 2011 Arab Spring, new opportunities arose. What this paper will attempt to demonstrate is a much more Foucauldian telling of US involvement in the Middle East/North Africa region.<sup>22</sup> This is not the first effort to invoke Foucault in studying Egypt,<sup>23</sup> though this approach is focused on an American production of power and knowledge. Rather than a neat, linear story, the US has been engaged in struggles to change the discourse of Middle Eastern economies of the global market. This is a continuation of what Smith argued was Woodrow Wilson’s real foreign policy. The US

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., *viii*.

<sup>21</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees.” In Chen, Kuan-Hsing, and David Morley, eds. *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Routledge, 2001, 25-46.

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” In *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, New York: Vintage, 2010, pp. 76-100.

<sup>23</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

wanted to “control the discourse of global power in such a way that territorial acquisition was rendered secondary if not irrelevant.”<sup>24</sup> Rather than frame these events in a linear progression and discuss “endgames” or failures of US foreign policy,<sup>25</sup> I want to show how the struggle for power, as well as the production of a modern Orientalist knowledge of the Middle East, must be understood through a Foucauldian genealogy of US/Arab relations. To claim that this the Iraq war represented an end is to view the US government as an object, much in the same way Western scholars have long viewed the actions of East.<sup>26</sup> It is my hope to demonstrate the concept of America’s Foucauldian globalization project through an analysis of the Suez Crisis as well as current US/Egypt relations.

### **Suez Crisis, 1956**

The Suez Crisis is absent from Smith’s *Endgame of Globalization*, likely due to his focus on Iraq rather than the greater Middle East/North Africa region. This does not mean that President Eisenhower’s involvement with Suez cannot fit within Smith’s argument. I wish to first present a brief history of power in Egypt, followed by an explanation of the the 1956 Suez Crisis.

#### *Imperial history prior to 1956*

European empires have long had an interest in Egypt prior to the Suez Crisis. Napoleon Bonaparte had led a French invasion into the region in 1798, not only for military interests, but with a sizable group of scientists and academics. Even though the French would be defeated by

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<sup>24</sup> N. Smith, *Endgame*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> S. Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage 1994.

the British and forced to leave Egypt, this began an Enlightenment era project to produce a new ‘modern’ knowledge of the Orient.<sup>27</sup> Such European involvement as well as the new ‘Orientalist’ discourse of the greater Middle East and North Africa would produce conditions legitimizing colonial rule and making independence a challenge.<sup>28</sup>

Egypt briefly returned to Ottoman control, though that power would be in name only after the actions of Muhammad Ali and the establishment of the monarchy in 1805.<sup>29</sup> The British later grabbed control in 1882 and immediately began exploiting the country. Through colonial practices, the British were able to extract foreign resources (and profits) while also protecting their own domestic industry.<sup>30</sup> This locked Egyptian trade firmly within the greater British economy and removed from other nations, just as Neil Smith argues.<sup>31</sup> This exploitation of Egypt and Britain’s other colonies did not simply impoverish the region, but rather produced complex capitalist local economies as well as a regional white collar middle class working within the bureaucracies required to run the colonies.<sup>32</sup>

Even with this new economic reality and their “bourgeois aspirations and lifestyle,” Egyptians revolted in 1919.<sup>33</sup> With such a legacy of external control and conquest, the 1919 Egyptian revolution positioned the country well for Woodrow Wilson’s pledge for “self-determination” as discussed above. Such independence would not be fully realized however, as

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 42-3.

<sup>28</sup> Said, *Orientalism*; Melani Cammett, Ishac Diwan, Alan Richards, and John Waterbury. *A Political Economy of the Middle East*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2015., 99.

<sup>29</sup> Cammett et al., *Political Economy*, 99.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>31</sup> N. Smith, *Endgame*, 71.

<sup>32</sup> Cammett et al., *Political Economy*, 95.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 95.

the British negotiated to maintain their interests in the region and keep a sizable military presence.

In 1952, a group known as the Free Officers, led by General Muhammad Naguib and Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, overthrew King Faruq in a military *coup d'état*. The primary reason was seen as a reaction to the Arab loss in the 1949 war with Israel, though Nasser would later describe it as a true revolution; the Free Officers intended to radically transform Egyptian society.<sup>34</sup> Existing political parties were abolished in 1953, with the Muslim Brotherhood being outlawed in 1954 after a failed assassination attempt of Nasser.<sup>35</sup> Sweeping reforms were enacted, promising Egyptians “social justice, free education, full employment, free health care, the liberation of Palestine, and Arab unification.”<sup>36</sup>

At the same time Egypt was undergoing a new regime, another military officer, General Dwight D. Eisenhower was running to become President of the United States. He had campaigned in part on the principle of self-determination for the colonial world. In 1952 he declared, “we can never rest until the enslaved nations of the world have in the fullness of freedom the right to choose their own path, for then, and then only, can we say that there is a possible way of living peacefully and permanently with Communism in the world.”<sup>37</sup> Eisenhower’s administration would develop a foreign policy that attempted to use the rhetoric of

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<sup>34</sup> Nasser, Gamal Abdel. *The Philosophy of the Revolution, Book 1*. Cairo: Mondiale Press, 1955. Accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/ThePhilosophyOfTheRevolutionBookI>; Ibrahim, Saad Eddin. “Arab Liberal Legacies Full Circle.” In *Modernization, Democracy, and Islam*, eds. S.T. Hunter and H. Malik, London: Praeger (2005), pp. 205-220.

<sup>35</sup> Cammett et al., *Political Economy*, 99.

<sup>36</sup> Ibrahim, “Arab Legacies,” 213.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose and Douglas G. Brinkley. *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938, 9th edition*. New York: Penguin, 2011, 126.

liberation, though practice a policy of communist containment. This would be tested throughout his presidency in Cuba, Korea, Vietnam, and the turmoil over the Suez Canal.<sup>38</sup>

### *The Suez Canal*

While Naguib was the first president of this new Egypt, Nasser would soon become the second, consolidating power in 1954.<sup>39</sup> In addition to his dreams of a pan-Arab society, Nasser wished to arrange for the withdrawal of British military forces, which would not be complete until 1956. British troops had been in Egypt in some capacity since 1882, but they had withdrawn from Cairo in 1947. They still had occupied the Suez Canal Zone to protect British interests in keeping the canal operational, but Nasser wanted them gone. In a 1954 treaty, Britain agreed to withdraw, though it would leave behind a base to which they “could theoretically return in the event of an attack on any members of the Arab League.”<sup>40</sup>

The Suez Canal represented a key geopolitical asset in the region and thus had many Arab and Western groups vying for control. The Middle East after World War II found itself caught in the middle of Western designs on the new postwar economic landscape.<sup>41</sup> According to ‘top secret’ documents from the time, Britain maintained a strong military presence to “perform solely an international duty by keeping the Canal open for international trade. More traffic is going through the Canal now than ever before. British forces are not in the area for promoting in

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Thornhill, Michael T. “Britain, the United States and the Rise of an Egyptian Leader: The Politics and Diplomacy of Nasser’s Consolidation of Power, 1952–4.” *The English Historical Review* 119, no. 483 (2004): 892-921.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas, *Suez*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> N. Smith, *Endgame*.

any manner British imperialist interests.”<sup>42</sup> It is hard to believe that Britain was sincere in acting only out of economic good will as it maintained influence over the Middle East’s “inner ring” of Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq. At the same time, the US focused on ties with the “outer ring” of Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Northern Iraq to ensure Soviet influence was kept to a minimum.<sup>43</sup> This required a delicate give and take from the Western forces; the US was concerned that the perceived British imperialism in the region was “hindering an improvement in Arab perceptions of the West.”<sup>44</sup> The US under the Truman administration, and still later under Eisenhower, was preaching the “self-determination” of Woodrow Wilson, but Arabs and the British both understood their involvement as being colonial in nature.<sup>45</sup> Regardless of motives, both the US and British governments wanted to ensure that the canal remained open and out of Soviet control, but also felt that the nascent Egyptian Republic could not adequately defend it. They were pushing for the development of the Middle East Command (MEC), a multinational force tasked with protecting the Suez Canal Zone. The US would assist Britain in this effort, as would, they hoped, France, Turkey, and Egypt. US documents reveal a concern in Egyptian participation in the MEC, but an assumption that “when something specific has been created, the Middle Eastern countries will be more inclined to give favorable consideration to participation.”<sup>46</sup> Freiberger has argued that this plan revealed just how little the two Western

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<sup>42</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, Volume IX, Part 1, The Near and Middle East, 1952*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 56. Accessed at: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d56>

<sup>43</sup> Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, Volume IX, Part 1, The Near and Middle East, 1952*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 57. Accessed at: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d57>

nations understood about the Middle East. Turkey and Egypt were both struggling to assume dominance in the region, and Turkey's pro-West stance and support of Israel helped Egypt reject the proposal.<sup>47</sup>

In the summer of 1956, under President Nasser, Egypt seized control of and nationalized the *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez* (Suez Canal Company). The act was not to shut down the canal, Nasser claimed, but rather to ensure that profits from its operations went to Egypt and not the West. In his broadcast address announcing his actions, Nasser denounced British colonial practice and also stated that this would allow Egypt to build the Aswan Dam without US aid money.<sup>48</sup> The US had recently withdrawn financial support of the dam project, which forced Egypt to look for new sources of funding, including discussions with the Soviets.<sup>49</sup>

Nasser's rejection on joining the MEC and other his anticolonial stances had firmly situated him as an enemy in Britain's eyes while also a hero amongst Arab nations.<sup>50</sup> Britain certainly felt it had its reasons to not allow Nasser's actions at Suez to go unchallenged. Appeasing Adolph Hitler had disastrous results, and despite the hyperbolic comparison between Nasser and Hitler, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden felt that it was too risky to ignore such possibilities.<sup>51</sup> Eden also spoke of Nasser as a "Moslem Mussolini."<sup>52</sup> Eden's Orientalist leanings

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<sup>47</sup> Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, 22-23.

<sup>48</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, Volume XVI, Suez Crisis, July 26-December 31, 1956, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 1. Accessed at:

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v16/d1>

<sup>49</sup> Ambrose and Brinkley. *Rise to Globalism*

<sup>50</sup> Nigel J. Ashton. *Eisenhower, MacMillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955-1959*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.; Elie Podeh. "The Struggle over Arab Hegemony after the Suez Crisis." *Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 1 (1993): 91-110.

<sup>51</sup> David Carlton. *Britain and the Suez Crisis*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.

<sup>52</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, Volume XVI, Suez Crisis, July 26-December 31, 1956, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government

have been explored and as such, he would have certainly viewed Egypt as an object without agency, a thing that needed to be controlled by Western forces.<sup>53</sup>

The US on the other hand, was seen as reacting to President Nasser's policies and stances in a much more pragmatic way.<sup>54</sup> While their main concern was to keep communism out of the region, and the withdrawal of funding for the Aswan Dam may have threatened that, the US also wanted to take a less drastic approach to dealing with conflict in the Middle East. Starting with Eisenhower's 'New Look' policy, the United States Military was more focused on the buildup of nuclear arms than a conventional army. This represented an effort to keep defense spending down, but it also meant that US involvement in small conflicts would tax its military resources.<sup>55</sup>

In October of 1956, the Israeli military stuck Suez, with support soon coming from both Britain and France. The attack was successful, and the joint forces took control of the Suez Canal Zone. The military success of the event has been explored, especially from the Israeli perspective, but any success would be short lived as the both the US and the Soviet Union demanded that the occupiers leave the Sinai Peninsula immediately.<sup>56</sup> The Soviet Union called for the US and United Nations to join it in assisting Egypt, as it was "ready to contribute to the cause of curbing the aggressors, of defending the victims of aggression, and of restoring peace, by sending to Egypt the air and naval forces necessary for the achievement of this purpose."<sup>57</sup>

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Printing Office, 2010), Document 499. Accessed at:  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v16/d499>

<sup>53</sup> Lindsay Frederick Braun. "Suez Reconsidered: Anthony Eden's Orientalism and the Suez Crisis." *Historian* 65, no. 3 (2003): 535-561.

<sup>54</sup> Ashton, *Eisenhower*.

<sup>55</sup> Ambrose and Brinkley. *Rise to Globalism*

<sup>56</sup> Herzog, "Suez-Sinai Campaign."; Ilai Z. Saltzman. "Making War, Thinking History: David Ben-Gurion, Analogical Reasoning and the Suez Crisis." *Israel Affairs* 22, no. 1 (2016): 45-68.

<sup>57</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Volume XVI, Suez Crisis, July 26-December 31, 1956*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government

The US needed to take action, but there was also concern that the Soviet Union was, quoting President Eisenhower, “failing so badly in the satellites” (unrest was occurring in Hungary at the same time), that they were “ready to take any wild adventure.”<sup>58</sup> This placed the US in an awkward position of wanting to end conflict in the region, express its anger toward the British, French, and Israelis for keeping their actions secret, and also to keep the Russians from escalating Suez into a nuclear war. Ultimately through pressure by the United Nations (which the US supported and felt was the best way to handle Suez) and threats of economic sanctions, the three occupying forces left Sinai and Suez by the spring of 1957.<sup>59</sup> While the United States did not directly send troops into the region, keeping with Eisenhower’s ‘New Look’ policy, it was credited with taking control of the situation and ultimately usurping Britain as the dominant power in the Middle East.<sup>60</sup>

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Printing Office, 2010), Document 504. Accessed at:

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v16/d504>

<sup>58</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957*, Volume XVI, Suez Crisis, July 26–December 31, 1956, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 509. Accessed at:

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v16/d509>

<sup>59</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957*, Volume XVI, Suez Crisis, July 26–December 31, 1956, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 512. Accessed at:

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v16/d512> ; *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957*, Document 551. Accessed at:

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v16/d551> ; *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957*, Document 565. Accessed at:

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v16/d565>

<sup>60</sup> Richard M. Filipink Jr. “‘Force is the Last Method’: Eisenhower, Dulles and American Intervention in the Suez Crisis.” *Critique* 35, no. 2 (2007): 173-188.; Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez.*; Schulzinger, “The Impact of Suez.”; Simon C. Smith. “‘America in Britain's Place?’: Anglo-American Relations and the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Suez Crisis.” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 10, no. 3 (2012): 252-270.; S. Smith. *Ending Empire in the Middle East.*

## Analysis of US involvement

This is not to say the the US was without regrets about their involvement with Suez. Richard Nixon, US Vice President in the year 1956, felt that the crisis led to both Nasser acting more reckless, while removing Britain and France's desire to get involved in further peace keeping in the region. According to Nixon, the United States would be on its own in "the foreign policy leadership of the free world."<sup>61</sup> This was a rather basic assessment of the next half-century, as Britain still maintained a presence in the region, which the US encouraged as it became more involved in places like Vietnam.<sup>62</sup>

This pessimism of the events and what it meant for US foreign policy in the Middle East dominates much of the literature on the Suez Crisis.<sup>63</sup> The US seems to have failed in its actions:

Following the Suez Crisis, the United States replaced the British as the dominant Western power in the Middle East. But what appeared to be an American policy success was in truth a failure. The United States pursued a flawed policy in dealing with Arab nationalism; its subsequent military intervention in Lebanon and the overthrow of the Iraqi government by nationalist forces in 1958 reflected the failure of Washington's policies. By the late 1950s America had not only replaced the British, but in the eyes of the Arabs, had also inherited London's colonialist mantle. Washington's inability to alter its imperialist reputation in the Arab world caused it to lose interest in promoting negotiations to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict over the ensuing decades. Today, as a result, the Middle East is no closer to peace than it was thirty-five years ago.<sup>64</sup>

Was this truly a failure? The problem that these analyses of the Suez Crisis fall into is in using an Enlightenment era based approach to the study of modern history. As the above passage reveals, historians' accounts are working in a linear progression. The US failed *then*, because we do not have peace *now*. In a Foucauldian approach to these same events, we should instead look

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<sup>61</sup> S. Smith. *Ending Empire in the Middle East*, 67.

<sup>62</sup> S. Smith. "America in Britain's Place?"

<sup>63</sup> Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez.*; Schulzinger, "The Impact of Suez."; Hillel Ticktin. "Introduction: 1956 as the Year of Stalinist Upheaval and the Iconic Transfer of Imperialist Power to the USA." *Critique* 35, no. 2 (2007): 159-171.

<sup>64</sup> Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*. 13.

at what the US is today and push backwards to find the sites and situations of the power struggles that brought it to this current moment in time.<sup>65</sup> Foucault was focused on the question of “how is it that at certain moments and in certain orders of knowledge, there are these sudden take-offs, these hastenings of evolution, these transformations which fail to correspond to the calm continuist image that is normally accredited?”<sup>66</sup> In other words, rather than to move from Woodrow Wilson to Dwight D. Eisenhower and then later to George W. Bush and Barack Obama, charting their efforts in spreading democracy in places like the Middle East, and then calling them failures when democracy does not take hold, we should focus on the moments of 1919, 1956, and 2003 in exploring what ‘democracy’ truly meant for the US and what the reality is today. Freiburger says the US failed to establish peace; I would argue peace is irrelevant to the prevailing discourse of development in the Middle East.

This is not to say that policy makers and leaders do not think using these Enlightenment concepts. Many twentieth and twenty-first century policies have been couched in a “modernization” school of thought.<sup>67</sup> This modernization school suggests that democracy will only grow if there is economic and social reform first.<sup>68</sup> It has been suggested that different crises have tested such policies: Iran’s 1979 revolution and the 9/11 attacks of 2001 are such examples.<sup>69</sup> The above history should reveal how the Suez Crisis fits within this category of a foreign policy-shaping crisis. These different events have led some to argue that Islamic ideology

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<sup>65</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.”

<sup>66</sup> Michel Foucault. “Truth and Power.” In *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, New York: Vintage, 2010, 54.

<sup>67</sup> Lars Berger. “The Missing Link? US Policy and the International Dimensions of Failed Democratic Transitions in the Arab World.” *Political Studies* 59 (2011): 38-55.

<sup>68</sup> Charles Issawi. “Economic and Social Foundations of Democracy in the Middle East.” *International Affairs* 32, no. 1 (1956): 27-42

<sup>69</sup> Yakub Halabi. “US Response to Major Developments in the Arab-Islamic World: Evaluation of Role of Ideas.” *International Studies* 43, no. 4 (2006): 339-365.

is at odds with democracy and neoliberal modernity, while others have had a much more nuanced analysis of democracy in the region.<sup>70</sup>

Aid programs are an important and complicating component of US policy in Middle East. As briefly mentioned above, in the 1950s, the US offered and then withdrew support for the Aswan Dam project along the Nile, potentially pushing Egypt toward a financial dependence of the Soviet Union. Apart from overall concerns with cost, the problem lied in the fact that many members of congress had conflicting interests, whether in supporting Israeli interests or the US cotton industry.<sup>71</sup> Aid, whether in gift or loan form, has been a complicated balance of promoting modernity or democracy while still ensuring US economic and military interests in the region, which can often target very specific nations rather than look at actual need.<sup>72</sup> One issue is that US aid programs are often targeted toward existing governments or elite groups rather than toward actually promoting political reform. Quoting Jon B. Alterman of the Hoover Institution, Berger writes, “In the words of one friend in the White House, the typical aid recipient in the Middle East is the son of an ambassador, with a German mother, who happens to run [a Non-Governmental Organization].”<sup>73</sup> Despite the best(?) efforts of the US to improve the conditions for self-determination and democracy in the region since the end of WWII, authoritarianism continued to grow into the twenty-first century, “upgrading” the system of oppression to

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<sup>70</sup> Samuel P. Huntington. “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer, 1993): 22-49.; Berger, “The Missing Link?”; N. Smith, *Endgame*.

<sup>71</sup> Ambrose and Brinkley. *Rise to Globalism*, 153.

<sup>72</sup> Berger, “The Missing Link?”; Peter Nunnenkamp. “Systematic Factors and Economic Development in Islamic Countries.” In *Modernization, Democracy, and Islam*, eds. S.T. Hunter and H. Malik, London: Praeger (2005), pp. 162-185.

<sup>73</sup> Berger, “The Missing Link?”, 39.

maintain power.<sup>74</sup> The issue seems to be, as evidenced by the Bush administration after the Iraq invasion, that a strong foundation of capitalism is seen as a means to promote true democratic reform. It has been argued, with impressive certainty and confidence, that “ultimately, autocracies will move toward liberalism.”<sup>75</sup>

Egypt, having been a major focus and ally of US interests in the Middle East, should be a prime example of how democracy and liberal economies go hand-in-hand. Despite interest in the nation beginning in the 1950s, it was not until 1979, after the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, that the US has made a strong foreign aid commitment to Egypt.<sup>76</sup> For the fiscal year (FY) 2016, the US State Department requested \$1.5 billion in Foreign Assistance funds, with \$1.3 billion being allocated to “Foreign Military Financing (FMF)” and \$150 million going towards “Economic Support Funds (ESF).”<sup>77</sup> While the ESF have been reduced by \$50 million since the FY 2014 budget, the FMF has remained the same.

The wording of the justification for such funding is enlightening. For example, the ESF request will:

focus on supporting sound macro-economic management, improving the climate for private sector businesses, developing small and medium enterprises to create jobs, and promoting bilateral trade. ESF funding also aims to strengthen democratic governance in Egypt by improving the rule of law and enhancing efficiency of service delivery and transparency in government. Assistance in the education sector will strengthen basic skills in elementary school and adult literacy to increase the employability of young Egyptians.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Steven Heydemann. “Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World” *Brookings Institution Center for Middle East Policy Analysis Papers*, No. 13, October 2007. Accessed April 4, 2016 at <http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2007/10arabworld.aspx>

<sup>75</sup> Daniel Deudney and G. John. Ikenberry. “The Myth of Autocratic Revival: Why Liberal Democracy Will Prevail.” *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 1 (2009), 79.

<sup>76</sup> Jeremy Sharp. *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*. Congressional Research Service, July 24, 2015. Accessed February 12, 2016. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> USA Department of State. *Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations, Appendix 3*. FY 2016, Accessed April 4, 2016 at, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238222.pdf> , 141.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

All of these items sound like legitimate efforts to bolster Egyptian society and encourage democracy. When one begins to look at the means to accomplish such goals however, he or she can get mired in ‘development speak.’ Not only are details elusive in plans to “counter trafficking in persons and violence against women” or helping “5.5 million early grade learners master basic skills,” but there is an underlying American interest within the program. For example, “up to \$60.0 million will support the private sector through continued support to the Egyptian-American Enterprise Fund.”<sup>79</sup> According to its website ([www.eaefund.org](http://www.eaefund.org)) The Egyptian-American Enterprise Fund (EAEF) is a New York City based, public-private partnership, that was spearheaded by President Obama in 2011 and became a reality in 2013. It’s board of directors is comprised of five US citizens and three Egyptians. On the website, the 2016 annual letter to stakeholders, Chairman James A. Harmon discusses involving non-US investors working in parallel with the EAEF to “thereby leverage the US taxpayer seed capital in the Enterprise Fund.”<sup>80</sup> While the policies and programs discussed on the EAEF’s website sound altruistic, the lack of actual detail and the New York base of operations suggest it is a publicly-funded Wall Street investment firm looking to increase profits. This public-private partnership, a relatively new approach to public services and the ‘marketization’ of economies, is a phenomenon only now beginning to be explored in a theoretical and political sense. The incorporation of the private sector “raises important questions about the role of the state and

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>80</sup> accessed at:

[http://www.eaefund.org/news/the\\_egyptianamerican\\_enterprise\\_fund\\_annual\\_letter/EAEF-Annual-Letter-2016.pdf](http://www.eaefund.org/news/the_egyptianamerican_enterprise_fund_annual_letter/EAEF-Annual-Letter-2016.pdf)

citizens” as well as “the extent to which residents and users are meaningfully consulted and given access to information.”<sup>81</sup>

The FMF is equally telling as to what financial assistance truly means, and is a revealing look into the American globalization project. Despite the fact this represents almost 90% of the budget, the State Department does not go into much detail in their justification. “Assistance will support the procurement of defense goods and services that support counter-terrorism, border and maritime security, and interoperability, as well as maintain some previously purchased US-manufactured defense articles.”<sup>82</sup> The maintenance of “defense articles” is a nebulous term, one that legally could mean anything from “combat shotguns” to “naval nuclear propulsion plants.”<sup>83</sup> What this justification fails to mention apart from details, is that “all US military aid to Egypt finances the procurement of weapons systems and services *from US defense contractors*.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, the Egyptian government does not get cash from the US, it gets a gift card redeemable only for US companies. The term ‘aid’ sounds benevolent until one begins to dig at what this help truly is: a circular movement of capital to ensure American industry flourishes regardless of the actual regime in place.

If US support of Nasser was truly about self-determination and an end to colonialism, projects like the Aswan Dam would have been funded. If it was instead out of the concern of Soviet expansion into the Middle East, then the US should not have had any issues with the British, French, and Israelis seizing control of the Suez Canal. If anything, British and French dominance in the Middle East would have ensured that the Soviets could not get a foothold. If

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<sup>81</sup> Kean Birch and Matti Siemiatycki. “Neoliberalism and the Geographies of Marketization: The Entangling of State and Markets.” *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no 2 (2016), 195.

<sup>82</sup> USA Department of State, 143.

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cft/text/22/121.1>

<sup>84</sup> Sharp, *Egypt*, 2, emphasis added.

we discount the motives of an end to colonialism and the ‘red scare,’ we are left with Neil Smith’s argument of an American globalization project. In a world where territorial grabs were irrelevant, the continued operation of global markets was crucial.

The Obama administration, keeping in tradition with past US presidential policies, has been seen as verbally supporting democracy in Egypt, yet failing to truly commit.<sup>85</sup> “While these words may make Americans feel good and is consistent with their self-image, the administration walked away from these efforts when they threatened other security priorities. The inconsistent policies and the lack of a sustained commitment to democracy by the Obama Administration harmed Egypt’s transition [to a fully democratic state].”<sup>86</sup> Rieffer-Flanagan claims that past support of Hosni Mubarak (Egypt’s authoritarian president from 1981-2011) and support of current President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi weakens American foreign influence by “talking about democracy and human rights without taking meaningful actions to back them up.”<sup>87</sup> She argues that limiting of military aid could incentivize a real transition to an Egyptian democracy. While that seems logically sound, she and others encouraging democratic reform through American pressure are missing the actual issue at work. The US does not need a democratic Middle East in order to be ‘successful’ in the region. The elaborate policies currently at work are set up to benefit US economic interests regardless of regime or ideology. Endgame of globalization? Hardly.

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<sup>85</sup> Anne R. Pierce. “US ‘Partnership’ with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its Effect on Civil Society and Human Rights.” *Society* 51, no. 1 (2014): 68-86.

<sup>86</sup> Barbara Ann Rieffer-Flanagan. “Democratic Dreams Neglected in the Land of the Pharaohs: US Democracy Assistance in Egypt.” *Human Rights Review* 15 (2014), 450.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusions

When President Eisenhower was finishing his second term in the White House, he requested to address congress with a farewell address. The speech has become most famous for its warning of the “military-industrial complex” and its potential influence:

Our military organization today bears little relation to that known by any of my predecessors in peacetime, or indeed by the fighting men of World War II or Korea. Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry... But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations.

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence – economic, political, even spiritual – is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.<sup>88</sup>

Rather than debate on whether such a complex has risen to power within the US to take charge of democratic processes, the purpose of this paper is to suggest that such a complex does exist and requires a positioning within the Middle East to remain profitable. This is not to say that the Eisenhower administration deliberately intervened in the Suez Crisis to lay the groundwork for late twentieth century profits. Nothing in the communications from the time that are now available to the public suggests that this was the case. I do, however, wish to propose that the US has adapted to ‘failures’ in the Middle East to ensure that it remains economically profitable to at least certain US industrial sectors. The US did not use Suez to become the new colonial force in

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<sup>88</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower. “Farewell Address” Delivered January 17, 1961. *Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home*. Accessed at: [https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online\\_documents/farewell\\_address/Reading\\_Co\\_py.pdf](https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/farewell_address/Reading_Co_py.pdf)

the region. Instead, they seized this “moment of danger” to create a new discourse and to further their own economic interests even at the expense of peace in the Middle East.<sup>89</sup>

Analyses of why the US sided with Egypt have typically focused on the beginning of fall of the British Empire and the ascension of US influence in the Middle East, though to varying degrees.<sup>90</sup> While some have worked to explore the complexity of the event and its context, none have fully explored the Suez Crisis within a framework of a larger American globalization project or a Foucauldian genealogy of the power/knowledge relations.<sup>91</sup> While Neil Smith’s work on uncovering US motives in its twentieth and twenty-first century foreign policy did not address US/Egyptian relations, this historic event fits neatly within his theory.

Such an approach to studying the motives behind US foreign policy opens up new positionings of understanding in the region. Currently, there is discussion of the creation of a Kurdish State to help stabilize the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The Kurds have long been seen as an ally of the US, and have been framed as long suffering and deserving of US assistance.<sup>92</sup> This should not be viewed through the Wilsonian lens of self-determination; we have yet to see the US act out of a pure commitment to democracy. The Kurds managed to make something out of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003; constructing a democracy seen as “pro-Western, largely democratic, largely secular, and economically prosperous.”<sup>93</sup> It does not hurt that Kurdish territories also sit atop large oil reserves. The events surrounding the current Syrian conflict and

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<sup>89</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 2007, 255.

<sup>90</sup> Winthrop W. Aldrich. “The Suez Crisis.” *Foreign Affairs* 45, no. 3 (1967): 541-553; Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*; Schulzinger, “The Impact of Suez”; Thomas, *Suez*.

<sup>91</sup> Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*; S. Smith. *Ending Empire in the Middle East*.

<sup>92</sup> “The Time of the Kurds.” Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed February 27, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/time-kurds/p36547#!p36547>

<sup>93</sup> Dexter Filkins. “The Fight of Their Lives.” *The New Yorker* September 29, 2014. Accessed February 27, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/09/29/fight-lives>

turmoil in Iraq should be framed as moments arising out of complex history, not one with a specific endgame in mind, but instead a continuous discourse on the production of power in the Middle East and North Africa.