Episode 2.17, Britain Knows Best looks at Anthony Eden’s furious efforts to shape the debate on the British intervention in Egypt in the first few days of November, 1956. Our story on 5th November where, just as British and French paratroopers were landing on Port Said, the British Government was fighting its own battle in the House of Commons. Selwyn Lloyd, the beleaguered Foreign Secretary, was tasked with standing up for British foreign policy in light of the emerging controversies. At this stage, the idea that there could have been collusion was vehemently denied, but for now, it was bad enough that Britain had acted without American support, defied the UN and failed to appraise all parties of the policy it planned to put forward.

There seemed a great deal of secrecy underway, and while he couldn’t quite put his finger on it, Hugh Gaitskell, Labour Party leader, knew that something was up. Gaitskell wasn’t the only one; his Labour colleagues fired a succession of difficult questions at Lloyd, who by now probably wished he had stood up to Eden when he’d had the chance. It was good for his own sakes that Lloyd was able to open the debates of 5th November with some good news – the resolution on the UN Emergency Force had been approved in the UN General Assembly, meaning that a peace force could soon be sent to the trouble spot of the Middle East. What stood out from this resolution though was the fact that the British and French had abstained rather than vote for it in the UN. This stunned and deeply angered the opposition, who believed that yet another opportunity for peace had been lost.

Hungary remained a topic on the lips of many, and few backbenchers on either side could ignore the fact that this crisis distracted perfectly from what was happening in Budapest. Still though, the Tories insisted – their intervention had been right, and peace would now be guaranteed. Eden’s government was now banking above all on a capitulation from President Nasser, which it was hoped would come once the Anglo-French forces landed in number on the following morning of 6th November. This victory would surely mask the terrible embarrassment which had preceded it, but here, it was made clear that not all were convinced. Something was afoot, yet even despite the objections of his peers, neither Eden nor Lloyd gave in. They had come to far to give up now. Might would make right, because in the confused international circumstances presented by the 1950s, it was only rational to conclude that Britain knew best…

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Hello and welcome history friends patrons all to 1956 episode 2.17. Last time our analysis of Eden’s lack of friends and the worsening Suez Crisis continued, as we also added in some Canadian flavour to the narrative. We last left Anthony Eden on 5th November, having learned that the Canadian FS Lester Pearson had successfully pushed for the UN EF resolution. As per the terms of this resolution though, a ceasefire would have to be arranged first, which was a tad problematic since at that moment, Anglo-French paras were dropping over Port Said, and Operation Musketeer was being put into action. It only seemed logical then that President Eisenhower, having had enough of Eden’s schemes, would demand that a ceasefire be arranged before any face-saving measures be undertaken. Eden thus set himself a new task – he would have to recast the Anglo-French action not merely as a police action, but as a holding action. British and French soldiers, Eden would claim, had only arrived to hold peace together until the UN EF was ready to arrive. Time would tell if not merely the Americans, but also the political opposition in the House of Commons, would let Eden away with this manipulation. Let’s find out, as I take you all to the House of Commons, on the early afternoon of 5th November 1956…

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Selwyn Lloyd had already had a long day before he had even made his way into the House of Commons on the afternoon of 5th November. The news was awash with bad tidings; the UN, alongside the US, seemed to be on the verge of forcing a ceasefire, and cutting the Anglo-French legs out from under them before they had even got off the ground. Worse than that, one pillar of hope throughout the whole crisis – that the Egyptian government would fold, or eject Nasser, as soon as significant Anglo-French forces landed, were proved to be utterly false. By 1PM GMT, British and French paras were engaging in a fierce battle with Egyptian defenders along a spit of land in front of Port Said. This para-drop had been tasked with softening up the defenders and seizing key positions before the main bulk of the force arrived. Yet, there was another hope that, at first contact, a white flag would be waved, and these Egyptians would surrender unconditionally, removing any need to land more soldiers at all.

The Egyptian government would capitulate to Anglo-French demands, Nasser would be removed, and the entente would have achieved its satisfaction before generously welcoming the UN EF into the Suez Canal, having achieved their objectives. This dream-like scenario was still at the top of the PM’s list of goals when 5th November began, and this explains his reluctance to call a halt to any military action for the moment. However, in the evening of 5th November, it was learned that the Egyptians would not be surrendering unconditionally, and that, on the contrary, Nasser had instructed boxes of small arms to be placed on street corners, with all able-bodied Egyptians welcome to help themselves and attack the invader. 5th November was thus a day which began and ended very differently, and in the middle of that day, when all the answers were not yet available, Selwyn Lloyd would have to do his best to face the music which his peers planned to play.

While Anthony Eden sat the debates out, and dealt with matters of state, the FS would have to stand up for his master’s policy, which we can guess that by this point, he held very little stock in. Public and private feelings were very different things though, and Lloyd would have to remain loyal to the man who had led him this far, lest he wanted disloyalty to be heaped upon the pile of his other sins – those being naivety, manipulation, and carelessness. 5th November was also the day that more information was coming out about affairs in Hungary, where the Soviets had re-invaded Budapest and were in the process of trampling the revolutionary government there after promising not to so many times before.

Indeed Lloyd opened the Commons debates by talking first about Hungary, and then about the situation in Egypt and the relevant resolution on an EF which had recently been approved by the UN GA. After opening the discussion on Hungary by describing what had gone on there, and what the British government had done to help the Hungarians – forwarding a paltry £25k loan for instance – Lloyd then sat back and faced some blistering responses. The first challenge came from Arthur Henderson, a Labour backbencher, who made an uncomfortable comparison for the FS, saying:

Is the Foreign Secretary aware that many people in this and other countries will believe that the action of Her Majesty's Government in using force against the people and Government of Egypt offered a direct encouragement to the Government of Russia to employ the brutal force that they did yesterday, in Budapest, to suppress the struggles of the Hungarian people for freedom and independence?

This was followed by another request from another Labour MP, Alfred Robens, who made a good point when he asked…

…the United Nations is calling on the Soviet Government to desist from their intervention in Hungary and to withdraw their forces from that country—and as I have no doubt the representative of the Government in the United Nations will support that decision of the United Nations—would it not be as well to carry out the United Nations decision on Egypt so that we can go to the United Nations with clean hands?

But the final challenge, amidst the calls for Lloyd’s resignation, came from Labour MP Victor Collins, who asked:

Can the Foreign Secretary say whether, in principle, there is any difference between that and the Russian threat to the Hungarians, except that they gave four hours' notice and we gave twelve hours' notice? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman further aware that the Egyptian people were told that not only the guilty few would suffer, but the innocent as well? Can he say whether the Egyptians were guilty of the same crime as the Hungarians—wanting to run their own country in their own way?

It was Labour MP Douglas Jay who captured the day’s events best when he finished by asking the FS:

Has the Foreign Secretary noticed that the Russian Foreign Secretary has stated that Russia is carrying out a police action in Hungary? Does the Prime Minister realise that most of the British public regard him as personally guilty of this tragedy?[[1]](#footnote-1)

Selwyn Lloyd was evidently in enemy territory, and he had clearly lost a great deal of sympathy and goodwill from the opposition benches, who were tired of being lied to and not receiving proper answers. Just after 4PM though, Lloyd was then to present the debate on the situation in the ME, which involved explaining the last few days’ worth of debating in the UN GA, and explaining why the British had abstained rather than voted for the resolution which established the UN EF. The GA resolution passed anyway of course, but the abstention was duly noted and shouts of ‘shame’ were levelled at Lloyd as soon as he referred to it. Why had the British delegate elected to abstain rather than give his assent to the creation of the UN EF, especially when the British would support that force in the future?

The first thing to remember is that at the time of abstaining, it was still hoped that the Egyptians would capitulate to the Anglo-French forces soon to land. This would remove any need for any high level UN interference, and Eden didn’t want a potential victory to be snatched away, especially if this victory would do away with President Nasser. The second thing to remember is that the resolution calling for the establishment of a UN EF also called for a ceasefire and for all sides to pull back – the British delegate in the GA at the time reasoned that these two ends were not compatible. If all sides pulled back and refrained from fighting, and the British and French forces left the region, how would the EF establish itself? Far better to keep the British and French armies on the ground in Suez, so that that they could maintain order *until* the EF arrived, right? Well, while this makes a small amount of sense, everyone in opposition and, it seemed, in other countries, could smell a rat. The British and French did not wish to stay behind to keep the peace – they wanted to stay behind to defeat the Egyptians, to cling to the Canal and to ruin Nasser. This, Lloyd insisted, was simply not true, as he declared in the Commons:

It is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to ensure that the Israel forces withdraw from Egyptian territory. We have also told the United Nations that we believe it is necessary to secure the speedy withdrawal of Israel forces. But we cannot ensure that the Israelis withdraw from Egyptian territory until we are physically in the area to keep the peace, to give the necessary guarantees and to prevent a repetition of the events of the past few years. There must also be immediate means on the spot to take the necessary measures, as I have said, to remove obstructions and restore navigation through the Suez Canal, and to promote a settlement of the problems of the area.

There was a good deal of confusion regarding the government’s decision to abstain when it came to the EF proposal. Hugh Gaitskell, the Labour Party leader, even felt compelled to ask ‘Can we clarify a little more the attitude of Her Majesty's Government to the international force proposal?’ Yet the matter was further complicated by the very question of the Suez Canal – Selwyn Lloyd claimed that the EF resolution must do more than merely keep Israel and Egypt apart, it must also protect the Suez Canal, as the British and French planned to do. By excluding the issue of the Canal, the UN implied that the Egyptians could hold onto it as before, which to the British remained unacceptable. Gaitskell was anxious to impress upon the FS what position this put Britain in though, and how much of a villain she would appear, he said:

Is the Foreign Secretary aware that by imposing that particular implication the effect is to confirm in the minds of the whole world that the real reason for British and French intervention here was not to separate the combatants but to seize control of the Canal? Is he further aware that if Her Majesty's Government insist that the purpose of the international force under the United Nations must be to deal with the Suez Canal problem, they will effectively sabotage the whole idea of that force?

Indeed, of course Lloyd was aware of this, but now he was effectively playing for time. Before the evening of 5th November, when the Egyptians made plain their intentions to resist, it was far from certain that an EF would be needed at all. It would be better to try and delay this force where possible, and to trip it up on matters of the Canal. This way, if the UN failed to account for the Canal, then the British and French could stay and wrest the necessary concessions from Cairo, but if the UN did manage to create a resolution for the Canal, then it would be taken out of Nasser’s hands, and at Eden would have something to point to as the fruits of his labours. This straightforward equation, of course, does not account for the cuttingly bad press which Britain would endure in the meantime, which was what Gaitskell was referring to.

The cynicism in British foreign policy and its naked self-interest could no longer be hidden – if it was clear to the leader of the Labour Party that Eden’s government was using the Canal to slow matters down, then it would certainly be clear to the Americans as well. Gaitskell then did some of our work for us, when he asked Lloyd:

Is the Foreign Secretary aware that it is vitally important to distinguish between the setting up of an international force to deal with the Arab-Israeli question and an international force to impose on Egypt a solution of the Suez Canal problem? Does the Foreign Secretary realise that it is because I feel that this distinction is vital that I am pressing the difference between the two proposals?

Indeed, Lloyd was not aware, or if he was, he did not admit to being so. Instead he began with a lie, insisting that ‘there is no question of imposing a settlement’, when imposing one was exactly what the British and French were trying to do. Lloyd then added ‘I should have thought that every sensible person would have agreed that these things having happened, it was wiser that there should be a settlement of all those matters [the Suez Canal and an Israeli-Egyptian ceasefire] before the international policemen were removed.’

After some more fiery rhetoric, including damaging exposes where the transcripts of British broadcasts to Egyptians were read, underlining the fact that Britain was at war with Egypt in all but name, Anthony Eden jumped in to rescue his embattled FS with some news. It was to the effect that:

I think that the House would wish to know that I have had a flash signal from the Commander-in-Chief in the Eastern Mediterranean which affects even the discussion which is now taking place. That is why I intervened, as I know the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition will understand. This is the flash signal, which is, of course, subject to confirmation: “Governor and Military Commander, Port Said now discussing surrender terms…Cease-fire ordered”.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Cheers and hollers followed Eden’s announcement, as the relieved faces of the Conservatives told several tales. It had been a close run thing, but now a ceasefire had been ordered in Egypt, and on British terms for sure. Yet, Eden had jumped the gun. Only later in the evening would the PM find out that no ceasefire had been agreed to at all, and only preliminary talks had taken place. Eden’s false flag had created one of the most impassioned reactions amongst his backbenchers that he had seen since VE day, but he would soon have to retract this statement altogether. Thousands of miles from the historic house, the reality of the Egyptian situation was playing itself out.

It was at Port Said on the day of 5th November that the Anglo-French paras battled the Egyptians, on the expectation that they should fold and capitulate, throwing Nasser under the bus in the process. According to the original plan, if the Egyptians did not buckle under the combined pressures, then the armed forces of both powers waiting only a few miles out at sea would be landed the next morning on 6th November. Eden, we’ll recall, had banked much on the expectation that the Egyptians would fold at the first encounter with the Anglo-French elite.

Back in the Commons, and informed by the C-in-C that ceasefire talks were on-going with orders to make that ceasefire happen, it seemed only natural for Eden to expect that the next phase of his plan would be followed, and a ceasefire favourable to Britain would be his. This he could wave in front of the Commons, to prove that he had been right all along, and the British forces would of course then stand down and allow the UN EF into the country to replace them. As per the terms of this hypothetical peace treaty, Eden expected the Suez Canal to be back in Anglo-French hands as well. On all of these breathtakingly naïve counts, the British PM was to be disappointed, but he didn’t know this in the early evening of 5th November.

The stormy and angry scenes in the Commons, and the gauntlets laid down by the Labour party leader above all inflicted untold damage on Eden’s image of control. He was evidently not in control of the situation. His peers both behind him in the benches and across in opposition were sick of being uninformed; they were sick of reading the scandalous contents of a leaflet alleged to have been dropped on the Egyptians, or the transcript of a radio broadcast which the Egyptians had heard, only for the FS to say that he had never heard, read or approved of such acts. How did the left hand not know what the right was doing to such an extent? Britain had been painted as the enemy of peace under Eden’s leadership – her reps in the UN had several times voted against measures which would have brought about peace, on the understanding that they somehow ‘knew better’.

Whatever the latent leftover legacy of world power status, the UN had always been Anthony Eden’s pride and joy – he had vouched for it and enthusiastically supported it in the immediate post-war years, as a means of uniting the West against tyranny and protecting the national interest together. During this time he had forged important relationships and crafted a picture of British governance as sensible and patient, as considerate and willing to defer to the UN in order to get things done. In many respects, Lester Pearson’s UN EF solution should have been Eden’s – the Eden of 20 years before could well have proposed it to keep peace between Nazi Germany and the rest of Europe, had there been a UN to speak of at that point in time.

There are also some parallels between what Eden pushed relentlessly for here and what Benjamin Disraeli *tried* to push for in the late 1870s. In both these cases, the PM attempted to pursue a radical policy line against increasing odds; Disraeli went against the grain to redefine British Conservative foreign policy in a manner which characterised Toryism all the way up to the outbreak of the FWW and beyond. But Eden, try as he might, could not redefine anything – he was not the calibre of statesmen which the decades of experience should have moulded him into, and he approached the premiership in possession of a profound inferiority complex, the result of coming after a giant like Churchill. Ironically, while Disraeli did not have his war with Russia, he still managed to leave an indelible mark upon British politics and policy. Eden, on the other hand, *did* get his war, but the same cannot be said for his political legacy.

If this judgement seems harsh, then it is difficult to be generous to a man who had only to tow a certain line and plug himself into the prevailing political mood of the time in order to succeed, rather than embrace an obsolete world view in an era which was rapidly leaving Britain behind. Britain didn’t need to be a first rate power, and Eden must have known that it was impossible to aim this high. Yet, still, the PM pushed for a conflict which few outside his immediate circle wanted, or even understood, and he pursued relentlessly the figure of Nasser out of vanity and a sense of hurt pride. Nasser, this Egyptian, this native, this Arab, had gotten the better of him and embarrassed him too many times. Because Eden was so insecure to begin with, Nasser was always bound to get under his skin, and thanks to the stunted manner with which Eden wielded the Conservative Party, the Suez Canal was always going to become a Suez Crisis.

It is somewhat nostalgic, but also tragic, to watch *The Darkest Hour*, and to see Oldman’s Churchill rely so heavily on Anthony Eden, whom he referred to throughout the film as simply ‘Anthony’. Anthony Eden had made a career out of opposing tyranny in Europe, and had made his name by resigning rather than stand for the kind of spineless lack of direction which British policy in the late 1930s represented. Eden was a good, solid character in many respects, but it does seem as though his war experience represented the better part of his career. While he relished Churchill’s friendship and his praise, and while he felt immensely proud to succeed the man who was in many respects his political mentor and ideological equal, Eden was never, ever able to escape Winston Churchill’s shadow, and because the comparisons to what Churchill would have done were never far behind him from spring 1955, he never seemed to possess enough confidence to step out on his own and forge ahead with a new policy in Conservatism.

Instead Eden offered more of the same when it came to Tory foreign policy, yet this more of the same was also tinged with an insecurity and a sensitivity which meant the new PM took things too personally, and that he surrounded himself with yes-men rather than share the load, or share the information, among the cabinet, the government, or the administration. This led to a repeat of scenes we’ve already seen – where the legal officers, tasked with advising the FO, were kept so in the dark that they didn’t know what to do with themselves, and they then found they couldn’t abide by this direction in policy when they did learn of its truths. It also meant that Eden’s policy was liable to be ripped apart by the political opposition, be it in the Commons or more damagingly still, over the radio for all to hear. Finally, of course, Eden’s style meant that he first rubbed people the wrong way, and then he deeply angered and offended them. One of these figures who was just so offended was a man whom Eden still naïvely believed was his friend – Dwight D. Eisenhower, president of the US.

It seemed impossible to Eisenhower that Eden could have so bungled British foreign policy, to the point that the Soviets had managed to breeze into Hungary while all the world was focused on Suez. If you can remember back many episodes ago to the first part of 1956, and that scene where the war correspondents had left Budapest in droves because in their view, from late October, the story was over, and the new story was unfolding in Egypt. This scene is a great metaphor for the public perception of what was going on in Hungary. Considering the oft-parroted importance which Suez held to British interests, it was understandably difficult for the average British citizen to keep pace with, or at least invest additional emotional weight into, events taking place in an east European city. Had Suez not flared up when it did, it is likely that Khrushchev would still have ordered the tanks into Budapest, since he felt he had no choice. However, if he had chosen to topple Imre Nagy’s government without any other crisis in the world to distract from this act, we imagine that the political and diplomatic complications and consequences would have been a lot more serious.

The US President couldn’t bring himself to believe that his British peer had handed such a perfect opportunity to the Soviets. Here was one of the clearest examples of British imperialism pulling resources and attentions away from more critical theatres at just the wrong time. Eisenhower’s anger must have been palpable when we consider that Khrushchev’s secret speech had been viewed as a kind of turning of the corner for Soviet government, and the departure of Hungary from the Soviet bloc seemed to indicate that Soviet power, if not on the decline, was certainly not as steely as Moscow liked to pretend. This of course was the major reason why the Soviets re-intervened in Budapest in the first place; short of every other flimsy excuse that they offered, the exit of Hungary from the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet bloc made Kremlin look very weak and foolish indeed. In an effort to recoup his prestige, Khrushchev ordered the tanks into Budapest.

It was a line of thinking which would not have been alien to Anthony Eden, who was also fighting for prestige. Now, it seemed that the Anglo-French and Soviets had thrown caution to the wind and struck out, in the name of old-fashioned pursuits which could only result in war. The most visible manifestation of the world’s Suez distraction was the utter clogging of the UN, where the SG Dag Hammarskjold worked well into the night for the first fortnight of November in order to get through the workload, and still was consistently behind the times. There was just too much for everyone to do and talk through; an EF had to be developed and sent to Egypt, a proper ceasefire with lasting effect had to be arranged between the Egyptians and Israelis, and the Suez Canal debacle would also require a solution. All of these issues had the potential to heighten tempers, and even before the eruption of the Soviet invasion of Hungary in the early hours of 4th November, tensions had been high and everyone was worn out from the constant all-night sessions required to sift through the paperwork, lobby the necessary votes and climb carefully over the bloated egos to reach some kind of Egyptian solution.

Eisenhower’s problems were compounded by three additional factors. First, John Foster Dulles, who had long complained of stomach pains in the previous weeks, was rushed to hospital on 3rd November with suspected appendicitis, which turned out to be colon cancer. Dulles would be down for months for surgery and recuperation, and Dulles’ replacement was Herbert Hoover Jr, son of that president, who in the 1950s was an American oil baron, and who also happened to be the Under-Secretary of State for foreign affairs. Hoover had extensive interests in the ME for personal business reasons, and took it as a personal affront that the British and French wished to take some of these important assets for themselves. In the constant oil wars which waged in the background of political niceties, men like Herbert Hoover Jr administered their oil business while also attending to political responsibilities, and they were often able to merge the two parts of their lives for their own convenience. Hoover was skilled in negotiation, but Eisenhower knew that he lacked the patience for the worn out arguments of Britain and France that the tactful Dulles had held. This meant that from 3rd November, Anglo-American and Franco-American diplomacy was in danger of drifting apart.

The second more immediate problem to Eisenhower concerned that of a political nature. On 7th November, mere days away, Americans would go to the polls and decide whether they wanted Eisenhower to stay on for another term. In the end, they decided that they liked Ike very much indeed, but this could not have been certain in the heady days before 7th November. A politician through and through, Eisenhower had been counting down to that day for some time, and had planned several campaign trails around it. Yet, in the two week period before his re-election, everything seemed to fall apart, with revolution in Hungary and crisis in Egypt pulling his energies and resources away. As the hours ticked closer to the election and he grew more nervous, Eisenhower also grew more irritable, out of the fear that Eden’s policy could cost him the presidency, since it could highlight American foreign policy as paralysed just at the moment when the President was exclaiming his plans for a tough line towards communism.

Finally, Eisenhower’s third problem was related to a profound distrust of Soviet policy, and a fear that this moment, in early November 1956, potentially held all the ingredients for a third world war. Soviet aggression in Hungary, twinned with Western inaction and distraction, painted a frightful combination. One of Eisenhower’s advisors later remember that discussions in the Oval Office remained ‘sombre’ and focused on the threat level meaning from Moscow. His advisor continued:

No stern and indignant rhetoric could make the moment less perilous, less precarious. For the obvious danger existed that Moscow might be irresistibly tempted towards aggressive action, on a massive scale, by *both* hope and fear – the hope that Egypt signified a deep division in the West, and the fear that Hungary threatened a kind of earthquake within the Soviet sphere. The combination looked explosive. And the president described it pithily: ‘Those boys are both furious and scared. Just as with Hitler, that makes for the most dangerous possible state of mind. And we better be damn sure that every intelligence point and every outpost of our armed forces is absolutely right on their toes.[[3]](#footnote-3)

He had just lost Dulles, a keen friend and mind in these crisis filled times, so Eisenhower’s gloom is easy to understand. Dulles would normally be the one to calm or reason with Eisenhower, and to search for an alternative approach. By 5th November though Eisenhower had yet to find a new approach. The Anglo-French were clearly stalling in the UN; an armed intervention was being launched by the Soviets against Hungary, and Anglo-French paratroopers had landed in Egypt earlier in the day. What Eisenhower may not have known was the basis for a telegram from London which soon reached him – this was the first of several messages which Eden was to send to Washington and across the world, in a bid to recast British intervention in Egypt as a noble act, one which had been done for the benefit of the UN and for stability. It was one of these letters which arrived on Eisenhower’s desk then, just as he was tying himself in knots, and doing his very best not to aggravate his heart. Eden’s letter read thus:

I am convinced that, if we had allowed things to drift, everything would have gone from bad to worse. Nasser would have become a kind of Muslim Mussolini and our friends in Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and even Iran would gradually have been brought down…We and the French were convinced that we had to act at once to forestall a general conflagration throughout the ME. And now that police action has been started it must be carried through…You will realised, with all your experience, that we cannot have a military vacuum while a UN force is being constituted and is being transported to the spot. That is why we feel we must go on to hold the position until we can hand over the responsibility to the UN…This in its turn will reduce the threat to the Canal and restore it to the general use of the world. By this means, we shall have taken the first step towards re-establishing authority in this area for our generation.

Eisenhower may well have asked – the authority of whom? Did Eden mean an Empire? A British Empire? Or did he simply refer to an Egyptian government which would respond to British commands? Perhaps the PM meant an international body as the authority? Yet, as we said, Eisenhower was a politician, and he would have recognised in this letter here an early attempt by Eden to save face by recasting Britain and France as peacekeepers, intercepting the role of the UN and filling in for that noble body when the able-bodied men were not at that point available. Rather than ask questions about the contents, Eisenhower would instead have wondered what had brought this change in approach. The reason why Eden was now painting the Anglo-French act as something of a holding action in Suez was because the PM had recently received some bad news.

The Egyptians would not be making an unconditional surrender under any circumstances, and with this in mind, it was time to work to ensure that whatever happened next, Britain and France were sufficiently insulated to not have to worry about the fallout in public relations. They would probably have to fight Nasser to obtain the ceasefire agreement that they wanted, but they would have to make sure that their war and search for a regime change still appeared like a noble exercise. Eden was here fashioning an excuse which could be used by British policymakers to explain why Operation Musketeer was about to be put into motion. Early the next morning on 6th November, the Anglo-French paratroopers were joined by their thousands of peers. Equipment, ammunition, military vehicles and countless soldiers poured into Egypt through Port Said. The Suez Crisis, at the moment when Eisenhower’s political fortunes were in stake, and the people of Budapest were fighting for their lives, had become a Suez War. Next time, we’ll resume our story and explain how the Anglo-French forces were destined to only fight for a day, thanks to some severe pressures levelled at the now squirming British PM. I hope you’ll join me for that but until then history friends and lovely patrons all, my name is Zack and this has been 1956 episode 2.17. Thanks for listening and I’ll be seeing you all soon.

1. All extracts cited from *Hansard*, ‘HUNGARY’, HC Deb 05 November 1956 vol 558 cc1946-55. Available: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1956/nov/05/hungary [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. All cited from *Hansard*, ‘Egypt and Israel (United Nations Resolutions)’, HC Deb 05 November 1956 vol. 558 cc1956-70. Available:

   http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1956/nov/05/egypt-and-israel-united-nations [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cited in Barry Turner, *Suez 1956*, p. 368. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)