

Strike Hard, Strike Sure – Operation Musketeer

British Military Planning during the Suez Crisis, 1956



Petteri Jouko

Department
of Tactics

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Petteri Jouko

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British Military Planning during the Suez Crisis, 1956**

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**Strike Hard, Strike Sure - Operation Musketeer
British Military Planning during the Suez Crisis, 1956**

PETTERI JOUKO

MAANPUOLUSTUSKORKEAKOULU – NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY

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All of this began when I participated in the Staff Officer and General Staff Officer Courses at the Finnish National Defence College in 1996–1998. The Department of War History, under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Ari Raunio, sought to make a remarkable change in instruction and research on war history. Firstly, the temporal focus was moved from the battlefields of the Second World War into the era of the Cold War. This was something new, as the research tradition had previously concentrated on the Finnish experience of fighting against the Soviet Union in 1939–1944. The change of approach was even more dramatic. Instead of studying events, the Department sought to analyse the art of war. A partial purpose was of course to bring war history as a discipline closer to one of the main disciplines of soldiering: operational art and tactics. As a result, officer students were encouraged to write their theses on post-WW II conflicts. At the time, the inspiring atmosphere of the Department of War History was the main impetus for me to apply to the doctoral programme at the University of Helsinki.

I had the privilege of becoming a student of Professor Erkki Kouri who encouraged me to conduct a study that could be based almost entirely on primary sources. Soon, after my first visit to the Public Record Office, I decided to concentrate my effort on a very limited part of British military history: the Suez Crisis. Studying and conducting research under the supervision of Professor Kouri was both rewarding and enjoyable.

One can not be certain whether this research would ever have been carried out, had I not been chosen for the post of Research Officer at the National Defence University. The Commandants of the National Defence University, Major General Aarno Vehviläinen and Major General Pertti Salminen provided me with their full support. Very special thanks go to Professor Mikko Viitasalo who was Research Director at the National Defence University. His assistance was indispensable.

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Conducting research was sometimes rather tiring. To be brutally honest, it was quite often rather tiring. I sought my inspiration through running. Captain Marko Palokangas accompanied me these runs and had the questionable pleasure of listening to the details of the Suez affair for what probably amounted to hundreds of hours. Marko is a true friend and an honourable officer of the very best kind.

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I am very proud that the Department of Tactics, which is to take the lead role in research on post-WW II history at the Finnish Defence University, agreed to publish my dissertation.

Finally, I want to thank my spouse Sari. Her support, especially in the form of carrying the burden of maintaining our household, which includes an energetic trio of young children: Ines, Eetu and Niilo, was truly invaluable.

Helsinki, on the 375th anniversary of the battle of Lützen,

Petteri Jouko

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PREFACE

Operation Musketeer, a combined joint Anglo-French operation aimed at regaining control of the Suez Canal in 1956, has received much attention from scholars. The most common approach to the crisis has been to examine the political dimension. The political events that led Prime Minister Anthony Eden's cabinet to decide to use military force against the wishes of their superior American ally and in the face of American economic pressure and a Soviet threat to attack Paris and London with rockets have been analysed thoroughly. This is particularly the case because the ceasefire and eventual withdrawal were an indisputable defeat of British policy in the Middle East. The military operation not only ruined Prime Minister Eden's career, but it also diminished the prestige of Britain. It was the beginning of the end, some claim. The British Empire would never be the same.

As the consequences of using force are generally considered more important than the military operations themselves, very little attention has been paid to the military planning of Operation Musketeer. The difference between the number of publications on Operation Corporate of the Falklands War and Operation Musketeer is striking. Not only has there been little previous research on the military aspects of Musketeer, the conclusions drawn in the existing works have not reached a consensus. Some historians, such as Correlli Barnett, compare Musketeer to the utter failures of the Tudor landings and Gallipoli¹. Among significant politicians, Winston Churchill, who had retired from the prime ministership only a year before the Suez Crisis, described the operation as "the most ill-conceived and ill-executed imaginable".² Colin McInnes, a well-known author on British defence policy, represents the middle view when he describes the execution as "far from failure".³ Finally, some, like Julian Thompson, the Commander of 3

¹ Correlli Barnett, *Britain and Her Army, A Military, Political and Social History of the British Army 1509–1970* (London: Cassell & Co, 1970), p. 486.

² Roy Jenkins, *Churchill*, (London: Macmillan, 2001), p. 902. At the height of the crisis, Churchill, who was still an influential figure in British and international politics and whose advice was often sought, was recovering from a stroke in Southern France. As a result, he intervened relatively little in the handling of the crisis.

³ Colin McInnes, *Hot War, Cold War: The British Army's Way in Warfare 1945–95* (London: Brassey's (UK) Ltd., 1996), p. 10.

Commando Brigade during the Falklands War, rate the military action itself as being successful.⁴

The interpretation of how successful the handling of the Suez Crisis was from the military point of view depends very much on the approach taken and the areas emphasised in the subject. Frequently, military operations are analysed in isolation from other events. The action of a country's armed forces is separated from the wider context and evaluated without a solid point of comparison. Political consequences are often used as validated criteria, and complicated factors contributing to military performance are ignored. The lack of comprehensive research on the military action has left room for an analysis concentrating on the military side of the crisis.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research problem

The objective of this study is to produce a military analysis of Operation Musketeer.

At the time of Operation Musketeer, things were changing rapidly. The nuclear deterrent was assuming a dominant role in British strategic thinking as a result of the successful atomic test in October 1952. The preparations for the hydrogen bomb test that was to be conducted in spring 1957 were in a hectic phase. The largest concentration of British conventional forces, the British Army of the Rhine, was preparing for a confrontation with the Soviet Union and its allies in the event of a Global War, while a significant amount of military resources were tied up in imperial policing operations, and naval and air stations around the still mighty British Empire. Moreover, a novel type of warfare, the Cold War, was raging around the globe daily. Simultaneously, experience, namely the experience of the victorious Second World War, dominated the thinking of the time.

⁴ Julian Thompson, *Royal Marines, From Sea Soldiers to a Special Force* (London: Pan Books, 2001), p. 487.

British military preparations covered the Middle East, which due to its political and economic importance was one of the key focuses in British defence policy. In order to understand the context and regional background of Operation Musketeer, the following questions must be examined:

1. *How, and for what reasons, did British policy and strategy develop in the Middle East after the Second World War?*
2. *What was the British threat perception in the Middle East?*
3. *What was the role of contingency plans in the Middle East?*
4. *What was the effect of contingency plans on Operation Musketeer?*

When a military performance or action is analysed, it is reasonable to ask how the military action should be approached. What is a reasonable measure that does not detach an event from its historical context or its era? In this thesis, military performance is evaluated in the light of the prevailing doctrine of the time. Military doctrine serves as a point of comparison as it is a reflection of the thinking and practice of its era. However, it is quite difficult to precisely define and describe the defining principles of British military doctrine in the early 1950s. However, I still seek to answer the following questions: *What was the essence of British tactical doctrine at the time of the Suez Crisis, and did the British follow their doctrine during the planning and execution of Operation Musketeer?*

Plans and their execution reflect the art of war of their time. Therefore, I have decided to focus on the planning process for combined operations, as amphibious operations were also known, at all levels of planning. The planning for an overseas combined operation was a long process. At the time, the Combined Operations Handbook *Introduction to Combined Operations Planning* recognised four different levels of planning. A Chiefs of Staff Directive and an outline plan by the Joint Planning Staff would initiate the planning. This would be followed by a theatre outline plan. The force commander's plan would be the plan for the actual assault on the basis of the

theatre plan. Only after this would each service produce their service plans in order to carry out the force plan.⁵

The Suez Crisis took place during a relatively short period of time. Still, several different outline plans were produced. Some of them remained merely concepts, but most were prepared for actual execution. In order to track down factors affecting the planning process one must ask: *How, and for what reasons did the plans change in the course of planning?*

A description of the plans in each planning stage down to the smallest detail would not shed much light on the key issues raised here. There is not enough space to present the tactical or technical fine points. They have only been discussed below when they affect the entire concept of the operations. I have consciously emphasised the role of intelligence in this work. Threat perceptions produced by intelligence agencies were, and still are, the starting point for any serious military planning. Therefore, my main principle has been to compare the products of the intelligence machinery to the changes in the operational concept.

Operation Musketeer was carried out in conjunction with French armed forces. Although the French force operated under British leadership, the French had different views on the development of the plans. As a result, it is appropriate to ask what the French influence on the evolution of the overall concept and plans was.

This study is a mixture of chronological and thematic approaches. The British Middle Eastern policy and strategy presented in chapter two provide a strategic context for the study. The threat perception and contingency plans are presented in chapter three. The tactical principles in chapter four provide a comparison point for the evaluation of the operation. The initial plans and preparations after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal are presented in chapter five. This chapter's main theme is an analysis of the reasons for the change of concept, as the Limited War option was abandoned in favour of attacking Alexandria. The most dramatic conceptual change, and the main

⁵ *Combined Operations Handbook No.1a. Introduction to Combined Operations Planning* (Admiralty Code No.CB 4514, 1949), p. 5.

subject of this study, is presented in chapter six. Plans for a traditional amphibious operation aimed at Alexandria were rejected and the concept of an air offensive was accepted as a starting point for new planning. The obedient planning machinery produced completely new plans, which are also introduced in chapter six. These plans laid the foundation for all operations planned after this point. Chapter seven covers slight alterations of the interim concept in the "Winter Plan", although the essence of the plans remained unaltered. As a result, the contents of the tactical plans are not repeated in conjunction with the Winter Plan, only the main differences with the Musketeer Revise plans are briefly described. Instead, the development of the intelligence picture and the planning for psychological warfare is analysed. The development of deception and diversion, as well as the Israeli connection, are analysed in chapter eight. Chapter nine seeks to analyse the French influence on the development of the plans. The invasion itself is well described in previous literature and articles.⁶ Therefore, the execution of the operation is only briefly described in chapter ten. Finally, the conclusions are presented in chapter eleven.

1.2 Definitions

Definitions often provide a good and accurate reflection of the thinking of an era. At the time of the Suez Crisis, definitions, especially those for large and abstract subjects, were highly ambiguous. There are natural reasons for this. Britain and the British armed forces were very different from what they are today. The role of the Ministry of Defence as the hub of military affairs was only emerging, and the services still had an independent status so that each service defined terms somewhat differently.

Defence policy, strategy

A renowned researcher on British defence, John Baylis, suggests in his introduction to *British Defence Policy in a Changing World* that the terms

⁶ General descriptions concentrating on the execution of Operation Musketeer include: A.J. Barker, *Suez: The Seven Day War* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1964) and Roy Fullick and Geofrey Powell, *Suez the Double War* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979).

policy and strategy are often used almost as a synonym.⁷ They truly were intertwined in the 1950s. Air-Vice Marshall E.J. Kingston-McCloughry, a frequent author on British defence matters in the 1950s, simplified the matter by claiming that "While strategy should always be servant of defence policy, strategy and defence policy must be dealt with as a whole. Defence policy is primarily a political concern and strategy primarily a military concern but they comprise two aspects of one problem: Defence."⁸ His view reflected the thinking of the time quite well. The Global Strategy Paper produced by the Chiefs of Staff in 1952 is actually titled "Defence Policy and Global Strategy". The document is a declaration of the Chiefs' views on defence policy, which includes a wide spectrum of political, economic and military issues, and on a strategy that was concerned merely with using the military as an instrument.⁹

The levels of war were properly defined for the first time in conjunction with the introduction of joint and service doctrines in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The conduct of war was divided into four levels: *grand strategic*, (*military*) *strategic*, *operational*, and *tactical*.¹⁰ In the middle of the 1950s, the situation was different. Even though the existence of grand strategy had been acknowledged, it was not being systematically used. Actually, *grand strategy* had been introduced in *The Field Service Regulations* before the Second World War, and defined as the "art of applying the whole of national power in the most effective way towards attaining the national aim."¹¹ Still, it was not actively used in the middle of the 1950s. Instead, the term *strategy*, was widely, and ambiguously used.

General Andre Beaufre, the commander of the French land forces participating in Operation Musketeer and a well-known author in the field of strategy, enlarged the definition from the classic "employment of military

⁷ John Baylis, *British Defence Policy in a Changing World* (London: Groom Helm, 1977), pp. 11–12.

⁸ E.J. Kingston-McCloughry, *Defence Policy and Strategy* (London: Stevens & Sons Limited, 1960), p. 1.

⁹ NA CAB 131/12/1, D (52) 26, 17 June 1952, "Defence Policy and Global Strategy".

¹⁰ *Design for Military Operations – The British Military Doctrine* (Army Code 71451) (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1989), pp. 37–39; *The Fundamentals of British Maritime Doctrine* (3rd Impression, London: The Stationery Office, 1995), fig. 7.1; *Air Power Doctrine*, AP 3000(2nd Edition, HMSO, 1993), p. 3; and *British Defence Doctrine* (HMSO, 1997), p. 12

¹¹ *Field Service Regulations, Vol III, Operations – Higher Formations*, 1935 (His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1936), p. 5.

force to employment of force".¹² Chief Air Marshall Slessor, the Chief of Air Staff 1950–1953, also possessed a holistic view of the nature of strategy. Strategy was "the management of the political, military, economic and industrial resources of the Western Coalition in such way as to achieve the object of the Free World."¹³

Military plans or military manuals did not provide a rigid definition of *strategy*. For example, strategic plans principally consisted of the military means to achieve an objective, although they also included other means to some extent. *Strategic* was also linked with the capability to wage war. For example, a *strategic air offensive* was defined as "air operations designed to effect the progressive destruction and disintegration of war making capacity".¹⁴

To sum up the conflicting nature of strategy, it is useful to quote Lawrence Freedman whose 1981 book *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* states "there has been no constant and generally accepted definition of strategy, even during the post-war years".¹⁵ In other words, the definition of strategy often included issues from both grand strategy and strategy. Brian Holden Reid explains the reasons for this mixing of the meanings of grand strategy and strategy. According to Reid, the reliance on the strategic doctrine of nuclear deterrence linked and mixed the meanings of grand strategy and strategy. There was no purely military strategy because the decision to use nuclear weapons was linked to the very existence of a nation.¹⁶

Theatre and theatre strategy

Neither the British nor the Americans recognised the operational level of war. Still, the terms *theatre of war* and a *theatre strategy* were both known. During peacetime, the Middle East formed one theatre. It was "An extensive

¹² Andre Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy* (Faber and Faber, 1965), pp. 22–31.

¹³ John Slessor, *Strategy for the West* (London: Cassell & Co, 1954), p. 3.

¹⁴ *Joint Services Glossary*, 1952 (War Office Code 8766, 1952).

¹⁵ Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (London: MacMillan Press, 1981), p. xvi.

¹⁶ Brian Holden Reid, *Introduction: The Operational Level of War and Historical Experience in The British Army and the Operational Level of War* (London: Tri-Service Press Limited 1989), pp. 2–3.

geographical area of strategic importance" as the theatre was defined in the *Joint Services Glossary*.¹⁷ The term *theatre* was used in several connections. For example, the Joint Planning Staff promoted a theatre air offensive – to be conducted by the squadrons subordinated to the Middle East Air Force – against the Soviet Union in conjunction with the Baghdad Pact plans. *Introduction to Combined Operations Planning* emphasised the semi-independent role of theatre commanders in the preparation of an outline plan for any operations overseas.¹⁸ However, the Suez Crisis showed that the role of theatre strategy had steadily declined in parallel with the reduction of colonial power, with the centralization of governmental machinery and with the development of real-time communications.¹⁹

Tactics and tactical

Due to the lack of an operational level of war or operational art, the terms *tactics* or *tactical* covered a wide range of activities. The concept of *grand tactics*, introduced by Antoine Henri de Jomini in the 19th century to interlink the strategic and tactical levels of war, was probably utilised by British military thinkers.²⁰ Still, it was not officially recognised. The term *tactical* referred to issues of relatively minor scale usually linked with the area where the actual battle took place. For example, *tactical air support* was designed to support army formations on the battlefield. In the Royal Navy, the manual, *The Fighting Instructions* was regarded as providing tactical principals even if it covered the organisation and command of rather large forces, such as a carrier group. On the other hand, the same manual offered information on the proper use of individual weapon systems.²¹ The Army produced training pamphlets advocating squad tactics as an "application of fire and movement", while simultaneously using the term *tactical* with regards to limited nuclear warfare in the interim *Corps Tactical Battle in Nuclear War*, which sought to establish a "tactical doctrine on which the corps nuclear battle will be

¹⁷ *Joint Services Glossary*, 1952 (War Office Code 8766, 1952).

¹⁸ *Combined Operations Handbook No. 1a. Introduction to Combined Operations Planning*, p. 12.

¹⁹ E.J. Kingston-McCloughry, *Global Strategy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1957), pp. 182–183.

²⁰ Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War* (London: Greenhill Books, 1992), 13.

²¹ *The Fighting Instructions* (CB 04487, 1947), pp. 18–19 and 54–55.

based".²² This indicates that the use of the terms *strategic* and *tactical* was related to time and effects. While a strategic air offensive was designed to cause holistic, long-term effects, a tactical nuclear battle was intended to cause immediate, rather short-term effects on the battlefield.

The essence of *tactics* in the 1950s can be simplified as the preparations for and conduct of military operations executed at the tactical level. Moreover, the tactical level included all organisations below that of the theatre of war. As a result, the spectrum of tactics was cast. It included activities from corps to infantry squad level.

There were three levels of war: strategic, theatre (strategic) and tactical. One has to accept that the strategic level of the era covered a wide array of functions. Economic, diplomatic, political and military efforts were combined in the Cabinet and in the Egypt Committee. These established governmental policy and the political objectives for military planning. The Chiefs of Staff Committee with its assisting committees and staffs provided essential strategic guidance, resources for the operations and produced plans that not only affected the forces participating in the operation but also the global structure of the British armed forces.

During peacetime, a British Co-ordination and Defence Committee, chaired by a representative of the Foreign Office, carried out preparations for the Middle East theatre strategy. During the Suez Crisis, however, full advantage of this existing command structure was not taken for reasons that are not entirely clear. Instead, General John Keightley, Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East Land Forces (MELF), was appointed Allied Commander-in-Chief for Operation Musketeer.²³ General Keightley, not only implemented the

²² *Infantry Training (Vol 1), Infantry Platoon Weapons Pamphlet No.1* (WO Code 8369) (The War Office 1948), p.2 and NA WO 216/934, *Corps Tactical Battle in Nuclear War* (Draft), 1958, p.2.

²³ General Charles Frederic KEIGHTLEY: b. 24 June 1901; married 1932; two sons. Military career: 5 Dragoon Guards, 1921, served in Palestine, India and Egypt; Adjutant 5 Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards, 1930–1933; Staff College, 1934–1935; Staff Officer to Director General of the Territorial Army, 1936; Brigade Major, Cavalry Brigade in Cairo, 1937–1938; Instructor Staff College, 1938–1940; Commander 30 Armoured Brigade, 1941–1942; Commander 6 Armoured Division in Tunisia, 1942–1943; Commander 78 Infantry Division in Italy, 1943 – 1944; Commander V Corps in Italy and Austria, 1944–1945; Director of Military Training (War Office), 1946–1947; Military Secretary to the Secretary of State for War, 1948;

strategic guidance set by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, but as the most senior military expert on Middle Eastern matters he also formulated strategic guidance himself in keen co-operation with the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the Egypt Committee and the Prime Minister.

The Task Forces Headquarters and all their subordinated units clearly fall into the tactical category. The Task Force Commanders established a system of joint tactical command, as referred to in the *Handbooks on Combined Operations Planning*. In that role, they performed the detailed planning and carried out plans that they had to have accepted at the strategic level.²⁴

Doctrine

The meaning of the term *doctrine* was also inconsistent. There was no inter-service, coherent view on the nature or the scope of doctrine. Consequently, there was no common doctrine incorporating service goals, tasks and measures in a joint manner. The services also did not have service doctrines in the form that they exist in today.

The lack of a formal, recognised doctrine, expressly called a doctrine, does not mean that the services did not have written guidance dealing with a variety of subjects that are currently regarded as being part of military doctrine. On the contrary, each service had its own guidance, which varied considerably from the others both in quality and in quantity and which was defined in different ways.

Possibly the best view of the time on the nature and scope of doctrine was in the introduction of the *Royal Air Force Manual*. It linked “the operational principles on which the Royal Air Force is to be trained in peace and fought in war” to “Air Staff doctrine of today”.²⁵ In addition, the *Royal Navy War Manual* connected doctrine to principles by claiming that the principles of war – discussed later in this thesis – were a “basis for common doctrine throughout

Commander-in-Chief, British Army of the Rhine, 1948–1951; Commander-in-Chief, Far East Land Forces, 1951–1953; Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Land Forces from 1953.

²⁴ *The Manual of Combined Operations* (WO Code B 1655, 1950), p. 31. According to the manual, the force commanders are “responsible for tactical command of the assault”.

²⁵ *Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1 Operations* (RAF Code No. AP. 1300, 1950), introductory note.

the services”²⁶. The Army’s *Conduct of War* defined its role as a source of “the general principles for the conduct of operations at all levels”.²⁷

According to Colin McInnes and John Stone, contrary to general perceptions, the British Army did have a doctrine before the Second World War in the form of *Field Service Regulations*. The principles contained therein were applied during the world wars, even if the regulations did not have the official status of a doctrine. They claim that the explanation for the lack of a doctrine was British military culture, which rejected theory and encouraged a pragmatic approach.²⁸

Apparently, the services, not only the army, sought to avoid the term *doctrine*. Instead, they promoted the pragmatic term *principles* as guidelines for their action. In other words, *the Royal Air Force Manual*, *the Royal Navy War Manual*, and *the Conduct of War* possessed at least a semi-official status as service doctrines. They sought to provide “fundamental principles on how war is fought”. This study seeks to prove that this was also the Suez Crisis-era view of the role of a doctrine. These manuals were the tip of the iceberg in each service. Below them was a vast array of tactical manuals and handbooks that presented the principles, a tactical doctrine for the tactical level.

Amphibious operations had a peculiar role in the British armed forces. Due to their nature, which involved all the services, the development of training and techniques for amphibious warfare was under the supervision of the independent, inter-service Amphibious Warfare Headquarters. One may argue that it was the only organisation in the British military that produced real inter-service guidelines. However, the *Manual for Combined Operations* also did not dare to declare itself an amphibious doctrine. It referred indirectly to that role by claiming that the “USA has ALSO (*emphasis by author*) evolved a now well defined doctrine for carrying out amphibious operations.” In practise, the *Manual for Combined Operations* and its subordinate

²⁶ *The Naval War Manual* (B.R. 1806, 1958), p. 18.

²⁷ *Conduct of War*. (WO Code No.8472, 1950), p. ii.

²⁸ Colin McInnes & John Stone, “The British Army and Military Doctrine” in Michael Duffy, Theo Farrell & Geoffrey Sloan (eds.), *Doctrine and Military Effectiveness. Proceeding of the Conference held at the Britannia Royal Naval College, January 16–17, 1997* (Exeter, 1997), pp. 24–25.

Combined Warfare Handbooks had the same semi-formal status as a doctrine as the *Royal Air Force Manual* and others did in their respective services.

Combined, amphibious and joint

The term *combined* had a dual meaning in British military use. Julian Corbett, a renowned thinker on maritime strategy at the beginning of the twentieth century, used the word to describe operations (expeditions) conducted by the navy and army where they combined their efforts in a campaign. In practise, it was a synonym for *amphibious*.²⁹ The practise was continued throughout the Second World War. According to a Combined Operations Command wartime publication, a combined operation “is one in which two or more of the Fighting Services co-operate in order to strike the enemy with the maximum of effect at a chosen place and a chosen moment”³⁰. The definition is in line with the *Manual of Combined Operations*, which described a combined operation as the “integration of sea and land forces with associated air support; and also of sea, land and air forces when an airborne assault is an integral part of such an operation”³¹. During the war, however, “combined” took on another meaning, coming to describe co-operation between different nationalities. As a result, the nomenclature was re-arranged after the war. In the 1952 Joint Services Glossary, the original meaning of “combined” was replaced by “amphibious”: “A landing or embarkation involving the integration of sea and land forces with, or without, air operations”. *Combined* was defined as an action including two or more services of two or more nations. *Joint*, in turn, meant an action including two or more services of one nationality. Had Britain executed Operation Musketeer alone, it would have been described as a joint operation. Nevertheless, because the operation involved both French and British forces from all services, it can be defined as a *combined-joint operation*.³²

²⁹ Julian Corbett, *The Seven Years War* (London: The Folio Society, 2001), xxi and 135.

³⁰ Ministry of Information, *Combined Operations 1940–1942* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1943), p.7.

³¹ The *Manual of Combined Operations*, 1950, p. 1.

³² *Joint Services Glossary*, 1952,

Administration and logistics

The terms *Administration* and *logistics* were sometimes used as synonyms., although they did refer to different issues. Logistics was part of administration, which was defined as “the organization, discipline, and well-being of men and the movement and maintenance of men and materials”. Logistics, in turn, was described as “the science of planning and carrying out the movement and maintenance of forces”.³³

Manoeuvre warfare and attrition warfare

The terms *Manoeuvre warfare* and *attrition warfare* are required concepts in the current military nomenclature describing the nature of war. Battles and campaigns are categorised, sometimes rather artificially one may claim, as being one or the other of these types of warfare. As Carter Malkasian in his rare analysis on attrition warfare argues: “As an operational strategy, attrition is often posited against maneuver warfare”.³⁴ Attrition warfare has a sinister reputation because basically it represents piecemeal destruction of an enemy’s military capability. It has become a synonym for mud, casualties, and, above all, incompetence and lack of imagination within military leadership.

The British armed forces had plenty of experience with both types of warfare. Some of its highest-ranking officers, Field Marshall Montgomery and General Templer among them, had participated in both of the World Wars. All senior officers had participated in the Second World War and had experienced the German version of manoeuvre warfare, *Blitzkrieg*, in one way or another. The German invasion of Northern France in spring 1940 is often considered to be the classic example of manoeuvre warfare. It included elements that typify manoeuvre warfare at its best: calculated logistical risk, surprise achieved by directing the main thrust through unexpected terrain, deep attack on the opponent’s rear causing its encirclement, speed, and relatively light

³³ *Joint Services Glossary*, 1952, pp. 2 and 15.

³⁴ Carter Malkasian, *A History of Modern Wars of Attrition* (London: Praeger, 2002), p. 4.

casualties.³⁵ British military thinkers, such as Basil Liddell Hart and J.F.C. Fuller, had also introduced some concepts on manoeuvre warfare. However, although the individual components of manoeuvre warfare were recognised, the British armed forces were not organised to fight manoeuvre warfare as a whole. Neither strategic nor tactical manuals promoted “manoeuverist” thinking.³⁶

Mobile warfare

The British version of manoeuvre warfare was called “mobile warfare”. The British realised the usefulness of movement. Still, one should understand that the essence of mobile warfare is very different from our present understanding of manoeuvre warfare. The lack of long-standing front lines, the movement of motorised and armoured forces and offensive action were characteristic of British mobile warfare. Nevertheless, the main difference was in the aim and the way in which operations were to be conducted. British tactical manuals called for the physical destruction of the enemy rather than for dislocating it.³⁷

Psychological warfare

In the mid-1950s, the British defined psychological warfare as “the planned use of psychological measures, including information, propaganda³⁸ and others, designed to influence the opinions, emotions, attitude and behaviour

³⁵ This event has been subject to various accounts. Forr Basil Liddell-Hart's interpretation of the campaign, see "Matador's Thrust" in Basil Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill* (Watford: Cassell and Company, 1951), pp. 139–187.

³⁶ J.F.C. Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War* (Row: Hutchinson & Co, 1925), pp. 107–111; on mobility see, e.g., Basil Liddell Hart, *The Remaking of the Modern Armies* (London: John Murray 1927), pp. 17–28, and Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought, From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 661–679.

³⁷ *The Infantry Division in Battle* (War Office Code 1857, 1950), p. 22.

³⁸ During the 1950s, both the British and the Americans divided propaganda into three categories in accordance with the source:

White= the source of information is openly acknowledged, e.g., a government.

Grey= the source is deliberately concealed and denied by its originators

Black= the source of information is falsified, and the real originators disclaim all knowledge of it. See, NA DEFE 28/16, “A draft of Staff Officers' Guide to Psychological Warfare”, an annex to the letter from Group Captain Magrath to Major Ashworth, 4 March 1959 and Digital Security Archives, National Security Council, NSC 74, 10 July 1950, ‘A Plan for National Psychological Warfare’.

of enemy, neutral or friendly groups in support of current policy in time of war or emergency.³⁹

Notes on acronyms and abbreviations

Acronyms, abbreviations, and military symbols are important tools for any officer planning or conducting military operations. They provide a way to shorten documents bound to be numerous and large. To make the text more readable, this study has made an attempt to avoid them. In some cases, abbreviations are more commonly used than the full form and are required for clarity. This is particularly the case with highly specialised landing vessels.

- LST (3) Landing Ship Tank, specialised landing ship with a capacity of approximately 180 troops, and a mixed load of tanks and vehicles.
- LST (A) Landing Ship Assault, a converted LST to carry assault troops to be landed by landing craft. On a tank deck, a mixed load of tanks or vehicles could be carried, e.g., 12 Centurion tanks. In addition to six landing crafts (LCA) in its davits, a few vehicles could be carried on the upper deck. Under normal peacetime conditions these ships were designed for transporting approximately 60 soldiers in addition to the ship's crew. This amount could be increased to almost 500 soldiers for short passages.
- LCT (8) Landing Craft Tank, a vessel capable of transporting four Centurion tanks in an assault role.
- LCA Landing Craft Assault. A landing craft capable of transporting 35 equipped soldiers ashore from a mother ship.
- LVT Landing Vehicle Tractor. Basically, an amphibious tracked personnel carrier capable of transporting approximately 20 men ashore⁴⁰

³⁹ NA FO 1110/875, Interdepartmental Working Party on Psychological Warfare (PSW) (56) 4 a Note, 26 June 1956.

⁴⁰ Amphibious Warfare Handbook No.4A, *The Battalion with Supporting Arms in the Amphibious Assault*, 1956 (Amphibious Warfare Headquarters, 1956). On details of Landing Vehicle Tractor, see A.D Baker, *Allied Landing Craft of the World War Two* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1985). For a good study of the development of British landing craft during the Second World War—most of the designs were still in operational service during the Suez Crisis, see, e.g., R. Baker & W Holt & J Lenaghan & A Sims A and A Watson, *Selected Papers on British Warship Design in World War II* (Conway Maritime Press), pp. 167–187.

Other abbreviations and symbols that may appear in maps are used in accordance with the contemporary *Staff Duties in the Field* handbook.

1.3 On Sources

1.3.1 Archival sources

The archival documents preserved in the National Archives, London are without doubt the most important sources used in this work. In order to understand the value of these documents and to put the plans and decisions into the correct context, it is essential to understand the command structure of Operation Musketeer. Therefore, this thesis attempts to combine an introduction to the command structure of the operation and an analysis of the archival sources into a somewhat longer and perhaps more atypical form.

The higher levels of the British defence establishment can be described as “a promised land of committees”. Before the evolution of the current, more centralised hierarchy, much of the strategic guidance was based on the work of inter-service and inter-departmental committees. The myriad of committees would be a valuable research subject itself as the *Committee Organization Book* in 1956 listed over seventy committees responsible for defence matters within the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Defence.

Cabinet and Defence Committee

Defence policy and sometimes even operational matters were discussed and decided in the presence of the full Cabinet. But, it was the Defence Committee of the Cabinet (the Defence Committee herein afterwards) that continued the British tradition of having politicians principally formulate defence policy. The Committee was a consequence of the introduction of the Governmental White Paper “Central Organization for Defence” of 1946 and was the successor to the Committee of Imperial Defence. The committee was actually a miniaturised cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister, consisting of key ministers reinforced by the experts in warfare – the Chiefs of Staff. A memorandum, “Organization of Defence under the Government of the United

Kingdom", describes the key role of the Defence Committee aptly: "It (The Defence Committee, *author*) is responsible both for the review of current strategy and also for the preparation of plans for the country's transition from peace to war and discharges the tasks carried out before the war by the Committee of Imperial Defence."⁴¹ Due to Prime Minister Eden's decision to establish an *ad hoc* committee, the Egypt Committee, to co-ordinate measures to counter the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, the role of the Cabinet and the Defence Committee in particular was very limited. As a result, the Cabinet and Defence Committee papers preserved in class CAB 128/129 (conclusions and memorandums) and in CAB 131 (papers of the Defence Committee) have provided fairly little information for this study aside from some background information.

Egypt Committee

The Egypt Committee was essentially Prime Minister Eden's War Cabinet. Military preparations were co-ordinated with diplomatic and political measures in the Egypt Committee. It was established on 27 July and consisted of the most influential ministers within the cabinet: the Prime Minister, the Lord President, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretary, the Commonwealth Secretary and the Minister of Defence. Other ministers and the Chiefs of Staff were invited to advise the committee on a need-only basis. The service ministers were initially not included in the committee's composition. However, in the middle of September, at the height of the military preparations, they were invited to attend the meetings of the committee regularly.⁴² Practically all the Egypt Committee papers (CAB

⁴¹ NA (Public Record Office), DEFE 7/2172, Unsigned and undated memorandum, "Organization of Defence under the Government of the United Kingdom". The memorandum was most probably produced in late 1947 after the Ministry of Defence Act or early in 1948. The representative of the Colonial Office is not mentioned in the composition of the Joint Intelligence Committee. He became a permanent member in September 1948.

⁴² NA PREM 11/1189b, 28 July 1956, "Egypt Committee, Composition and Terms", Norman Brooks' letter to the Prime Minister on the composition of the Committee on 13 September 1956.

The names of the various committees are abridged in the footnotes as follows:

DC	Defence Committee
EC	Egypt Committee
EOC	Egypt Official Committee
COS	Chiefs of Staff Committee
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JIC (ME)	Joint Intelligence Committee, Middle East
JP	Joint Planning Staff

134/1216–1217) are open to the public. This thesis takes the view that strategic guidance largely stemmed from the decisions taken by the Egypt Committee. Prime Minister Eden himself chaired the Committee, but the Suez papers in his possession in PREM 11, provide very little information on the decisions taken at the highest political level, apart from a few personal letters from his ministers. To assist with the formulation of policy, a high-level official committee was established. The papers of this committee, the Egypt Official Committee (CAB 134/1225), have been consulted for insight on the political objectives of the operations, as the committee formulated no less than eight political directives for the Allied Commander-in-Chief.

Ministry of Defence

The Ministry of Defence was a new institution within the British administrative system. During the Second World War, Prime Minister Winston Churchill acted as Minister of Defence but he had no single ministry to plan, co-ordinate and execute his orders. Instead, he used the existing system of three service ministries (the War Office, the Admiralty and the Air Ministry) and numerous committees to guide the British war effort. After the war, the Labour Government founded the Ministry of Defence. It was made responsible to Parliament for the distribution of resources, administration of some inter-service establishments such as the Joint Intelligence Bureau and co-ordination of administration common to the services.⁴³ In practice, the ministry lacked real power. It did not have direct control over the Chiefs of Staff Committee or the service ministries. The service ministries were accountable directly to Parliament in matters of administration and, more importantly, finances. Each of the service ministries would present its own annual budgets, the estimates, to Parliament. The Minister of Defence had the authority to present a combined expenditure to the Defence Committee, but his main task was more to co-ordinate than to command. The actual co-ordination was carried out by the Service Ministers' Committee chaired by the

⁴³ H.C. Boyce (revised by), *Lindsell's Military Organization and Administration* (28th Revised and Enlarged Edition, Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1953), p. 4.

Minister of Defence. Yet, the service ministries remained in charge of the actual execution of policy.⁴⁴

During the Suez Crisis, the role of the Ministry of Defence was still unclear. The Chiefs of Staff Committee or its chairman bypassed the ministry in operational matters. It appears that not all questions were subordinated to the Minister of Defence. Rather, some questions were presented in the Egypt Committee by the Chiefs of Staff, by General Keightley in his role as Commander-in-Chief, or by an individual service minister. Prime Minister Eden tried to promote the role of the Minister of Defence by nominating the service ministers to the Egypt Committee. However, the execution remained in the hands of an operational command structure provided by the service ministries. They and their sub-ordinate peacetime command structure carried out the actual preparations.

Chiefs of Staff Committee

The highest level of military experts responsible for defence planning was the Chiefs of Staff (COS) Committee. The wide scope of their tasks is well described in the governmental organization book: "To advise Her Majesty's Government on all matters affecting the defence of the United Kingdom and the British Commonwealth".⁴⁵

The committee was composed of the service heads: First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (Admiral The Earl Mountbatten of Burma), Chief of the Imperial General Staff (General Sir Gerald Templer)⁴⁶, and the Chief of the Air Staff (Air Chief Marshall, Sir Dermot Boyle)⁴⁷. Since 1955 the committee had a

⁴⁴ Martin Edmonds, *Central Organization of Defence in Great Britain* in Central Organizations of Defence (Westview Press, 1985), pp. 87–88 and Franklyn Johnson, *Defence by Ministry. The British Ministry of Defence, 1944–1974* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980), pp. 16–18 and 29–30.

⁴⁵ NA CAB 161/8, "The Committee Organization Book", Eighth Issue, 1956.

⁴⁶ General, Gerald Walter Robert TEMPLER: b. 11 September 1898; married 1926; one son and one daughter. Military career: Joined Royal Irish Fusiliers 1916; during the Second World War commanded, e.g., 2 Corps, 47 Division, 56 Division and 6 Armoured Division; Director of Military Government 21 Army Group, 1945–1946; Director of Military Intelligence (War Office), 1946–1948; Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 1948–1950; General Officer in Command, Eastern Command (UK), 1950–1952; High Commissioner, Federation of Malaya, 1952–1954; Chief of the Imperial General Staff from 1955.

⁴⁷ Air Chief Marshal Dermot Alexander BOYLE: b. 2 October 1902; married 1931; two sons and one daughter. Military career: Commissioned RAF 1924; Director-General of Personnel

separate chairman, which at the time of the Suez Crisis was the Marshall of the Royal Air Force, Sir William Dickson⁴⁸. The papers of the Chiefs of Staff Committee have been the most valuable source of information on military planning at a strategic level. Their decisions and recommendations for the ministers are carefully preserved in the minutes of the meetings in DEFE 4. The memorandums in class DEFE 5 include the most important plans accepted by the committee. The memorandums include not only planning concerning Musketeer, but also provide a wider picture of British defence arrangements. However, some of the most sensitive discussions or memorandums are not in DEFE 4 or DEFE 5.

The Chiefs of Staff Committee was assisted by a small secretariat that filed documents classified as being of the highest secrecy in the special Secretary's Standard Files (DEFE 32). It appears that these files were rearranged after Musketeer as the files that should have been there are actually among the registered files of the Ministry of Defence (DEFE 11). These files have provided information not only on confidential discussions within the Chiefs of Staff Committee, but also on the co-operation between the COS-Committee and General Keightley, the Commander-in-Chief. Records of discussions and notes by General Keightley were produced for a most restricted circulation, with sometimes only four copies being made. They have provided explanations for many questions involving the formulation of the military concept. The value of these documents as historical evidence is emphasised by the fact that the files of Keightley's small Joint Headquarters are fragmentary and dispersed.

(Air Ministry), 1948–1949; Director-General of Manning (Air Ministry), 1949–1951; AOC 1 Group, Bomber Command, 1951–1953; AOC-in-Chief Fighter Command, 1953–1955; Chief of Air Staff, 1955.

⁴⁸ Marshall of the Royal Air Force, William Forster DICKSON: b. 24 September 1898; married 1932; one daughter (one deceased daughter). Military career: Royal Naval Air Service, 1916–1918; Test pilot, 1921–1922; Air Ministry, 1923–1926; 56 Fighter Sqn, 1926–1927; RAF Staff College, 1927–1928; various posts, e.g., Station and Squadron Commander in India, 1929–1936; Directing Staff, Staff College and Imperial Defence College, 1936–1939; Director of Plans (Air Ministry), 1941–1942; Group Commander (Fighter Command), 1942–1943; 83 Group Commander, 1943–1944, Commander, Desert Air Force, 1944; Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Policy), 1945–1946; Vice-Chief of the Air Staff, 1946–1948; Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Air Force, 1948–1950; Member for Supply and Organization (Air Council), 1952 – 1953; Chief of the Air Staff; 1953–1956; Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee since 1956.

The British military tends to not fully record discussions at meetings. Views of importance are sometimes not written down, which forces scholars to rely on biographies of questionable reliability. Conclusions about the personal views of the service heads and about discussion within their respective service ministries can be drawn based on evidence, mainly correspondence, preserved in AIR 8, WO 216 and ADM 205.

Joint Intelligence Committee

A network of committees and their subordinate planning staffs supported the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the most important and influential being the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and the Joint Planning Staff (JPS). The Joint Intelligence Committee was at the top of the British intelligence community. It was responsible for co-ordination of Britain's intelligence effort, the provision of intelligence estimates to the Chiefs of Staff and liaison with foreign intelligence services. The chairmanship of the Joint Intelligence Committee was not held by the military but by the Foreign Office. Under-Secretary Patrick Dean, head of the Permanent-Under-Secretary's Department (PUSD)⁴⁹ held the post at the time. This arrangement guaranteed political control over strategic intelligence. Members of the committee included the directors of the service intelligence bodies as well as the Director of the Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB), which was an intelligence establishment within the Ministry of Defence responsible for topographic and economic information. The Director of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) was responsible for signal intelligence. The Head of MI6, "C", (also known as the Secret Intelligence Service, SIS) was concerned with secret intelligence abroad. His counterpart, Director-General of the Security Service (also known as MI5), was in charge of Britain's counter-espionage. Representatives from the Colonial Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office supplemented the political intelligence for their areas of responsibility.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ According to Richard Aldrich, a well-known scholar of intelligence affairs, this department, created in 1949, had become the hub of political intelligence in the political establishment by the mid-1950s, Richard Aldrich (ed.), *Espionage, Security and Intelligence in Britain 1945–1970* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp.115–116.

⁵⁰ NA, CAB 161/8, *The Committee Organization Book, Eight Issue*, 1956; CAB 158/30, JIC (56) 123, 29 November 1957, "History of the Joint Intelligence Committee" and CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 71, 14 June 1956, "Charter for the Joint Intelligence Committee". James Craig, "The

The Joint Intelligence Committee's memorandums (CAB 158) and the minutes of their weekly meetings (CAB 159) can be used to construct a picture of British strategic intelligence on Egyptian dispositions and intentions. The weekly intelligence reviews (CAB 179) have supported this picture. Although a significant part of the Joint Intelligence Committee's materiel is accessible, their secretariat minutes in class CAB 176 from April 1954 onwards are still retained by the government, as are those of MI5, MI6, and the Government Communication Headquarters. The Joint Intelligence Bureau papers are scattered and lack a coherent catalogue, but some of their analyses in WO 252 and DEFE 60 on Egyptian infrastructure have proved to be useful.

A wide range of psychological operations and deceptions connected with military preparations in the Middle East are still classified. Most of the files of the Directorate of Forward Plans, an organization within the Ministry of Defence responsible for planning counter-subversion, psychological operations and deception, are retained.⁵¹ Only the fragments of their files preserved in DEFE 28 have been available. The FO 1110 houses the papers of the Information Research Department, which was in a key position in formulating psychological warfare at the strategic level. Although the papers reveal a general picture of the ideas at that level, the details of the work of the "Dodds-Parker Advisory Committee", responsible for co-ordinating psychological warfare at a strategic level, remain unclear as the weekly minutes of the committee were not available at the time this manuscript was produced.

The intelligence bodies of the service ministries were responsible for the provision of tactical intelligence. Army intelligence estimates are well

Joint Intelligence Committee and British Intelligence Assessment, 1945–1956". (Ph.D diss. Christ's College, University of Cambridge, 1999), pp. 11–12. The Joint Intelligence Committee's charter was revised in 1957, after which it was required to report to the Secretary of the Cabinet and to the Chiefs of Staff Committee on military matters. For a general picture of the British intelligence apparatus, see NA AIR 40/2771, Air Ministry, "Secret Intelligence Summary", August 1957.

⁵¹ For the tasks of the Directorate of Forward Plans, see UK National Archives, Catalogue, Series Details: DEFE 28, <http://www.catalogue.nationalarchives.gov.uk/displaycataloguedetails.asp?CATLN=3&CATID=4269&SearchInit=4&CATREF=defe+28>, accessed 20 September 2004.

preserved in the War Office Suez files. Most of the army intelligence products, such as intelligence summaries or appreciations on Egyptian army dispositions, are in the files WO 288/97–99 and WO 288/161. Naval intelligence is more scattered. Some useful comments by the Director of Naval Intelligence can be found in the First Sea Lord's papers in ADM 205. However, to acquire the best and most coherent intelligence on the Egyptian Navy, it is advisable to consult the appendices of the naval operations orders. Estimates on the performance of the Egyptian Air Force are in the overall air plans and in AIR 20. Of the individual files, AIR 20/9229 has been very profitable as it includes intelligence summaries by the Middle East Air Force, and also most of the bi-weekly intelligence reviews by the regional Joint Intelligence Committee, JIC (ME).

Joint Planning Staff

The Joint Planning Staff, founded in 1927, produced strategic appreciations and military plans. It was headed by the directors of plans of the three service ministries and divided into four permanent regional sections: Middle East, Far East, NATO, and section D for executive planning, which had world-wide responsibility to put plans into action. In addition, there was a new section committed to Baghdad Pact planning. The plans were typical of those made at a strategic level. They were outline plans that usually included aims, concepts for operations and resources available for operations. The detailed plans were to be produced by the Commanders-in-Chief in the various overseas theatres.⁵²

The military planning process at the strategic level was often initiated by a decision or an inquiry made by the Chiefs of Staff Committee. The Joint Planning Staff consulted the Joint Intelligence Committee and the other committees and produced a preliminary draft report on the subject. This draft was then studied and commented on by the operational branches of the service ministries and then sent to the three service ministries, where ministers, assisted by their directors of planning, produced official statements on the subject. These comments were considered at the Joint Planning Staff

⁵² NA DEFE 24/384, JP (56) 53, 20 March 1956, "History of the Joint Planning Staff".

meeting where the final draft on the subject was created. The draft was then presented to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, which would either approve it, approve it with comments or send it on for further consideration. The service ministries and their subordinate command structures then handled the execution of the plan.⁵³ The Joint Planning Staff produced surprisingly few documents during the Suez Crisis because planning was delegated to the Commander-in-Chief and his organization. Their documents in DEFE 6 have, however, been the main source of information on British contingency plans in the Middle East.

British Defence Co-ordination Committee, Middle East

The lack of a permanent theatre-level joint headquarters forced the British to establish regional co-ordination committees. In the Middle East, defence planning was co-ordinated by the British Defence Co-ordination Committee, Middle East (BDCC (ME)). According to its terms of reference, the committee was made “responsible for co-ordination of all civil and military matters in the region, having a bearing on defence”.⁵⁴ The committee included the heads of the service commands in the theatre. General John Keightley represented Middle East Land Forces (MELF). The RAF provided Commander-in-Chief for Middle East Air Force (MEAF), Air Marshall Hubert Patch for the committee. Since Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean had become Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean (NATO) in 1953; the Royal Navy was represented in the committee by a Flag Officer, Middle East.⁵⁵ The committee was chaired by a representative of the Foreign Office, the Head of the British Middle East Office. Note again the subordination of military affairs to political control. Both the air and land headquarters were in Cyprus. The Royal Navy had transferred its headquarters to Malta in 1946.⁵⁶ The area the

⁵³ Franklyn Johnson, *Defence by Committee. The British Committee of Imperial Defence 1885–1959* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 309–310.

⁵⁴ NA DEFE 6/5, JP (48) 15, 14 February 1948, “British Defence Co-ordination Committee Middle East”.

⁵⁵ The Commander-in-Chief was Admiral Guy GRANTHAM: married, 1932; two daughters. Military career: Naval ADC to the King, 1947–1948; Flag Officer, Submarines, 1948–1950; Flag Officer, Second-in-Command, Mediterranean Fleet, 1950–1951; Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff, 1951–1954; Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Station and Allied Forces, Mediterranean, from 1954.

⁵⁶ Peter Elliot, *The Cross and the Ensign: A Naval History of Malta 1798–1979* (London: Granada Publishing, 1982), p. 215. The Middle East Air Force was divided into two regional air headquarters: Air Headquarters Levant (RAF units in Iraq, Jordan, Cyprus and Libya) and

committee was responsible for was vast: it extended from Southern Rhodesia to Egypt and from Libya to Persia (Iran).⁵⁷

Allied Commander-in-Chief

As briefly mentioned earlier, the existing command structure was not taken full advantage of during the Suez Crisis. Overall command within the theatre was retained by the peacetime Commanders-in-Chief from the services. Meanwhile, a task force organization was established to plan and conduct Musketeer with the forces especially assigned to them. In practice, this meant that the Task Force Commanders did not have any units under their operational command before the task force organization was activated at the end of October. The peacetime command structure provided the resources for the task forces and it also administrated and commanded them. For the overall command, including the French forces, the Egypt Committee appointed General Sir Charles Keightley, Commander-in-Chief of Middle East Land Forces. On 22 August, his Joint Headquarters was set up in the War Office under the code name "War Office SD 12"⁵⁸

General Keightley's small headquarters consisted of approximately 50 people, mainly drawn from the army. The Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force had representatives in both the operational and administrative planning staff. The exact composition of the headquarters was very secret, even the documents of the National Archives did not contain a list of personnel. This is explained by two peculiarities in the planning structure: planning cells for both special operations and psychological warfare.⁵⁹ The fact that the co-ordination of special and psychological operations was concentrated in the C-in-C's headquarters also explains the lack of documents. General Keightley

Headquarters British Forces in Aden (RAF units in East Africa, the South Arabian Coast and the Persian Gulf), see David Lee, *Flight from the Middle East. A History of the Royal Air Force in the Arabian Peninsula and Adjacent Territories 1945–1972* (London: HMSO, 1980), pp. 28–29.

⁵⁷ NA CAB 131/13, DC (53) 41, 5 August 1953, "Command Organisation for the Middle East".

⁵⁸ NA DEFE 4/87, COS (56) 74th Meeting, 30 July, 1956; ADM 116/6209, *Naval Report on Operation Musketeer*, 15 February 1957, pp. 25–27, and DEFE 11/152 the War Office Memorandum *Formation of Joint Headquarters Cinc Middle East*, 22 August 1956. SD stands for Staff Duties. At the time of the crisis, there were only 7 sub-departments within the department of Staff Duties, see *The War Office List*, 1956 (Eighty-Second Publication), pp. 22–24.

⁵⁹ SHD 9 U 3, A telephone directory of General Keightley's Headquarters, compiled in the War Office on 21 August 1956.

himself and his staff were tightly interlinked with the British intelligence apparatus, and received substantial amounts of special intelligence, which was either destroyed afterwards or is still held by the different intelligence bodies. The intelligence connection is also the logical reason for not allowing a single Frenchman to be attached to this headquarters. Otherwise, the arrangement would be difficult to comprehend as General Keightley was, after all, the Allied Commander-in-Chief. As a result of the nature of "SD 12", there is no comprehensive list of its products. Some estimates, notes and directives by General Keightley are in the registered files of the Ministry of Defence, but, unfortunately, one can only guess how many are missing.

Task Force Commanders

The lack of a catalogue also applies to the tactical commanders' papers. They produced over thirty joint documents with the prefix *AFC (Allied Force Commanders)*. Less than half of these joint instructions, sailing programs and appreciations have been located. Still, they provide unique insight into the planning process, especially in relation to the introduction of General Keightley's concept in late August. The conflict between the theoretically splendid concept of Keightley and the pragmatic touch of the officers tasked with executing the operation is apparent. The Task Force Commanders started their planning only four days after the initiation of the new command structure in the Montague House Annexe of the War Office. The War Office nominated Lieutenant General Sir Hugh Stockwell,⁶⁰ the Commander of 1 British Corps, British Army of the Rhine (BAOR), as Land Task Force Commander. The organization of his headquarters was based on the establishment of a corps headquarters numbering up to 350 personnel.⁶¹ Therefore, his headquarters was designated Headquarters, 2 (British) Corps. WO 288 is devoted to the papers of this corps and its units. The set is

⁶⁰ Lieutenant General Hugh Charles STOCKWELL: b. 16 June 1903; married 1931; two daughters. Military career: Joined Royal Welsh Fusiliers 1923; served in West Africa, 1929–1935, Brigade-Major, Royal Welsh Brigade, 1938–1940; 30 East African Brigade, 1942–1943; 29 Independent Brigade, 1943–1945; Commander, 82 Division 1945–1946; Commander, Home Counties District (UK), 1946–1947; Commander 6 Airborne Division, 1947–1948; Commandant, Royal Military Academy, 1948–1950; Commander 3 Infantry Division and East Anglian District, 1951–1952; General Officer Commanding, Malaya, 1952–1954, General Officer Commanding, 1 Corps, British Army of the Rhine from 1954.

⁶¹ NA WO 288/65, The War Office, 10 August 1956, "Memorandum on Formation of Headquarters, 2 Corps".

gratifyingly complete. Orders, plans, war diaries and the reports of 2 Corps and its subordinate units, 16 Independent Parachute Brigade Group, 3 Infantry Division and 40 Sub-Area, to mention only a few, are carefully preserved. It was relatively easy to change concepts in army planning during Musketeer. The same cannot be said about the actual preparations. Despite painfully long lists of movement plans in WO 32, it would be most difficult to track down the actual movement of troops allocated to Musketeer due to the constant change in plans.

Vice Admiral Maxwell Richmond⁶², the Flag Officer, Second in Command, Mediterranean Fleet, was assigned as Naval Task Force Commander only to be replaced by Vice Admiral Robin Durnford-Slatter⁶³ in late October, when Richmond's tour in the Mediterranean ended. The Suez papers of the Royal Navy are contained in two main series. ADM 116 includes forty-three bound volumes of documents. In addition to Royal Navy reports on proceedings, these volumes include operational plans and papers created by the Task Force Commanders. ADM 205, papers of the First Sea Lord's Office, contains, amongst other things, operational plans, notes on the Navy's state of readiness and Lord Mountbatten's correspondence on preparations.

Air Vice Marshal D.H.F. Barnett, Commandant of the RAF Staff College, was designated as Air Task Force Commander.⁶⁴ While the other Task Force

⁶² Vice-Admiral Maxwell RICHMOND: b. 19 October 1900; married 1929; two sons and three daughters. Military career: Staff College, 1939; HMS Hostile in command; 1936–1938; HMS Basilisk in command, 1939–1940, Operations (Admiralty), 1940–1941, Senior Officer Escort Group (Atlantic and Russian convoys), 1942; Staff Officer to Commodore, Londonderry, 1943; Captain 3 Destroyer Flotilla, 1944–1946; Assistant Chief of Supplies (Admiralty), 1946–1948; Naval Liaison Officer in New Zealand, 1948–1950; Senior Naval Officer in Northern Ireland, 1951; Deputy Chief of the Naval Personnel, 1952–1955; Flag Officer (Air), Mediterranean, and Flag Officer Second-in-Command, Mediterranean Fleet from 1955.

⁶³ Vice-Admiral Leonard Francis DURNFORD-SLATER: b. 9 July 1902; married 1936; one son and one daughter. Military career: several assignments during the Second World War: Executive Officer, HMS Hermes and HMS Hermes; Senior Officer, Escort Group, Western Approaches; Director of Underwater Weapons (Admiralty). Post War: Senior Officer 1 Escort Flotilla; Commandant, School of Amphibious Warfare; Captain HMS Gambia; Deputy Controller (Admiralty), from 1953.

⁶⁴ Air Vice-Marshal Denis Hensley Fulton BARNETT: b. 11 February 1906, married 1939, one son and two daughters. Military career: Squadron Leader, 1938; 84 Squadron Commander, 1938; Squadron and Station Commander, and Staff Officer, Bomber Command, 1939 – 1944; Deputy Director, Bomber Operations (Air Ministry), 1944; Deputy SASO, Bomber Command, 1945; Director of Operations (Air Ministry), 1945–1946; Air Staff in India, 1946–1947; Joint Services Staff College, 1948; Commandant Central Bomber Establishment, 1949; Director of Operations (Air Ministry), 1950–1952; Representative of the Chiefs of Staff Committee in the UN Command, Tokyo, 1952–1954, Air Officer Commanding

Commanders brought the nucleus for their planning staffs from their respective peacetime headquarters, Barnett had no option but to assemble his staff from various RAF establishments.⁶⁵ Most of the Air Task Force papers are in AIR 20. There are no large gaps in the Air Task Force papers, and with the exception of the first overall air plan, all the subsequent air plans are available. Several excellent reports on Musketeer, such as Bomber Command's various reports in AIR 14, have been consulted as well as the Air Task Force Commander's overall report, which is preserved in AIR 24.

French archival sources, the French Command Structure

As mentioned earlier, this thesis does not aim to comprehensively describe French planning and preparations. However, it does seek to explain French influence on the development of the overall concept and British documents do not provide an adequate explanation of this aspect. Therefore, the French War Archives (*Service Historique de la Défense, SHD*) in Paris were consulted. The French documents reveal not only the attitude of the French high command on the evolution of the plans, but they also provide reasons for their views in the form of evaluations, internal correspondence, intelligence estimates and reports. The volume of French documents consulted in this study has been only approximately 1/10 of the British material. As a result, one may easily adopt the view that the French planning process in their national command structure was much more straightforward and smooth than was the case for their British counterparts. This may be partially true as at least General Beaufre was very frustrated by what he called "British planning". This picture is, however, partially unfair. As the research of this study focuses on British planning, the French planning process has not been examined in as much detail as that of the British.

In France, the military operation against Egypt was initially named Operation 700 (*Opération 700*) or Amilcar (sometimes also written as Hamilcar). The strategic guidance and allocation of forces was co-ordinated by the General

No.205 Group, Middle East Air Force, 1954–1955; Commandant, RAF Staff College from 1956.

⁶⁵ NA ADM 116/6209, "Naval Report on Operation Musketeer", 15 February 1957, pp. 25–27, and WO 288/77, "2 (Br) Corps Report on Operation Musketeer", 1 February 1957, pp. 10–11.

Staff (*Etat-Major Général des Forces Armées, CEMGFA*) in Paris. The documents of this command level have proven particularly valuable in establishing a picture of the initial French evaluations before the task force organisation was created. These documents are preserved in the 8 S series.

The French had to adapt themselves to British overall command. By the end of August, the time when General Keightley was nominated the Allied Commander-in-Chief, the command structure had been formed. The Allied Commander-in-Chief, as well as all three British Task Force Commanders, had their French counterparts as deputies. Vice Admiral P.E.M.J. Barjot was designated Allied Deputy Commander-in-Chief, but at the same time, he was Commander-in-Chief of all French forces (*Commandant en Chef les Forces Françaises Opérationnelles, C.C.F.F.O.*) participating in the operation. Barjot, like his British counterpart, General Keightley, possessed a small headquarters, which in this case consisted of approximately 70 people. The papers from Barjot's headquarters, preserved in the 9U3–9U5 series, have proved to be the most valuable. They include documents revealing French views on the development of the overall concept, French intelligence estimates and plans and reports by the French Task Force Commanders.

The French Task Force Commanders wore a "double hat", just like Admiral Barjot. General (*General de Division*) André Beaufre was the commander of the French Land Task Force, which was designated Force A. General (*General de Brigade Aerienne*) A.A. Brohon was the commander of the French Air Task Force, known as *Groupement Mixte No 1*, and Rear Admiral (*Contre Amiral*) P.J.G.M Lancelot was commander of the French Naval Task Force (*Force Naval D'Intervention*). The most important sources on the activities at the Task Force Commanders' level have been the three-part report and plans of Force A.

The Military Archives of Finland

It was rather surprising and pleasant to note that the Military Archives of Finland (*Sota-arkisto*) house some materiel relevant to the subject. Several Finnish officers attended British military courses at the beginning of the 1950s. Usually, they wrote a long memorandum on their experiences and on

the subjects taught in the courses. Their views, and above all, the original handouts used in these courses have confirmed the view that the tactical principles presented in British manuals were not dead letters. They were actually taught and put into practise.

The archival evidence, however, is not without gaps. The Egypt Committee did not make all the vital decisions by itself. The Prime Minister made some of them alone. The best example of this is the Sèvres Agreement. Eden authorised its signing without consulting the Egypt Committee or the Cabinet. After a hectic beginning, the pace of work in the Egypt Committee slowed down. In October – when certain military plans and decisions were made – there was a two-week pause in its meetings. One can assume that military matters were presented to the Prime Minister at private staff conferences, sometimes attended by no other politician. Unfortunately, records of these conferences are only fragmentary and provide an incomplete picture of the decision-making process.

Because much of the information on military planning and decision-making at a strategic level has been garnered from the papers of the three committees introduced above, it is useful and essential to evaluate the nature of these documents. A major part of the sources are different plans composed by various establishments at different levels. One must keep in mind that a plan is only an *intention* to do something. There was (is) a clear difference between a plan and an order. A plan is an *intention*; an order is an *execution*. This particularly applies to contingency plans, of which there were many in the military structure. Most of the plans were not carried out, but their value as evidence lies in their intention and in their purpose.

Highly confidential military plans, unlike policy papers, did not usually include political rhetoric. The military produced them for the serious purpose of preparing forces to meet contingencies where soldiers would be exposed to grave peril. When evaluating the veracity of documents, one should, however, remember the possibility of the plans being used for deception. When carried out properly, deception remains unidentified even by ones' own forces. Strategic deceptions are not revealed to subordinates operating at the tactical level. Instead, they are encouraged to create their plans and

estimates, and are kept unaware of the deception. In this thesis, the possibility that the documents used were created as part of a deception plan is rather small because the material includes documents from all the levels from strategic to tactical. A cross-section from a rather short period of time has enabled the author to evaluate the evidence.

Britain and the United States continued to exchange information after the Second World War. The UKUSA agreement, signed on the eve of the Cold War in 1947, enabled the signatories to exchange not only intelligence but also intelligence officers.⁶⁶ These exchanged officers prepared intelligence estimates on the Soviet Union and operational plans within the framework of NATO. However, the British military handled many matters, usually of British national interest, that were not delivered to its allies. For example, a great proportion of the Baghdad Pact documents belong to this category. In addition to a Top Secret grading, these documents were labelled with "Guard" or "UK Eyes Only" markings. Sometimes the true information is only found in special briefs for the highest military or political leadership. The distribution of these revealing documents was restricted by labelling them "Special Circulation" or "Suez Circulation" in the context of Suez.

1.3.2 Private papers and Oral History Projects

The official documents did not provide adequate explanations for all the questions raised in this thesis. Some themes, such as the evolution of the "victory through bombing" concept, psychological and special operations, and intelligence affairs required further clarification. In addition, apart from correspondence, the personal views of those in leading positions remain in the dark due to the laconic style of the official documents.

The Imperial War Museum has a substantial collection of private papers. For this research, the most valuable papers have been those of Air Vice Marshall Denis Barnett, the Air Task Force Commander during Musketeer, and Brigadier Kenneth Darling, who was the Chief of Staff of the Headquarters of 2 Corps.

⁶⁶ Peter Gudgin, *Military Intelligence, A History* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp. 79–80.

The papers of Lieutenant General Hugh Stockwell, the Commander of 2 Corps, and Major General John Churcher, the Commander of 3 Infantry Division, are at the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives. They have provided some information on planning and on views about the development of the overall concept.

The papers of the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Marshall of the Royal Air Force, William Dickson, are preserved at the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge. Unfortunately, they included no relevant materiel. The papers of the Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, Vice-Admiral William Davis, who was the Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff, and Rear-Admiral Lawrence Power, the Commander of the Carrier Group, which are also in possession of the Churchill Archives Centre, have been consulted.

According to the catalogues of the National Army Museum and the Royal Air Force Museum, the papers of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Templer and the Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshall Dermont Boyle do not incorporate relevant materiel.

The papers of General Charles Keightley are still in the possession of his family in Tarrant Gunville, Dorset. His son, Major General Richard Keightley, CB, kindly made the papers available. The papers do not radically alter the picture of the events in the Suez Crisis but they do offer some explanations on special themes such as psychological warfare. It also appears that General Keightley was much more critical about the status of British military readiness than his two official dispatches indicate.

The results of two oral history projects have also been utilised. Anthony Gorst and Scott Lucas conducted a series of interviews in 1989–1991. The materiel, which includes an impressive 22 interviews, is contained in the Suez Oral History Project at the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives. The collection has been an important reference in intelligence affairs and related psychological warfare. The transcripts of the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme (BDOHP) are preserved at the Churchill Archives Centre. The collection includes a large number of interviews with former diplomats. Although the testimonies provide insights from former diplomats and civil

servants, the collection contains relatively little information about the Suez Crisis.

The effect of the human factor, the influence of personalities, and the friction between different individuals on the course of events remains unclear even after this study as the official documents and the private papers revealed relatively little about this aspect. It is futile, and perhaps even dangerous, to try to draw a picture of the individuals involved without access to their personal files, which, according to current policy, are still held by the services.

1.3.3 Previous research and literature

In this study, the chronology of the political and diplomatic decision-making during the crisis is based on previous research. There are standard works, such as Keith Kyle's *Suez* and Lucas Scot's *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis*, that give an accurate and durable picture of political developments in the fateful months of autumn 1956. In this work, these two books have been the main sources on the political dimensions of the Suez Crisis. Of the political figures, the actions and views of Prime Minister Eden play a key role. The most informative picture of his conduct is presented in Robert Rhodes James' biography of Eden. Several articles in *The 1956 War: Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East*, edited by David Tal, and in the *Journal of Strategic Studies* were used to shed light on the co-operation with Israel and France.

Previous research based on primary sources on the military dimension of the crisis is surprisingly scarce. The general descriptions of the war, such as A.J. Barker's *Suez: The Seven Day War* and Roy Fullick's and Geofrey Powell's, *Suez the Double War*, were written long before the archives were opened. to researchers However, these works do provide an enjoyable and a fairly accurate account of the military operations. Robert Jackson had a good chance to write a detailed military analysis of Musketeer based on archival sources in the mid-1990s when he published *Suez: The Forgotten Invasion*. Unfortunately, the book mostly concentrates on the aerial warfare part of the

campaign. Research conducted outside the Anglo-American academic sphere has not been consulted in this study.

The French experience is well described by André Beaufre, commander of the French land forces. *The Suez Expedition 1956 (L'Expedition de Suez)* presents a critical view of the operational options available to the Allies. *Suez 1956* by Paul Gaujac is the best holistic French analysis of Operation 700. The research is evidently based on original documents, but its value as a source is unfortunately questionable due to a lack of adequate source citation.

Insight into Egyptian preparations for the war remains incomplete due to a lack of Egyptian primary sources. The best picture is provided in a collection of articles, *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956, Retrospective and Reappraisal*, which was edited by Selwyn Troen and Moshe Shemesh in 1990.

On the naval side, Eric Groves' durable and detailed *Vanguard to Trident*, which actually concentrates on the development of British post-war naval policy, is along with Ian Speller's *The Role of Amphibious Warfare in British Defence Policy, 1945–56*, the best account of the Royal Navy's participation. There is one work on aerial warfare that rises above all others, *Wings Over Suez*, published by Brian Cull's team in 1996. It is a detailed description of the air campaign during Musketeer. It analyses the roles of all participating air forces, and provides valuable information on the Egyptian Air Force. David Lee's account *Wings in the Sun: A History of the Royal Air Force in the Mediterranean 1945–1986* has provided important background information on the Royal Air Force's preparations in the Middle East.

The analysis of tactical doctrine is principally based on the Amphibious Warfare Handbooks of the time. As mentioned earlier, the Amphibious Warfare Headquarters produced an impressive set of handbooks, some 40 in the early 1950s, which provided detailed instructions on amphibious operations. These handbooks can be found at the National Archives. Further understanding of the complicated nature of warfare is found in contemporary service manuals.

The *Notes from the Theatres of War* series offer unique insight into British tactical experience in the Second World War. In the early 1950s, the Army Council launched a project that aimed “to preserve the experience gained during the Second World War.” Some products of this series, such as *The Development of Artillery Tactics and Equipment* and *Maintenance in the Field*, were the most valuable sources for understanding the British way of warfare. The definitive account on strategic bombing is the official report of the British Bombing Survey Unit, re-produced by Frank Cass in 1998.

Several unpublished dissertations have at least partially touched upon Operation Musketeer. Dawi Awaad Al-Solami was one of the first scholars to produce an academic study on Suez after the files were opened. Although military preparations are an important part of his thesis, “British Preparations for the Suez War–1956”, he focuses more on the political preparations. As a result, he has ignored most of the available military sources. While some of his work, particularly the chapter on psychological warfare, is based on reliable analysis, his inclination to find evidence of collusion with Israel is too great. His hypothesis seems to have become an obsession, leading to conclusions that cannot be supported by the known evidence.

Both the “The Joint Intelligence Committee and British Intelligence Assessment, 1945–1956” by James Craig and “The British Chiefs of Staff Committee, Military Planning and Alliance Commitments, 1955–1960” by Gareth Wyn Rees have been very useful sources for getting an overview of the British military machinery. I have tried to combine their approach. Namely, the basic problem with previous research on Suez has been the artificial separation of the perception of the threat and the plans. The perceived threat, the geographical facts, the resources available, and time are the key elements in the military planning. These factors could, of course, be overruled by political expediency, as was done during the Suez Crisis.

Michael Thornhill’s, “Britain and the Egyptian Question, 1950–1954” provides valuable background information on the Suez Crisis and also on the problems of British strategy in the Middle East. The seeds of the conflict and for the use of force were planted in the years preceding the final nationalisation of the Canal. The logic of the Cold War, you are either with us

or against us, worked against Nasser's ambitions to achieve an independent and influential position in the Arab world. Problems that preceded the Canal Zone Base agreement in 1954 and other factors helped convince the British that their vital interests were at stake when Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal. The problems of Middle Eastern policy are well presented in "British Cold War Strategy and the Struggle to Maintain Military Bases in Cyprus, 1951–60" by K.A. Kyriadikes. Kyriadikes' work focuses on the position of Cyprus, Britain's main base in the Middle East after the withdrawal from the Canal Zone. In addition to providing interesting information on British deployments, Kyriadikes' thesis offers valuable information on British preparations for a Global War.

2 TO BE OR NOT TO BE – BRITISH STRATEGY AND THE TROUBLESOME MIDDLE EAST

"The principal object of our Middle East policy has recently been stated by the Ministers to be the security of the oil on which the United Kingdom so greatly depends".⁶⁷

The Middle East played an important role in British strategy during the Second World War. After the British Expeditionary Force withdrew from France, the Middle East became the main battlefield for the British for three years. The British, due to their relatively strong influence during the early years of the Anglo-American coalition, were able to pursue a strategy that promoted their interests in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean.

The Second World War had a profound effect on the world order. Britain's position and power were in decline. The process of decolonization, the increase of American and Soviet influence in the Middle East, inter-Arab rivalry, and the Arab-Israeli conflict created a situation that is hard to comprehend. The true causality of events and decisions in this relatively short period of time is still disputed by scholars. As a result, any attempt to try to write a new, objective history of the entire course of developments would be outside the scope of this work. However, it is still necessary to understand the general development of British post-war strategy in the Middle East in order to understand the decisions that were made at the strategic level during the Suez Crisis.

2.1 Three-tier strategy prioritises the Middle East

Britain was not prepared to meet the demands of the emerging Cold War. The post-war Labour cabinet inherited huge economic problems in spite of Britain's victory in the Second World War. The commitments to establishing a welfare state and to retaining the status of a super-power proved to be an impossible combination. In 1947, Prime Minister Attlee's government made three important decisions: withdrawal from India, submission of the Palestine

⁶⁷ NA DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 97, 25 May 1956, "United Kingdom Commitments under the Baghdad Pact"

question to the United Nations, and termination of aid to Greece and Turkey.⁶⁸

However, the fundamental problem was how to execute a controlled withdrawal from the Empire without leaving it to the mercy of local nationalists who were considered to be easy prey for the Soviet Union aiming to expand its ideological influence. In May 1947, the Defence Committee accepted an important assessment by the Chiefs of Staff. The "Future Defence Policy" paper was to "set out fundamental principles which should govern our future Defence Policy and to arrive at a clear statement of the basic requirements of our Strategy". Along with the paper, the United Kingdom adopted an anti-Soviet policy by concluding that "The most likely and formidable threat to our interests comes from Russia".⁶⁹

The paper called for an anti-communist containment policy that was much like that adopted by the United States under the Truman Doctrine. The paper emphasised the value of active measures aimed at opposing the spread of communist influence in areas of strategic importance to Britain. The British Isles, the ever-important sea communications, and the Middle East were the basic ingredients of the so-called three pillars strategy. Counting on the effects of the American atomic stockpile and on the coming British nuclear weapons (the decision to develop a national atomic force had been made in January 1947),⁷⁰ the British adopted an offensive air campaign as their principal means of countering the Soviets in the case of Global War. Apart from their economic significance, the Middle East and Egypt in particular were regarded as a "vital strategic area" since it was an important staging area for the offensive air campaign.⁷¹ The *raison d'être* for this was both geographical and technical. The limited range of the bombers available did not make it possible to carry out full-scale atomic attacks against industrial

⁶⁸ Michael Cohen, "The Strategic role of the Middle East after the War" in Michael Cohen and Martin Kolinsky (ed.) *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East. Britain's Responses to Nationalist Movements 1943–55* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 23–25.

⁶⁹ Julian Lewis, *Changing Direction. British Military Planning for Post-war Strategic Defence 1942–47* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 370–380.

⁷⁰ Andrew Brookes, *The History of Britain's Airborne Deterrent V-Force* (London: Jane's, 1982), pp. 6–8.

⁷¹ Lewis, pp. 380–383.

targets beyond the Ural Mountains from bases in the British Isles. These targets, however, were reachable from the Middle East.⁷²

The British idea of defending the Middle East and her Middle Eastern policy in general was soon challenged. The establishment of a Jewish state in 1948 caused a profound change in the Middle East. It is clear that for the British, Israel was an unwanted player in the mosaic of intricate politics in the Middle East. The existence of Israel forced Whitehall to balance not only between delicate relations amongst the Arab states, but also between the Arab world and Israel.

In order to boost and maintain an uneasy armistice between the Arab states and Israel following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, France, Great Britain and the United States made a unified effort to stabilise the region. The agreement, known as the Tripartite Declaration, was designed to maintain peaceful co-existence between the Arab states and Israel. According to the declaration, the three governments agreed not to supply weapons to bellicose states and to commit themselves to take action if any of the states in the region violated the regional *status quo* with an aggressive act. The declaration soon became more or less a dead letter. It was not long before Israel, Egypt and Jordan were in a vicious circle of attacks and reprisal attacks. The declaration did, however, have an effect on its signatories' policies. This was particularly the case with British policy, since the agreement restricted arms sales to Israel and to the Arab states.⁷³

2.2 Deterrence and continental strategy gain momentum

The three-tier strategy emphasised British national interests. It was soon confronted by a continental strategy: European defence. The political dimension of defending Europe within the WEU (Western European Union)

⁷² Michael Cohen, "The Strategic role of the Middle East after the War" in Michael Cohen and Martin Kolinsky (ed.) *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East. Britain's Responses to Nationalist Movements 1943–55* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 26–27.

⁷³ NA CAB 158/25, JIC (55) 42, 15 September 1955, "Soviet Threat to the Middle East in a General War up to the End of 1959"; For the effect of arms sales, see Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez. Eisenhower Takes America into the Middle East*, (New York: The Linden Press, 1981), pp. 47 and 73. The full text of the declaration is easily accessible at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/tridec.html>.

and NATO gained momentum in the last months of 1949 once the American strategy moved towards defending Europe, even while this change was bitterly disputed in the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁷⁴ The shift altered both Allied policy and strategic war plans. The earlier strategic war plans, such as Halfmoon and Offtackle, had called for a withdrawal from Central Europe. Due to Soviet supremacy in conventional forces, American planners had assumed that the Soviet onslaught would be nothing but a repetition of the German campaign of 1940. The feeble Allied forces would be overrun. The Americans and British would have no other option but to hold the British Isles, the Iberian Peninsula and Northern Africa and to conduct a bombing campaign with nuclear weapons on the Soviet infrastructure and to re-invade Central Europe after adequate forces were mobilised.⁷⁵ Aside from the development of Soviet nuclear weapons, the weakness of the concept was that the feasibility of large, Overlord-type amphibious operations aimed at re-capturing Europe was considered to be at least questionable.⁷⁶

In 1950, the Chiefs of Staff accepted an important policy paper: "Defence Policy and Global Strategy". This paper signified a swing towards a continental strategy. There was no prospect of a repetition of Overlord because by the time of the landings "the Russian occupation would have put an end to Western Civilisation".⁷⁷ The paper, however, was not a declaration of a nuclear only-strategy. It stressed the value of deterrence, but not at the expense of the conventional force structure.⁷⁸

The communist aggression in Korea, a communist sponsored insurgency in Malaya, and the change in American policy have been seen as watershed events in British post-war policy. As a result of hardening attitudes, the government made a decision in January 1951 to launch a three-year re-

⁷⁴ Paul Cornish, *British Military Planning for the Defence of Germany, 1945–50* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 161–162 and Marc Trachtenberg, *History & Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 153–158.

⁷⁵ For a summary of American nuclear plans, see Michio Kaku and Daniel Axelrod, *To Win a Nuclear War. The Pentagon's Secret War Plans* (Boston: South End Press Ltd, 1987), pp. X–XI.

⁷⁶ Colin McInnes, *Hot War, Cold War: The British Army's Way in Warfare 1945–95* (London: Brassey's (UK) Ltd., 1996), pp. 6–7.

⁷⁷ Eric Grove, *Vanguard to Trident, British Naval Policy since World War Two* (Annapolis: 1987), pp. 66–67.

⁷⁸ Stephen Twigge & Alan Macmillan, "Britain, the United States and development of NATO Strategy, 1950–1964", in *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2/1996 (June 1996), p. 261.

armament programme. The decision called for an expenditure of £4,700 million over following three years, which effectively doubled the annual defence expenditure of the period prior to the Korean War.⁷⁹

The defence of the Middle East proved to be very problematic. According to plans produced in the late 1940s, the main defence of the vital assets was to take place at the so-called Ramallah line. This defence line ran from Israel to Aqaba and was geographically ideal because of its narrowness and proximity to the Canal Base Area. In addition, the main routes from the Euphrates Valley to Egypt went through this line.⁸⁰ Due to the Arab-Israeli dispute the plan was politically difficult in practice, and was in reality actually impossible. The plan also did not incorporate the countries in the northern tier of the Middle East, such as Iran (Persia), into the defence in any way.

A defence at the Ramallah line was designed to hold Egypt, the main British base in the Middle East, and to keep the Suez Canal open. However, the British position in Egypt could no longer be taken for granted. While the British were planning to defend their position in Egypt against a Soviet onslaught, the British position in Egypt became more and more compromised. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Egypt, formally independent since 1922, sought the evacuation of all British Forces from its soil. Finally, in late 1951, a period of constant turmoil began. The problems included armed clashes between the Egyptians and the British.⁸¹

- Before negotiations for a British withdrawal were to resume, a dramatic change in Middle Eastern politics took place in the summer of 1952. Dissatisfaction with King Farouk's rule, generally considered inefficient and corrupt, had slowly matured among the junior officers of the Egyptian army.

⁷⁹ Correlli Barnett, *The Verdict of Peace. Britain Between Her Yesterday and the Future* (London: Macmillan, 2001), pp. 32–42.

⁸⁰ Michael Cohen, "The Strategic role of the Middle East after the War" in Michael Cohen and Martin Kolinsky (ed.) *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East. Britain's Responses to Nationalist Movements 1943–55* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 29–32. For the main routes in the Middle East, see NA DEFE 60/147, Joint Intelligence Bureau (ME), 91/F, May 1952, "Through Routes from the Canal Zone to the Euphrates".

⁸¹ Michael Thornhill, *Britain and the Egyptian Question, 1950–1954*. DPhil thesis (Oxford: Oxford Trinity, St. Antony's College, 1995), p. 44.

At the end of July 1952, the Free Officers, as the group called itself, executed a successful military coup with the tacit consent of the US and Britain.⁸²

2.3 Global Strategy Paper

The crude contradiction between military resources and commitments forced the Chiefs of Staff to constantly re-evaluate the British position. In summer 1952, the Chiefs of Staff produced a memorandum entitled the "Global Strategy Paper". This document listed the objectives and means for a British strategy for years to come. It should be noted that the document was an extension of earlier papers and that its value as a true policy paper has been debated by scholars.⁸³

The paper promoted an effective nuclear deterrent as "the first essential of allied policy". Due to the devastation caused by nuclear weapons – no longer a monopoly of the United States since the Soviet Union had exploded its device in 1949 – allied policy was to aim to avoid a Global War with the Soviet Union. The most cost-effective way to accomplish this goal was to adopt a strategy of declaratory deterrence. According to the Chiefs, "The knowledge that atomic attack would be swift, overwhelming and certain is the main deterrent that will prevent Russia risking world war."⁸⁴ As mentioned earlier, the British government had decided to produce its own nuclear weapon as early as 1947 and the results of these plans would be seen within a few months of the Global Strategy Paper. However, it must be noted that as important as the first tests were scientifically and politically, it would still take years before British nuclear forces would be operationally ready.⁸⁵

The Global Strategy Paper divided the problems faced by Britain into two parts: the ones facing the Free World, meaning the world outside the Sino-

⁸² Ibid. According to Scott Lucas, the Americans, due to CIA involvement, were well informed of the plans in advance. The coup also had a direct influence on the British ability to acquire information from Egypt because British contacts with the Free Officers were almost non-existent, Lucas, pp. 14–16.

⁸³ On the importance of the Global Strategy Paper, see, John Baylis and Alan Macmillan, "The British Global Strategy Paper of 1952", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2/1993 (June 1993) pp. 219–222.

⁸⁴ NA CAB 131/12/1, D. (52) 26, 17 June 1952, "Defence Policy and Global Strategy".

⁸⁵ Stephen Twigge & Len Scott, *Planning Armageddon. Britain, The United States and the Command of Western Nuclear Forces 1945–1964* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 2000), p.47.

Soviet Bloc, and the ones directly confronting the United Kingdom. The Middle East was considered to be an important objective of the communist expansion that threatened British interests in Africa. As the centre of the Muslim World, the population of the Middle East would in theory set a good example for Muslims in Asia in resisting the expansion of atheistic communism. Militarily, the Middle East provided an important network of bases for Allied bombers launching a strategic nuclear air offensive against the Soviet Union in the event of Global War. However, the most important of all reasons was access to oil because it was a precondition for favourable economic development. The problems facing British policy were of a commercial nature. The “traditional and commercial interests in the area” consisted of several treaty obligations and the oil that had “particular importance to the United Kingdom”.⁸⁶

However, nuclear deterrence would not deter the Soviets from trying to expand their influence by any means that fell short of an all-out attack on the West. Actually, the Chiefs anticipated that a prolonged period of Cold War would be “the most likely” outcome because effective deterrence would make the likelihood of Global War small.

Because of its importance, the Middle East played a key role in the Cold War struggle against communist expansion. However, the Chiefs of Staff had to adjust to economic realities. They suggested a radical reduction of the Middle Eastern garrison. A smaller but more versatile force structure called for the establishment of a “Global Strategy Garrison” consisting of only one division and approximately 160 aircraft in the Middle East. This force would be sufficient to safeguard British interests in the Middle East, assuming that plans to establish a defence organization that included the United States in the defence of the region succeeded.

2.4 Egypt unwilling to co-operate with the West

The idea of combining efforts in the Middle East came from the very beginning of the Cold War. Early plans anticipated the use of British bases in

⁸⁶ NA CAB 131/12/1, D. (52) 26, 17 June 1952, “Defence Policy and Global Strategy”.

Egypt as the key area for launching nuclear attacks. The concept of forming a NATO-type alliance gained momentum in 1951 when the British proposed the establishment of the Middle East Command (MEC) under their supreme command.⁸⁷ One of the basic assumptions was that Egypt would be part of this coalition.

Egypt, however, was not willing to commit itself to a military alliance. It sought real independence from the British. In order to solve the Canal Zone problem rapidly, the Free Officers rejected Farouk's ambition of uniting Sudan and Egypt, which the former regime had interlinked with British withdrawal from Egypt. This clever political manoeuvre removed the greatest political obstacle hindering withdrawal and thus stripped the British of a political weapon that they had used during the talks on leaving the Canal Zone.⁸⁸

The re-start of the negotiations on British withdrawal from Egypt was closely linked with a change in the orientation of US policy in the region. During a fact finding tour of the Middle East, the new US Foreign Secretary, John Foster Dulles, drew some contradictory conclusions. The first observation concerned British power in the region. According to Dulles, British colonialism provided a stepping stone for the Soviet ideological campaign against the West.⁸⁹ In that sense, the political harm caused by the British military presence in the Canal Zone was greater than the military advantage the United States got from the situation.

⁸⁷ Peter Hahn, "Discord or partnership? British and American policy toward Egypt, 1942–56" in Michael Cohen & Martin Kolinsky (ed.), *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East. Britain's Responses to Nationalist Movements 1943–55* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 170–171.

⁸⁸ According to A.I. Dawisha, the adoption of this attitude on the Sudanese question was merely a political manoeuvre to eliminate British control over Sudan. The idea of the "unity of the Nile valley" was not abandoned, see A.I. Dawissa, *Egypt in the Arab World. The Elements of Foreign Policy* (London: MacMillan Press, 1976), p. 9.

⁸⁹ Anthony Seldon, *Churchill's Indian Summer. The Conservative Government, 1951–1955* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), pp. 392–393. Dulles characterised colonialism as an "Achilles' heel – the point through which a mortal blow could be struck", John Foster Dulles, *War or Peace* (New York: MacMillan, 1950) p. 75.

During the same tour, Dulles also became aware of the waning Egyptian interest in the alliance against the Soviet Union. The conclusion was clear: no Middle Eastern Defence Organization could be formed around Egypt.⁹⁰

As a result of this new political evaluation, US pressure on Britain to withdraw from Egypt mounted steadily. Simultaneously, a new military concept was maturing in Britain. Due to the technical development of atomic weapons and their delivery systems and the sparse resources available, the idea of abandoning the Canal Base gained momentum in the British military establishment.⁹¹ The Canal Base was no longer considered vital to Global War preparations.

Finally after long negotiations, Britain and Egypt signed the Heads of Agreement on 28 July 1954, with the final agreement coming three months later. The Anglo-Egyptian Defence Agreement required Britain to pull out all its forces from the Canal Zone by June 1956.⁹² The seven-year agreement allowed Britain to place the Canal Base area on a war footing if Egypt, any member of the Arab League or Turkey was attacked by a third party.⁹³

As Scott Lucas puts it, the agreement "ended open hostility between London and Cairo but it did not bring the 'new era of co-operation and mutual understanding' sought by the British."⁹⁴ Egyptian policy soon underwent a radical reorientation that worsened relations not only with the British, but also with the Americans. The basic challenge, not acknowledged or seemingly deliberately misunderstood in Britain and in the United States, was that Nasser, who was taking the leading role in Egypt, was not keen to become a political vassal of the Americans or the British. Instead, his ambition was to

⁹⁰ Scott Lucas, pp. 26–27. See also the memorandum of the conversation between the US Secretary of State and the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs May 11 1953, FRUS 1952–1954, Vol IX (The Near and Middle East) Part 1, pp. 5–6. Dulles introduced the new concept to President Eisenhower almost immediately after returning from his Middle East tour, Memorandum of Discussion at the 147th Meeting of the National Security Council, June 1, 1953, FRUS 1952–1954, Vol IX (The Near and Middle East) Part 1, pp. 379–384.

⁹¹ Michael Cohen, *Strategy and Politics in the Middle East 1954–1960* (Oxon: Frank Cass, 2005), pp. 24–26.

⁹² For a timetable of the withdrawal, see NA WO 106/5985, The Chief of Imperial General Staff to S of S, 3 January 1956.

⁹³ Cmd. 9230 *Heads of Agreement: Anglo-Egyptian Defence Negotiations regarding the Suez Canal Base, Egypt No.1*, (HMSO, 1954).

⁹⁴ Lucas Scott, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), p. 39.

extend his personal and Egyptian power and prosperity, while not becoming dependant on the West. Mohamed Heikal clearly expresses the matter from the Egyptian point of view. From the Egyptian perspective, the defence pacts “always come to the same thing: committing Egypt to an unequal alliance which would certainly perpetuate the stationing of foreign troops on Egyptian soil and very likely involve Egypt in a war with Russia”.⁹⁵

2.5 In pursuit of a common defence

The agreement to withdraw from Egypt was noted in a policy paper accepted by the Defence Committee at the end of 1954. This paper was a logical continuation of the Global Strategy Paper. It was a secret manifesto of Britain's ambitions to develop a hydrogen bomb. The introduction of the hydrogen bomb – tested by the United States in 1952 and by the Soviet Union a year later – had had a clear-cut impact on policy, “since Global War would probably result in mutual annihilation”. Because of the potential devastation that could be caused by thermonuclear weapons, it became more important than ever to adopt a strategy of preventing an all out Global War. To achieve this, Britain was to contribute to the allied nuclear deterrent with an effective nuclear arsenal. “The greater the deterrent, the less the risk”, the Chiefs of Staff concluded.⁹⁶

The document also covered British aims in the Middle East and tellingly reflected the change taking place in strategic thinking. The British adopted the American view on building up a defence organisation in the northern tier of the Middle East. The British military presence in the region would be maintained by small, efficient land/air forces that could be rapidly reinforced from a strategic reserve stationed in Britain. The reasoning behind this thinking was the estimate on the likelihood of war. An all out Global War against the Soviet Bloc was considered unlikely in the short term. Instead, political and military turmoil could develop as a consequence of the Cold War. The British were in the region not only to defend it, but also to

⁹⁵ Mohamed H Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes* (London: Andre Deutch 1986), p. 52.

⁹⁶ NA CAB 131/14 D (54) 43, 23 December 1954, “United Kingdom Defence Policy”. Actually the Cabinet had secretly decided to develop a hydrogen bomb in June 1954, see Lorna Arnold, *Britain and the H-Bomb* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 56–57.

demonstrate and convince local governments of Britain's political commitment to the Middle East.⁹⁷

The combined political-military dimension of the defence planning was articulated in the document "United Kingdom Strategic Intentions". Not surprisingly, the paper emphasised the importance of deterrence, but it also called for active measures to counter the Soviet threat when waging the Cold War. The Joint Planning Staff, which produced the document, estimated that the Soviets would also retain the initiative in the Cold War in the future. Militarily, the answer would be the establishment of an adequate strategic reserve, a highly mobile force of two divisions and a parachute brigade group, and an adequate peacetime deployment.⁹⁸

The document confirmed the British commitment to a continental strategy and promoted British commitment to NATO by concluding that in case of a Global War "The holding campaign in the West must therefore take priority over those in the Middle East and Far East". This conclusion had a direct effect on the Global War force allocation. According to the Global War force structure, the bulk of UK-originated land force reinforcements should be sent to Europe. Apart from individual reinforcements and some units from African colonies, no significant reinforcement was projected for the Middle East, although deployment of one division from the strategic reserve was considered possible.⁹⁹

Although they possessed different strategic goals that often excluded the national interests of the other party, both Britain and the United States agreed upon the necessity of a defence organisation in the Middle East to counter the rise of Soviet influence. After the negative Egyptian attitude towards the defence block became apparent, the emphasis moved to the northern tier of the Middle East. Because the Egyptian-centred defence coalition failed, the defensive effort was to be focused on the outskirts of the Middle East by linking up Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Syria.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ CAB 131/14 D (54) 43, 23 December 1954, "United Kingdom Defence Policy".

⁹⁸ NA DEFE 6/26, JP (54) 100, 23 November 1954, "United Kingdom Strategic Intentions".

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Michael Cohen, *Strategy and Politics in the Middle East 1954–1960*, pp. 68–69.

Encouraged by the Americans, Turkey and Iraq signed a defence pact in February 1955. The treaty was called the “Baghdad Pact” and became an alliance when Britain and Pakistan joined it in April 1955. Later that year, the alliance was enlarged when Iran joined.

Despite co-operation in many fields, the alliance did not gain real momentum since the original *primus motor* did not join the pact. The United States turned down Britain’s persistent appeals to join the alliance. The reasons for turning down the British appeals were as complicated as the Middle Eastern situation in general. The Eisenhower administration did not want to identify itself with Britain too closely due to British colonialism. The US also thought that the British design was to concentrate all its efforts against Nasser and not against the Soviet Union. The most formidable obstacle was Israel. The United States was committed to preserving the state of Israel. Membership of a pact that could potentially be used against Israel was considered impossible without providing the Israelis a security guarantee. This in turn would have compromised US efforts in its relations with the Arab world.¹⁰¹

2.6 The Czech–Egyptian arms deal shakes the delicate balance

The Arab-Israeli dispute was perhaps the greatest obstacle in establishing a united Middle East to counter the rise of Soviet influence or to resist an attack in the case of Global War. Simply put, it was a question of security. Israeli independence was followed by a steady cycle of violence. Attacks and reprisal attacks took place at infrequent intervals. In theory, the Tripartite Declaration should have prevented the distribution of arms to the belligerents, but in practice a small-scale arms race raged in the region.

The Czech–Egyptian arms deal in 1955 dramatically altered the political and military *status quo*. Nasser, in the face of escalating border violence, decided in 1954 to modernise the Egyptian Armed Forces. Since the US and Britain were unwilling to sell Egypt modern weapons, Nasser turned to Moscow. The Soviet Union, looking for any opportunity to obtain a foothold in the Middle

¹⁰¹ For the US motives for not participating in the Baghdad Pact, see, e.g., Memorandum of Conversation between the Secretary of State and Congressional leaders, April 10 1956, FRUS 1955–1957, Vol XV (Arab-Israeli Dispute), pp. 505–507.

East, committed itself to providing modern weapon systems to the Egyptian Armed Forces in a deal signed in September 1955.¹⁰²

The Soviet entrée was a political shock to the British and Americans because arms deals were regarded as the worst kind of subversion. After the arms deal, the US State Department had to bury its top secret venture, Operation Alpha,¹⁰³ which aimed to bring peace to the Middle East. In spite of this severe set-back, Eisenhower's administration persisted in December 1955 in promoting its influence by offering a loan to the largest Egyptian economic project at the time. The aim was to start massive dam projects on the Nile.¹⁰⁴ However, the Egyptian response was not positive from the US perspective. Nasser remained unimpressed by the US offer and did not respond to persistent appeals to commit Egypt to an Arab-Israeli settlement. A lack of confidence in the Egyptians, poor prospects for the Egyptian economy and resistance in Congress were the main reasons for the withdrawal of the offer by the US administration on 19 July 1956.¹⁰⁵

Nasser, determined to modernise the Egyptian economy through land reform and improved energy production, turned to the Soviets who had earlier hinted at the possibility of assistance.¹⁰⁶ Moscow, seeking to detach Egypt from the West, was willing to grant a loan for the Aswan Dam project.¹⁰⁷ This development was viewed with alarm in London. According to a Joint Intelligence Committee appreciation, a growing economic dependence on the Soviet Union could ultimately turn Nasser, who was initially regarded as a political opportunist, into an obedient client of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Rami Ginat, *The Soviet Union and Egypt, 1945–1955* (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1993), pp. 235–236.

¹⁰³ For the details of ALPHA see, e.g., Memorandum from the Deputy Under-Secretary of State (Murphy) to the Under-Secretary of State (Hoover), May 23 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Vol XIV (Arab-Israeli Dispute), pp. 199–204.

¹⁰⁴ For details of the offer, see Telegram from the Department of State to the US Embassy in Egypt, December 16 1955, FRUS 1955–1957, Vol XIV (Arab-Israeli Dispute), pp. 868–870.

¹⁰⁵ Memorandum of a Conversation, White House, July 19 1956, FRUS 1955–1957, Vol XV (Arab-Israeli Dispute), pp. 861–862.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Mabro, *The Egyptian Economy 1952–1972* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 81–82.

¹⁰⁷ It took almost three years to conclude the negotiations for the loan. Finally, in December 1958, the Soviet–Egyptian agreement was signed. The loan of 400 million roubles had an annual interest rate of 2.5%. The loan was to be paid back within 12 years after the dam was finished, see Marshall Goldman, *Soviet Foreign Aid* (New York: Praeger, 1967), appendix 4.

¹⁰⁸ NA CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 20, 4 April 1956, "Factors Affecting Egypt's Policy in the Middle East and North Africa"

Developments would probably not have seemed so sinister from the American and British point of view had the Egyptians not concluded a defence treaty with Saudi Arabia and Syria in April 1956. This, combined with an arms offer by the Soviets to these countries, provided undisputed evidence to the British and Americans of the grand design of Soviet subversion.¹⁰⁹

One could claim that Jordan played a particular role in British policy in the middle of the 1950s. It did not possess oilfields and due to its geographic location it did not control any vital sea lanes. Its army, the Arab Legion, was definitely better on paper than in reality, even though it was commanded by British officers. However, Britain had signed a defence treaty, including an article on collective defence, with Jordan in 1948. This treaty allowed some British forces to be stationed in Jordan.¹¹⁰

The reason for the special position of Jordan was, in fact, Egypt. The British regarded Jordan as a balancing factor in the region. After Nasser took over, Jordan became part of Britain's political "Nasser-containment" scheme. According to Whitehall's reasoning, British withdrawal from Jordan would cause a political vacuum that would only be filled by Nasser's virulent anti-imperialistic influence. This, in turn, would lead to instability in the whole region, thus weakening long-term British economic interests in the Middle East. There were also military reasons for a commitment in Jordan. British bombers could use two excellent airfields – Amman and especially Mafraq – when participating in the strategic air offensive against the Soviet Union. Still, the loss of prestige and influence in the region was considered more dangerous than the loss of bases.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ David Dallin, *Soviet Foreign Policy after Stalin* (London: Methuen & CO Ltd, 1960), pp. 396–397.

¹¹⁰ On the permanent British commitment to Jordan, see NA DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 57, 8 March 1956, "Implications of Recent Developments in Jordan".

¹¹¹ NA DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 64, 16 March 1956, "Review of the United Kingdom Position in Jordan". Mafraq with its 9 000 feet (~3 000 meter) runway was supposed to host a medium bomber squadron in the event of the looming Global War. According to K A Kyriakides, Mafraq was the only airfield aside from Akrotiri that was capable of supporting the nuclear deterrence, as delivered by V-bombers, in the Middle East. However, British V-bombers operated successfully from the Luqa Air Station during the Suez Crisis. See Kyriakides, "British Cold War Strategy and the Struggle to Maintain Military Bases in Cyprus, 1951–60", p.118.

By 1956, the British grip on Jordan was inevitably weakening. Britain was unable to bring Jordan into the Baghdad Pact. The Chief of Imperial Staff, General Gerald Templer, travelled to Jordan to negotiate the Baghdad Pact. Egyptian pressure, domestic politics and a desire to reduce British influence in Jordanian politics resulted in the negotiations going nowhere. According to President Eisenhower, Britain suffered its worst diplomatic setback in the Middle East in many years.¹¹²

There was worse to come. In February 1956, the Jordanians dismissed and expelled General Glubb Pasha, the commander of the Arab Legion. His dismissal and HMG's subsequent decision to ask the Jordanians to relieve other British officers serving in the Jordanian Armed Forces had a twofold effect. According to the Chiefs of Staff, British influence suffered a considerable setback and hopes for enticing Jordan into the Baghdad Pact practically ceased to exist.¹¹³

The blame for the whole episode was put on Nasser. British apprehension of Egyptian involvement gained new vigour when Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt initiated staff talks on a military alliance against Israel. The Joint Intelligence Committee considered the Jordanian position of "non-adherence of any foreign military alliance" unrealistic. It would be very difficult to resist Egyptian influence.¹¹⁴

As mentioned earlier, Israel was a problem for British Middle Eastern policy. The Suez Crisis brought the two countries together for a short period of time but as Zach Levey states, this "partnership did not flow from any prior Anglo-Israeli strategic understanding".¹¹⁵ Looking at the matter from the British perspective, Israel had little to offer. Aside from the fact that the Israeli Defence Forces were considered the most effective military in the region, and thus a useful component in the Global War, Israel was of marginal value. One could even simplify the matter by claiming that in the sinister world of

¹¹² Keith Kyle, *Suez* (London: Weinfeld and Nicholson, 1991), pp. 90–91.

¹¹³ NA DEFE 5/65, COS (56) 100, 8 March 1956, "Review of the World Situation".

¹¹⁴ NA CAB 159/23, JIC (56) 39th Meeting, 26 April 1956.

¹¹⁵ Zach Levey, "Anglo-Israeli Strategic Relations, 1952–56", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 4/1995 (October 1995), p. 772.

realpolitik where vital national interests and the existence of the weak were at stake, Israel was considered expendable.

Paradoxically, both Israel and Egypt opposed the Baghdad Pact, but for different reasons. Since Nasser's motives have already been explained, it is time to discuss the Israeli situation. The Israelis were highly suspicious of the pact. Any unified alliance orchestrated by Britain would pose a potential threat to Israel. The Israelis realised that the British would sacrifice them if they had to choose between their vital interests and the existence of Israel.¹¹⁶

Although relations between Britain and Israel were far from cordial, the British withdrawal from the Canal Zone was seen as a negative development from the Israeli point of view. British forces had served as an artificial buffer between Egypt and Israel. As a result of the pull-out, the British capacity and will to intervene in response to Egyptian aggression in accordance with the requirements of the Tripartite Declaration was significantly weakened.

The Czech-Egyptian arms deal was a turning point in Israeli-Egyptian relations, and it had two clear consequences in Israel. Due to US and British reluctance to provide arms to Israel, the Israelis turned to France. Although France was a signatory of the Tripartite Declaration, French policymakers regarded the strengthened military co-operation as a tool for containing Arab nationalism. As a result, the French agreed to sell advanced weapons to Israel and committed themselves to co-operation in other fields, such as sharing intelligence. Another consequence was linked with Israeli views on the regional *status quo*. The Czech-Egyptian arms deal was seen as weakening Israel's security to such an extent that the idea of a preventive war slowly gained support in the Israeli government.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Yair Evron, *The Middle East: Nations, Superpowers and Wars* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 33.

¹¹⁷ David Tal, "Introduction: 'The New Look at the 1956 Suez War'" in David Tal (ed.), *The 1956 War: Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001) pp. 8–10 and Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 48–50.

2.7 The Suez Canal – warrantable risk of war

Only two weeks before the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, the Defence Committee examined British requirements in the Middle East in the light of developments. The basics of British strategy remained unchanged: a Global War should be prevented and Soviet aims, especially in the Middle East, should be resisted and Limited War should be won.¹¹⁸

Rising nationalism in the Middle East was interlinked with Soviet subversion, which could not be fought efficiently by militarily means. In his memorandum on the situation in Egypt in early 1956, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Gerald Templer, had summed up the nature of the problem tellingly: "As has been said before the problem presented is neither completely diplomatic, nor military, nor economic. It is an amalgam".¹¹⁹ Cultural, political and economic initiatives should, however, be supported by an adequate military presence, which would provide additional confidence to local regimes resisting Soviet influence. In this sense, British deployment in the region can be at least partially interpreted as being more for demonstration than for militarily reasons.

However, the Chiefs had a pessimistic view of the British capacity to resist Soviet Cold War methods. Their note claiming that "Britain had drifted into a vicious circle of inability to influence events" was quite realistic.¹²⁰ Part of the problem in Middle Eastern policy was that Britain lacked a coherent overall strategy and, above all, the resources to counter the Soviet Cold War offensive in the Middle East. Its opponents had grabbed the initiative as General Templer soberly noted: "The danger of dealing with each situation piecemeal, is like that in playing chess tactically, not strategically, in which one's opponents gradually manoeuvres one into a position from which it is impossible to recover".¹²¹

¹¹⁸ NA CAB 131/17, DC (56) 17, 3 July 1956, "United Kingdom Requirements in the Middle East".

¹¹⁹ NA WO 216/926, Memorandum by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, January 1956.

¹²⁰ NA DEFE 5/69, COS (56) 232, 15 June 1956, "United Kingdom Requirements in the Middle East".

¹²¹ NA WO 216/926, Memorandum by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, January 1956.

The conflict of political, economic, and military goals was evident. An adequate force should be maintained in the Middle East as a political guarantee to local regimes resisting Soviet and nationalist subversion. However, these regions were not militarily important or even a practical solution. The deployment of an armoured division in Libya was not militarily preferable. Although the western desert offered a good, familiar training ground for an armoured force, it would take months to re-deploy the division somewhere else. Politically, however, Libya was in the front-line of preventing the spread of the nationalism preached by Nasser. The same logic applied to Jordan. The value of Jordan was mainly political: to provide psychological support to Baghdad Pact members and to retain British influence in Jordan. Militarily, only the air base at Mafraq, which was classified as a forward base in the strategic bombing plans, was an important asset. The Chiefs of Staff regarded the Anglo-Jordanian treaty as "an embarrassment" militarily. Of the Middle Eastern countries, Iraq was considered the most important because its ruler pursued a pro-western policy and its airfields, Habbaniya above all, offered adequate bases for a strategic air offensive. By July 1956, it had become clear that there was no return to the Canal Zone and the Chiefs very soberly assessed that the British were not in a position to maintain their base in the Canal Zone after the existing agreement expired in 1961.¹²²

Interestingly enough, the Chiefs listed several issues that were regarded as a "warrantable risk of war". A Soviet invasion would be part of a Global War and would cause an immediate UK commitment to the war, as would any politically comfortable, ambiguous United Nations operation. The remaining reasons for war were based on national self-interest: oil and a threat to free passage through the Suez Canal.

If Middle Eastern oil and the Suez Canal were factors that would drive the United Kingdom into military action, why were they so significant?

The importance of the Suez Canal – the 160 kilometre-long waterway between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea – to Britain can hardly be

¹²² NA CAB 131/17, DC (56) 17, 3 July 1956, "United Kingdom Requirements in the Middle East".

overemphasised.¹²³ Although Britain was able to survive without the Canal, as the five-month closure of the Canal in 1956–1957 showed, it was considered a vital part of British communications before the Suez Crisis. In 1955, approximately 116 million tons of cargo was transported through the Canal. British vessels carried about 30% of this total. Most of the traffic – 87 million tons – was northbound.¹²⁴ The main users of the Canal in terms of tonnage were the oil tankers, accounting for about 68–72 million tons of the traffic. As with the other vessels, most of the tankers headed northwards. About 20.5 million tons, 80% of the steadily increasing annual British oil consumption, was transported through the Canal. France, the other shareholder, was the second largest oil importer using the Canal: 12 million tons out of its annual 19-million-ton demand was transported through the Canal.¹²⁵

In the absence of the North Sea oilfields, which were only discovered after the Suez Crisis, Britain was dependant on Middle Eastern oil.¹²⁶ This amply explains its interest in the region. In 1955, the Middle Eastern Countries produced approximately 160 million tons of oil, which, according to a Chiefs of Staff Committee memorandum, "was equal to nearly two-thirds of all oil used by the free world outside the USA." Britain and Europe in particular were vulnerable to any disruption in oil production or transportation. Almost 100 million tons of Middle Eastern oil was imported to Europe. Most of this oil was carried in tankers through the Suez and 40 million tons were pumped through the pipelines running from Iraq and Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean coast.¹²⁷

¹²³ For a brief history and some statistics about the Canal, see, e.g., *The Suez Canal: Notes and Statistics* (London: Percy Lund, Humphies & CO LTD, 1952).

¹²⁴ D.C. Watt, *Britain and the Suez Canal* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1956), pp. 9–13.

¹²⁵ D.C. Watt, *Britain and the Suez Canal*, pp. 9–13 and NA CAB 134/1302, Middle East (Officials) Committee, (56) 6, 10 August 1956, "Financial Background and the Problem of Compensation to the Suez Canal Company." On the annual consumption levels, see *Europe's need for oil. Implications and Lessons of the Suez Crisis.* (Paris: OECD, 1958), pp. 60 and 76. British oil consumption was some 21 million tons in 1954, *Britain, An Official Handbook, 1956 Edition* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956), p. 172.

¹²⁶ It is worth noting that Western dependency on oil from the Arab countries did not go unnoticed by Nasser, see Gamal Abdul Nasser, *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution*, (Washington D.C: Public Affairs Press, 1956) pp. 106–109.

¹²⁷ NA DEFE 11/133, COS (56) 160, 20 April 1956, "Middle East Oil Communications". An OEEC publication claims that in 1956, when the Suez Crisis disrupted the region, some 180 million tons of oil were produced in the Middle East, see *Europe's need for oil, Implications and lessons of the Suez Crisis*, p.11. According to the Maritime Transport Committee's report "under normal conditions a total quantity of 105 million tons of oil would have become

Any disruption of the oil transport system would have a direct effect on the British economy. The closure of the pipelines would not significantly disturb oil deliveries as the United States could replace its own loss by increasing production. Tankers operating in the Eastern Mediterranean would be redirected to the Persian Gulf. If the Canal was closed, but the pipelines left intact, the result would be more severe. Still, most of the requirements could be met during the summer months by mobilizing the reserve tanker fleet. In both cases, the Treasury's delicate balance of payments would come under pressure. The worst scenario involved closure of both the Canal and the pipelines. This would cause a severe oil deficit. It would reduce European oil imports by 25 million tons annually. If the situation was prolonged, the British economy would suffer permanent damage. However, the Chiefs of Staff Committee, which evaluated British dependence on oil only a few months before the Canal was nationalised, reasoned that the worst-case scenario would not be beneficial to Egypt, Syria or Lebanon. It would endanger one of their main incomes – the transit fees. But Nasser – the memorandum concludes – could act against the oil routes, if he found it useful for his own ambitions. Furthermore, influential Egypt could possibly force Syria and Lebanon to play along.¹²⁸

In 1956, the Canal Zone Base Area was an important, but not vital, part of British preparations for war. The War Office had worked for some time to decrease military reliance on the Canal Zone infrastructure by directing the Middle East Land Forces to consume the massive stores in the area.¹²⁹ However, the base area still housed a large amount of materiel. Approximately 140 000 tons of materiel was stored in the area. 20 000 tons of ammunition, which was about 50% of theatre reserves, was stored in a vast complex of warehouses and depots. While additional storage was being built in the new deployment area, 90% of the theatre's war reserve of aviation fuel still remained in the Canal Zone Base. The base workshops were an

available for Europe during the year 1956", see NA MT 59/3091-3092, Maritime Transport Committee, Paris, 7 December 1956, " Draft Study on the Consequences of the Closing of the Suez Canal".

¹²⁸ NA DEFE 11/133, COS (56) 160, 20 April 1956, "Middle East Oil Communications".

¹²⁹ NA WO 32/16584, A Message from Troopers to Middle East Main, 977797 / Q (Ops) 1, 13 March 1956 and Memorandum by the War Office, 57 Egypt/6511/Q(Ops) 1 on 23 July 1956, "Policy on the Stocks in the Canal Zone".

important part of the Middle Eastern maintenance facilities. The annual repair output was estimated to be over 1 000 vehicles and just as many engines. A large number of weapons were repaired there. The civil contractors operating at the base were required to maintain staging facilities for aircraft at two air bases.¹³⁰

2.8 Conclusions

This chapter may have painted a very confusing picture of the British strategy and position in the Middle East. This image is accurate. Completely altered political alignments, economic troubles, strong old imperial traditions, and a pool of new political players fundamentally shook the political arena in the Middle East.

At the beginning of the Cold War, Britain and the United States pursued very different policies and strategies. They shared a common view of communism: that it should be contained, but that was practically the end of their common interests. Britain still advocated a view of the world that put Britain at the centre of affairs in the Middle East. This is natural even though the disintegration of the British Empire was gaining momentum. At the same time, the Americans saw a bipolar world: a global confrontation between the "Free World" led by the United States and the Soviet Union cunningly trying to slip the menace of communism under the iron curtain. In that world, the British Empire had no place because colonialism, in the American view, was a gift to the Soviet ideological campaign.

The Global Strategy Paper and its successors committed Britain to strategic deterrence and a continental strategy; the latter promoting the importance of Europe. However, the Middle East was still considered an important area, mainly due to economic considerations. The British government decided to re-arm in the early 1950s. It soon became clear that Britain could not be strong everywhere. As a result, the development of nuclear deterrence and the defence of Europe were prioritised. According to the strategy papers,

¹³⁰ NA, DEFE 4/83, JP (55) 144, 26 January 1956, "The Canal Zone Base", and Principal Administrative Officers Committee (56) 5, 30 January 1956, "The Logistic Implications Arising from the Denial to Us of the Canal Zone Base".

military deployments in the Middle East were to be reduced radically. The most important reduction was, of course, the decision to withdraw from the Canal Base Area, which had become unnecessary in Global War preparations due to technological development.

The role of the British military presence in the Middle East changed. Instead of being vital from a defence perspective, the military forces became merely a tool to promote British political commitment in region. However, there was less and less to promote as both the United States and the Soviet Union slowly engaged more and more actively in Middle Eastern politics. Due to the lack of a united front between the US and Britain, the Soviet Union was able to grab and consolidate a political foothold in the area. From the British perspective, it was most unfortunate that the Soviet political invasion took place in Egypt since it held a significant position in the Arab world. Through Egypt, the Soviets were able to influence other states in the region. This became a horrible reality when Jordan refused to join the Baghdad Pact and dissociated itself from military co-operation with the British.

It is somewhat peculiar to note the inflexible attitude of the political climate of the time. The mental attitudes of the Cold War had very little, if any, space for neutrality, which was considered a conduit for the Soviet influence. In this light, it is easy to see that Nasser's policy of promoting a nationalism independent of Western influence was bound to drift into a collision course with the West from the very beginning. The situation deteriorated after he started to consult the Soviets. In London, he and his policy were denounced as being nationalistic, in Washington he was regarded as a potential "could-be communist". The Americans, resolute in their condemnation of British imperialism, noticed that US imperialism seemed to suit Nasser no better. Not even the Czech–Egyptian arms deal, which truly electrified the political atmosphere in the Middle East, resulted in the US and Britain being able to agree on how to deal with Egypt.

Part of the problem was the Arab-Israel conflict because it divided British and American views. The Americans had committed to preserving Israel while the British were a partner in a defence pact directed against Israel. Moreover, both Washington and London realised that Israel was considered an even

worse menace than the Soviet Union by the countries surrounding it. This dispute united the Arabs and thus fuelled Arab nationalism, which in turn was considered vulnerable to Soviet subversion. However, there were no prospect of a common policy towards Israel.

Without a long-term policy and the active assistance of the United States, British policy in the Middle East became a "no-win game." Britain lacked a reliable ally, resources and perhaps also the determination to counter political events in the Middle East. Nationalism supported by the new super-power, the Soviet Union, was too much for the British to resist. The days of independent policy were hopelessly over, but it would take a major conflict for anyone to realise it.

3 BRITISH MILITARY PREPARATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

"The greatest problem lies in preventing direct or indirect Soviet action from undermining the Middle East stability in peace and, thus, threatening our vital oil interests and frustrating our hopes of holding the area in war"¹³¹

Having described the principles and problems of the British Middle Eastern policy and strategy briefly, it is now relevant to examine how the armed forces were prepared to meet military threats in the region. An analysis of the threats faced is a key factor for any armed forces preparing for a war. Britain, which still possessed a large empire, was not able to concentrate its efforts on one type of war. On the contrary, as described earlier, the British were compelled to counter multiple threats by the time of the Suez Crisis: Global War, Limited War and Cold War. They all required different force structures and contingency plans.

3.1 Global War

3.1.1 The destructive nature of Global War

According to British intelligence estimates, the likelihood of Global War was relatively low. The Soviet leadership would not choose to start a war because of the US nuclear deterrent and because post-Stalin Soviet policy had been successful in many fields. In addition, Soviet politicians were able to feel safer because recent weapons developments had given the Soviet Union leverage in the form of nuclear weapons.¹³²

If against all predictions the Soviet leadership chose war as a means to expand the influence of communism, they would launch the war without warning, surprise being one of the key elements in Soviet military doctrine. The Soviets would hide their real intentions – deception being common in Soviet political practice – by pursuing a political *détente* prior to the hostilities. In conjunction with the demonstration of apparent goodwill, the Soviet leadership would orchestrate a political campaign against the cornerstone of NATO's defence: nuclear weapons. Simultaneously, the Soviets would put

¹³¹ NA DEFE 5/65, COS (56) 100, 8 March 1956, "Review of World Situation".

¹³² NA CAB 158/24, JIC (56) 21, 1 May 1956, "Likelihood of Global War and Warning of Attack".

political pressure on neutral and NATO countries where there were significant communist parties with the aim of breaking up the alliance's cohesion and unity. The political campaign in the Middle East would also intensify, as the Soviets would continue to encourage local nationalism and neutrality.¹³³

Global War would take the form of a nuclear war. Both the Soviets and the Allies would use their nuclear inventory from the very beginning because the elimination of the opponent's counter strike capability would be the first priority. According to estimates, the United Kingdom – a base for the Allied strategic air offensive – was one of the main nuclear targets. Even if the Soviet attack concentrated only on the Allied bomber bases, the results would be dreadful because the US air bases were in the vicinity of populated areas.¹³⁴ If the nuclear attacks spread to other target areas – the central government, population centres and industry – the effects would be even more devastating. In 1954, before the Soviets exploded their first hydrogen bomb, two working parties conducted studies on the effects of an atomic attack against the United Kingdom. According to their estimates, a nuclear attack would cause over two million casualties and leave eight million people homeless. The bombing of military targets would destroy half the medium bomber force and almost the entire reserve fleet. The army's capacity to send reinforcements overseas would become uncertain. The paper very soberly came to the conclusion that "If war came and no counter-measures of this sort had been adopted we would be quite unable to implement our present plans. We might not survive the initial attack and could do little to prevent Europe being overrun in the opening phase of the war."¹³⁵

The introduction of the hydrogen bomb made prospects even darker. According to the Joint Global War Committee's final report on the effect of a

¹³³ NA CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 4, 2 January 1956, "Soviet Strategy in the Event of Global War up to the End of 1960" and CAB 158/24, JIC (56) 21, "Likelihood of Global War and Warning of Attack".

¹³⁴ At the beginning of 1956, the USAF (United States Air Force) had approximately 530 combat planes in the United Kingdom, see NA CAB 131/17, DC (56) 1, 23 January 1956, "Land Requirements of the United States Air Force in the United Kingdom".

¹³⁵ NA CAB 158/24, JIC (56) 41, 10 May 1956, "Likely Scale and Nature of Attack on the United Kingdom in Global War up to 1960". In the document, the JIC estimated that within a few years the Soviets would have 10-megaton yield nuclear weapons. On the nuclear effects on the United Kingdom, see NA DEFE 5/51, COS (54) 16, 15 January 1954, "Report of a Working Party on the Problems for the Armed Forces in the Initial Phase of War".

nuclear exchange taking place in the mid-1960s, approximately 30% of the population of the British Isles would be dead in the aftermath of a nuclear attack in a worst case scenario.¹³⁶

Apart from its nuclear arsenal, the Soviet Union possessed frightfully powerful armed forces. The Soviet Army had 2.8 million men in 175 active divisions ready for operations on the first day of a war. This army would be supported by approximately 180 vessels of cruiser or destroyer size, over 400 submarines and by almost 20 000 aircraft.¹³⁷

The attack of the conventional forces would commence after the Soviet leadership had assessed the outcome of the initial nuclear exchange. Multiple operations would target the invasion of North-West Europe, Western Turkey and Western Thrace in Greece in the first phase. To prevent reinforcements from the United States from reaching the region, a maritime campaign against sea communications would be conducted. Control of the exits of the Baltic and the Black Seas would be important as they controlled the sea lanes to the main Russian ports. The Soviets would not take the risk of compromising the factor of surprise by preliminary troop movements or mobilisation.¹³⁸

3.1.2 Global War in the Middle East

The Joint Planning Staff concluded that the threat of a Soviet invasion of the Baghdad Pact and the Middle East was linked with a Global War. A Limited War in the region would be unlikely because of the deterrence effect of the Baghdad Pact. Rather than using armed forces, the Soviets would pursue their political objectives through Cold War methods. The Soviets would slowly advance towards their political goals by supporting minorities, using

¹³⁶ NA DEFE 10/385, Joint Global War Committee, JGW (57) 7, 21 November 1956, "Report on the Nature, Course, and Duration of the Global War".

¹³⁷ NA CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 3, 14 March 1956, "Sino-Soviet War Potential, 1956–1960".

¹³⁸ NA CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 4, 2 January 1956, "Soviet Strategy in the Event of Global War up to the End of 1960".

economic aid and propaganda, and by promoting political and ethnic differences.¹³⁹

Various committees, the Joint Intelligence Committee amongst them, found it very difficult to evaluate the possibility of war and its effects. If a Global War started, the Soviet main line of attack was predicted to be in Europe. In the Middle East, Soviet operations would mainly aim at countering the Allied ability to launch nuclear attacks on the Soviet mainland. Their secondary aim was to deny Allied access to the oilfields of the Middle East and to cut vital communication lines.¹⁴⁰

The Western political position in the Middle East worried the British. The Joint Planning Staff assumed that in addition to the Baghdad Pact countries, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon would be on the Allied side. They would assist the Allied war effort by granting access to bases and by permitting Allied forces to pass through their territory. Estimates of Syria's likely attitude divided opinions. The Joint Intelligence Committee believed that Syria would be hostile, whereas the Joint Planning Staff counted on Syria's reliability. Egypt, the most influential country in the region, was a big question mark. Would Nasser respect the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement? The Joint Intelligence Committee came to the conclusion that Egypt would respect the Anglo-Egyptian Defence Agreement if the Soviets were the aggressors. But in future, as Egypt became increasingly dependant on the Soviet Union, there was a greater possibility that this would change.¹⁴¹

Of the Baghdad Pact nations, Turkey was thought to be the primary target of a Soviet invasion. The elimination of the Allied air bases in Turkey would reduce the Allied nuclear threat significantly. After taking control of the exits from the Bosphorus, the Soviets would have complete control over the Black Sea. The operation against Turkey would also serve another goal: it would

¹³⁹ NA DEFE 6/34, JP (56) 2, 4 January 1956, "The Baghdad Pact, Appreciation of the Military Situation" and CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 11, 17 January, "The Threat to the Baghdad Pact Area in Conditions Short of Global War and in the Global War up to 1960".

¹⁴⁰ NA CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 4, 2 January 1956, "Soviet Strategy in the Event of Global War up to End of 1960".

¹⁴¹ NA DEFE 6/34, JP (56) 2, 4 January 1956, "The Baghdad Pact, Appreciation of the Military Situation", and CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 3, 14 March 1956, "Sino-Soviet Bloc War Potential, 1956–60".

secure the left flank of the operation aimed at occupying the Middle East. The Soviets would attack Turkey from two directions. The main effort of eleven divisions would advance from Bulgaria (the Western Force) and the holding attack would come from the Caucasus (the Eastern Force). If the Soviets achieved operational surprise, the attack would meet its objective – the seizure of the Bosphorus – within two weeks. If the surprise attack failed, the attack across the Bosphorus would commence with twelve divisions on D+44.¹⁴²

The occupation of the whole of Turkey would be based on a double envelopment and would be synchronised with operations in Iraq and the Levant. This attack would start on D+52. The Western Force would advance along three routes and reach Ankara by D+79 and the Cilician Gates by D+121. Simultaneously, the Eastern Force, which would be up to seven divisions strong, would move along three axes and advance to Eastern Turkey. This force would meet the Western Force at the Cilician Gates or at Iskenderun at D+144 days.¹⁴³

It was thought that the mountainous terrain would have a significant effect on Soviet operations against Iran and Iraq. While the final objective would be the occupation of the oilfields of the Arabian Peninsula, the first phase of the operations would aim to capture the passes of the Zagros Mountains. Only after that could further operations be developed into the Iraqi Plain and the Persian Gulf. The invasion would commence with an advance by four motorised detachments across the four main Zagros passes. These groups would achieve their objectives in eight days (D+8). This spearhead would be followed by up to ten divisions. These divisions would push through the passes by D+7 to D+23. After passing through the Zagros Mountains, the follow-up divisions would pursue four lines of advance. In subsequent

¹⁴² NA CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 5, 2 March 1956, "Employment of the Soviet Armed Forces in the Land Campaigns in the Event of Global War 1956–1960". On force strengths, compare with JIC (56) 11, 17 January 1956, "The Threat to the Baghdad Pact Area in Conditions Short of Global War and in Global War up to 1960". In the latter document, the Joint Intelligence Committee estimated the eastern attack on Turkey to be up to 7 divisions strong (in comparison to the initial estimate of 4), because it was thought that a landing of 2½ divisions would take place in Trabzon.

¹⁴³ NA CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 11, 17 January 1956, "The Threat to the Baghdad Pact Area in Conditions Short of Global War and in Global War up to 1960", and CAB 158/22, JIC (55) 77, "The Threat to the Baghdad Pact Area up to 1960 in Global War-Brief for U.K. Representatives at Baghdad Pact Meetings".

operations, two divisions would invade Mosul by D+37, one division would invade Kirkuk by D+36 and at the same time the largest force of up to five divisions would capture Baghdad. A force of between two and three divisions would advance on the south and seize Basra by D+46.¹⁴⁴

In co-ordination with the attack on Iraq, a separate force of up to four divisions from the Caucasus and Turkmenistan would invade Iran. A single detachment would be used to capture Tehran, after which the main force would advance in two columns to reach the Persian Gulf in Bushire by D+50 and Bandar Abbas by D+35. As in all the estimates, the effects of possible nuclear strikes were not thoroughly analysed. The Joint Intelligence Committee doubted that the main body of Soviet forces would start moving before the outcome of the initial nuclear attack was certain.¹⁴⁵

The seizure of Iraq and Persia would be followed by a campaign in the Levant¹⁴⁶ and in the Persian Gulf region. Leaving three divisions behind for internal security duties, a Soviet force of seven divisions would attack from three directions towards the Mediterranean. The southern group, consisting of three divisions from the Baghdad area, would advance through the largely uninhabited deserts of Iraq and Jordan to the Mediterranean. The division in the centre would advance from the Tigris to Palmyra, Syria and then to Damascus. The northern group would advance along the axis of the Mosul–Aleppo railway which, when open, could support up to three divisions. This force would meet the forces operating initially against Turkey at Iskenderun by D+144. The absence of organised resistance and the easier terrain would enable the Soviets to invade the oilfields of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain very rapidly. A division strong attack from Basra would reach Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, within a week of its start.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ NA CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 11, 17 January 1956, "The Threat to the Baghdad Pact Area in Conditions Short of Global War and in Global War up to 1960".

¹⁴⁵ NA CAB 158/21, JIC (55) 42, 15 September 1955, "Soviet Threat to the Middle East in a General War up to the End of 1959".

¹⁴⁶ In this context, the Levant means the countries along the Eastern Mediterranean shores. See Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., s.v. "Levant".

¹⁴⁷ NA CAB 158/21, JIC (55) 42, 15 September 1955, "Soviet Threat to the Middle East in a General War up to the End of 1959".

Strategic threat perceptions – especially when assessed within alliances – can become useful instruments for political manoeuvring. The estimate on the course of a Global War in the Baghdad Pact region is a typical example of the theme. The British produced special estimates for Baghdad Pact planning. In one estimate, the Soviet operational concept was similar to the national estimate, but the timetable of the attack was significantly different. In the Baghdad Pact estimate, Soviet forces would pass the Zagros passes by D+15 to D+34 – about 7–10 days later than in the original estimate. Figures were changed on the grounds of political expediency. It would not be profitable or encouraging to give too gloomy a picture of Soviet capabilities. The same tendency applied to the effects of nuclear weapons: the British did not know themselves what the exact effect would be, which meant it was very easy to make the effects of nuclear weapons fit any needs. None of the Baghdad Pact countries – developing countries at the time – had any experience with nuclear technology. The notes of the two estimates are very revealing. On 14 January, the Joint Intelligence Committee warned readers of its estimate: “So far as possible this brief has been written to conform with the estimate agreed with Turkish representatives... We wish to stress that this estimate has been prepared for use in the context of the Baghdad Pact meetings and should not be used for any other purpose.”¹⁴⁸

A note by the Air Ministry dated 8 June 1956 is even more revealing. In order to reduce the requirements imposed by the Pact nations, an estimate promoting the effectiveness of nuclear weapons was under production. The Air Ministry’s note emphasised that the estimate should be compiled in a way that would not only “reduce inflated and unrealistic demands for land forces by the Pact countries” but also “demonstrate the effectiveness of nuclear weapons and the over-riding advantages that their use would give to the defence of the Baghdad Pact area”.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ NA CAB 158/22, JIC (55) 77, “The Threat to the Baghdad Pact Area up to 1960 in Global War – Brief for U.K. Representatives at Baghdad Pact Meetings”.

¹⁴⁹ NA DEFE 5/68, COS (56) 224, 8 June 1956, “The Baghdad Pact – Future Planning. The Impact of Nuclear Weapons on the Form of Global War in the Middle East”.

3.1.3 Deterrence and bluff – the Baghdad Pact and the defence of the Middle East

In November 1956, the United Kingdom's chief planner reported pessimistically on the planning process of the Baghdad Pact by concluding "Progress in Pact military planning is too slow to ensure confidence in its effectiveness as a military instrument". The chief planner complained about the United Kingdom's minimal commitment and about the selfishness of the other Pact nations. Some very basic questions – such as the operational concept – remained unresolved after twelve months of planning. At the same time, the prestige of Britain had been damaged due to the international humiliation caused by the unhappy end of Musketeer.¹⁵⁰

A year earlier, in late November 1955, the Joint Planning Staff had introduced its first draft on a concept for operations within the Pact. The concept, which conceded that the Soviets would enjoy both quantitative and qualitative superiority as implied in the Joint Intelligence Committee's estimates, relied on an Allied strategic air offensive and the use of nuclear weapons in the theatre. The defence would take advantage of the mountainous terrain. There were two alternatives for the main defence line. It could be organised either along the Elburz Line running from Lake Urmia to Tabriz, the Elburz Mountains and the Afghan frontier or the Zagros Line covering Lake Urmia, the Zagros Mountains and the Straits of Hormuz. Both the Americans and the British preferred the latter alternative from the very beginning because it had numerous advantages from a military point of view. As the mountain chain is deep in Iranian territory, the Soviet logistical system would be overstretched even before Soviet forces encountered the main defence line. Long communication lines and difficult terrain would provide opportunities for guerrilla warfare and aerial operations to slowly wear down the Soviet numerical superiority. Defence on the Zagros Line would also buy time for possible Allied reinforcements to pour in through the ports of the Levant or the Persian Gulf. If the main defence was on the Elburz Line, the defensive forces would have to be deployed there in peacetime in order to

¹⁵⁰ NA DEFE 6/39, JP (56) Note 10, 23 November 1956, "The Baghdad Pact, Report by the United Kingdom Chief Planner".

meet the Soviet aggression on the first day of the way. However, this caused very difficult political questions to be asked.¹⁵¹

The Joint Planning Staff had a gloomy view of Pact capabilities. There was no command structure or forces assigned to it. All available forces were kept under national command and were not deployed where they were needed. A theatre air offensive was not even considered feasible owing to the lack of an early warning system or adequate air bases. Turning the Pact into an efficient alliance would require a substantial amount of time and resources.¹⁵²

As within NATO, the primary defence would be a strategic air offensive under separate – in principle American – command. Massive use of nuclear weapons would reduce the Soviet capacity to reinforce their forces on various fronts. It would also hamper or destroy the command system and radically reduce the Soviet air threat. These attacks would be directed at targets deep inside Soviet territory.¹⁵³

The Joint Planning Staff also suggested that a separate theatre nuclear campaign should be conducted within the Pact area. This operation would concentrate on Soviet airfields, geographic chokepoints, ports in the Caspian and Black Seas, large troop concentrations and communication centres.¹⁵⁴

In a separate study on the nuclear option, the Joint Intelligence Committee estimated that there were about 50–70 suitable targets in the theatre. The approximately 30–40 airfields were the main targets. An attack on these targets would significantly reduce the Soviet aerial threat. The ports that had facilities for loading ships or amphibious operations, seven altogether, would suffer the worst. The harbour facilities and any possible invasion force would be virtually annihilated. Soviet ground forces would be attacked along their long lines of approach in 20 different areas. Despite the severe casualties

¹⁵¹ NA DEFE 6/34, JP (56) 2, 4 January 1956, "The Baghdad Pact, Appreciation of the Military Situation" and DEFE 6/32, JP (55) 156, 29 November 1955, "The Baghdad Pact, Concept of Operations".

¹⁵² NA DEFE 6/32, JP (55) 157, 21 December 1955, "The Baghdad Pact, Measures to Increase the Effectiveness of Defence Forces".

¹⁵³ NA DEFE 6/32, JP (55) 156, 29 November 1955, "The Baghdad Pact, Concept of Operations".

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

they would cause, these attacks would not stop the Soviet advance. They would only delay and limit it. The initial delay was estimated to last somewhere between several days and a fortnight.¹⁵⁵

During the first planning session in spring 1956, the vague picture of the capabilities of the Pact was clarified. The main aim of the conventional forces of the Baghdad Pact was to buy time for both the strategic and the theatre air campaigns. However, even this was eventually regarded as being too demanding a task. In theory, the Pact could field around 40 divisions, which was actually more than the Soviets would deploy in the area. Behind the numbers; however, there was a multinational, underdeveloped military machine that was hampered by political and national objectives. British planners found severe defects in all fields. The divisions were weaker than their Soviet counterparts. Security was so poor that the British were reluctant to draw up or discuss operational plans (if they really existed) with other Pact countries. Most Pact countries possessed very limited air forces, lacked air defence systems and had wretched base structures.¹⁵⁶

A relevant question at this stage is whether Britain was actually committed to such a weak alliance. What were Britain's genuine aims in the pact? The brief to the First Sea Lord underlines the British economic interest: "The greatest problem lies in preventing direct or indirect Soviet action from undermining the Middle East stability in peace, and thus threatening our vital oil interests and frustrating our hopes of holding the area in war". The same document references the political dimension of the pact: "Defence alliances for threatened countries represent both a deterrent to Global War and are aimed to give necessary confidence in the Cold War. Such alliances however imply an obligation to accept a "forward strategy" and hold as much territory as possible".¹⁵⁷

However, Britain was neither prepared nor able to bring economic or military assets to the pact. At the beginning of February, the Ministry of Defence

¹⁵⁵ NA CAB 158/25, JIC, (56) 88, 30 August 1956, "Brief for the Representatives at Baghdad Pact Meetings, September 1956: Effect on Enemy Threat of Nuclear Attack up to 1960".

¹⁵⁶ NA DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 113, 14 July 1956, "The Baghdad Pact, Interim Capabilities Plan" and DEFE 6/35 JP (56) 83, 20 April 1956, "The Baghdad Pact, Defence of the Baghdad Pact in Global War".

¹⁵⁷ NA DEFE 6/34, JP (56) 24, 1 March 1956, "Review of World Situation".

commented on the Joint Planning Staff's report on the measures required to increase the effectiveness of the Pact. The project would be too expensive. Britain could not spare enough resources to develop the Baghdad Pact into an effective military alliance either then or in the future.¹⁵⁸

Part of the reason for the United Kingdom's reluctance to commit itself to the Pact was the unlikelihood of Global War. Instead, the Soviets would pursue their objectives through Cold War methods. Economic infiltration, diplomatic pressure, encouragement of ethnic divisions, and anti-western propaganda would be their main weapons. According to the Joint Intelligence Committee's estimate, these measures would not be very successful within the Pact Countries. First, the communists were in a fairly weak position in all four pact countries. It was only in Iran that the communists were properly organised; in this case in the form of the illegal *Tudeh*-party.¹⁵⁹ Second, the Soviet Union did not have enough resources for a large-scale economic effort because most Soviet funds were tied up in internal and satellite development. The example of Egypt had shown, however, that the Soviet Union could make impressive efforts in individual cases. Therefore, the British were very serious when they used the Baghdad Pact as a political alliance in the guise of a military alliance. The benefits were obvious – Britain would get uninterrupted access to oil. For the other members of the Pact, the alliance would guarantee the regional *status quo* and serve as a means for receiving some economic aid.¹⁶⁰

Another reason for the British lack of faith in the Baghdad Pact was the danger of being dragged into local disputes. According to the Chiefs of Staff,

¹⁵⁸ NA DEFE 5/65, COS (56) 79, 21 February 1956, 'The Financial and Other Implications of Measures to Increase the Effectiveness of the Baghdad Pact'.

¹⁵⁹ NA CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 10, 20 April 1956, "Survey of World Communism". See also ADM 233/240, Quarterly Intelligence Report, No 11, January to March 1957, pp. 13–15.

¹⁶⁰ NA DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 97, 25 May 1956, "United Kingdom Commitments under the Baghdad Pact", DEFE 6/34, JP (56) 10 Final, 15 January, "Baghdad Pact – Background Brief". For an estimate on Soviet military efforts in the Baghdad Pact countries, see CAB 158/23, JIC (56) 17, 12 February 1956, "The Threat to the Baghdad Pact Area up to 1960 in Conditions Short of Global War – Brief for the U.K. Representative to the Baghdad Pact Meetings", On Soviet economic warfare, see, JIC (56) 9, "The Economic Policy of the Soviet Bloc in the Middle East and South and South East Asia in 1956–60 and its Impact on Western Interests".

other Pact members were often more concerned with regional rivalries than with the Soviet threat.¹⁶¹

The planning process within the Pact proved to be a very demanding task for the British planners who participated. They had to both engage in serious military planning and they had to hide Britain's real intentions and reluctance to develop the alliance. In April 1956, after the initial planning round, British planners expressed their dissatisfaction with this quasi-planning: "Although we appreciate that some element of bluff, particularly regarding our capabilities and intention in the air, will have to be employed in our planning, there are definite limits." Systematic lying could endanger the existence of the Pact.¹⁶²

Several key issues hindered any serious planning. The core essence of the Allied countermeasures, a strategic nuclear air campaign, was regarded with suspicion by Iraq and Turkey.¹⁶³ In addition, the Pakistani representatives argued the case for an exaggerated threat directed against their territory. Pakistani planners suggested that West Pakistan should not be seen as a secondary front for Pakistani forces and that units deployed there could seriously threaten the eastern flank of the Soviets on the eastern end of the Elburz Line. The Joint Planning Staff thought that the Pakistani suggestion was nothing but an excuse to ask for greater economic aid to develop a poor infrastructure. One of the basic disagreements concerned the main line of defence. Should it run along the Elburz or the Zagros Mountains? The United States expressed its doubts about the feasibility of a defence along the Elburz Line very clearly. As long as no peacetime forces were deployed there and as long as the logistics problems caused by the very difficult lines of communication prevailed, the line would not be defensible in practice. The main defence should be based on the Zagros Line. While the British agreed with this view, it caused political problems because Iran and Pakistan, who provided an important part of the forward defence on the Elburz Line, wanted to emphasise their own position in the Pact. Therefore, British planners

¹⁶¹ Gareth Wyn Rees, "The British Chiefs of Staff Committee, Military Planning and Alliance Commitments, 1955–1960" (PhD diss., Southampton University, 1994), pp. 138–139.

¹⁶² NA DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 86, 27 April 1956, "The Baghdad Pact, Future Planning".

¹⁶³ NA DEFE 4/87, JP (56) 107, 8 June 1956, "The Baghdad Pact, National Comments on Planning Papers".

suggested that the defence on the Elburz be called the "Defensive Position" and that the Zagros Line be called the "Supporting Position".¹⁶⁴ This was quasi military-political rhetoric at its best!

In order to give some credibility to the alliance, the Joint Planning Staff produced an estimate for a minimum commitment. According to this estimate, the annual expenditure would be some £3 million. This money would be mainly spent on improving radar and airfield facilities. Although the British were not willing to contribute land forces to the Pact force structure, a build-up of a stockpile for a brigade-sized group was suggested. In order to support the weak air forces of the participating countries, the plan called for the assignment of four light bomber squadrons and a reconnaissance squadron to the pact Global War force structure.¹⁶⁵

This arrangement would support the illusion that the Pact countries could count on a British nuclear air offensive within the theatre of war. Actually, this cornerstone of the operational plan of the Baghdad Pact was a façade. The Joint Intelligence Committee's studies on those 50–70 suitable targets for nuclear strikes were in fact part of the deception.¹⁶⁶ Non-existent nuclear weapons provided the basis for the deception plan in the Middle East: "The current United Kingdom deception plan for the Middle East is designed to give the impression that nuclear weapons will be available in quantity at H-hour. Our interim concept of operations is based on this premise". It was not until 1959 that weapons would be available. In addition, the US Sixth Fleet, which operated in the Mediterranean, could not be counted on because the United States was not committed to the pact.¹⁶⁷ One can only share Richard Aldrich's view of the nature of the Baghdad Pact, it was nothing but a deception – or at least the military dimension of it was.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ NA DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 97, 25 May 1956, "United Kingdom Commitments under the Baghdad Pact".

¹⁶⁶ NA CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 88, 30 August 1956, "Brief for the Representatives at Baghdad Pact Meetings, September 1956: Effect on Enemy Threat of Nuclear Attack up to 1960".

¹⁶⁷ NA DEFE 6 /34, JP (56) 10, 15 January, "Baghdad Pact – Background Brief".

¹⁶⁸ Richard Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London: John Murray, 2002), p 376.

3.2 Limited War – “Any international armed conflict short of Global War”

The scope for potential Limited Wars was vast. British rule extended into several regions that were in dispute. These areas stretched from British Honduras in South America to Borneo in the Far East. According to the Joint Planning Staff estimate, a Limited War could occur in all these places. However, these conflicts could be handled with the Cold War forces available, meaning mainly those forces deployed in these regions in peacetime. Two areas, however, were considered to be more dangerous than the others: Egypt and China.¹⁶⁹

Political unrest in Egypt and in the Middle East forced the British military to prepare a large number of contingency plans. One set of these plans specified how to protect British citizens and how to evacuate them safely, while other plans detailed how to fulfil Britain's defence agreements: namely the Tripartite Declaration and the Anglo-Jordanian defence treaty. A final set of plans spelled out how to take unilateral action against Egypt.

3.2.1 Rodeo – an evacuation by force from Egypt

The political instability in Egypt prior to Nasser's ascent to power was the cause for a series of updated contingency plans. The anti-British atmosphere was inflamed by the problems in the renegotiation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. The British Defence and Co-ordination Committee, a body responsible for co-ordinating the operational plans, anticipated that Egyptian authorities would be reluctant to put down large-scale anti-western turmoil in a worst case scenario. The passivity of the Egyptian Armed Forces at the beginning of the anti-British riots in Cairo in 1952 was well-known. A set of plans, known as Rodeo, aimed to “protect the lives of British and other friendly nationals in Cairo and Alexandria”. The plans were divided into two sub-plans: Rodeo Flail and Rodeo Bernard.

The available forces, and in particular the available ground forces, varied in the different versions of Rodeo, but the basic concept remained the same. Rodeo Flail called for the Mediterranean Fleet and for some army units

¹⁶⁹NA DEFE 6/36, JP (56) 115, 26 June 1956, “Limited War”.

belonging to the Canal Zone garrison to enter Alexandria, by force if necessary. The plan was straightforward. A force consisting of several battalion-sized units from the Royal Marines and the army would safeguard the port of Alexandria and Dikheila airfield. Once the units were in place, a swift evacuation by air and sea would follow. The Egyptian Armed Forces, unless hostile, would not be attacked.¹⁷⁰

While key parts of Alexandria were to be taken in Operation Rodeo Flail, the forces deployed in the Canal Zone would initiate Operation Rodeo Bernand. In 1953, when there were still approximately six British brigades in Egypt, the plan called for a rapid advance to the Egyptian capital. A column of three brigades was to have two main tasks. The leading brigade supported by an armoured regiment was to neutralise the Egyptian Armed Forces of the Cairo garrison if needed and seize the two airfields essential for aerial evacuation. The second brigade would pass through or outflank the main opposition and secure the key areas, the Western Embassies, where friendly nationals were to be gathered. The third brigade would act as the reserve. After the points of entry were seized, friendly nationals would be evacuated by Royal Air Force planes.¹⁷¹

The status of the Rodeo preparations varied according to the development of the situation in Egypt. In May 1952, when the negotiations over the Canal Zone broke down, these plans were partially executed. However, after the Canal Zone Agreement was signed in 1954 and after Nasser had stabilised his power, the execution of these plans became less imminent.¹⁷²

British planners found it very difficult to reconcile the requirement to both conduct an evacuation by force and to gradually diminish the forces in the Canal Zone garrison. The Chiefs of Staff and the Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East Land Forces, General Charles Keightley, had different views on the future of the Rodeo plans. Due to the reduction in the military presence in Egypt and the expansion of the Egyptian Armed Forces, the Chiefs of Staff

¹⁷⁰ ADM 1/24885, Office of the Joint Commanders, Med. 3681/8, 15 May 1953, "Operation Rodeo Flail, Part 1 – Joint Instruction".

¹⁷¹ NA WO 216/799, "Operation RODEO, Outline Plan as at 30 June 1953 (amended up to 15 April 1954)".

¹⁷² Eric Grove, *Vanguard to Trident, British Naval Policy since World War Two* (Annapolis: 1987), pp. 161–163.

doubted the actual feasibility of the whole concept. British forces would not be able to evacuate friendly nationals, or restore law and order in Egypt. They suggested that future plans should only be based on evacuating friendly nationals by sending a "strong flying column" to Cairo, and not getting involved in large-scale operations in Egypt. General Keightley, perhaps not yet fully recognising the shift from the Egypt-focused Middle Eastern strategy to the forward defence within the Baghdad Pact, complained about the inadequacy of his forces for even a rescue operation. His evaluation was based on the threat scenario during a possible operation. In his view, preparations should be made for the worst possible scenario, which meant that the Egyptian Armed Forces and the police would be hostile. To overcome this kind of resistance, large bodies of infantry supported by armour would be needed.¹⁷³

The idea of an evacuation by force did not last through the Suez Crisis. The means available to conduct a successful rescue operation to Cairo vanished as soon as British forces finally pulled out of the Canal Zone. Any rescue operation mounted to Cairo would meet organised resistance. Therefore, all plans for sending troops to Cairo for rescue operations were cancelled at the beginning of the crisis. The evacuation of 6 500 British and friendly nationals would depend on the "good offices of the Egyptian government".¹⁷⁴ Had the government fallen and Egypt drifted into anarchy, the British were prepared to conduct an emergency rescue operation through Alexandria with Task Force 324, which consisted mainly of units from the Mediterranean Fleet assisted by a company-sized detachment from the army. However, not even this scenario assumed that the Egyptian Armed Forces would not put up organised resistance.¹⁷⁵

3.2.2 If the Canal was closed – unilateral action against Egypt

At the beginning of June 1956, the Joint Planning Staff produced two "UK Eyes Only" studies on Limited War scenarios. The purpose of these studies

¹⁷³ NA CAB 131/14, DC (54) 19, 2 April 1954 and WO 216/799, General Keightley to the Chief of the General Staff, 13 May 1954, "Protection of the British Community in Egypt".

¹⁷⁴ NA DEFE 5/70, COS (56) 295, 3 August 1956, "Evacuation of British and Friendly Nationals from Egypt".

¹⁷⁵ NA DEFE 5/70, COS (56) 313, 17 August 1956, "Evacuation of British and Friendly Nationals from Egypt, Rescue Operations – Alexandria".

was to determine the size and shape of a Limited War and to estimate the need for resources. In that sense, one should understand that these studies were not actual plans against Egypt but were a basis for further planning on the force structure. In the Middle East, the “Planners”, as the Joint Planning Staff was also known, foresaw two potential Limited War scenarios: operations under the Tripartite Declaration and unilateral action against Egypt.¹⁷⁶

According to the Joint Planning Staff appreciation, the impetus for military operations against Egypt could be sparked by the seizure of the Suez Canal. In such a case, Britain would possibly have to act without United Nations authorisation and “our (British, *author*) only recourse, in view of our vital oil and economic interests in the Suez Canal, might be to take unilateral military action. The aim of such an operation would be to reopen the Suez Canal.”¹⁷⁷

The Joint Planning Staff produced an outline plan, which can be categorised as a classic amphibious operation. The concept was very similar to the one later executed in Operation Musketeer. The operation was to be divided into five phases:

- (1) neutralisation of the Egyptian Air Force.
- (2) destruction of the Egyptian Navy and imposition of a maritime blockade
- (3) seizure of one or more points of entry
- (4) defeat of Egyptian ground forces in a joint land and air action
- (5) seizure and occupation of vital areas, especially the Canal Zone.¹⁷⁸

The planners did not exclude the possibility of using nuclear weapons. They acknowledged the grave political arguments against the use of such weapons, but from the military point of view, “the quickest and most economical method of achieving our aim would be by use of a limited number of kiloton weapons to neutralise the Egyptian Air Force”. Nuclear weapons could also be used in subsequent phases if Egypt did not collapse after their initial use. In fact, the planners actually warned against not using nuclear weapons. The United Kingdom would have to maintain larger conventional

¹⁷⁶ NA DEFE 6/36, JP (56) 115, 26 June 1956, “Limited War”.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

forces and the Limited War would last longer and become more costly in terms of money and human casualties: "A Limited War between the United Kingdom alone and Egypt waged by conventional means would be protracted and expensive."¹⁷⁹

One of the principles of the outline plan was to attain clear superiority in numbers as it was considered both "prudent and in the long run economical". The reason for this was the ongoing Egyptian rearmament. If nuclear weapons could not be used, the maritime forces were to include a Carrier Task Force of three aircraft carriers, a pair of cruisers, and twenty destroyers or frigates. The administrative support would consist of ten replenishment ships. Altogether sixteen minesweepers would be needed to keep the canal and port areas clear of mines and obstacles. The amphibious lift, capable of providing assault craft and transportation for a brigade-sized group, would consist of an LHS, three LST(A), four LCT(8) and a large troop carrier.¹⁸⁰

The army operation would be based on an amphibious assault and large-scale airborne and air transport operations. A brigade group assisted by a battalion-sized parachute force would capture the harbour of Port Said. Simultaneously, as a result of a larger airborne landing by the rest of the parachute brigade group, a major airport in the Canal Zone would be captured. This air bridgehead would then be reinforced by air transportation of two infantry brigade groups that would capture additional airfields and secure bridges and ferries operating over the Canal. When the airfields and Port Said were safely in British hands, a large occupation force of two infantry divisions would follow. Altogether, the plan called for a total of three infantry divisions and a parachute brigade. This force was hardly available or transportable without calling up reserves and requisitioning merchant shipping, which the Joint Planning Staff considered inevitable.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ NA DEFE 6/36, JP (56) 125, 18 July 1956, "Forces for Limited War". For the amount of weapons received by the Egyptian Armed Forces, see Rami Ginat, "Origins of the Czech-Egyptian Arms Deal: A Reappraisal" in David Tal (ed.), *The 1956 War: Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass Publishers 2001) p. 160. On the classification and capabilities of amphibious warfare vessels, see Amphibious Warfare Handbook No.4A, *The Battalion with Supporting Arms in the Amphibious Assault*, 1956 (Amphibious Warfare Headquarters, 1956) appendix L.

¹⁸¹ NA DEFE 6/36, JP (56) 125, 18 July 1956, "Forces for Limited War".

Medium bombers would play a key role in eliminating the Egyptian Air Force. A total of eight squadrons operating from the United Kingdom would render the Egyptian airfields unusable in a few days. The option of deploying them in the forward bases of Akrotiri (Cyprus) or El Adem (Libya) was rejected due to the fact that these bases were in range of Egyptian aircraft. Alternatively, the Valiant squadrons could be used in rotation from Malta and Gibraltar, but it was thought that this would take too long a time. The RAF bombing effort would be assisted by aircraft operating from the Royal Navy carriers and by RAF fighters making offensive fighter sweeps. After suitable Egyptian airfields fell to the British, the appropriate fighter and bomber squadrons would be moved in to support the land operations. A large fleet of transport aircraft was needed to carry out the initial supply operations, handle the airborne landings and lift the two air transportable brigade groups.¹⁸²

If the operation was supported by nuclear weapons, it would mean that “our (British, *author*) aim of forcing the Egyptian Government to reopen the canal might well be achieved in a matter of days”. But because the nuclear weapons would cause uncontrollable chaos and havoc, it would be necessary to occupy the key centres of Egypt. Therefore, the land forces required would not be radically smaller than in the non-nuclear option. Two divisions and a parachute battalion would still be needed. A smaller air offensive and the lack of a need for naval bombardment would diminish the need for maritime and aerial forces. Royal Navy participation would be significantly smaller, amounting to only some twenty vessels. The number of Royal Air Force squadrons required would be approximately half of the non-nuclear alternative.¹⁸³

3.2.3 The Tripartite plans

As mentioned earlier, the essential purpose of the Tripartite Declaration was to deter military aggression between Israel and the Arab states surrounding it. As a consequence of the growing tension in the region, the British and the Americans produced a series of studies and plans in 1955–1956 on the

¹⁸² NA DEFE 6/36, JP (56) 125, 18 July 1956, “Forces for Limited War”. One should note that the Royal Air Force possessed only six operational Valiant squadrons at the time, see Humprey Wynn, *RAF Nuclear Deterrent Forces* (London: HMSO, 1994) p. 129.

¹⁸³ NA DEFE 6/36, JP (56) 125, 18 July 1956, “Forces for Limited War”.

military actions required to fulfil Tripartite Declaration obligations. The objective of the plans was to punish the potential aggressor. As a result, three scenarios were produced:

1. Israel starts the war
2. The Arab States start the war
3. A confused start, no clear indication of the aggressor.

The political problems in going forward with the planning were significant. A Joint Planning Staff report from February 1956 presented the problem confronting a combined military operation in the Middle East as follows: "An Arab-Israeli war would have the most serious consequences for the Western Powers. These would be particularly serious if action had to be taken against the Arabs, since the position of the Western Powers in the Middle East would be jeopardised." The Anglo-Jordanian Treaty made the British political position extremely complicated. British interests in Jordan and the commitments stemming from the Tripartite Declaration were in severe conflict. An aerial campaign, the main means available for military action, would put British forces and bases in Jordan, and officers serving in the Arab Legion, in grave danger.

If the Arabs were the aggressors, the security of British and American nationals in the region would be threatened as well. Above all else however, a war against the Arab countries would endanger the Western position in the Middle East. In the short term, this could interrupt the flow of oil, which would harm the European economies. In the longer term, it would undermine the Western political position and open the countries in the Middle East to Soviet subversion. Therefore, the document stated, "The primary aim of action under the Tripartite Declaration should be to prevent the outbreak of war". This should be done by creating a credible military deterrent and by supplementing the military effort with political action, all of which would also help prevent the eruption of Global War.¹⁸⁴

The means available for showing the determination of the Tripartite powers varied. It should be noted that the issue was more a question of Anglo-

¹⁸⁴ NA DEFE 6/34, JP (56) 21, 8 February, "The Military Problems Involved in Action Under the Tripartite Declaration of 1950".

American resolve, since the French were kept out of the planning process. British planners suggested extensive use of deception. The fact that the Tripartite plans were non-existent or fragmentary at best was to be kept secret by introducing a cover plan that would be fed to both Israel and Egypt. Simultaneously, the United Nations Truce Supervisory Force (UNTSO) should be reinforced in order to create a better warning system.

The Joint Planning Staff suggested in spring 1956 that efforts at deterrence should at least seem to be aimed against Israel and Egypt impartially, although the proposed measures were mainly targeted against Egypt. This change of tone in the planning papers had occurred within just a few months. Instead of Israel, Egypt was considered to be the main threat to peace in the area, although a preventive Israeli war could not be left out of the equation. In order to protect themselves from the growing threat of Egypt, the Tripartite nations should sell arms to Israel. To deter the Egyptians from attacking Israel, information on advanced Israeli capabilities and plans, such as those for the destruction of the Aswan Dam, should be leaked to Egypt. This covert action would be augmented by well-proven methods of showing force: constant patrolling by aircraft carriers, combined exercises and air force visits. The military operation would be assisted by a political one aimed at undermining the Egyptian position in the Arab world.¹⁸⁵

If deterrence failed, the Tripartite signatories would have to intervene militarily. The Chiefs of Staff Committee considered Israel to be the easiest case: "In any case in which Israel is clearly the aggressor, no strategic difficulties arise."¹⁸⁶ Good relations with Israel were not of paramount political or economic importance to Britain. Until the ascent of Nasser, the Czech–Egyptian arms deal in 1955 and the dismissal of Glubb Pasha in Jordan, Israel had been a thorn in Britain's side. It had been seen as an additional and unnecessary player that shook up the delicate Middle Eastern military balance.

¹⁸⁵ NA DEFE 5/64, JP (56) 78, 12 April 1956, "Further United Kingdom – United States Action to Prevent Arab-Israel Hostilities". Compare this with earlier estimates on the aggressor, DEFE 5/64, COS (56) 9, 9 January 1956, "Assistance to Jordan in the Event of Israeli Aggression".

¹⁸⁶ NA DEFE 5/65, COS, (56) 94, "Implications of an Arab/Israel War".

A reasonable starting point for the contingency planning was an estimate of Israel's capabilities. American and British planners agreed on Israel's relative superiority. Israel would be able to defend its territory against any Arab force and offer tough resistance to any possible Tripartite ground invasion. If the Israeli Defence Forces chose to attack, they could seize areas extending up to forty to eighty kilometres beyond the existing border. Only a lack of adequate logistics support would prevent the Israelis from striking any further. The Israeli Air Force would be able to destroy the main body of the opposing Arab air forces. Because the initial fighting would be over within a few weeks, a Tripartite maritime blockade, a classic British option, would only have a limited effect. A blockade could be imposed within days, but it would be months before it took effect.¹⁸⁷

Therefore, a combined sea-air operation would be mounted. The main targets would be the Israeli airfields and the communication lines leading to the battlefronts. This kind of a plan required the deployment of four light bomber and two ground attack squadrons, a reconnaissance squadron, three aircraft carriers, and a squadron of naval vessels suitable for naval bombardment missions.¹⁸⁸

In the event of the Arab countries being the aggressors, Egypt would be the main target. Among the possible concepts of operations was a maritime blockade. This would be enhanced by an intensive air campaign and a combination of sea, air and land operations. Egypt was chosen as the most important target because of its influence in the Arab world and because the Suez Canal was vital for the British economy. The planners, in a reflection of their earlier estimates on the Israeli Defence Forces, thought that the Tripartite signatories would not have to get actively involved in the war. The Israelis would finish off the Egyptians. However, this situation would

¹⁸⁷ On the combined US-UK views on Israeli capabilities, see NA DEFE 5/66, COS (56)115, 19 March 1956, "Analysis of Military Problems in Action under the Tripartite Declaration of 1950". The Israeli interpretation of British policy in the Middle East was very similar, see, e.g., Kyle, Keith: "Britain's Slow March to Suez" in *The 1956 War. Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East*, edited by David Tal, (Cornwall: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), p. 95.

¹⁸⁸ NA DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 79, 12 April 1956, "Joint United States – United Kingdom Action in the Event of Arab-Israel War. The Concept of United Kingdom – United States Operations in the Event of Israeli Aggression against Egypt".

deteriorate as the capabilities of the Egyptian Armed Forces improved – maybe with the assistance of Soviet Bloc volunteers.¹⁸⁹

The maritime blockade was considered to be ineffective unless all the shipping transiting the Suez Canal could be inspected. Not only were there legal problems to this stemming from the Canal's status as an international waterway, but such a task was beyond British capabilities. More importantly, the British economy would suffer if the Canal was closed. A second alternative, a combined air-sea action, was considered more attractive. An intensive air campaign would render the Egyptian Air Force useless and land communications to the Sinai would be severely damaged. However, the problem of keeping the Suez Canal open to traffic remained. One possible solution very similar to the Limited War option was accepted. An airborne assault and amphibious landing were to follow a triumphant air campaign. Then, the main elements of the 16 Independent Airborne Brigade Group would capture the most important airfields in the Canal Zone. After the seizure of these targets, a massive airlift of two infantry brigades would take place and a further reinforcement of two infantry divisions would be transported by sea. A large number of troops, up to three divisions of ground forces alone, would be used. Curiously, the plan, ambitious in design and in size, did not estimate the time it would take to mobilise sufficient forces.¹⁹⁰

The concept of operations for the third scenario, a war without a clear aggressor, resembled the modern version of a peace-enforcement operation through air power. If the aggressor could not be defined, the Tripartite powers would try to end the hostilities by restricting the use of airspace through continuous air patrols and by acting decisively against anyone violating these restrictions. On land, the main effort would be focused on the interdiction of the battlefields by the air forces.¹⁹¹

The Chiefs of Staff presented the status of the Tripartite planning to the Defence Committee at the end of April 1956. In the paper, the Chiefs gave their advice on the political problems facing the creation of a real deterrence.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ NA DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 79, 12 April 1956, "The Concept of United Kingdom – United States operations in the Event of a Confused Start to Arab – Israel Hostilities".

Their views reflect the dilemma of British policy in the Middle East. An aggressive policy would only harm British interests in the region because it would push the Arabs towards the Soviet Bloc. Therefore, any action that increased tension in the area would be harmful because it could ultimately result in war. Such a war would probably harm the British economy due to the predicted disruption of traffic through the Suez Canal traffic. However, the Suez Canal and Middle Eastern oil were amongst Britain's vital interests. The Chiefs' view on the practicality of the operational concepts is revealing. If Egypt was the aggressor and Tripartite action was taken, a land campaign and occupation of the Canal Zone would be inevitable. If Israel was the aggressor, decisive air action would be essential. A maritime blockade, besides being ineffective, would not convince the Arab states of the genuine good will of the Tripartite Nations. If there was a confused start to a war, the Chiefs argued that the Tripartite concept would be ineffective. The Defence Committee only made one decision based on the Chiefs' paper. It would be preferable to continue to exclude the French from the planning process for reasons of secrecy. It was also anticipated that the French would be reluctant to contribute any forces.¹⁹²

The Joint Planning Staff participated in a combined planning session with the United States' planning team in the late spring of 1956. The combined planning teams shared a common view on the measures required to boost the deterrence value of the Tripartite Declaration. The military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean should be increased. This show of force would be supported by purposeful leaking of information on the Tripartite plans to all sides.¹⁹³

The planning results had a far more mixed effect on the operational concept. The concept of using air forces in all three scenarios was agreed on by both parties. But the commitment of land forces and the command structure caused friction. If Egypt were the aggressor, the United States Marines onboard the US Sixth Fleet would have been ideal for amphibious operations, but the American planners were reluctant to include them in the

¹⁹² NA DEFE 5/67, COS (56) 181, 2 May 1956, "State of United Kingdom/United States Planning under the Tripartite Declaration of 1950".

¹⁹³ NA DEFE 5/67, COS (56) 187, 9 May 1956, "US/UK Planning Talks to the Tripartite Declaration of 1950".

common plans. For political reasons, the United States did not want to give the impression of a pre-planned combined action against Egypt. In other words, the United States did not want to be seen to be collaborating with Britain. From the British point of view, this attitude was a setback. Restraint by the US would mean that Britain would also have to bear the main burden of world opinion. This picture is reinforced by the fact that the American planners had strict instructions to turn down British proposals for a combined command structure. The US planners preferred a nationally-based command system.¹⁹⁴

The British had even stronger doubts about the American will to intervene with land forces if Israel was the aggressor. In spite of problems, the planning session produced common concepts and force requirements for the operations, but not much else. The report on the planning session leaves an impression of a somewhat fruitless meeting. American reluctance to co-operate in the military sphere with the British in the Middle East is clearly evident. The US planners were not even able to produce a tentative list of the forces available. However, they did get a very clear idea of British capabilities and of British concepts for operations in case of an emergency in the Suez Canal area. When the Suez Crisis developed, the Americans knew what to expect. The objective of pulling the United States into an integrated planning process did not end with this planning session. The British representative in the Joint Services Mission in Washington was sent instructions that obliged him to continue with the matter. The letter emphasised the need for an efficient combined command structure and stressed the importance of US participation in Tripartite operations. It was considered to be so important that the Chiefs of Staff Committee agreed that they would accept an American as supreme commander if needed.¹⁹⁵

Neither Britain nor the United States could plan for any operations in the Middle East without accounting for possible Soviet involvement. According to the Joint Intelligence Committee estimate, the Soviets were benefiting from

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ NA DEFE 6/35, JP (56), 99, 23 May 1956, "Combined United Kingdom – United States Action in the Event of an Arab – Israel War"; DEFE 5/67, COS, (56) 54th Meeting on 29 May 1956; and DEFE 5/67, COS (56) 187,9 May 1956, "US/UK Planning Talks to the Tripartite Declaration of 1950".

the current dispute between Israel and the Arab nations. While labelling Israel as a tool of the Western powers, the Soviets backed Arab nationalism and encouraged the creation of neutral states in the Middle East. These neutral states would each in turn then be subjected to gradual communist subversion. The on-going Cold War did not mean that the Soviets would get militarily involved if a war erupted in the Middle East. The reason for this was both political and practical. If the Western powers were on the Israeli side, the Soviets would benefit politically in the long term. During the crisis, the probable Soviet course of action was thought to include propaganda against the Western powers, an appeal to the United Nations, and political support for any Middle Eastern country imposing economic sanctions on the Western powers. Military involvement would not be practically possible. The Soviet Union did not possess any bases in the area and aircraft carrying either bombs or airborne forces would have to fly over either NATO or Baghdad Pact countries.¹⁹⁶

3.2.4 The Jordan contingency

Assistance to Jordan in case of Israeli aggression

The special position of Jordan, already identified as one of the cornerstones of British Middle Eastern policy, is evident from the amount of planning papers and estimates on the country. The primary threat prior to the March 1956 dismissal of Lieutenant General Glubb from his post as senior military adviser in Jordan was thought to come from Israel. It was Israeli aggression that would compel the British to aid Jordan. A military plan, code-named Cordage, was introduced at the beginning of 1956. The initial phases of the operation would be along the same lines as in the Tripartite plans. Israel would be isolated by a maritime-aerial blockade. However, it was thought that economic measures would be too slow. As a result, active military involvement by all services would start from the very beginning. The British would take full advantage of their numerical and qualitative supremacy in the air and at sea. The Royal Air Force, assisted by carrier-based Fleet Air Arm squadrons, would neutralise the Israeli Air Force and would shift its effort to

¹⁹⁶ NA CAB 158/24, JIC (56) 36, 21 March 1956, "Probable Soviet Attitude to an Arab/Israel War".

ground targets after gaining aerial superiority. Military installations, energy production facilities and airfields in the vicinity of Tel Aviv and Haifa would be subjected to naval bombardment. The army units stationed in Jordan were to be reinforced from the United Kingdom and from Cyprus. The Amphibious Warfare Squadron would land a Royal Marine Commando and an infantry battalion at Aqaba after a speedy transit of the Suez Canal. This force would then capture Elath in order to secure Aqaba.¹⁹⁷

The main effort on the ground would be further north. The deployment of two brigades without heavy equipment, one directly from the United Kingdom and one from Cyprus, would secure the airfields of Mafraq and Amman. The fighting power of these units was based on pre-positioned materiel. A considerable amount of materiel, including 350 vehicles, 30 field and anti-tank guns and 5 000 tons of ammunition, was stored at the 627 Ordnance Depot at Zerka.¹⁹⁸ After this, the British ground units would assist the Arab Legion in holding the line of the River Jordan. Further operations would depend on the Israeli course of action. It was thought that the Israeli Defence Forces would not advance beyond the River Jordan. Rather, the IDF would choose to defend its gains. This advance could not be rolled back in the short term, but the prolonged maritime blockade would bring the Israelis to the negotiating table in the long run.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ NA, DEFE 6/32, JP (55) 137, 19 January 1956, "Limited War in Support of Jordan against Israel" and CAB 131/17, DC (56) 10, 27 April 1956, "The Implications of the Anglo-Jordan Treaty". The number of different code words is amazing, as the operations they described often interlocked and overlapped. This means there is some possibility for error. The most important code words for operations in the context of Jordan and Israel were as follows:

BRIMSTONE – The overall plan for the deployment of ground and air reinforcements from the UK

QUICKFIRE – The deployment of a fighter wing to Cyprus

ALACRITY – The deployment of two Canberra bomber squadrons to Cyprus

FLEETFOOT – The deployment of a Valetta transport force to Cyprus

GRIDIRON – The deployment of one infantry brigade to Cyprus to replace the units despatched to Jordan

OVERSEE – The shift of 16 Parachute Brigade Group to Jordan

ENCOUNTER – The deployment of the Middle Eastern forces to Jordan in accordance with Joint Operations Instruction number 27. The overall joint plan, including all previous sub-operations and military operations in addition to deployments, to assist Jordan in case of Israeli aggression was called CORDAGE. On code words, see NA DEFE 5/64, COS (56) 9, 9 January 1956, "Assistance to Jordan in the Event of Israeli Aggression" and COS (56) 95, 5 March 1956, "Emergency Commitments in the Middle East".

¹⁹⁸ NA, DEFE 5/67, COS (56) 161, 23 April 1956, "Action in the Event of Certain Circumstances Arising in Jordan".

¹⁹⁹ NA, DEFE 6/32, JP (55) 137, 19 January 1956, "Limited War in Support of Jordan against Israel" and DEFE 5/64, COS (56) 9, 9 January 1956, "Assistance to Jordan in the Event of Israeli Aggression". The latter document includes Joint Planning Instruction No.2 as an annex. One should note the difference between a Joint Planning Instruction and a Joint

The dismissal of Glubb Pasha and the other British officers changed not just the basic political context of the plan but also the military situation. In the British view, the capacity of the Arab Legion to fight collapsed the moment its British leadership was expelled. The Arab Legion would not be able to survive a determined Israeli onslaught. It would disintegrate within a few days, which would result in a breakdown of law and order. As the lives of British citizens would be exposed to the threat of potential mob violence, British forces should not only assist the Arab Legion in repelling the Israeli attack. They should also intervene in the domestic situation. The dispatch of two brigades to Jordan would be more urgent than ever. However, their redeployment to Jordan would depend on the situation in the air. The prerequisites for the use of aerial force had actually deteriorated since the Arab Legion was unable or unwilling to defend the vital airfields.²⁰⁰

Restoring law and order

After the unsuccessful trip of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in late 1955, the internal situation in Jordan deteriorated rapidly. The problem was exacerbated when the Jordanian Cabinet resigned. This event, combined with Egyptian sponsored propaganda, caused riots at the beginning of January 1956. The Joint Planning Staff produced a contingency plan to meet the demands of this new crisis. If the Arab Legion failed to keep internal order, British forces of up to four brigades would be deployed to Jordan. The basic idea of Operation Hornblower was to use the 16 Parachute Brigade Group, now taking part in internal security operations in Cyprus, as a spearhead force.²⁰¹

Operations Instruction in the context of reinforcement plans. The Joint Planning Instruction was a document produced by the Joint Planning Staff and accepted by the Chiefs of Staff. This document covered the resources and the transfer concepts for the units that would be deployed from the United Kingdom to the overseas Commands (the Middle East in this case). A redeployment within an overseas command, for a unit from Cyprus to Jordan for example, was planned in a Joint Operations Instruction produced by the local Defence Co-ordinating Committee (Joint).

²⁰⁰ NA CAB 131/17, DC (56) 10, 27 April 1956, "The Implications of the Anglo-Jordan Defence Treaty".

²⁰¹ Two parachute battalions had been sent to Cyprus in January with the prospect of participating in possible operations in Jordan. After the tension passed, these units were used in internal security operations against EOKA in Cyprus. See NA DEFE 5/69, COS (56) 263, 6 July 1956, "Relief of Parachute battalions in Cyprus".

The first elements of the brigade would arrive in Jordan within 48 hours. The rest of the brigade would be flown in along with a Cyprus-based infantry brigade by D+6. The leading elements of a UK-based infantry brigade would arrive by air on D+8. The rest of the brigade would be transported to Cyprus on an aircraft carrier capable of conducting a high-speed transit. It would then board transport aircraft to be flown to Jordan. Simultaneously, another infantry brigade would be transported by air directly from the United Kingdom to Jordan. The massive movement of forces to Jordan would be finished within three weeks. Altogether, four brigades with very light equipment and basically without any supporting arms would be transported to Jordan. The plan was based on the assumption that practically all potential aircraft available would be used. A transport fleet of up to 100 aircraft would be involved.²⁰²

Military coup considered

The continuing political disturbances led the British to believe that an Egyptian organised *coup d'état* might take place: "If this happens it will be necessary to maintain British prestige and to protect British nationals in Jordan. It may also be necessary to safeguard the person of King Hussein." To achieve this, the Amman and Mafraq airfields would be secured. The Joint Planning Staff rushed to produce an outline for further planning. For planning purposes, it was assumed that the Arab Legion would not commit its full strength against the airfields. The planners also thought that Iraq would take full advantage of being able to participate in a Nasser containment operation and initially send a brigade to assist the British. This force would later be brought up to divisional strength. The bulk of British forces in Jordan, an armoured regiment, an infantry company, and an anti-aircraft battery, were deployed in Aqaba, which was about 200 miles from Amman. Although they possessed formidable firepower, these units could not be used in operations. This force was too far from Amman or Mafraq and its composition was unsuitable for police-type operations. The other forces in Jordan were mainly anti-aircraft units providing air defence for the airfields. There was one light anti-aircraft wing in Amman and another one in Mafraq. These units would be

²⁰² NA DEFE 6/34, JP (56) 16, 15 February 1956, "Reinforcement of Jordan", On the development of the political situation during General Templer's visit, see John Cloake, *Templer, Tiger of Malaya* (London: Harper Limited, 1985), pp. 340–342.

able to provide air defence for the reinforcements and to withstand attacks from disorganised mobs. Still, effective defence against possible Arab Legion attacks was beyond their capabilities.²⁰³

Because King Hussein and most of the British nationals were in Amman, the greater part of the reinforcements, an infantry brigade, would be flown to Amman. The deployment of an infantry battalion to Mafraq was considered to be enough. The first elements of the force, including two parachute battalions, could reach Jordan within two days of receiving its orders. If the transport force reserved for the Royal Air Force reinforcement plans was made available, a further two battalions could be in Jordan within five days. The same planes would evacuate the British nationals collected at the airports on their return flights. The evacuation of friendly nationals was based on the assumption that they had also been gathered at the airports. The available resources would not enable active rescue operations in Amman. The Royal Air Force fighter squadron deployed in Amman could probably not operate effectively due to the besieged airfield. Freedom of passage for the transport force would therefore be secured beforehand by having the British personnel operating in the Jordanian squadron render the planes of the Jordanian Air Force inoperable.²⁰⁴

As the seizure of the airports in Amman and Mafraq was the cornerstone of any practical reinforcement plan, the Chiefs of Staff sought the Defence Committee's approval to conduct further planning on seizing the airports as points of entry.²⁰⁵ The British Defence Co-ordinating Committee (ME) carried out the planning and produced their plan, Joint Operations Instruction No.33, by the end of May. The committee did not share the Joint Planning Staff's assumptions on the passivity of the Arab Legion. On the contrary, they expected the Arab Legion to actively resist any British attempt to take control of the airports. The Arab Legion would not withdraw its forces facing Israel on

²⁰³ NA, DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 74 Final, 29 March 1956, "Action in Jordan in the Event of Coup D'Etat".

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ NA, CAB 13/17, DC (56) 5th Meeting, 1 May 1956.

the West Bank of the River Jordan, but it would use its armoured forces and an infantry brigade deployed in the vicinity of Amman.²⁰⁶

Due to this threat scenario, both the number of forces and their employment were altered. Force O, the armoured regiment in Aqaba, was to take an active role and advance to Amman as soon as possible along with a substantial amount of supplies, fighting its way in if necessary. At the same time, each of the airports were to be taken over by an airlifted brigade with anti-tank guns and a battery of field artillery. An infantry company from Mafraq would then be dispatched to capture the depot at Zerka for the British Forces. The basic precondition for executing this plan was, of course, surprise. The first elements of the British reinforcements were to arrive before the Arab Legion had deployed any of its forces against the airports.²⁰⁷

Both the Joint Planning Staff and the Chiefs of Staff considered Joint Operations Instruction No.33 to be too risky. If the Arab Legion was hostile, any reinforcement by air would be very difficult to conduct. Airfields could be easily obstructed. In addition, if the Arab Legion was prepared to use armour against the British, it could launch its attack before the arrival of the British anti-tank units. Any reliance on the Zerka Depot was considered to be overoptimistic. Surely, the Jordanians, who were already deployed in the area, could easily take over the depot and deny the British the opportunity to use it? Therefore, the Chiefs of Staff suggested that the plan should be altered by pre-positioning anti-tank weapons in the British-controlled airports. As this could not be done from the Zerka Depot without the Jordanians realising it, the weapons would be flown in from Cyprus. At the same time, the vehicles and guns at the depot would be made inoperable to the Jordanians by making sure that essential parts were stored under British protection at the airports.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ NA, DEFE 5/67, COS (56) 161, 23 April 1956, "Action in the Event of Certain Circumstances Arising in Jordan" and DEFE 5/68, COS (56) 203, 25 May 1956, "Reinforcement to Secure the Airfields at Amman and Mafraq, Joint Operations Instruction No. 33".

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ NA DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 4 May 1956, "Planning Against an Emergency in Jordan" and DEFE 5/68, COS (56) 218, 4 June 1956, "Planning Against an Emergency in Jordan".

3.3 In the middle of a transformation – limited capabilities to intervene

To cope with all three categories of warfare, Global War, Limited War and Cold War, the British defence organisation was slowly moving towards three layers of defence and three different types of force structure.²⁰⁹ The highest level consisted of strategic nuclear weapons, which formed the nuclear deterrence that was to be the primary means of fighting a Global War, if it ever started. In mid-1956, the national deterrent was actually negligible. The V-bomber fleet was just becoming operational. Britain had no alternative to relying on American nuclear deterrence.

The second tier of defence consisted of conventional forces that could be used in conflicts. The number and type of these forces depended upon the severity and size of the conflict. These forces would be concentrated in a region where there was trouble. Once there, they would participate in Cold War operations, such as the suppression of a communist or nationalist uprising, or they would take part in a Limited War, which has been described in detail earlier in this study.²¹⁰

3.3.1 Limitations of the strategic reserve

The plan was that the core of the army reinforcements directed at the troubled regions was to come from formations belonging to the strategic reserve.²¹¹ The British had created a UK-based strategic reserve to reduce their expensive network of garrisons. This force, supplemented by an adequate transport capacity, would be the first reinforcement for any trouble spot within Britain's over-stretched defence commitments.²¹² The implementation of this concept was far from complete. The UK-based 3 Infantry Division, the core of the strategic reserve, was totally unprepared for

²⁰⁹ Gareth Wyn Rees, "The British Chiefs of Staff Committee, Military Planning and Alliance Commitments, 1955–1960" (PhD diss., Southampton University, 1994), p. 116.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ The exact composition of the army strategic reserve at the time of the Suez Crisis is unknown. According to a Joint Planning Staff document, "United Kingdom Strategic Intentions", produced in 1954, the original plan called for the establishment of a force consisting of two infantry divisions and a parachute brigade group. It is evident that 3 Infantry Division was part of this force, but any other possible formation assigned to this force remains unidentified, NA JP (54) 100, 23 November 1954, "United Kingdom Strategic Intentions".

²¹² William Snyder, *The Politics of British Defence Policy, 1945–1962* (Ohio State University Press, 1964) pp. 11–12.

overseas deployment. Its units were under-strength, they lacked essential equipment and their standard of training was not adequate.²¹³

Any deployment would be severely hampered by the lack of transport capacity. The Transport Command of the Royal Air Force only possessed approximately forty Hastings aircraft capable of carrying long-range reinforcements, a handful of Comets, and less than a dozen of the new Beverley aircraft that were still under evaluation.²¹⁴ Apart from the military aircraft, there were a limited number of commercial airplanes available for transport operations. The jet age was just beginning for passenger flights, and the British charter companies had no more than eighty aircraft suitable for carrying passengers. Of these, less than sixty would be available. Due to the loss of foreign currency, the Joint Movements Co-ordination Committee, which co-ordinated global movements, did not dare to take aircraft from the British Overseas Airlines Company (BOAC) or British European Airways (BEA) into account. On the contrary, the committee calculated that it would not be able to sell surplus aircraft to independent charter companies as it had promised to sell its planes abroad in order to acquire dollars.²¹⁵

In the post-war naval cuts, the reduction of the amphibious fleet was the most dramatic. During the decade following the Second World War, British amphibious resources, which provided the means to transport heavy equipment, had fallen from almost 1 000 major amphibious vessels to only a handful.²¹⁶ Due to the limitations in manpower and finance in the post-war era, amphibious capability had slowly declined. The demand to maintain

²¹³ NA, WO 288/75, Major General Churcher's "Report on Operation Musketeer", 15 January 1957.

²¹⁴ NA DEFE 5/70, COS (56) 283, 24 July 1956, "The Long Range Air Transport Force"; Humphrey Wynn, *Forged in War. A History of RAF Transport Command 1943–1967* (London: The Stationery Office, 1996), p. 96 and AIR 8/2081, Royal Air Force Operational Commands, Order of Battle as of 1 December 1956.

²¹⁵ NA DEFE 10/305, Joint Movements Co-ordinating Committee (56) 10, 8 June 1956 "Types of Charter Aircraft Used and Available for Air Trooping". The available aircraft break down as follows: 14 Hermes, 12 Yorks, 15 Vikings and 14 Dakotas (DC-3). Of these only the Hermes, a civilian variant of the Hastings, and the Yorks, can be categorised as long-range aircraft.

²¹⁶ For the composition of the British amphibious fleet at the end of the Second World War, see Ian Speller, *The Role of Amphibious warfare in British Defence Policy, 1945–56* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2001), pp. 130–134. The British decision to sell or scrap most of its amphibious vessels was not unique. The United States Navy possessed about 610 AW (Amphibious Warfare) ships at the end of the Second World War. Five years after the war, only some 90 remained. See Simon Foster, *Hit the Beach, Amphibious Warfare from the Plains of Abraham to San Carlos Water* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1995), p. 85.

sufficient amphibious shipping for an infantry division had been rejected by the Chiefs of Staff and replaced with a requirement to provide transport for a brigade group as early as 1946.²¹⁷ Not even this modest target was achieved. The standing amphibious element, the Amphibious Warfare Squadron in Malta, consisted of only a Headquarters ship, two LSTs and two LCTs. This force was hardly capable of transporting one of the two Royal Marine Commandoes.²¹⁸ All the additional vessels, the 24 LSTs and 21 LCTs being the most important, were in operational reserve in Malta and Britain. These ships would have to be activated in a process that could take anything from a few weeks to a couple of months.²¹⁹

When it came to shipping troops around the world, the situation was somewhat better. Britain possessed about ten troopships capable of moving approximately 12 000 men in a single operation when all the ships were available.²²⁰

3.3.2 The Cold War deployment – the Middle East Garrison

The third tier of defence consisted of forces deployed permanently overseas. In the Middle East and the Mediterranean, Cyprus and Libya were the most important bases for the army and air force, and Malta was the main naval station in the Mediterranean. The loss of Egyptian facilities underlined Malta's

²¹⁷ Ian Speller, "Defence or Deterrence? The Royal Navy and the Cold War, 1945–1955" in Michael Hopkings, Michael Kandiah and Gillian Staerck (eds.), *Cold War Britain, 1945–1964. New Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 100–101. A demand to land a divisional sized force would have required a totally different shipping capacity. According to an estimate produced in 1947, the landing of an infantry division reinforced with an armoured brigade would have required 106 LSTs and about 119 LCTs. In addition, seven troopships and a large force of merchant ships would be needed to transport the balance of some 14 000 men and over 2 200 vehicles, NA DEFE 2/1605, Combined Operations Headquarters, CO 694/47, 30 October 1947, "Divisional Assault Lift". Another example illustrating the requirement for specialised landing craft is provided in the Amphibious Warfare Handbook *Naval Planning in Amphibious Warfare*. An infantry brigade group in an assault against light opposition was estimated to require some 150 landing vessels – about 14 LSTs and 24 LCTs among them. (*Combined Operations Handbook No.1b. Naval Planning in Amphibious Warfare* (Admiralty Code No.CB 4442, 1952), appendix A.)

²¹⁸ NA ADM 205/120, "Brief for the First Sea Lord for meeting with the French Chief of Naval Staff", 29 July 1956.

²¹⁹ NA ADM 187/170, Admiralty, Operations Division, "Pink List", 8 May 1956.

²²⁰ NA DEFE 10/305, Joint Movements Co-ordinating Committee (56) 3, 28 June 1956, "Personnel Movement Plan 1956–1957".

importance as a Limited War base.²²¹ Not only was the Mediterranean fleet deployed there, but it was also the hub of the logistics. The bulk of the naval ordnance was stored in Malta.²²² The Mediterranean station²²³ had retained its status as the most important overseas base for the British fleet. In addition to the Amphibious Warfare Squadron, the peacetime deployment included an aircraft carrier, two cruisers, three Darings²²⁴, 12 destroyers and frigates, a submarine squadron of eight submarines, 12 minesweepers, and six auxiliaries.²²⁵ In order to enhance and co-ordinate the anti-submarine effort, two Royal Air Force Maritime patrol squadrons with Shackleton aircraft were based in Malta. In addition to housing the two fighter squadrons providing air defence for Malta, the airfields of Malta, Halfar and Luqa in particular, offered an important staging post for Transport Command's flights to the Middle East and the Far East.²²⁶

After the withdrawal from the Canal Zone, Cyprus had become the most important army base in the Middle East. Due to a counter-insurgency campaign, a typical "hot war" within the Cold War, against the Cypriot independence movement, EOKA, the garrison was exceptionally large. Along with two infantry brigade headquarters (50 Infantry Brigade and 51 Infantry Brigade) and eight infantry battalions, the advance brigade headquarters and three parachute battalions of 16 Independent Parachute Brigade Group operated in Cyprus.²²⁷ The parachute force had initially been deployed to

²²¹ DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 136, 24 August 1956, "Strategic Value of Malta to the United Kingdom".

²²² NA ADM 116/6101, Director of Armament Supply to Admiral Richmond, 6 October 1956, "Logistic Situation in the Mediterranean".

²²³ The Mediterranean Station actually covered the area from the Straits of Gibraltar down to the southern entrance (Aden excluded) to the Red Sea, NA 167/148, Admiralty Board, B 1069, 30 April 1956, "Re-organization of America and West Indies Station".

²²⁴ Daring class ships were actually heavy destroyers, about 3 600 tons at full load, capable of operating in roles such as cruiser reconnaissance, and anti-submarine and anti-aircraft patrols. These versatile vessels were also equipped to take a flotilla leader role. The eight ships of the class were categorised as "Darings" at the time of the Suez Crisis only to be re-rated as destroyers two years later. *Jane's Fighting Ships 1959–1960* (Slough: Groves, Brodie & CO, 1960), p. 23.

²²⁵ NA DEFE 5/70, COS (56) 285, 25 July 1956, "Force Requirements in the Middle East".

²²⁶ NA DEFE 5/70, COS (56) 285, 25 July 1956, "Force Requirements in the Middle East". For air routing , see CAB 131/17, DC (56) 19, 4 July 1956, "The Indian Ocean Air Route". See also, Humprey Wynn, *Forged in War. A History of RAF Transport Command 1943–1967* (London: The Stationery Office, 1996), pp. 92–93.

²²⁷ It is worth noting the difference between an independent brigade group and a brigade here. The division was the basic formation that combined units from different arms and services in the British army. It consisted of a certain number of brigades, plus supporting arms and administrative units. The basic organisation of an infantry brigade within a division did not contain such units. An independent brigade group differed from a basic brigade. It

Cyprus for contingencies in Jordan, but as these plans did not take place it had been assigned to internal security operations. Although there were a significant number of infantry units in Cyprus, the force can hardly be described as being capable of participating in conventional operations without careful preparations. In spite of support from a field regiment of the Royal Artillery, a field engineer regiment of the Royal Engineers and the armoured car regiment deployed in Cyprus, the lack of supporting arms was evident.²²⁸ The internal security operations in Cyprus had prevented both the paratroopers and also the Royal Marine Commandoes from continuing their special training. The commando brigade had not conducted amphibious exercises for nearly a year, and even then the exercise had not been an all-arms affair.²²⁹ The situation was somewhat better within the Amphibious Warfare Squadron as it had conducted three larger landing exercises in the year preceding Musketeer.²³⁰ Without adequate balancing, the forces in Cyprus were not suitable for anything other than counter-insurgency operations against a lightly armed guerrilla force.

Cyprus was the main base for the Royal Air Force as well. It housed two Venom fighter/ground attack squadrons, two Meteor equipped reconnaissance squadrons and three squadrons of transport aircraft deployed at Nicosia and at the new airfield at Akrotiri.²³¹

Britain had only one division, 10 Armoured Division, in the Middle East. In fact, the division was not available as a formation²³² for operations. Its components were scattered across a vast area although the main body of the

could possess both supporting arms and administrative units, which made it a miniature formation capable of conducting independent operations. A good example of using an independent brigade group instead of deploying a whole division was in the early days of the Korean War. The order of battle of the 29th Independent Brigade Group included about 50 different units and was 9 000 soldiers strong, Anthony Farrar-Hockley, *The British Part in the Korean War, Volume I*, (London: HMSO, 1990), p. 117 and Appendix H.

²²⁸ NA DEFE 5/70, COS (56) 285, 25 July 1956, "Force Requirements in the Middle East".

²²⁹ NA DEFE 2/2067, COS (55) 316, 28 November 1955, "Yearly Progress Report of Amphibious Warfare (November 1954–October 1955)", see also Julian Thompson, Royal Marines, *From Sea Soldiers to a Special Force*, (London: Pan Books, 2001), p. 466.

²³⁰ NA DEFE 2/2067, COS (56) 404, 13 November 1956, "Yearly Progress Report of Amphibious Warfare (November 1955–October 1956).

²³¹ Michael Armitage, *The Royal Air Force: An Illustrated History* (London: Arms and Armour, 1996), pp. 229–230 and Robert Jackson, *Suez: The Forgotten Invasion* (Shrewsbury: Airlife, 1996), p. 15.

²³² A formation was a combination of different arms and services up to a strength of a brigade or more, Chris Ellis and Peter Chamberlain (ed.), *Handbook on the British Army 1943* (London: Purnell Book, 1975), p. 1.

division was in Libya. Its reconnaissance element, the Royal Horse Guards, which was an armoured car regiment, was stationed in Cyprus. Approximately 1000 kilometres separated the two armoured regiments deployed in Libya, while another regiment, the 10 Royal Hussars, was in Jordan. Not only did the division lack an infantry battalion, its units were about 1 000 men below the required numbers. In addition, its administrative tail also did not correspond to the operational requirements for mobile warfare in the desert.²³³ Without reinforcements the division was only able to perform tasks in internal security operations in a fairly static posture. Mobile operations without reinforcement were out of the question.

3.4 Conclusions

The defence agreements in the Middle East reflect the transition slowly taking place in British strategic thinking. From a military point of view, if the Soviet Union was considered the main enemy and Global War the main threat, countries to the south and west of the Mediterranean were losing their importance. Bases in Libya and Egypt were not considered vital any longer in a Global War because this war would be fought primarily by the nuclear weapons delivered by the V-force. From that point of view, only Mafraq in Jordan was of vital interest. Huge, conventional garrisons, such as the British Canal Zone Base, were becoming obsolete at the beginning of the 1950s. In this sense, the defence agreements in the region were more political. They were a means of maintaining status in the area and of pursuing British economic interests.

However, the Suez Canal was considered vital for economic reasons. One can hardly overemphasise the importance of economics in the post-war

²³³ WO 288/131, "10 Armoured Division Historical Report 1 July 56–31 December 56", 28 February 1957. On the strength of the division and the requirement for additional administrative units, see NA WO 32/16319, War Office, (SD2), 1 August 1956, "Reinforcement of MELF". The organisation of the armoured divisions was in transition. In 1955, the British armoured divisions were re-organised. The proven combination of an armoured brigade and an infantry brigade was abandoned. The new organisation called for a very "all-tank" formation consisting of four armoured regiments and of only one battalion of infantry. At the same time, the brigade headquarters were removed from the establishment. It appears, however, that the armoured component of 10th Armoured Division was reduced to only three armoured regiments with an additional infantry battalion. On the basic organisation of an armoured division, see H.C.B. Rogers, *The British Army Today and Tomorrow* (London: Book Club Associates, 1979), p. 134.

strategy of heavily indebted Britain. Continuous and favourable economic development was required if Britain wanted to achieve its goal of becoming a country with a welfare system as had been promised after the Second World War. By nationalising the Suez Canal, Nasser raised the threat of economic blackmail. Had Nasser not made an arms deal, considered the worst kind of communist subversion, with the Soviet Bloc, the situation might have seemed somewhat different from the British perspective. But the idea of submitting British prestige and prosperity to potential blackmail by a possible client of the Soviet Union was too much to bear. From the British point of view, Nasser was by no means neutral. Why? This was because, despite some rare exceptions, there was no such thing as neutrality in the Cold War logic that prevailed at the time – at least within the military. Neutrality was considered a path to communism. An attitude of “If you are not with us, you are against us” dominated military thinking. Neutral states would be easy prey for the Soviets, who had mastered the methods of the Cold War.

The immense redeployment of forces, which was bound to take years, was by no means complete by the time of the Suez Crisis. According to the Canal Agreement, Britain was compelled to withdraw its Canal Garrison in a relatively short period of time. As a result, the new deployments were not totally expedient from a military point of view. The only powerful formation, the 10 Armoured Division, was scattered around the Middle East and thus was not able to operate as a formation without tedious preparation. There were a significant number of army units in Cyprus, but they were a totally unbalanced force. Without mobile administrative units and supporting arms, these battalions could not be used in anything but a counter-insurgency role against lightly-armed guerrillas. It appears that apart from the British Army of the Rhine, the army had adapted the role of maintaining internal security. Most army units were deployed in independent tactical units to conduct imperial policing operations around the Empire.

The new deployments impaired the British ability to intervene in Egyptian matters in particular. In 1953, British forces were in a position to conduct large-scale operations in Egypt within days or weeks. By maintaining such a large contingent in the Canal Base, the British Government controlled Egypt at least partially. This was fully realised by Nasser. He would not be free to

carry out an independent policy before British forces were pushed out of Egypt. The situation was totally different after the retreat from the Canal Zone began. When this coincided with Egyptian re-armament, the British were not in a position to operate freely after the end of 1954. Two years later a large-scale military campaign would take months to prepare as the Limited War studies by the Joint Planning Staff demonstrate.

But could the situation have been any different in the Middle East? Part of the problem was the lack of a comprehensive threat perception. In addition to a Global War, with which the peacetime deployment corresponded reasonably well, what was the most dangerous threat in the region? It appears that the British military was not able to answer this question. The military planning, as well as the policy, was more responsive and reactive than predictive. Political developments were simply moving too quickly for the politicians and for the top-ranking military leadership.

The British had realised that the time of the worldwide garrisons was over. In the event of a Global War, such garrisons would be nothing but good targets, and, above all, there was no money to maintain them. But the concept of a centralised strategic reserve, which was to be the main means to intervene in conventional conflicts, remained incomplete. The British strategic reserve was a dead letter in the Government's White Papers – a good intention without the means to succeed. Considering the wide range of possible contingencies in the Middle East, the status of the strategic reserves was appalling. The reinforcement plans for Jordan called for the rapid deployment of land forces of up to five brigades, but there was no permanent reserve available to conduct this operation. Not only was the force to be transported in a sad condition, but so was the means to transport them. The Transport Command of the Royal Air Force was overstretched. Global commitments, Operation Grapple (the program for thermonuclear testing) and various contingency plans effectively tied up the resources of the inadequate transport fleet. The situation within the amphibious fleet was no better. Although the Mediterranean Station was generally well prepared, the amphibious squadron was inadequate.

However, the planning for a Limited War also demonstrates that the forthcoming problems were, if not anticipated, at least recognised. At least the Joint Planning Staff had a very clear view of British capabilities. It would take months to mount a large-scale, multi-divisional amphibious operation against Egypt, unless nuclear weapons were used. The selective use of nuclear weapons was the only way to intervene quickly and decisively. It appears that the Joint Planning Staff was ahead of its time in a way. The concept of using nuclear weapons tactically in conjunction with conventional military operations was only just gaining momentum in military thinking. If nuclear weapons were not used, the operational concept would be based on the well-proven superiority in numbers and quality. A long maritime blockade, the historical, well proven *modus operandi*, would be not sufficient due to the long time it would take before its effect was felt.

A common factor in all the concepts and in all the contingency plans is the rise of air power. All the plans promoted an aggressive use of aerial bombardment. This trend is by no means a purely British phenomenon and is linked with the development of nuclear weapons. Even though the Korean War and small Cold War events around the world had shown that nuclear weapons were far from being a versatile solution in a conventional crisis, these weapons and air power remained the only solution for defence in the event of a Global War. Not everybody shared this attitude and it appears that the Chiefs of Staff, among others, were not unanimous about the capabilities of air power. It was acknowledged that air power provided a quick and fairly small-scale means of using military power with a limited risk of causing casualties on the side using it. But air forces could not solve everything. This also definitely applied to regions with a large landmass – the Suez Canal being one example. An air force could pave the way for any intervention in Egypt, but the deployment of large land forces would be essential to safeguard the free use of this waterway.

4 THE TACTICAL DOCTRINE – A HERITAGE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

*"Fools never learn from experience; most men learn from their experience; successful men from the experience of others"*²³⁴

As mentioned previously, it would be anachronistic to separate military plans or actual fighting of the war, battles and engagements that took place, from the military doctrine that prevailed at the time. The manner in which armed forces plan and conduct military operations is the culmination of the long, tedious process of the training and preparations that originate from the doctrine.

It is apparent that the strategic doctrine was slowly shifting towards nuclear deterrence. The anticipated Soviet ambitions of expanding their influence through a Global War would be prevented by threatening nuclear devastation on a grand scale. A nuclear arsenal was not, however, an omnipotent answer to wars on a limited scale. Limited Wars, meaning any armed conflict other than a Global War, would be fought using conventional forces and weapons. The Korean War had very clearly shown the limitations of nuclear weapons. Due to its destructive power, the question of using a nuclear weapon was highly political in its nature. These weapons could not be employed in every conflict.

As a result, the nuclear powers, Britain among them, had to maintain armed forces that were ready for conventional conflicts. This chapter examines the fundamentals of traditional, conventional warfare – the essentials of tactical doctrine. In other words, I aim to study the principles involved in the conduct of military operations. The focus in this chapter is on combined operations and on the land operations that were to follow an amphibious landing. The nature of desert tactics is also briefly introduced. Aerial warfare, and strategic bombing in particular, played such an important role in British plans during the Suez Crisis that it will have its own discussion.

²³⁴ *The Naval War Manual* (B.R. 1806, 1958), p. 1.

4.1 Principles of war

"Weapons and methods of waging war are changing constantly. The basic principles however remain the same"²³⁵

War and battle are very complicated phenomena. There is no general rule or concept on how to win a battle or a war. However, there are some principles that can point in the right direction or at least this is what the British believed. These principles, the principles of war, are perhaps the most widely dispersed products of British military thought of the 20th century. The renowned British military thinker J.F.C. Fuller initially produced the principles, or at least he assembled and formulated them in their present form, at the beginning of the 1920's. Since then, they have been either copied or adopted in a suitable form by various armed forces.

By the beginning of the 1950s, the original eight principles of the Field Service Regulations published in 1924 had been refined to ten.²³⁶ As previously mentioned, the services did not possess a joint doctrine, but the Chiefs of Staff did declare the principles "a basis for common doctrine throughout the services."²³⁷

The selection and maintenance of aim was considered to be the "master principle" by all services as it defined both the political and the military aims of warfare. Without a proper and clearly stated purpose established for all levels of war, any effort was bound to lose focus. *Maintenance of morale* promoted the importance of the individual man as the soldier was the only common factor in all operations. The principal of *security* was two-fold. A secure base was a precondition for a successful offensive; however, it was also acknowledged that a calculated risk was sometimes a precondition for success. The Naval War Manual characterised risk-taking as: "It is not a breach of security to take risks; but it is a serious breach not to realise they

²³⁵ *Conduct of War* (WO Code No.8472, 1950), p. ii.

²³⁶ *Field Service Regulations, Vol II, Operations 1924*, (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1924), pp. 2–5.

²³⁷ *The Naval War Manual*, p.18.

are being taken". Surprise should be sought at all levels of war because even when other factors were unfavourable, surprise could lead to success.²³⁸

Concentration of materially and numerically superior forces with better morale against an enemy at a decisive time and place would bring victory one step closer. Concentration of force was important in all forms of battle, but staying on the defensive would not result in final victory. Therefore, *offensive action* was a forerunner of victory, as an attacker would have the initiative and be in a position to choose the decisive time and place.²³⁹

A military commander can rarely be strong everywhere. He must establish priorities to be able to concentrate his forces and to also maintain an adequate level of security. This principle of a reasonable allocation of forces was called *economy of effort*. Conditions would not remain static in a fast-moving war fought in various theatres. To be able to respond appropriately to the unexpected, it was important to maintain *flexibility*. The appearance of the unexpected was not just a negative development. Flexibility was needed to alter plans to seize opportunities. However, opportunities would be lost, if administrative preparations were not adequate. One could claim that the well-learned lesson from previous wars was that *administration* would dictate the planning and conduct of operations, not *vica versa*. Finally, there was the principle of *co-operation*. In spite of peacetime inter-service and inter-arms rivalry, the British realised the importance of co-operation. This principle was naturally emphasised in any combined operation.²⁴⁰

4.2 Overwhelming superiority – the principles of amphibious operations

In his analysis of the role of amphibious warfare in British post-war defence policy, Ian Speller has a chapter on the Second World War entitled "Amphibious Renaissance".²⁴¹ During the course of the war, the Allies launched scores of amphibious operations. The invasion of Europe would not

²³⁸ *The Naval War Manual* (RN code No. B.R.1806, 1958), pp. 18–21; *Conduct of War* (WO Code No. 8472, 1950), pp. 3–5 and *Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1 Operations* (RAF Code No. AP. 1300, 1950), pp. 13–18.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ Speller, *The Role of Amphibious warfare in British Defence Policy, 1945–56* p. 15.

have been possible without large-scale amphibious landings in Italy and France.

Lessons drawn from the Second World War were the governing factors that moulded the British view on the tactical doctrine of combined warfare. According to an unpublished "History of the Combined Operations Organisation" produced by the Amphibious Warfare Headquarters in 1956, the British had conducted over 30 combined operations during the war.²⁴² A typically British, pragmatic respect for experience was embodied in the introduction of *The Manual of Combined Operations* produced in 1950. The basics of the combined warfare defined in the manual were "based on the lessons of Combined Operations in all theatres in the Second World War". The military revolution caused by advanced technology, atomic weapons, supersonic aircraft, guided weapons and a new generation of submarines was acknowledged in the introduction of the manual, but it did not dare to evaluate their influence due to a lack of experience.²⁴³

It would be impossible to analyse all the factors that affected the conduct of a combined operation. These factors were all too varied, detailed and complicated. Instead, one has to focus on the principles that are distilled and described in the *Manual of Combined Operations*, which was the "master manual" for providing "an outline picture of the general conduct of Combined Operations", and in the other manuals in the Combined Operations Handbooks series.

4.2.1 Preconditions for successful operations

The *Manual of Combined Operations* emphasised that the nature of a combined operation did not differ fundamentally from any other operation. The main difference and challenge was the requirement for intense and integrated co-operation between all three services. After all, it has been suggested that the introduction of a combined joint leadership in the form of the Combined Chiefs of Staff was one of the success stories in the alliance

²⁴² *History of the Combined Operations Organisation 1940–1945* (London: Amphibious Warfare Headquarters, 1956), pp. 136.

²⁴³ *The Manual of Combined Operations* (Adm Code 3181, 1950), pp. 1–2.

during the Second World War. The services shared a common view on the essential conditions for a successful operation: command of the sea and air superiority.²⁴⁴ Although both these requirements are discussed in some detail later in this work, it should be emphasised that these requirements were regarded as a precondition for action: otherwise, a “prolonged or large-scale Combined Operations will not be a sound operation of war.”²⁴⁵

Surprise and concentration of forces, already identified as basic principles of war, were promoted in the *Manual of Combined Operations*. Experience had made clear that the first days following the landing were critical because the defender would make every possible effort to dislodge the attacker. To withstand the heavy counterattacks of the defender, a margin of superiority should be attained by not only landing a strong enough initial force, but also by pushing forward with a rapid build-up. The site and timing of the landing should be chosen to cause maximum surprise. It was acknowledged that strategic surprise would be difficult to attain, but a tactical surprise should be achieved by deceiving the enemy as to the time and location of the landing. Tactical surprise should also be achieved by making sure the preparations for the attack were secure and by employing new tactical methods.²⁴⁶ This is exactly what the Allies had done during the war. They had employed a large variety of operations aimed at deceiving the defender in connection with their combined operations. Operation Fortitude, which was the name for the operation aimed at misleading the Germans prior to the invasion of France, is the most celebrated one, but it is not unique. For example, the landings in Italy were preceded by campaigns in deception such as Barcley, Boardman and Zeppelin.²⁴⁷

Due to its very nature, a combined operation required co-operation and compromise between the services. The purpose of the operation was the most important issue to be resolved when acting in accordance with the previously mentioned master principle. The strategic aim of the operation should not be confused with the local objectives of the actual seaborne

²⁴⁴ In addition to *The Manual of Combined Operations*, see *The Conduct of War*, p. 42.

²⁴⁵ *The Manual of Combined Operations*, p. 3.

²⁴⁶ *The Manual of Combined Operations*, pp. 15–16 and *The Naval War Manual*, p. 96.

²⁴⁷ NA DEFE 28/50, Cabinet Office, London Controlling Section, April 1946, “Naval Deception Plans Conducted from Africa and Cairo in 1943 by A Force”.

assault. This assault was only a means of putting a force ashore, which was a tactical objective. The real aim of the operation would be achieved in subsequent operations and thus the selection of the bridgehead should be made in the light of this requirement. The *Manual for Combined Operations* simplifies the issue by describing a combined operation as, "in itself, only a means to an end."²⁴⁸ The naval report on Operation Neptune, which was the initial assault phase of Operation Overlord, illustrates the matter from a historical perspective. This report stated that the aim of the operation was to "secure a lodgement on the continent from which further operations could be developed."²⁴⁹

4.2.2 Naval requirements

The basic naval demand for a successful combined operation was the necessary control of the sea in the area. When this was attained, the navy would be able to provide maximum support for the landing itself. *The Fighting Instructions*, which defined tactical doctrine in the Royal Navy, divided an amphibious operation into five sequential, partially overlapping stages: planning, mounting, preparation for the assault, assault and build-up.²⁵⁰

Mounting and sustaining a combined operation designed to develop into a ground campaign would be impractical without an adequate area with port facilities, preferably outside the effective range of enemy aircraft, to use as a base. The Second World War had witnessed huge developments in landing vessels that were specially designed for combined operations. Thousands of vessels of different categories were constructed to transport land forces to the battle zone. To achieve proper superiority during the assault, a sufficient number of these vessels and other shipping was needed. The further the distance between the base and the landing areas, the more vessels required due to the longer turnaround time.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ *The Manual of Combined Operations*, pp. 1, 15–16.

²⁴⁹ NA DEFE 2/426, "Admiralty report on Operation Neptune", D.S.D. 75/45, date unclear, probably early June 1945 as the report has been received by the Combined Warfare Headquarters on 20 June 1945.

²⁵⁰ *The Fighting Instructions* (Adm Code C.B. 04487, 1947), p. 160.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Naval requirements in the landing area emphasised the importance of a safe approach and suitable beaches for the landing craft. The approach stage could be especially demanding due to enemy mines and obstacles. As a result, the seaward approach should be navigable by minesweeper flotillas. When naval and aerial superiority were achieved, the opposition to the assault would be from coastal defences and ground forces. The assault force and the naval elements supporting the assault should be large enough to overcome the network of coastal defences (consisting of mines, obstacles, coastal guns) and the ground forces deployed to defend the coast.²⁵²

4.2.3 The demand for a rapid break-out

The navy and army shared the requirement for a port, but they had different reasons. The naval point of view stressed the importance of a safe anchorage to shelter the naval force from the enemy and from the weather. The devastation caused by the post Normandy invasion gales should be remembered. The army's demand was interlinked with the subsequent operations on the ground. A good infrastructure of unloading facilities would be essential for a rapid build-up in the bridgehead and a subsequent breakout. There was an alternative to an adequate port: the development of the bridgehead by landing units and supplies on the beaches. However, experience had shown that this was only practicable if an adequate number of specialised transport vessels were available. The build-up phase would be painfully slow without large special vessels, such as LSTs and LCTs, which were able to land men, vehicles and materiel directly on the beach. Getting men and material ashore from moored transport ships would take a very long time unless amphibians such as DUKWs²⁵³ or other minor landing craft were available in substantial numbers.²⁵⁴

The communications network ashore would become an important factor for the very same reason. However, road and rail systems were a double-edged sword. They could be used for a rapid breakout, but they also enabled swift

²⁵² *The Manual of Combined Operations*, pp. 16–18.

²⁵³ A DUWK was a wheeled amphibian capable of operating both on land and at sea. It could transport 7 000 lbs. (3 200 kg) of cargo. *Combined Operations Pamphlet No. 30, Employment of Amphibians in Combined Operations (provisional)* (Navy Code BR 640(30), 1944), appendix A.

²⁵⁴ *The Manual of Combined Operations*, p. 18.

counter-attacks by the enemy.²⁵⁵ Of course such counterattacks could be blocked by an airborne force, assuming a proper landing zone for a parachute force was available. This was another basic factor to be kept in the army commanders' minds.²⁵⁶

If land-based aircraft of the Royal Air Force were to support combat operations, the bridgehead should be within the range of Royal Air Force bases. In order to provide air support for the ground forces, the bridgehead should also include sites suitable for development into airfields.²⁵⁷ For example, ten airfields were constructed for the Royal Air Force in the perimeter of the bridgehead in four weeks during Operation Overlord.²⁵⁸ However, this option was becoming less viable in the early 1950s because modern jet aircraft were not able to operate from the rather unsophisticated grass airfields of their predecessors.

4.2.4 The recipe for victory – superior force

It is interesting to note that the manual did not encourage the British to look for opportunities for unopposed landings, although this could be seen as the point of the principle of surprise in the tactical doctrine. The reason behind this is probably the experience of the Second World War. All the major landings in Europe were conducted on defended beaches. However, as the "History of the Combined Operations" notes, no frontal assaults on a defended port were carried out after the catastrophic Operation Jubilee, the infamous raid on Dieppe.²⁵⁹

The recipe for overcoming opposition in a frontal assault was simple: massive superiority. Neither the *Combined Warfare Manual* nor the *Combined Warfare Handbooks* provided a rule of thumb for the scale of the

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ *Combined Operations Handbook No. 1c. Army Planning of the Combined Operations 1950* (Admiralty No. CB 4522, 1950), p. 6.

²⁵⁷ *The Manual of Combined Operations*, p. 17.

²⁵⁸ M.I. Buchanan, comp., *Works Services and Engineer Stores* (War Office, 1953), pp. 180–181. According to Michael Armitage, there were 13 Allied airfields from which some 38 Allied squadrons operated, see Michael Armitage, *The Royal Air Force: An Illustrated History* (London: Arms and Armour, 1996), p. 176.

²⁵⁹ *History of the Combined Operations Organisation 1940–1945* (London: Combined Warfare Headquarters, 1956), p. 41.

assault and follow-up. The attack force should be assembled in accordance with the principle of attaining overwhelming superiority in numbers. If this was not possible due to a lack of resources, the attacker was left with three alternatives: to reduce the fighting power of the enemy through bombing or diversion, to rely on tactical surprise to compensate for reduced numerical superiority or to alter or totally abandon the plan.²⁶⁰

The conclusions to be drawn from the three alternatives are seemingly trivial but they are still important as they offer an insight into the British view of amphibious operations. An amphibious operation was an operation that simply could not be allowed to fail. According to the *Combined Warfare Manual*, strategic surprise, which meant the achievement of total surprise, would be very difficult to achieve. If successful, tactical surprise could compensate for a lack of resources, but it would include a certain amount of risk. The surest way to win a victory was to allocate enough resources for the landing and to simply push a way through the enemy defences. This might also be the reason why an analysis of the threat perception was not as prominent as would seem to be required in the *Manual of Combined Operations*. Amphibious operations were not regarded as games that could fail. The stakes were too high. Either there would be enough resources to overcome the enemy with certainty or there would be no operation. After all, it had been British reluctance stemming from a lack of resources that had postponed Overlord several times.

The lack of traditional fire support from field artillery was one of the features of an amphibious operation. To compensate for the missing fire of the field batteries, the full weight of the naval and aerial bombardment capacity available was to be brought to bear. This judgement was probably drawn from experience and is related to the British tendency of heavily relying on firepower in the Second World War. This approach will be discussed later in connection with ground operations. It appears that no entirely satisfactory solution for fire-support was invented during the Second World War. Although bombardment had a “considerable moral effect” on some landing beaches, as the report on Operation Neptune indicates, co-operation between the air

²⁶⁰ *The Manual of Combined Operations*, p. 17.

force and the landing force and the time gap between the assault waves and the deployment of supporting artillery remained problematic throughout the war.²⁶¹ The British had improved the situation by introducing specially designed landing craft equipped with an impressive array of rockets and self-propelled artillery that could land and deploy faster than towed artillery, but a totally successful answer was not found.

The manual and the *Combined Operations Handbooks* did not speculate on how much time was required for preparations. Although it is difficult to determine an exact time for the preparations that preceded the combined operations in the Second World War (for example, is the starting point the political directive or the operational instruction by the Commander-in-Chief), it is obvious that it usually took months before a political decision led to actions on the battlefield. Preparations for Overlord took more than a year and the time between the initial Joint Plan and the operational orders was nearly three months long.²⁶² The invasion of Sicily took place nearly six months after the political decision had been made.²⁶³

4.2.5 The employment of airborne forces

Most of the major combined operations of the Second World War included an airborne component. By using examples from the war, the tactical manuals of the late 1940s and the early 1950s listed several general tasks for airborne forces operating in conjunction with a main ground force:

1. Seizure of vital ground that dominated the advance of the main force or the breakout from the amphibious bridgehead
2. An attack on enemy headquarters and rear communications
3. Blocking the arrival of enemy reserves and protecting the flanks
4. Capture of airfields for use as advanced bases
5. Harassment or cutting off the enemy's retreat

²⁶¹ NA DEFE 2/426, "Admiralty report on Operation Neptune", D.S.D. 75/45, date unclear, probably early June 1945 as the report has been received by the Combined Warfare Headquarters on 20 June 1945 and *History of the Combined Operations Organisation 1940–1945*, pp. 119–123.

²⁶² NA DEFE 2/426, "Admiralty report on Operation Neptune", D.S.D. 75/45 and Ian Speller and Christopher Tuck, *Amphibious Warfare. The Theory and Practice of Amphibious Operations in the 20th Century* (Staplehurst: Spellmount 2001), pp. 33–34.

²⁶³ Nigel Nicolson, Alex. *The Life of Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis* (London: Pan Books, 1976), pp. 203, 230–237.

6. Reinforcement of ground troops in action.²⁶⁴

In the *Manual of Combined Operations*, further discussion of the topic was confined to practical tasks relevant to an amphibious assault. Due to their relatively weak firepower, airborne forces were not regarded as being ideal for a direct assault role against enemy beach defences, especially if these beaches were strongly defended. If surprise was achieved however, the employment of an airborne force could provide good prospects for overcoming lightly defended beach defences.²⁶⁵

The use of airborne forces for a direct strike on beach defences was not considered to be the ideal way of deploying them. The tactical limitations of airborne units, which include a lack of firepower, poor tactical mobility, limited sustainability and dependence on weather conditions, were just some of the factors that restricted the airborne force to the vicinity of the landing zone. Thus, airborne forces were considered useful for protecting the flanks of an assault, for preventing or delaying the arrival of enemy reserves, and for capturing ground critical for a breakout from the bridgehead.²⁶⁶ Although the manual for airborne operations promoted the use of airborne divisions, prospects for an independent large-scale airborne operation had slowly vanished since the war as a result of post-war reductions in the airborne corps.²⁶⁷

The deployment of an airborne force was a delicate matter. Owing to the vulnerability of the parachute drop zone and the assembly following landing, the drop zone should be free of enemy interference. However, due to their

²⁶⁴ *Airborne and Air Transport Operations, Land/Air Warfare Pamphlet No 4* (War Office, 1953), pp. 6–7 and *The Manual of Air Transport Operations* (Air Ministry, 1949), chapter 3, para. 13.

²⁶⁵ *The Manual of Combined Operations*, p. 77.

²⁶⁶ *The Manual of Combined Operations*, pp. 77–78 and *Airborne and Air Transport Operations, Land/Air Warfare Pamphlet No 4*, pp. 4–6.

²⁶⁷ The British ability to conduct airborne operations had decreased in parallel with the capacity to mount amphibious operations. The First Airborne Division had been disbanded in 1945 and the 6 Airborne Division was disbanded in 1948 after it returned from Palestine. The only unit left in active service was 2 Parachute Brigade, which was re-designated 16 Independent Parachute Brigade Group in 1948. In addition to 16 Airborne Brigade Group, the Territorial Army (TA) maintained the 16 Airborne Division. However, this division was not designed for use in an airborne role as it was committed to tasks for the defence of the United Kingdom. See, Barry Gregory, *British Airborne Troops 1940–1945* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1974), pp. 154–158 and NA DEFE 5/53, COS (54) 242, 4 August 1954, “The Requirement for an Establishment for Airborne Forces”.

lack of mobility, it would be impractical to land airborne forces in a zone that was more than a few miles distant from the objective. This principal was probably one of the most bitter lessons learned from Operation Market Garden, as well as the need for a link-up with advancing ground forces, preferably with armour to boost weak anti-tank defences, within two days.²⁶⁸

Normally all elements of an airborne formation would not be parachuted into a hostile drop zone simultaneously. Only a limited number of supporting arms and services could be deployed alongside the fighting elements due to a lack of transport capacity. However, airborne formations were like all other formations: they were a balanced combination of arms and services. As a result, an early link-up between the fighting and support elements was required after which the formation could be used in a normal ground role.²⁶⁹

When should an airborne landing take place? During Operation Overlord, the Allied landings took place several hours before the amphibious landings were to occur. The *Manual for Combined Operations* provides no advice on timing, but its forerunner from 1945, *Combined Operations Pamphlet No 1*, presents the idea that the timing of the operation was connected to the tasks of the airborne element. If the airborne forces were to support the main assault locally, the airborne attack should be made at or after H-Hour to prevent the loss of the element of surprise. If the airborne landings aimed at diverting or blocking the involvement of enemy forces, landings could be executed before H-Hour.²⁷⁰

4.3 Attrition continued – the tactics of warfare on the ground

British views on the nature of the operations that would follow an amphibious landing corresponded with their experiences in the Second World War. Britain and the Allies had faced a determined, skilful enemy that was prepared to fight until its fighting power was completely exhausted. The German-Italian army in North Africa had resisted until it was encircled. The

²⁶⁸ *Airborne and Air Transport Operations, Land/Air Warfare Pamphlet No 4*, pp. 4–6 and 32.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 36–37.

²⁷⁰ *Combined Operations Pamphlet No. 1, Combined Operations (General)* (1945), pp. 30–31.

German will to fight had not collapsed even though the divisions of the *Wehrmacht* were severely mauled during Overlord. The Germans had regrouped their forces over and over again and continued their persistent resistance even when there was no apparent victory in sight. It is not surprising that British tactical manuals promoted the destruction of the enemy as a result of this experience. Only after the physical destruction and annihilation of his fighting power, would the will of the enemy collapse.

The aim of destroying the enemy on the battlefield meant that the British were bound to adapt attrition as their principal approach to battle. Centrally planned battles were designed to wear down the enemy instead of seeking to cause dislocation. This, in turn, meant that the British approach to mobile warfare was not a copy of German *Blitzkrieg*-tactics, which were characterised by bold, deep penetrations into their opponents' rear followed by encirclement.²⁷¹

The variety of British experience also dictated the British view of the battlefield itself. Apart from a few experiences in the desert, the British had not launched rapid large-scale penetrations followed by remorseless pursuit in the Second World War. The war in Italy and North-Western Europe had been characterised by futile efforts to create breakthroughs against an enemy defence system that had been organised in depth and was supported by mobile reserves. Operations aimed at annihilating the opponent were to be conducted pragmatically and methodologically. Jonathan House, an author who studies the evolution of combined arms warfare, claims that the British were able to succeed only after they shifted to "World War I-style planning" that included centralised "stage-management" of the battlefield at the highest level of command.²⁷²

It is obvious that combined operations were centrally planned and characterised by a set-piece approach because of their complexity and because of the requirement for utmost secrecy. There were simply too many

²⁷¹ For the basic elements of *Blitzkrieg*-tactics, see Pasi Kesseli, *In Pursuit of Mobility. The Birth and Development of Israeli Operational Art. From Theory to Practice*. Doctoral Dissertation published by the Department of War History, National Defence College of Finland, (Helsinki: Edita, 2001), p. 13 and appendix 2.

²⁷² Jonathan House, *Combined Arms. Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press 2001), p. 119.

components that could fail. As discussed, the assault on and consolidation of a bridgehead along with any possible airborne operation were the only means for entering the battlefield. Did the principles of combined operations apply to subsequent ground operations aimed at achieving the strategic aim as well? What were the basic tactical principles for employing formations after the breakout from the bridgehead?

As mentioned earlier, views on the nature of war were in transition in the mid-1950s. The United States and the Soviet Union were slowly introducing tactical nuclear weapons.²⁷³ The influence of these weapons on tactics, the way they would mould the battlefield, were still being studied. In 1952, the War Office produced a provisional pamphlet on nuclear warfare, *Notes in Atomic Warfare*, but its recommendations, including mobility, dispersion of assets, the requirement for speed, and the importance of the terrain, were still elementary.²⁷⁴ A Limited War, which would be fought against a non-nuclear power with conventional weapons, could be very similar to the Second World War. After all, the Korean War had been a very traditional war where large conventional armies confronted each other.

4.3.1 The tool – tactical formations

The manuals of the 1950s were designed to meet the demands of units that were larger than those that actually existed during peacetime. Some of the manuals still covered high-level formations like army-groups or armies. Such formations existed, the Northern Army Group was an example, but they were multi-national. The highest nationally controlled formation that the British expected to mobilise was a corps, even though the manual on organising a corps headquarters declared that it would “under normal conditions” be part of an army. The same manual stated that “a corps is the highest headquarters which is intimately connected with a tactical battle.”²⁷⁵ In other words, the function of a corps was to connect (theatre) strategy and tactics.

²⁷³ Theodore Mataxis and Seymour Goldberg, *Nuclear Tactics, Weapons and Firepower in the Pentomic Division, Battle Group and Company* (Harrisburg: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1958), pp. 34–41.

²⁷⁴ *Notes on Atomic Warfare* (War Office Code 8912, 1954), pp. 4–9.

²⁷⁵ *Command and Organization of a Corps Headquarters in War* (War Office Code 1893, 1950), p.1.

The corps had taken over the role that had been assigned to armies in the Second World War.

Unlike a division, a corps did not have a permanent structure. It was to be designed for special purposes and was considered strong enough to carry out independent operations. The order of battle of 30 Corps during the crossing of the Rhine at the beginning of 1945 provides a good example of a fairly large army corps. It consisted of four infantry divisions, an armoured division and an armoured brigade, and a large body of supporting arms and services.²⁷⁶ Six months earlier during Operation Market Garden, the same corps had consisted of only three divisions. At the time of the Suez Crisis, the British possessed only one permanent corps, 1 Corps, which was part of the Northern Army Group in Germany.

The basic formation used in ground operations was still the division. The composition of a division had changed relatively little since the end of the Second World War. In spite of the introduction of independent brigade groups, the 16 Independent Parachute Brigade Group was a good example of this trend, the division remained the basic fighting formation in the British army.

An armoured division had an armoured brigade subdivided into three armoured regiments, a motor battalion and a lorried²⁷⁷ infantry brigade consisting of three infantry battalions. Apart from the brigade headquarters, a headquarters squadron and a light aid detachment, the brigades possessed no supporting arms or services²⁷⁸ as they were pooled at the divisional level.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ J.A.H. Carter & D.N. Kann, comp., *Maintenance in the Field, Vol II: 1943–1945* (War Office, 1961), pp. 362–363.

²⁷⁷ A motor battalion and a lorried infantry battalion had different equipment and roles. A motor battalion was intended to fight alongside the armour in every situation. As a result, it was tactically mounted and possessed good mobility and protection in the form of armoured personnel carriers. Furthermore, the motor battalion possessed greater firepower than an infantry battalion but could put far fewer men on the ground than the infantry battalion, which meant that it was not suitable for a large-scale deliberate assault. A lorried infantry battalion was basically an infantry battalion transported by lorries organic to the battalion and by the lorries of the divisional transport column. For the organisation and tasks of a motor battalion, see SAR, T 26890/Hla 4, RAC Centre, Tactical Wing, 1956, Tactical Note "The Motor Battalion".

²⁷⁸ The terms "arms" and "services" require some further explanation. The term "arms" was a generic term for the branches of service that participated in the actual fighting, e.g., armour,

Divisional reconnaissance, vital for an up-to-date picture of the enemy and for the planning of mobile operations, was chiefly assigned to the armoured car regiment. This unit included three squadrons designed and equipped to carry out independent reconnaissance in advance of the forward troops.²⁸⁰ Two self-propelled artillery regiments and a light anti-aircraft regiment under the command of the Commander, Royal Artillery provided additional firepower. The Divisional Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps, was essentially a heavy anti-tank regiment equipped with self-propelled anti-tank guns. A field engineer regiment whose main task was to enhance the mobility of the division provided engineer support. The divisional signals regiment was responsible for the division's communications network. This network was based on the extensive use of wireless communications and was essential for leading mobile operations.

The Armoured Division in Battle defines the "dependence of the division on its administrative echelon" as one of the main characteristics of an armoured formation. Mobile operations could not be sustained unless special emphasis was put on administration. The divisional administrative apparatus consisted of the following elements:

- a divisional RASC (Royal Army Supply Corps) column of three transport companies and a troop carrying company
- medical units consisting of two field ambulances²⁸¹ and a field dressing station (FDS)
- three armoured workshops whose main task was vehicle evacuation and repair
- Royal Army Ordnance Corps' field park, bath and laundry company and store sections.²⁸²

infantry, artillery, signals and engineers. The term "services" covered all the administrative branches of service.

²⁷⁹ To compare the organisation with that used in the Second World War, see George Forty, *British Army Handbook 1939–1945* (London: Chancellor Press, 2000), p. 161 or F.M von Senger und Etterling, *Die Panzergrenadiere. Geschichte und Gesicht der Mechanisierten Infanterie 1930–1960* (Munchen: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1961), pp. 148–149.

²⁸⁰ SARk, T 26890/Hla 4, RAC Centre, Tactical Wing, 1956, Tactical Note "The Armoured Car Regiment".

²⁸¹ One should not confuse a field ambulance with the vehicle called an ambulance. A field ambulance was a medical unit with some 230 men and 40 vehicles.

²⁸² *The Armoured Division in Battle* (War Office Code 8715, 1952), pp. 11 and 19–23.

The organisational structure of an infantry division was quite similar. The infantry component was organised into three infantry brigades. The organization of other arms and administrative units followed the lines of an armoured division. The greatest difference was in the number of field artillery regiments and field ambulances. There were three of each in an infantry division, although the field regiments were armed with towed guns, as the basic tactical solution was to support each brigade with a field regiment and a field ambulance.²⁸³

During the Second World War, most British amphibious assaults had been carried out by army formations specially trained for the task. In addition to establishing commando units capable of raiding and carrying out amphibious assaults, the major proportion of the 74 000 marines who served were deployed in their traditional role in small detachments onboard the vessels of the Royal Navy. The end of the war saw a radical reduction of the Royal Marines and only one larger formation remained: 3 Commando Brigade.²⁸⁴

By the middle of the 1950s, 3 Commando Brigade was practically the only remaining formation that was specially trained for amphibious warfare. To be precise, the brigade cannot be described as a real formation because it lacked the pool of arms and services essential for independent operations. The brigade consisted of three battalion-sized units called commandos but all the other arms and services, such as armour or medical units, were to be subordinated to the brigade according to its mission.

4.3.2 The British art of attack

The roles and tasks of an armoured division and an infantry division in attack were quite clear. Both divisions were considered suitable for advance into contact with enemy forces, although an armoured division would naturally be more suited for rapidly changing situations due to its characteristics: mobility, striking power, armour, and advanced wireless communications. If the enemy had been able to establish a solid defence, it was the task of the infantry division to locate it and to punch a hole through it. An armoured division,

²⁸³ *The Infantry Division in Battle* (War Office Code 1857, 1950), p. 81.

²⁸⁴ Julian Thompson, *Royal Marines, From Sea Soldiers to a Special Force*, pp. 417–420.

preparing for its role away from the frontline, would then push forward to exploit the success when enemy defences were at the breaking point or already broken.²⁸⁵

The British view of advancing into contact reflects their concept of a tightly knit battlefield with very few opportunities for an easy advance. Because there were relatively few gaps on the battlefield, it would be "desirable to advance on as wide a front as possible".²⁸⁶ Due to its fighting power, the armoured division was considered adequate for advancing as the first echelon of a corps. Taking advantage of its good mobility and wireless communications, the division should advance along several parallel roads behind the reconnaissance screen of an armoured car regiment. As the advance into contact was considered risky, mainly due to open flanks that left the enemy an opportunity to attack the divisions' administrative chain, the manuals did not call for a frantic advance. Dashing forward with little concern for the flanks was not among the British principles. Advancing into contact, just like other operations, was based on careful planning and preparations that included a careful assessment of the enemy and of the problems posed by the terrain.²⁸⁷

The manuals specified two kinds of attacks: a hasty attack against an enemy that had not been able to consolidate his defences and a deliberate attack against an enemy in a well developed defence system. An armoured division was particularly suited for a hasty attack, also called an encounter battle, as the fighting had not settled into a close-range slugging match and there was still an opportunity to achieve rapid breakthrough. A precondition for any successful attack, whether hasty or deliberate, was meticulous preparation. An attack should be mounted from behind secure lines held by friendly forces. This allowed the division to be only committed to battle when intended, which prevented the dispersal of its fighting power. The attack itself should be supported by concentrated fire and be prepared to meet deep defences. The objectives captured during the advance should be secured at the earliest possible moment to fend off any counter-attacks. In other words,

²⁸⁵ *The Infantry Division in Battle*, p. 22 and *The Armoured Division in Battle* (War Office Code 1871, 1952), p. 12.

²⁸⁶ *Conduct of War* (War Office Code No.8472, 1950), p. 15.

²⁸⁷ *The Armoured Division in Battle*, pp. 32–33.

the aim after making a breakthrough was not to make a rapid and ruthless advance into the enemy rear, but, as the tactical handout of the Royal Armoured School put it, "to break through the enemy advanced forces and seize tactical features."²⁸⁸ The focus of capturing vital ground and reinforcing defences with strong anti-tank defences was based on British experience in the Western Desert. This was where the Germans had repeatedly lured British armour into their anti-tank traps, often with disastrous results.²⁸⁹

If the enemy was able to consolidate his defences, a deliberate attack was required to break the defensive lines. A deliberate attack used the trusted methods of the set-piece operation, which was another predominant feature of British tactics in the Second World War. Such attacks were carried out by infantry, preferably by an infantry division supported by armour. These attacks were divided into four stages: preparations, break-in, dog-fight at close quarters and break-out.²⁹⁰

Infantry manuals from divisional to platoon level emphasised the importance of certain principles. These were called the "*Eight Basic Points*", and they were a prerequisite for any successful deliberate attack. The first three of these points, organising an attack in depth, concentrating fire, and mounting the attack from behind secure lines, were already presented in the context of an encounter battle. The other principles called for infantry-armour-artillery co-ordination, maintenance of impetus, swift reorganization, rapid redeployment of supporting arms, and domination of the No Man's Land after reorganization.²⁹¹

The value of careful preparations in a deliberate attack was as significant as ever. Determined reconnaissance, including aerial photography, played a paramount role in revealing the dispositions of the enemy and the location of any obstacles in the way. Determining the location of enemy forces was not only important for planning the attack, it was also important for preparing the

²⁸⁸ SArk, T 26890/Hla 4, RAC Centre, Tactical Wing, 1956, Tactical Note "The Attack".

²⁸⁹ Jonathan House, *Combined Arms. Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001), p. 125.

²⁹⁰ *The Infantry Division in Battle*, p. 26.

²⁹¹ *The Infantry Division in Battle*, pp. 25–26; *Infantry Training, Vol IV, The Infantry Platoon in Battle* (War Office Code 9624, 1960), pp. 110–111 and SArk, T 26890/Hla 4, RAC Centre, Tactical Wing, 1956, Tactical Note "The Attack".

fire support. In order to conserve forces for the main attack, the assembly of forces and the advance to the start line for the attack should take place behind lines secured by friendly forces.²⁹²

Terrain considerations also played an important part in British tactical thinking. Consequently, the structure of a set-piece attack called for careful staging aimed at capturing a specific piece of terrain of tactical value. In other words, the British paid special attention to ground dominating the battlefield. The principle of concentration applied particularly to a deliberate attack. In order to not jeopardise the impetus, the attack should be directed against a narrow front. The stronger and deeper the defence, the narrower the front to be attacked should be. In a divisional attack, this meant in practice that a strong position was to be assaulted by only one brigade at a time, while the two others would be used to deepen the break-through, to secure the flanks and to act as a reserve. The principle of concentration applied not only to man power, but to firepower as well. In order to sustain the momentum, the attack should be organised on a narrow but deep front to enable the concentration of maximum firepower on the decisive area.²⁹³

It was anticipated that the nature of the fighting would change after the initial breakin phase. Command and control would inevitably become more difficult as the fight turned into a slow and dispersed slog, with close-range fighting in the enemy positions. In order to maintain the advance, the divisional commander should not commit the main body of his forces to deal with petty pockets of resistance left on the flanks or rear. Instead, he was to aim for a deeper penetration with follow-up attacks by available forces.²⁹⁴

Once the attacking forces gained their intermediate objectives, they should consolidate their positions and defend themselves at the earliest possible stage. One of the features of the tactical level in the Second World War had been the German ability to mount rapid counter-attacks. Not only had German defences been organised in depth, but there had also been an adequate tactical mobile reserve available to repel any Allied breakthrough.

²⁹² *The Infantry Division in Battle*, pp. 26–27.

²⁹³ *The Infantry Division in Battle*, pp. 30–31.

²⁹⁴ *The Infantry Division in Battle*, pp. 43–45.

It was often the case in the battle for Normandy that local territorial gains had not developed into anything due to rapidly mounted German counter-attacks.²⁹⁵ This experience was fully acknowledged in British post-war manuals. These manuals emphasised the need for rapid organisation of anti-tank defences between the attack phases because the attacking forces would be under constant threat of counter-attack by enemy armour. The basic principle of using anti-tank assets in an offence was to bring them forward as soon as the situation permitted. In order to create the strongest possible defence, most of the divisional or subordinated anti-tank units were to be deployed forward and not retained in the reserve. Although mines were to be used mainly when on the defensive, minefields could be built to protect vulnerable flanks. Even hastily prepared minefields would provide protection, as it was unlikely that the enemy would be able to conduct careful reconnaissance before his counter-attack.²⁹⁶

The fight within the enemy positions was to be followed by a breakout. This was the moment to shift from the infantry to armour. In a fight by a corps, it would be the time to advance the armoured division through the breach and begin the pursuit as soon as possible. Pursuit was held to be the most suitable form of fighting for an armoured division. Therefore the tactical manuals advised that a divisional commander could permit himself to accept “greater tactical and administrative gambles”. The purpose of the pursuit was to deny the enemy time to re-organise his defences. This could be accomplished by directing the advance through the central nodes of the communication lines in the enemy rear.²⁹⁷

To exploit success during a pursuit, the general principal of keeping a division together could be relaxed. In the early stages of the war in the Western Desert, dispersal of forces had been one of the British tactical mistakes. Vast areas and relatively small forces had proved to be an irresistible temptation to British commanders to disperse their forces, often

²⁹⁵ Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), pp. 145–148.

²⁹⁶ *Anti-tank Tactics*. (WO Code No.8807, 1953), pp. 26; 36–38.

²⁹⁷ *The Armoured Division in Battle*, pp. 47–50.

with catastrophic consequences.²⁹⁸ The British were not doctrinally prepared or trained to adapt to the new tactics promoting mobile warfare with widely dispersed units. When Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery assumed command of the 8 Army, one of his first tasks was to re-organise his forces back into divisions.²⁹⁹ The desire to keep the division the basic fighting formation remained palpable in the early 1950s tactical manuals.³⁰⁰ In a pursuit however, an armoured division could be grouped into composite brigade groups with attached artillery and engineers to make its advance as rapid and flexible as possible.³⁰¹

4.3.3 Reminiscent of El Alamein – desert tactics

"Desert warfare is largely a matter of administration and a threat to communications at once becomes a very serious matter"³⁰²

The tactical principles described above were designed for operations all over the world. However, it should emphasised that they were only principles and that they were to be adapted according to the situation. Desert warfare had special features of its own. The reaction to these features was also based on three and a half years' of experience of fighting against Axis forces in North Africa.

As an operating environment the desert was dramatically different from conditions in Europe. Open spaces without landmarks made navigation and concealment difficult. The lack of infrastructure, such as roads, railways and inhabited areas, and long distances put severe stress on transportation. The hostile climate not only affected personnel but also equipment, causing particular problems for vehicles and hardware. All these factors were mainly negative and they contributed to the birth of the famous aphorism: "desert is a quartermasters' hell". The other side of the coin was freedom to manoeuvre. With adequate preparations, a desert could become "a

²⁹⁸ Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power. British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904 – 1945* (George Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp. 224–226 and *Notes from the Theatres of War, No. 6 Cyrenaica, November, 1941/January, 1942* (War Office, 1943), pp. 3–4.

²⁹⁹ Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: Making of a General 1887–1942* (Sevenoaks: Sceptre, 1981), pp. 671–672.

³⁰⁰ *Warfare in Undeveloped Countries, Part 1—Desert Warfare* (War Office Code 8828, 1954), p. 2.

³⁰¹ *The Armoured Division in Battle*, pp. 47–50.

³⁰² LHCMA, LH 15/11, Papers of Major General Hobart. "7th Armoured Division, An Account of the Operations in Libya, 18th Nov–27th Dec 1941", 31 January 1942.

tactician's dream." A tactical pamphlet used by British forces in Egypt summed up the problems of fighting in the desert by describing the desert as a barrier that one had to cross. Whoever sought to cross this barrier had to be properly prepared since combat in the desert was a battle for lines of communication and supply. It would not be enough to cross the barrier because there would be an enemy who sought to cut your communications on the other side.³⁰³

The tactical principles of conducting warfare in the desert differed surprisingly little from the tactics presented in the basic manuals for armoured and infantry divisions. Instead of emphasising the possibilities for manoeuvre, the manuals offered pragmatic advice on deliberate attacks. In spite of undeniable German triumphs in 1942, it is evident that the British interpreted the results of these battles through their own experience rather than considering their opponent's insights. Defence was considered to be more powerful than offence. However, the ideal way to fight was to first defend and then to attack.

The British view of desert tactics is actually strikingly similar to the tactics used in the battles of Alam El Halfa and El Alamein. It was in Alam El Halfa that the British stopped Rommel's push into Egypt. The main tactical ingredients of the victory had been a lethal combination of anti-tank guns, the deployment of tanks in anti-tank tasks and concentrated artillery fire.³⁰⁴ The only way to defeat such a defence was to plan and execute a deliberate attack. Although the principles of such an attack have been described earlier, it is essential to emphasise a few details characteristic of desert warfare and the British experience.

Because a featureless desert offered few opportunities for concealment, tactical surprise, one of the principles of war, was to be achieved through deception. In addition to strategic deception, deception at the tactical level was typical of the British way of fighting. For example, deception by 13 Corps in El Alamein, and, later, deception by 2 Army during the battle of Normandy

³⁰³ *Military Operations in the Desert*. A training pamphlet by the General Headquarters, Middle East Land Forces, 1951, pp. 6–7.

³⁰⁴ See, e.g., Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: Making of a General 1887–1942*, pp. 637–642.

in 1944, included elements aimed at luring the enemy into a battle of attrition or at distracting the enemy from the axis of main effort.³⁰⁵

The killing power of anti-tank and infantry weapons in the desert was difficult to overcome, particularly if combined with minefields and obstacles. To compensate for vulnerability to these weapons in a open terrain, the desert manuals suggested night attacks as an appropriate *modus operandi*. In order to take full advantage of the darkness, the attack should be planned to start early in the evening so that re-organization could take place before dawn. A feature of a night attack was that the frontage and depth of the attacking unit would be reduced to half of the frontage covered during daylight.³⁰⁶

One of the main reasons for the setbacks suffered by British armour in the Second World War had been a lack of co-operation between infantry and armour. British armour had often committed itself to unsupported head-on attacks. This happened so often that it was described as "an unruly mob of latter-day chevaliers" by John Ellis, who has analysed Allied tactics in the Second World War. The results of these assaults were often horrific. The attacking armour was sometimes decimated, as it was unable to clear the enemy's anti-tank defences without any infantry and artillery support.³⁰⁷ However, there was another side to the coin. The concept of the battle of El Alamein had been based on close co-operation between the different arms. The "crumbling" attacks, aimed at systematically wearing down German defences through integrated attacks by armour and infantry, had been a

³⁰⁵ There is still controversy over whether the operations of the 2 British Army in the Caen area were intended to tie down the German armour or whether its failure to break through the German defence was explained away as being part of a deception. Compare, e.g., Liddell Hart's critical analysis of the matter with Montgomery's own views; B.H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (London: Papermark, 1997), pp. 578–583 and Montgomery of Alamein, *A Concise History of Warfare* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2000), p. 331.

³⁰⁶ *Warfare in Undeveloped Countries, Part 1 – Desert Warfare* (War Office Code 8828, 1954), pp. 16–18 and *The Infantry Battalion in Battle* (War Office Code 8716, 1952), p. 101–106.

³⁰⁷ John Ellis, *Brute Force. Allied Strategy and tactics in the Second World War* (London: Andre Deutch, 1990), pp. 244–247 and P.G. Griffith, "British Armoured Warfare in the Western Desert 1940–43" in J.P. Harris and F.H. Toase (eds.), *Armoured Warfare* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1990), pp. 77–80. For an evaluation from the time, see *Notes from the Theatres of War, No. 4 Cyrenaica, November 1941 – January 1942* (War Office, 1942), pp. 1–3.

great success.³⁰⁸ This co-operation and the way the armour was employed reflect the British view on the employment of armour very well.

Following the breakthrough, an armoured force of up to a division should be directed to an area that was so essential to the enemy that he would be forced to counter-attack. The armoured force would then shift over to the defence as “Armoured tactics are based on the fact that stationary tanks from hull-down positions can engage tanks moving to attack with far greater prospects of success than if the enemy has to be attacked in position.”³⁰⁹ If the situation was favourable, the enemy counter-attacks were defeated and the administrative arrangements were sound, it was time for the pursuit. The aim of the pursuit was to cut the enemy lines of communication, concentrating first on the combat area itself. Afterwards, the pursuit should be directed deep into the enemy rear to achieve decisive results. To overcome the administrative problems, which were bound to be severe, full advantage of air supply and large columns of heavy transport vehicles should be taken.³¹⁰

This brings us to administration, one of the cornerstones of sound warfare. The manual on desert warfare sums up the most important lesson of fighting in the desert by declaring that “victory came to the side that at the time was able put on the field superior forces and was then able to maintain their fighting efficiency over long distances during operations carried out at great speed.”³¹¹

One could claim that the British way to maintain momentum was based on efficient administration. The division was the basic framework for

³⁰⁸ Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: Making of a General 1887–1942* (Sevenoaks: Sceptre, 1981), p. 711.

³⁰⁹ *Warfare in Undeveloped Countries, Part 1 – Desert Warfare* (War Office Code 8828, 1954), pp. 21–22. The principle of fighting an armoured battle from a defensive posture is also described in an MELF training pamphlet, see *Military Operations in the Desert*. A training pamphlet by the GHQ Middle East Land Forces, 1951, pp. 16–17.

³¹⁰ *Warfare in Undeveloped Countries, Part 1 – Desert Warfare*, pp. 27–28.

³¹¹ *Warfare in Undeveloped Countries, Part 1 – Desert Warfare*, p. 3. According to Martin Van Creveld's analysis, this was truly one of the reasons for the Allied victory. At the same time, problems with administration were one of the main reasons for the Axis defeat, see Martin Van Creveld, *Supplying War. Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 199–201.

administration as it was structured and equipped for independent administration.³¹²

There were only minimal administrative units at the brigade level and below, although there was a support company at the battalion level. The British way of grouping administrative units, and transports units above all, was to concentrate them at the divisional level and above to relieve battalion and brigade commanders of administrative burdens. This had two consequences. First, brigade level and smaller units were not able to conduct independent operations unless they were grouped with administrative units and materiel. Second, the only way to conduct administration functions was to move from rear to front as the administrative resources were centralised. Of course, the idea of providing administrative support to actual combat units was in line with the principle of offence. Tactical units engaging the enemy could focus on actual fighting while the service units at the divisional or corps level would handle the administration.

Although the administrative units were centrally controlled, as was the battle as a whole, they were deployed to support combat operations at a low level. The manual for administration gives a clear explanation for this: "The system by which the stocks are held well forward is designed to give that necessary flexibility which enables a commander to switch formations rapidly and to compete with the changing conditions of mobile (*sic*) warfare".³¹³ This naturally put heavy strain on divisional level transportation. The transport columns of the Royal Army Supply Corps were to transport materiel to specific points³¹⁴ in the rear of the brigades. This required a large number of motor vehicles. Royal Army Supply Corps transport companies possessed about 180 lorries in an infantry division and some 420 in the more mobile armoured divisions.³¹⁵

³¹² *Administration in the Field*. Vol 1: *Administration within the Division* (War Office, 26/GS/1956, 1951), p. 18.

³¹³ *Administration in the Field*. Vol 1: *Administration within the Division* (War Office, 26/GS/1956, 1951), pp. 3–4.

³¹⁴ Ammunition was delivered to ammunition points (AP), petrol and lubricants to petroleum points (PP), and supplies to supply points (SP). Usually, there was one of each of these points for every brigade and one for troops under divisional command. For example, in an infantry division consisting of three infantry brigades, the basic solution was to establish four ammunition points.

³¹⁵ *Administration in the Field*. Vol 1: *Administration within the Division*, appendix and SArk, T 26890/Hla 4, RAC Centre, Tactical Wing, 1956, Tactical Note "Replenishment and Supply".

Within administrative planning, the principle of foresight was emphasised as a result of historical experience. Administrative arrangements for a large-scale attack, especially if executed in the desert, were a time-consuming process because planning and preparations had to be made not only for the initial attack but also for subsequent operations. This fact was easily overlooked when operations were analysed afterwards. The planning and preparations for the offensive at El Alamein had lasted for over two months from the first directive by General Alexander. Furthermore, most of the time was spent on training and setting up the administrative chain.³¹⁶ The administrative challenge for an amphibious attack was even greater. The preparations for the landing in Sicily took about ten weeks after a firm plan had been completed. The Allied landings at Anzio, which can be classified as a short-range combined operation, had taken ten weeks as well.³¹⁷

Finally, there is the aspect of firepower. Allied tactics in the Second World War have often been described as a manifestation of firepower, the paramount element of attrition. As J.B.A. Bailey notes in his comprehensive study on artillery tactics, the massing of firepower was the main ingredient in British tactics in the Second World War. In lower level formations such as divisions, this meant the massing of artillery.³¹⁸

The rules for employing massed artillery had changed little since the war. Advanced communications and the extended ranges of the artillery pieces offered opportunities to concentrate artillery fire, at least within the framework of a corps. The Second World War had seen huge artillery concentrations, especially when a breakthrough was being prepared for. Operation Goodwood, the British attempt to break through the German lines in Normandy, included about 36 artillery regiments in the fire preparation. The culmination of the artillery battle took place some months later when 30 Corps penetrated the Siegfried Line. Over 1 000 guns were assembled to support an attack taking place in an area approximately 5 000 meters wide

³¹⁶ *History of the Second World War. The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol IV* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1966), p.1.

³¹⁷ J.A.H Carter and D.N. Kann, comp., *Maintenance in the Field, Vol II: 1943–1945* (War Office, 1961), p. 156.

³¹⁸ J.B.A. Bailey, *Field Artillery and Firepower* (Oxford: The Military Press, 1989), pp. 206–208.

and 12 000 meters deep. Massive counter-battery fire was followed by a creeping barrage that lasted for 6 ½ hours. Over 400 000 rounds of ammunition were expended.³¹⁹ Fire preparations of this magnitude were not possible without a rigid and centralised command system. This principle was still encouraged in the post-war artillery manual.³²⁰

Heavy ammunition expenditure was characteristic of artillery operations conducted in conjunction with a deliberate attack. To give an idea of the amount of fire needed, one may quote an artillery manual that had been written based on the “results of investigations carried out on bombardments in North Africa and Western Europe”. The manual promoted an extensive and heavy use of firepower in artillery preparations. According to the manual, it took approximately two thousand 25-pounder³²¹ shells an hour to neutralise³²² an enemy occupying open positions in an area that was 1 000 yards by 1 000 yards. If the aim was to demoralise the enemy, to break his will to resist in other words, it would take 16 000 rounds in four hours or 10 000 rounds in 15 minutes to accomplish this goal.³²³ If the enemy was dug-in or in proper fortifications such as the concrete bunkers typical of beach defences the amount of fire needed would naturally rise significantly.

The artillery plan was to extend beyond the preparatory bombardment. The advance was to be supported by covering fire aimed principally at neutralizing the enemy's anti-tank weapons and small arms. The basic form of neutralizing fire had its origins not in the Second World War, but in the Great War.³²⁴ A creeping barrage, as a wall of artillery fire advancing in front

³¹⁹ A.L. Pemberton, comp., *The Development of Artillery Tactics and Equipment* (War Office 1950), pp. 225, 262–264 and map 16.

³²⁰ *Artillery in Battle. Organization, Command and Employment* (WO Code 8288, 1948), pp. 26–27.

³²¹ The 25-pounder gun was the basic field gun in the field regiments of the British Army in the Second World War. It retained its role until the 1960s. The gun was capable of delivering a shell weighing 25 pounds to a range of 13 400 yards (12 200 metres). *History of the Second World War. The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol IV* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1966), p. 503.

³²² According to an artillery manual of the time, “neutralization is achieved when artillery fire prevents the enemy from doing as he wishes, eg, from using his weapons effectively”; “Demoralization is achieved when the enemy's will to resist is broken to such an extent that he does not recover for an appreciable time after the fire has lifted.”

³²³ *Artillery in Battle. Organization, Command and Employment*, pp. 57–58.

³²⁴ For an analysis of British artillery tactics during the First World War and a description of a creeping barrage, see Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front. The British Army's Art of Attack 1916–1918* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 142–145.

of the infantry was known, still retained its role as the basic form of covering fire when enemy positions were not known. If the enemy positions were well known, they would be subjected to a series of concentrations, another form of neutralizing fire.³²⁵

4.4 The primary arm – the principles of air power

"Allied Air Power was decisive in the war in Western Europe. Hindsight inevitably suggests that it might have been employed differently or better in some respects. Nevertheless it was decisive"³²⁶

It is no coincidence that John Slessor, Marshal of the Royal Air Force, a former Chief of Air Staff quoted the United States Strategic Bombing Survey in his 1954 book "Strategy for the West". As established previously, Britain's strategic doctrine was to be based on nuclear deterrence. This doctrine emphasised the role of the Royal Air Force due to the absence of missiles, which were still under development. The RAF was to supposed to become the primary arm since it was to deliver Britain's nuclear inventory if deterrence failed.

As mentioned earlier, the scope for potential Limited Wars was vast and the Royal Air Force had to adapt to a different role in conventional war. During the Suez Crisis, air power was to play a predominant role in the Allied attack plans. To understand the background for the decisions taken in these plans, it is relevant to review the ideas about aerial warfare that prevailed at the time. As discussed earlier, the Second World War provided the empirical basis for British tactics in the early 1950s. Had the role of air forces changed since the Second World War? What were the roles and principles of applying air power in a conflict short of a Global War?

³²⁵ SAArk, T 26890/Hla 4, RAC Centre, Tactical Wing, 1956, Tactical Note "Attack" and T 23101/F 3 sal, SKK:n asiak nro 50/sal/29.1.1959, "Majuri M Alajoen matkakertomus tutustumismatkasta Englannin kenttätykistöön". (A report by Major M Alajoki on his study tour in the British field artillery).

³²⁶ John Slessor, *Strategy for the West* (London: Cassell & Co, 1954), p. 96. Originally quoted in the *United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Over-all Report (European War)*, September 30, 1945, (Washington D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1945), p.107.

The Air Ministry condensed its views on the proper employment of air power into the *Royal Air Force War Manual*, which contained “operational principles on which the Royal Air Force is to be trained in peace and fought in war.”³²⁷

4.4.1 Strike Hard, Strike Sure – bombing campaigns are praised

The basic foundations of the air force doctrine originated from a holistic understanding of a country's capacity to wage war. The ability of an enemy to fight stemmed from several factors: the armed forces, morale, industrial and economic might, research and man power. Most of the physical manifestations of these factors were located inside enemy territory. This led to the logical conclusion that an air war must be fought offensively. The tool for this offensive was the bomber.³²⁸

Bombing would not yield the desired results however, if the air effort was not concentrated. The air doctrine faithfully followed the “Douhuetic” principle of massive air power by calling for the concentration of the greatest possible force as “THE (*sic*) cardinal principle of war”.³²⁹

Bomber Command had suffered greatly during the air war over Germany. When German air defences were still capable of offering stiff resistance in 1943 and early 1944, the attrition rate had risen to intolerable levels, which prevented the Allies from conducting their bombing offensive effectively. The main cause of the losses were the German fighter defences, which had not been paralysed. Large bomber formations that flew at night, as the British did, or that carried out precision bombing during daylight hours, like the Americans did, were vulnerable to German fighters. This “fighter menace” was addressed only after the introduction of a proper long-range fighter

³²⁷ *Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1, Operations* (Air Ministry, 1950), introductory note by the Chief of Air Staff.

³²⁸ *Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1, Operations* (Air Ministry, 1950), pp. 2–5, 19.

³²⁹ *Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1, Operations*, p. 16. Although this thesis does not seek to analyse British air doctrine in the light of the theories of Giulio Douhet, the striking resemblance of the ideas of Douhet and the British air doctrine is worth noting. This topic may perhaps be a subject for further research. For the principle of concentration, see Giulio Douhet, *The Command of Air* (Office of the Air Force History, 1983), pp. 49–50.

escort.³³⁰ The logical conclusion of this experience was that a large-scale bomber offensive was impractical without air superiority.³³¹

The requirement for air superiority did not only apply to bomber operations. Its importance was well expressed by Lord Tedder³³² in 1947 when he defined it as "a prerequisite for all war-winning operations, whether at sea, on land or in the air".³³³ This view was fully acknowledged not only by the Royal Air Force but by other services as well. This was particularly true for amphibious operations, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.³³⁴

The desire for air superiority and the principle of the offensive were closely interlinked. Aerial warfare was to be extended over the hostile airspace at the earliest possible moment. The enemy air force was to be beaten over its own territory. In the Second World War, the Allies had won air superiority through attrition. The campaign had been a costly and time-consuming affair due to the size and skill of the German Air Force. One practical solution when facing a weaker opponent was to attempt an early aerial *coup de main* by destroying the enemy air force in its bases.³³⁵

The bomber force could be very useful in a campaign for air superiority, but the main aim of a bomber offensive would be the annihilation of a country's capacity to wage war. The idea of bombing an enemy into submission came from the period between the world wars when strategies for air offensives were slowly taking shape in the form of the concept of strategic bombing. There was no proper doctrine however, as Scot Robertson notes in his analysis on the development of strategic bombing.³³⁶ Early in the war, the British had conducted daylight bombing raids against German military targets

³³⁰ *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939–1945, Vol II: Endeavour*, by Charles Webster and Noble Frankland (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1961), pp. 87–88.

³³¹ Air superiority was defined as "a state in which we (the British, *author*), are able to make use of the air for our own purposes and the enemy air forces are unable to operate effectively against us", see *Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1, Operations*, p. 21.

³³² Lord Tedder preceded Air Marshall Slessor as the Chief of Air Staff. During the Second World War, he held an important post as Deputy Supreme Commander for General Eisenhower.

³³³ Andrew Vallance, *The Air Weapon. Doctrines of Air Power Strategy and Operational Art* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 15.

³³⁴ *The Manual of Combined Operations*, (1950), p. 3 and *Conduct of War*, p. 13.

³³⁵ *Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1, Operations*, pp. 22–24.

³³⁶ Scot Robertson, *The Development of RAF Strategic Bombing Doctrine 1919–1939* (Praeger, 1995), pp. 158–159.

with unpromising results³³⁷. During the course of war, the British bomber offensive targeted the war potential of the German cities through nightly aerial bombing. As described in a directive after the Casablanca conference, the objective was “the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic systems, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to the point where their capacity for armed resistance was fatally weakened”.³³⁸

German morale never collapsed even though the population was subjected to heavy bombing that caused severe casualties. Actually, the result was quite the opposite of the original objective. Instead of reducing German determination, the bombings increased the German resolution to stand firm as the killing of innocent civilians by the Allies offered excellent propaganda opportunities to the regime.³³⁹ The same trend occurred in the bombing of industry. After re-organising its production, German industry was actually able to increase its output. German war-time production reached its peak in 1944, which was the year of the heaviest bombing in the war.³⁴⁰

Throughout the bombing campaign, the British retained a somewhat sceptical attitude towards precision bombing. This view was held by the Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command in particular. Nevertheless, the official report by the British Bombing Survey Unit reveals that the British realised the importance of some key targets in their post-war studies. According to the report, the oil and communications facilities were the two “target systems whose attack yielded major strategic gains.” However, the same report acknowledged that the destruction of the oil system did not paralyse the German fighting capacity due to the introduction of strict rationing and reserve stocks. Moreover, German industry was able to maintain its

³³⁷ John Searby, *The Bomber Battle for Berlin* (London: Guild Publishing, 1991), p. 18.

³³⁸ Arthur Harris, *Despatch on War Operations* 23 February, 1942, to 8 May, 1945, ed. Sebastian Cox (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p.33. According to Sir Arthur Harris, the wartime Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command, the Casablanca directive actually relieved him of the obligation to break German morale. Arthur Harris, *Bomber Command* (London: Greenhill Books, 1990), p. 144. In his more recent analysis, Max Hastings claims that the Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command actually pursued his policy of levelling German cities in spite of the directive produced after the Casablanca conference. Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (London: Pan Books, 1992), pp. 185–189.

³³⁹ Max Hastings, *Bomber Command*, p.349

³⁴⁰ David Divine, *The Broken Wing. A Study in the British Exercise of Air Power* (London: Hutchinson & CO, 1966), pp. 259–260.

production levels owing to the large pool of skilled labour and to a relatively adequate amount of raw materiel.³⁴¹

The bombing report endorsed the targeting of one system above others: communications. The strategic bombing offensive against the German transportation system had a two-folded effect. The survey argues that it was the fundamental and main reason for the gradual collapse of the German industry involved in military production. However, this campaign also had an direct effect on military traffic. The railway system in France was subjected to heavy bombing for about three months before Operation Overlord and it “completely nullified the pre-arranged German organization for dealing with troops movements, reinforcements and supplies”.³⁴²

The value of these observations is self-evident. The lessons were transferred directly to the post-war bombing doctrine. The *Royal Air Force War Manual* identified the goal of paralysing the movement of the enemy as a primary objective of a bombing campaign. Attacks on the transportation network and the fuel industry would deprive the enemy of the means to move his troops and the goods used by the civilian society.³⁴³

The Allied consensus on the vulnerability of the German oil and communications systems had not been easy to achieve by any means. During the war, the Allies had constantly argued about bombing policy.³⁴⁴ The results of the bombing offensive were revealed only after the war during the extensive bombing surveys. This observation highlights the role of intelligence. Experience in the Second World War had shown that the economic planning conducted in conjunction with a bombing campaign was dependant on assumptions. These assumptions could not always be verified during the course of war as the enemy did his best to conceal the actual

³⁴¹ *The Strategic Air War Against Germany 1939–1945. Report of the British Bombing Survey Unit* ed. Sebastian Cox (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 134, 166–167.

³⁴² Ibid. pp. 118, 166–167. For the post-war analysis of the effects on the German transport system during the Second World War, see also Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Air Vice-Marshall Sydney Osborne Bufton, BUFT 1/39, “Lectures on Air Power in Modern War” by Lord Tedder, pp. 47–50 and diagram no. 7.

³⁴³ *Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1, Operations*, pp. 28–30.

³⁴⁴ See, e.g., David MacIsaac, *Strategic Bombing in World War Two. The Story of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey* (New York & London, Garland, 1976), pp. 14–20.

results.³⁴⁵ The British Bombing Survey noted bluntly “our (British, *author*) economic intelligence was basically unsound”.³⁴⁶

According to the bombing survey, it was not the amount of intelligence materiel but the quality and interpretation of this materiel that mattered.³⁴⁷ If hard intelligence on enemy capabilities to maintain production, to restore production, or to introduce substitutive commodities was incorrect, then the bombing campaign could be aimed at the wrong targets.

4.4.2 The air arm and the ground campaign

The principles involved in supporting an amphibious operation and combat on the ground next to the landing zone were essentially the same. Air force support for a combined operation was broken up into three phases. The preliminary phase would be devoted to creating a favourable air and maritime situation in the theatre of war. The principles for using offensive air power would be very similar to those mentioned earlier. Interdiction operations,³⁴⁸ which meant constant and concentrated attacks on transportation targets, would be aimed at depriving the enemy of his freedom of movement. The intensive air offensive would limit the opponent's options for transferring strategic or tactical reserves into the battle zone. During the preparatory phase, while the invasion force was loading and at sea, the air force was to concentrate its efforts on the area around the landing area, striking targets such as the landing beaches or tactical reserves. In the final phase, the assault, the main task of the air force would be to neutralise the local defences and to interdict the beachhead. The role of the air force would be emphasised during the assault phase due to the army's lack of long-range weapon systems. The air force would therefore make a general exception to the rule that aircraft should not be assigned to directly support the ground forces. In practice, this would mean using ground attack planes in close air

³⁴⁵ *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939–1945, Vol II: Endeavour*, by Charles Webster and Noble Frankland (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1961), pp. 214–220.

³⁴⁶ *The Strategic Air War Against Germany 1939–1945. Report of the British Bombing Survey Unit* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p. 170.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ Interdiction was defined as “the disruption of the enemy's communication system with the object of restricting his powers of movement”, *A Precis of Lectures by the Land/Air Warfare Training Team, Northern Army Group, 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force (Stationary Service RAOC, BAOR, 1953)*, p. 2.

support tasks such as neutralization of the beach defences, help for assault troops involved in close-range fighting for the bridgehead, and transport support by dropping or carrying supplies to the bridgehead.³⁴⁹

If the landings were to take place outside the effective range of Royal Air Force bases, the assault carrier groups would assume a more important role. The principles involved in employing carrier-borne aircraft were not radically different from those for land-based units. The concentration of air effort was the governing principle for employing carrier-borne aircraft as well. The combined force of all aircraft carriers belonging to the assault group was to be used simultaneously. However, the reason for this mainly stemmed from maritime requirements such as the protection of the carrier group, which required complex manoeuvres by the destroyers in the anti-submarine screen.³⁵⁰

One of the greatest assets of a carrier force was its manoeuvrability. A carrier group was able to move long distances overnight. However, there were several limitations that had to be taken into account. In spite of their striking power, carriers were vulnerable to heavy surface units, enemy aircraft, and above all to submarines.³⁵¹

In an ideal scenario, a carrier force would be used only after the enemy air force was depleted by a strategic air offensive. Otherwise, a Carrier Group Commander would be compelled to waste a large proportion of his air effort to protect the carrier force from the hostile air force. When this factor was combined with unpredictable weather and the requirement to replenish supplies approximately every five days, the carrier air effort could be significantly reduced.³⁵²

³⁴⁹ Amphibious Warfare Handbook No.8 A, *The Employment of Air Forces in Amphibious Warfare*, 1952. (Admiralty No. CB4555, 1952), pp. 2–4.

³⁵⁰ Amphibious Warfare Handbook No.8 A, *The Employment of Air Forces in Amphibious Warfare*, pp. 8–9.

³⁵¹ All three had taken their toll on the Royal Navy during the war. However, it was the U-boats that had been the main cause of British carrier losses., Of the eight British aircraft carriers lost in the Second World War, submarines had sunk five.

³⁵² Amphibious Warfare Handbook No.8 A, *The Employment of Air Forces in Amphibious Warfare*, pp. 10–11.

The use of carrier groups could not compensate for the demand to establish Royal Air Force air bases in the bridgehead as soon as the general situation permitted. Carriers could be needed elsewhere and their use in direct support for land campaigns for prolonged periods would not be economic or even possible in the absence of adequate fleet supply trains or bases. As a result, the responsibility for supporting any subsequent land operations was generally allocated to the Royal Air Force squadrons. The use of air power in a ground campaign did not alter the basic requirements for an air offensive. The strategic bombing campaign would still be directed against targets that yielded long-term effects, as described earlier in this chapter. The use of bombers for direct support was considered an inappropriate diversion of resources.

The deployment of lighter forces, such as ground attack planes, was also to be directed against movement. This kind of operation, called interdiction as mentioned earlier, would follow the principle of not deploying aircraft for tasks that could be performed by artillery or armour. The firepower of aircraft should be directed at targets further from the frontline to cause long-term damage.³⁵³ The principal of concentration of effort against movement was again based on empirical experience. During the war, the British had used their ground attack planes for two types of missions that were still carried out at the time of the Suez Crisis: close air support and armed reconnaissance. Both types of missions were conducted during Operation Musketeer.

Armed reconnaissance was a form of interdiction. Planes were given a specific area well behind enemy lines where they were to attack any target of tactical value.³⁵⁴ Close air support, in turn, was defined as "support given to the ground forces by air action against enemy troops actually engaged in the land battle."³⁵⁵ The closest form of close air support was called CabRank, which was a patrol of ground attack planes kept in the air and ready for use against targets specified by ground controllers.³⁵⁶

³⁵³ *Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1, Operations*, p. 55.

³⁵⁴ Ian Gooderson, *Air Power at the Battlefront. Allied Close Air Support in Europe 1943–1945*. (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 198–199.

³⁵⁵ SArK, T 26890/Hla 4, RAC Centre, Tactical Wing, 1956, Tactical Note "Air Support".

³⁵⁶ *Notes from the Theatres of War, No. 20: Italy 1943/1944* (War Office, 1945), pp. 68–69 and Ian Gooderson, *Air Power at the Battlefront*, pp. XV and 2–3.

Experience in the Second World War had proven that armed reconnaissance was more effective than close air support when considering the number of enemy casualties caused. This experience had also shown the value of artillery. If artillery was available, it was usually more effective in destroying enemy positions than close air support because the main weapon systems of the British ground attack planes were rather unsophisticated unguided rockets or bombs. However, ground attack planes in a close air support role often had have a better effect on morale than artillery.³⁵⁷

The last aspect is air transport operations. The *Air Force War Manual* acknowledged the limitations of British transport capacity. It somewhat prophetically forecasted the transport problems that would occur during the Suez Crisis when it claimed: "The air resources available in the early stages of a war will never be enough for the use of airborne troops on anything but a very small-scale."³⁵⁸

4.5 Conclusions

The principles of sound warfare were introduced at the beginning of this chapter. Were these principles, identified as the basis for a common doctrine in all the services, really applied or were they only dead letters that promoted a noble concept that did not exist in reality?

Without a doubt, the main factor that influenced British tactics were their experiences in the Second World War. This empirical foundation ruled the British view of the battlefield and, as a consequence, the practical employment of sound tactics. As a result, relatively little had changed by the time of the Suez Crisis.

The selection and maintenance of a clear aim was the main principle. Operations were to be planned to serve a clear, attainable goal. The tactical manuals defined the breaking of the enemy's will to fight as the ultimate aim. In practise, this meant the physical destruction of the enemy. The British approach, which was based on their historical experience, called for the total

³⁵⁷ Gooderson, pp. 192–193.

³⁵⁸ *Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1, Operations*, p.63.

elimination of the enemy's fighting power. As a result, there was no anticipation of an easy victory; the most resilient side would win. This view had direct consequences. Among them was the domination of the tactical approach by pragmatism.

Tactics were characterised by a certain amount of caution and formalism, which some could interpret as a lack of imagination. Or was it rather pragmatism? The explanation may be found in the British experience again. Apart from the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, all the campaigns fought by the British occurred somewhere outside the British Isles. This put a very heavy strain on the administration and administrative preparations. Any operation without adequate administrative back-up, especially if fought in an under-developed country or a hostile environment like a desert, was regarded as including a possibility for disaster.

A close examination of the *Royal Air Force War Manual* indicates that concentration of effort was perhaps the real master principle. The tactical manuals promoted the massing of forces, firepower and other resources at the decisive point and time. This principle applied particularly well to amphibious operations. Any failure to consolidate and expand the bridgehead would lead to a severe defeat with long-term consequences. If the chances of overcoming the enemy were marginal, the operation should be called off or additional resources should be poured in until a safe margin was attained. In other words, amphibious operations were designed to meet the principal of security, even at the expense of surprise, another principal of warfare.

Experience had shown how difficult it was to achieve total surprise. Consequently, the British emphasised the value of tactical surprise, which could be attained by concealment and deception. However, an overwhelming superiority in numbers achieved by concentration and careful preparations was still considered more important than surprise.

The service manuals shared a common view of the importance of co-operation. There is little doubt that Allied joint planning during the Second World War was one of their success stories. Integration of effort by all services towards a common goal was regarded as a precondition for a

successful military operation. This applied particularly well to amphibious operations, which demanded explicit planning and preparations.

Flexibility was one of the principles of war. However, it was a relative notion in practice. In any amphibious operation there remained relatively little room for flexibility as all the complicated elements were co-ordinated between the services. Any significant changes in the plan, especially during the initial stages of an amphibious assault, would cause severe difficulties and disorder.

The principal of the offence was the essence of amphibious operations, as these kinds of operations was almost purely offensive by nature. They did involve landing a force on hostile shores after all. Mastery of the sea and air, which were prerequisites for a successful amphibious operation, could not be won without the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force being deployed offensively in the preparatory stage. The aerial war was to be moved over enemy territory at the earliest possible opportunity. The main weapon for the offensive was the bomber. Simultaneously, the naval element was to eliminate any enemy maritime force that could threaten opposition to the landings. Although the *Combined Warfare Manual* and *Combined Warfare Handbooks* encouraged a rapid break-out, they still advocated the consolidation of the bridgehead and a substantial administrative build-up before the launch of the subsequent land campaign. This tendency was also related to the army's view on offensive action. In an ideal situation, the enemy would attack and be defeated first, whereupon the army could confidentially launch its offensive against the now weakened enemy.

It is apparent that the demand for systematic preparations was linked with the command structure and the British way of planning and executing operations. The manuals encouraged centralised planning and command instead of initiative, especially in the Royal Air Force and army. This was also connected to the principal of concentration of effort. The British had not prevailed because of their innovative concepts and willingness to take risks. They had succeeded because of their exhaustive preparations and superiority. One could simplify the matter by claiming that the motto of

Bomber Command, *Strike Hard, Strike Sure*, was actually a concrete expression of the British way of war in the middle of the 1950s.

5 FROM THE LIMITED WAR OPTION TO ALEXANDRIA

*"We consider, however, that it would be prudent, and in the long term economical, to be able to deploy overwhelming force from the outset."*³⁵⁹

5.1 First plans based on the Limited War scenario

The nationalisation of the Suez Canal on 26 July 1956 apparently took the British by surprise. Egyptian action was anticipated as a possibility in the Limited War scenarios, but the timing and actual execution remained a secret. Available British primary sources do not analyse the reasons for the Egyptian success in concealing Nasser's intentions. But, it appears that Nasser concealed his plans well. British intelligence, in this case the Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ) in co-operation with MI5, had been able to read the ciphered signals traffic of the Egyptian Embassy in London for some time. However, they were still not able to give any precautionary warnings.³⁶⁰ The reason for the intelligence failure, if such a term can be used, is not mysterious. Laura James, whose research is mainly based on Egyptian sources, suggests that Nasser kept the decision very much to himself and delayed taking it until the last possible moment.³⁶¹

Prime Minister Eden consulted the Chiefs of Staff Committee at his residence on 26 July. At the unofficial meeting, Eden apparently asked the Chiefs of Staff for his available military options. No records were kept of the discussion and accounts of this meeting conflict with each other. It is possible that Lord Mountbatten speculated on the possibility of using the available Royal Navy assets in the Mediterranean to launch a surprise attack on Port Said. Whether he seriously meant this proposal is a totally different matter. His suggestion should be understood as an idea or option rather than as a serious appreciation of the situation.³⁶² It is also most improbable that the

³⁵⁹ NA DEFE 6/36, JP (56) 125, 18 July 1956, "Forces for Limited War".

³⁶⁰ Stephen Dorrill MI6, *Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service*, (New York: Touchstone, 2000), p. 623 and Peter Wright, *Spycatcher: The Candid Autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer* (London: Viking Penguin INC, 1987, 4th Printing), pp. 84–85.

³⁶¹ Laura James, "When did Nasser Expect War? The Suez nationalization and its aftermath in Egypt", a working paper presented at the University of Hull, 26 July 2006, during the seminar "Re-assessing Suez Fifty Years On".

³⁶² NA DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 73rd Meeting, 27 July 1956. On Lord Mountbatten's idea for a hasty operation, see Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten* (London: Guild Publishing, 1983) p. 538. I

Chiefs of Staff would have threatened to resign had the Prime Minister made the decision to use military force immediately.³⁶³ However, it is clear that the Chiefs of Staff were ordered to consider all possible military options before the next day's meeting.³⁶⁴

On 27 July, the Chiefs of Staff attended the Cabinet meeting. During the meeting, the chiefs were assigned the task of producing a military plan to occupy the Canal Zone and, according to Mountbatten, "to get rid of Colonel Nasser personally and his regime."³⁶⁵ The Chiefs of Staff met immediately after the cabinet meeting and asked the Joint Planning Staff to draw up plans for the seizure, control and operation of the Suez Canal and to restore law and order in Egypt if necessary. At this very first meeting, the Chiefs of Staff expressed a profound opinion that removed any prospect, or speculation, of a surprise attack. Due to a lack of adequate logistical support, all possible military action against Egypt would have to be undertaken with overwhelming force from the very beginning.³⁶⁶

Contrary to many claims, this judgement on the capacity of the British military to react quickly was not new to Prime Minister Eden. It is evident that Eden was appalled by the military's inability to react quickly to the Canal seizure.³⁶⁷ He need not have been. As Chairman of the Defence Committee, he was very well aware of British preparations. At the 6th meeting of the Defence Committee, Eden claimed that the reserve forces (the strategic reserve, *author*) that were being built up in the United Kingdom "were unduly large in relation to any calls that might be made on it for reinforcing overseas

can only agree with Robert Rhodes James' analysis on the First Sea Lord's behaviour during the initial period of the Suez Crisis; Robert Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1986), pp. 457–458.

³⁶³ Ziegler, pp. 537–538 and Cloake, John, *Templer, Tiger of Malaya* (London: Harper Limited, 1985), p. 346. On the threat to resign, see Scott, *Divided We Stand, Britain the US and the Suez Crisis*, p. 143. There is no evidence of Lucas Scott's claim that the Chiefs of Staff threatened to resign if Eden decided to use force immediately.

³⁶⁴ The Chiefs of Staff had their own meeting before the full Cabinet meeting on 27 July 1956. See NA CAB 128/30, CM (56) 54th Conclusions, 27 July 1956 and DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 73rd Meeting, 27 July 1956.

³⁶⁵ NA ADM 116/9097, First Sea Lord to VCNS, 27 July 1956.

³⁶⁶ NA DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 73rd Meeting, 27 July 1956.

³⁶⁷ A brief, first hand account of the stress Eden was under is contained in a letter by the First Sea Lord who attended a meeting with the Prime Minister on 30 July 1956, see NA ADM 205/117, 30 July the First Sea Lord to the Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff, see also Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez: Eisenhower Takes America into the Middle East* (New York: Linden Press, 1981), p. 278.

theatres." At the same meeting, the Joint Planning Staff memorandum on the Limited War options was presented to him. This memorandum suggested that any unilateral action against Egypt could take up to six months to execute. His knowledge of the problems in the Tripartite planning process is also evident.³⁶⁸

The Joint Planning Staff produced its first estimate on available forces for the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 29 July 1956. Their estimate called for three echelons of ground forces. The first echelon would make maximum use of the Middle East Land Forces. The 16 Airborne Brigade Group and the main elements of 3 Commando Brigade, both deployed to Cyprus for internal security operations against EOKA, were to be used in an initial assault on Port Said along with a reinforced infantry brigade group from the United Kingdom. Simultaneously, 10 Armoured Division was to start active operations from Libya. The follow-up forces would mainly consist of UK-based units. The remainder of 3 Infantry Division, the air transportable 24 Infantry Brigade and an unspecified infantry division were to be deployed.³⁶⁹

The shortage of available airfields in the vicinity of Egypt and the range of the Egyptian operated IL-28 light bombers would restrict the use of bombers. A V-bomber force of 24 Valiants was to be based in Malta, Libya, Aden and Bahrain. Several squadrons of light bombers, about 50 Canberras altogether, would be deployed to Cyprus by taking advantage of the existing Alacrity contingency plan. The air defence of Cyprus would be brought up to strength by using another contingency plan, Quickfire, which concentrated two state of the art Hunter squadrons there.³⁷⁰

The Mediterranean Fleet would naturally provide the framework for the naval forces. But not even reinforcement by two aircraft carriers, a cruiser and three destroyers would boost the amphibious capability.³⁷¹ The Amphibious Warfare Squadron could not lift a force of two Commandos and a Commando

³⁶⁸ NA CAB 131/17, DC (56) 6th Meeting on 10 July 1956. The Defence Committee (ex. Joint Planning Staff) Memorandum (56) 18 is still retained.

³⁶⁹ NA DEFE 4/89, JP (56) 134, 29 July 1956, "Availability of Forces for Action Against Egypt".

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

Brigade headquarters before the activation of three additional vessels in reserve.³⁷²

This deployment could be carried out within 42 days of the decision to invade. In order to reserve transport capacity for airborne operations, most of the aerial units were to be deployed first – within two weeks of the decision being made. Simultaneously, 3 Commando Brigade and 16 Independent Parachute Brigade were to be assembled in Cyprus and the reinforcements for the fleet would be despatched. The complicated movements of the UK-based ground forces would be concentrated in the last two weeks of preparations. The Joint Planning Staff suggested that several decisions be made immediately. The amphibious vessels in operational reserve should be reactivated and the reinforcements for the Mediterranean fleet should be sent on their way as well. The replacement brigades bound for Cyprus and Libya should also be activated. In order to handle the logistical requirements of 10 Armoured Division in Libya, preparations to move the division to the Egyptian border should be authorised without delay. While the Royal Air Force contingency plans Quickfire and Alacrity were being executed, two army anti-aircraft regiments responsible for air defence should be moved to Cyprus.³⁷³

The Egypt Committee accepted the Joint Planning Staff's proposals. In addition, the training carriers, HMS Theseus and HMS Ocean, would be used to transport troops during the preparations.³⁷⁴ The Egypt Committee authorised tentative staff talks with the French planners. There were, however, certain restrictions. The call up of reservists should be restricted to those who could be returned to service without special legislation.³⁷⁵

³⁷² NA DEFE 4/89, JP (56) 134, 29 July 1956, "Availability of Forces for Action Against Egypt". A Royal Marine Commando was (is) roughly equivalent to an army infantry battalion.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ HMS Theseus and Ocean could no longer support aerial operations. During the preparations, Ocean was also equipped with a hospital. Anthony Watts, *The Royal Navy: An Illustrated History* (London: Arms and Armour, 1995), pp. 219.

³⁷⁵ NA CAB 134/1216, EC, (56) 3rd meeting, 30 July 1956. HMS Theseus and Ocean were non-operational aircraft carriers belonging to the Training Squadron, Cecil Hampshire, *The Royal Navy Since 1945, Its Transition to the Nuclear Age* (London: William Kimber & CO. Limited, 1975), p.125. The British reserve consisted of several elements. The Army reserve organisation included three categories: Regular Reserve, Army Emergency Reserve and Army General Reserve. The first element (~100 000 men) consisted of ex-regular soldiers. The Army Emergency Reserve (~177 000 men) mainly consisted of administrative units and individuals needed to back-up the Regular Army. This reserve was further divided into three sub-categories. Army Emergency Reserve 1 (AER 1) consisted of whole units that agreed to be called out for service anywhere, including overseas, without Royal Proclamation. The

The Chiefs of Staff Committee reviewed the Joint Planning Staff report at their meeting the same day. When they evaluated the resources available for a landing, it became evident that the strength of the initial assault force would be limited due to a lack of LCAs. Thus, a simultaneous parachute drop would be essential to achieve maximum affect in the landing area. The parachute force, however, suffered from a lack of resources as well. There was not sufficient equipment for dropping the heavy equipment and the troopers had not had enough parachute training. They should either be trained in Cyprus or shipped to Britain for training.³⁷⁶

The Chiefs of Staff Committee looked for additional measures to boost the effect of the amphibious operations. The committee agreed that further studies should be conducted to see if “our (British, *author*) aim should be achieved by the use of air action alone.” Special emphasis in these studies was to be put on the feasibility of interrupting Egyptian oil supplies through air strikes. The head of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) was also asked to produce an evaluation of the possibility of sabotaging Egyptian oil supplies and the bridges crossing the Suez Canal, as well as the chance of disrupting the Nile.³⁷⁷

The Joint Planning Staff produced its first outline plan on 31 July, only a few days after President Nasser had nationalised the Suez Canal. The Chiefs of Staff Committee named the plan Operation Musketeer on the following day.

main difference between AER 2 and AER 1 was that reservists belonging to AER 2 could not be posted overseas without Royal Proclamation. AER 3 was designed to respond to the rising requirement for technical knowledge and can be described as “a pool of highly skilled tradesman and women”. The bulk of the reserve, some 2 000 000 men, was placed in the Army General Reserve. Another pool of army man power (~260 00 men) and whole units belonged to the Territorial Army. It was composed of three different elements: volunteers, National Service volunteers and National Servicemen who were carrying out their three and a half years’ obligation to belong to reserve forces in the Territorial Army. The Royal Navy reserve system was yet more complicated. It consisted of ten different types of reserves used to strengthen the naval forces. Numerically, the most important was the Royal Navy Emergency Reserves which still included some 165 000 men who had seen service during the world war. The reserves available to the Royal Air Force were divided into two categories: The Royal Air Force Reserve and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. The first one was divided into eight different sub-categories bringing the total reserves to some half a million men. For the composition of the British reserves, see NA DEFE 6/29, JP (56) 26, 24 June 1955, “Reserve Forces”; A.J. Barker, *The Seven Day War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), pp. 202–203; H.C. Boyce, (revised by). *Lindsell’s Military Organization and Administration*. 28th Revised and Enlarged Edition (Aldershot: Gale & Polden 1953), pp. 24–26.

³⁷⁶ NA DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 74th Meeting, 30 July 1956.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

Many writers have claimed that the operation was initially called Hamilcar in Britain, but that the codename had to be changed because the French were not able to pronounce the initial letter. It is even claimed that the recognition letter H was painted over due to this misunderstanding. Actually, there is no hard evidence for any of this. On the contrary, the letter H remained the vehicle recognition sign throughout the crisis.³⁷⁸

The plan, which also anticipated French participation, was based on a Limited War/Tripartite action concept, but it ruled out the option of using nuclear weapons. According to the estimate, an air campaign would probably not be sufficient to overthrow the Egyptian government. As a result, other forces would need to be brought in and deployed near the Egyptian borders. If negotiations failed, a naval blockade and vicious air attacks were to be launched. This would be followed by an amphibious assault on the Port Said area. There was a practical reason for establishing a maritime blockade, which has been considered ineffective earlier. A blockade would limit the amount of shipping entering the Canal just before the start of hostilities and prevent the Egyptians from using these vessels to block the Canal.³⁷⁹

The build-up was based on the earlier report on force availability. The Joint Planning Staff suggested that 3 Commando Brigade should be ready for operations in mid-September. The second follow-up division would arrive in theatre about 45 days after the initial assault, and it would be unloaded 75 days after D-Day. In addition to the earlier report, the Joint Planning Staff had a tentative French order of battle available. The French could provide two aircraft carriers, a battleship, and ten other vessels. A parachute brigade and

³⁷⁸ On claims about Hamilcar, see Roy Fullick and Geoffrey Powell, *Suez the Double War* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979), p. 20. NA DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 76th Meeting, 1 August 1956. The secret code word was sent to C-in-C Mediterranean and to the General Headquarters, Middle East the same evening; ADM 116/6138, Ministry of Defence to G.H.Q Middle East, 1 August 1956. On the recognition signs, see WO 288/91, "Allied Land Forces Operation Order No 4", 24 October 1956 or ADM 202/456, "3 Commando Brigade Operation Order Number 3", 28 October 1956. Even though the use of nuclear weapons was ruled out, it appears that the British possessed a limited nuclear capability. According to a top secret note, the United Kingdom had about 31 "Special Weapons" in the 10 kiloton-range available for operations. See NA AIR 19/859, undated (probably first week of August 1956) note "Forces Available for Operations in the M.E.A.F.". In the later stages of planning, the Joint Intelligence Committee suggested that the codeword should be changed because it had been compromised. Their list of suitable code words did not, however, include Hamilcar. See NA DEFE 11/139, Secretary of the Joint Intelligence Committee to the Secretary, the Chiefs of Staff Committee, 9 September 1956.

³⁷⁹ NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 135, 31 July 1956, "Action Against Egypt, Outline Plan".

a light mechanised division from North Africa could be made available with a potential follow-up force of two divisions. A large contingent of advanced F84 fighter-bombers was to support the French participation.³⁸⁰

Both the Joint Planning Staff and the Chiefs doubted the feasibility of using the Libyan-based 10 Armoured Division. Apart from the political sensitivities involved, arranging administrative support for the division would have been challenging. As previously mentioned, the division was not prepared for immediate operations. Of the forces available in Libya, one of its two armoured regiments, The Queen's Bays, and most of the divisional support elements were based in Tripolitania in Western Libya. Over 1 200 kilometres of desert separated this force from the Egyptian border. In addition, there would be another 400 kilometres to go from the Egyptian border before they could arrive on the outskirts of Alexandria.³⁸¹

The Chiefs of Staff Committee mostly agreed with the Joint Planning Staff's report and asked for several further studies. The initial assault force was to be larger than one commando. The paratroopers were to be trained in Britain before the operation. The Chiefs distrusted the idea of a naval blockade and suggested that it would be preferable to act through political channels. The site of the joint headquarters for the operations would be a compromise. Malta was better from the naval point of view but the arguments of the air force and the army, mainly based on permanent communication arrangements, were overwhelming. Cyprus was chosen as a result.³⁸²

The Egypt Committee accepted the outline plan on 2 August. D-Day would be in mid-September. The operation would be mounted on the quickest possible timetable suggested by the Joint Planning Staff. In addition to granting its permission to start preparations, the Egypt Committee also set some restrictions. Bombing should be directed against military targets only, not at cities. The question of using Israel was also raised. The Chiefs of Staff had speculated just one day earlier on the idea of trying to get the Israeli

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ NA DEFE 4/89, JP (56) 135, 31 July 1956, "Action Against Egypt, Outline Plan" and WO 288/131, "10th Armoured Division Historical Report 1st July 56–31st December 56".

³⁸² NA DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 76th Meeting, 1 August 1956. See also, AIR 8/2082, ACAS (P) to CAS, 2 August 1956.

Government to conduct a practice mobilization as a diversion. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Harold MacMillan, supported this idea. The Allies should take full advantage of Israel's apprehensions about Egypt. A possible reward for Israel could be arranged under the combined, secret US-British project named Alpha, which was originally established to push through an Arab-Israeli settlement. However, the Committee decided that the question of Israeli participation in military operations should be postponed pending the outcome of the forthcoming international conference.³⁸³

The dilemma of using Libya as a staging area for ground operations was also raised by the Foreign Secretary. The defence treaty did not permit British forces to operate outside of specially designated areas.³⁸⁴ It was not even clear whether the airfields of El Adem or Idris would be available for military operations. If this was the case, it would be a set-back for the Royal Air Force, which initially had planned to deploy bombers there.³⁸⁵

5.2 The Task Force Commanders prefer Alexandria

The service ministries had chosen their respective Task Force Commanders by 4 August. These commanders established their headquarters at Montagu House in London. The next step in the planning process was an appreciation

³⁸³ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 9th Meeting, 2 August 1956 and EC (56) 10th Meeting, 3 August 1956. Harold MacMillan was careful to reveal nothing about these ideas in his memoirs. According to his biographer Alistair Horne however, MacMillan's diary reveals great anxieties over a plan that put a very limited number of forces into a vulnerable position. See Harold MacMillan, *Riding the Storm 1956–1959* (London, 1971), pp.101–109 and Horne, Alistair, *MacMillan 1894–1956, Volume 1 of the Official Biography*, (London: MacMillan, 1988), p. 399. For details of operation ALPHA, see Scott, *Divided We Stand, Britain the US and the Suez Crisis*, pp. 46–51 and Lucas Scott and Alistair Morey, "The Hidden "Alliance": The CIA and MI6 Before and After Suez" in David Stafford and Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones (ed.); *American-British-Canadian Relations 1939–2000* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), pp. 102–103.

³⁸⁴ Libya, a former Italian colony that had become independent in 1951, followed a cautiously pro-Western policy and belonged to the traditional faction of the Arab League. In order to maintain its position in Libya, Britain proposed and concluded a twenty-year treaty of alliance in 1953. The articles of the British-Libyan defence treaty committed its signatories to collective defence. This enabled Britain to maintain its military forces and facilities in Libya, which received financial support in return. On the military side, Libya provided bases for both the Army and the Royal Air Force. The ports of Idris and Tobruk were considered to be important alternate bases for the Royal Navy during a Global War, see NA DEFE 6/34, JP (56) 19, 2 February 1956, "Strategic Importance of Libya"; and on British-Libyan Treaty, CAB 158/21, JIC (55) 42, 15 September 1955, "Soviet Threat to the Middle East in a General War up to the End of 1959".

³⁸⁵ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 9th Meeting, 2 August 1956 and EC (56) 10th Meeting, 3 August 1956. For the bomber deployment, see Air Ministry to HQ MEAF, 30 July 1956.

of the Joint Planning Staff outline plan by the newly chosen Force Commanders, who were the tactical commanders responsible for the detailed planning and execution of the operation. They considered the four following options:

- (1) A full-scale assault on Port Said and capture of the Abu Sueir airfield with an airborne landing.
- (2) A full-scale assault on Alexandria followed by an advance to the Suez Canal via the Cairo area.
- (3) A limited operation against Port Said followed by a major operation on Alexandria.
- (4) A limited operation against Alexandria followed by major operation on Port Said.³⁸⁶

Because of the limited resources, the Task Force Commanders were reluctant to divide their forces between two sites. The Chiefs of Staff had earlier rejected the idea of launching a diversionary operation from the south for the same reason. The Libyan front was not attractive because of logistical problems. The fuel demands alone would have required the transport of more than 3 000 tons of supplies. The water would have required the transport of about 400 tons in 130 special water transporters. In addition, the movement of forces to the Libyan border would have drawn Egyptian attention to their Western region.³⁸⁷

The Task Force Commanders, supported by the Chiefs, preferred to land at Alexandria for tactical reasons. Alexandria, with its airport and good harbour, offered a much better staging area for a large-scale operation than Port Said. The harbour of Alexandria, the former main station of the British Mediterranean Fleet, had much better facilities for a rapid extension of a bridgehead than Port Said. It could provide docking facilities for more than 50 vessels of 18-ft draught and, as a benefit, most of these could be berthed alongside excellent quays enabling rapid unloading.³⁸⁸ The assault would take place after 2–3 days of bombing. The vital build-up of forces after the

³⁸⁶ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 15 10 August 1956, "Military Operations: Force Commanders' Outline Plan".

³⁸⁷ NA WO 32/16320, "Operation Musketeer, Outline Maintenance Plan for First Thirty Days", 3 August 1956.

³⁸⁸ NA WO 252/1218, Joint Intelligence Bureau, August 1956, "Alexandria – Key Points".

initial landing could be performed rapidly. The Chiefs warned in their recommendation that it might take a longer time to reach the Canal but Cairo, the hub of power, could be reached more quickly.³⁸⁹

It is important and interesting to note that all four options anticipated the capture of a port. The principal reason was the lack of special equipment capable of delivering materiel ashore. During the Second World War, the British had been able to maintain assault forces and follow-up forces over beaches for prolonged periods of time because they had large numbers of specialised amphibians.³⁹⁰ By the time of the Suez Crisis however, this capability had vanished almost totally. This meant that although the long Egyptian coastline offered some opportunities for landings between Alexandria and Port Said, these beaches were unusable unless a sufficient quantity of light draught craft were available.³⁹¹

The need for an adequate port equipped with proper facilities can be further explained by illustrating the magnitude of the transportation task. The movement plan for a force equivalent to some four divisions plus administrative units called for the transportation of approximately 77 000 men and some 11 000 vehicles. In addition, these forces required the transport of about 120 000 tons of materiel in the first 30 days of operations.³⁹²

The logistics side of the operation called for support for a week of intensive campaigning, fourteen days of air force activity, and for twenty days of

³⁸⁹ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 15 10 August 1956, "Military Operations: Force Commanders' Outline Plan" and on the COS-Committee's view on a diversion from the south, see DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 78th Meeting, 9 August 1956.

³⁹⁰ During the early stages of Operation Overlord, over 60% of daily freight was delivered over the beaches. *Maintenance in the Field, Vol II: 1943–1945* (compiled by J.A.H Carter & D.N. Kann) (War Office, 1961), p. 281. According to Commodore J.A. Grindle, the Director of Combined Operations (Naval) about 55% of the materiel and stores landed in Arromanches, the main administrative beach of the 2 Army, was carried by DUKW-vehicles, see J.A. Grindle, "The Development of Combined Operations Materiel and Technique", *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, No. 572 (November 1948), pp. 546–547.

³⁹¹ NA ADM 239/750, Joint Intelligence Bureau, December 1954, "British Intelligence Survey, Egypt, Part VII: Ports, Beaches and Landing Places".

³⁹² NA WO 32/16320, War Office, QM (3), 17 August 1956, "Shipping Requirements up to D-30" and War Office, LM to 1216/2/Q(ops), 17 August 1956, "Maintenance Plan for Operation Musketeer".

"mopping up" operations. After that, the logistical support would be limited to less intensive internal security operations.³⁹³

The Egypt Committee accepted the Force Commanders' outline plan on 10 August. The idea of entering Alexandria had actually been presented to the Egypt Committee two days earlier in conjunction with a memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. His paper raised questions about the objectives of the operation. Based on his earlier experiences with troubles in the Canal Zone, MacMillan claimed that occupation of the Canal would not solve the problem over the long term. The problem was a political one. The essence of the Egyptian peril was President Nasser and his hostile anti-Western policy. Consequently, any military operation should aim to overthrow Nasser's government, while occupying the Canal Zone at the same time. To achieve this, the Allies would have to advance to Cairo. For that purpose, Alexandria offered far better facilities than Port Said. MacMillan also expressed his concerns about the air campaign. More planes should be amassed for the initial air operations aimed at neutralising the Egyptian Air Force, even at the expense of Operation Grapple, the British hydrogen bomb test then being prepared.³⁹⁴

At the same meeting, the availability of Libyan-based forces was discussed. Although the actual attack plans had already been cancelled, the plans still called for the deployment of a large numbers of forces between 10 and 26 August. These forces could cause political unrest. A large troop movement before the international conference would impair the political efforts of Britain. The committee suggested that the forces in Cyrenaica, an armoured regiment and an infantry battalion, should be used as a diversion, while the rest of the division was shipped to Egypt as a follow-up force. But as the Chiefs remarked, even a limited movement aimed at diverting the Egyptians would require a considerable logistical effort. As a result, the committee permitted limited reinforcements to be sent to Cyrenaica and asked the

³⁹³ NA DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 78th Meeting, 9 August 1956 and DEFE 5/70, COS (56) 297, 7 August 1956, "Operation Musketeer" a note by the CIGS.

³⁹⁴ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 11th Meeting, 7 August 1956 and EC (56) 8, 7 August 1956, "Action Against Egypt", a note by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Chiefs to produce a paper that would estimate the minimum forces required for a worthwhile diversion.³⁹⁵

Details of the military plans were discussed at a staff conference at Chequers on 11 August. The Vice Chief of Air Staff was concerned about congestion on the Cypriot airfields. He suggested the use of Turkish or Libyan airfields to solve the problem. With hectic military preparations under way, the Egypt Committee stopped to consider its options in relation to a forthcoming international conference, to a debate in Parliament and to the military timetable. Politically, one of the biggest problems was the amount of time required after the political decision to use military force had been made to put those plans into effect. This timing issue was to remain a problem throughout the crisis. As a major part of the invasion force was to sail to the region from the British Isles, the politicians would have to make the decision well before the hostilities commenced. If the operation was to start in mid-September, a reinforced brigade group of 3 Infantry Division should depart on 1 September. The carefully planned tactical loading, a vital aspect in any amphibious operation, would take ten days. In other words, it would have to start on 20 August. Postponement of the operation would be impractical after the troopships had sailed, because the troops and some of the stores could not be kept on board for long periods of time.³⁹⁶

The problem was made worse by a lack of transport. The Ministry of Transport estimated that the initial follow-up³⁹⁷ consisting of a reinforced brigade group would include almost 9 000 personnel and about 1 300 vehicles. The main body of 3 Infantry Division with the task force administrative units would number 19 000 men and 1 000 vehicles. By 9

³⁹⁵ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 11th Meeting, 7 August 1956 and EC (56) 7, 7 August 1956, "Libya", a note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs".

³⁹⁶ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 19, 14 August 1956, "Forecast of Timetable, Note by the Secretary of the Cabinet". Compare with Egypt Committee (56) 14, 9 August, "Shipping Requirements, Note by the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation", There is a slight difference of views on the timetable. The Minister of Transport, basing his view on the original JPS report, suggests that the voyage from Britain would only take 11 days while the Secretary of Cabinet suggests that it would take 14 days.

³⁹⁷ The Manual of Combined Operations divides the forces arriving at the bridgehead after the initial assault as "follow-up forces" and "build-up forces". The "follow-up forces" were defined as tactically loaded formations pre-assigned to defined tasks after landing. Their tasks usually involved extension of the bridgehead and defence against enemy counter-attacks. The build-up forces were to be used in breakout and subsequent ground operations, see *The Manual of Combined Operations*, pp. 5–6.

August, approximately twenty-five ships had been requisitioned. However, most of these ships were not suitable for amphibious operations. They lacked the facilities essential for tactical loading. Neither were any of these vessels fit to carry any of the 130 heavy Centurion tanks included in the order of battle. This desperate lack of ten adequate landing ships for tanks could only be compensated for by requisitioning the majority of the Bustard fleet, a commercial company operating ex-service LSTs. In addition, the movement of up to 40 000 personnel would require 10–15 passenger ships, if special measures proposed by the Minister of Transport were not taken.³⁹⁸

At the meetings of 14 and 16 August, the Egypt Committee made a firm decision to continue the military preparations with the option of launching military operations in mid-September. In spite of obvious financial inconveniences and unwelcome public attention, the Bustard Fleet LSTs were requisitioned. The Committee decided that further decisions on the timing of military operations would be made on 27 August; just a few days before the assault brigade of 3 Infantry Division was set to sail.³⁹⁹

5.3 Threat perception – estimates of Egyptian military capabilities

British intelligence was very focused on the Middle East throughout the beginning of the 1950s. Scores of different scenarios involving Israel, Jordan and Egypt at war against each other were distributed for evaluation. In this context, the capabilities of the Egyptian forces were evaluated several times. In 1955, before the Suez Crisis, the Egyptian Army was thought to have approximately 15 front-line brigades. About two thirds of these brigades were deployed in the Eastern Sinai in the vicinity of the Egyptian-Israeli border and the Gaza Strip. The total armour strength was about 270 tanks before the deliveries of the arms provided by the Czech arms deal. The Egyptian Air Force (EAF) was thought to be inferior to its opponents because the on-going reorganisation would reduce its performance despite an apparent numerical

³⁹⁸ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 19, 14 August 1956, "Forecast of Timetable, Note by the Secretary of the Cabinet". Compare with EC (56) 14, 9 August 1956, "Shipping Requirements, Note by the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation".

³⁹⁹ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 15th Meeting, 14 August and 16th Meeting, 16 August 1956.

superiority in jet aircraft. The Egyptian Navy would not be able to conduct significant operations; instead, it might try to avoid battle.⁴⁰⁰

This general picture of the Egyptian armed forces became more detailed over the course of the crisis. It was thought that the arms deal with the Soviet Bloc (Czech–Egyptian) in September 1955 upset not only the local military balance, but also that of the whole of Africa. According to the first Joint Planning Staff estimate after the deal, the agreement would move Egypt towards the Soviet sphere of influence, providing “the Soviet Bloc its first foothold in the Middle East and Africa with its possible consequences to our position in the rest of that continent”. By emphasising the political dimension, the Joint Planning Staff estimated that militarily the new deal merely equalised the military balance between Israel and Egypt rather than fundamentally altering it even if it did provide Egypt with new hardware. However, the deal could still cause the Israelis to launch a preventive war.⁴⁰¹

The deal considerably enhanced Egyptian military capabilities. However, the integration of 120–200 MIG 15 fighters and IL 28 light bombers, about 200 tanks and naval hardware including two destroyers, 12 Motor Torpedo Boats (MTB) and three submarines into the Egyptian force structure remained incomplete at the time of the Suez Crisis.⁴⁰² British intelligence estimated that the Egyptian capacity to operate the new interceptors or the light bombers, with which the Egyptian Air Force (EAF) had no previous experience, was probably quite limited. According to the Joint Intelligence Committee’s estimate, the Egyptian Air Force would be able to operate them on a larger scale by December at the earliest. The effectiveness of these aircraft would remain low for some time even after the initial flying instruction had taken

⁴⁰⁰ NA CAB 158/22, JIC (55) 68, 9 November 1955, “Likely Israeli Course of Action and Scale of Attack in War with Arab States in the Near Future”.

⁴⁰¹ NA DEFE 6/31, JP (55) 115, 3 October 1955, “Supply of Arms from the Soviet Bloc”.

⁴⁰² For details of the arms deal, see, Rami Ginat, “The Soviet Union and Egypt, 1945–1955” (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1993), pp. 215–216; NA CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 84 , 14 August 1956, “Considerations Affecting Action Taken by Egypt in the Event of Armed Intervention”; WO 288/98, G (Int) HQ 2 Corps, 11 August 1956, “Capabilities, Dispositions and Possible Future Action by the Egyptian Army”. According to Russian Major General V.A Zolotarev, the arms deal, which was worth 250 million US Dollars, included 230 main battle tanks, 200 armoured personnel carriers, 100 assault guns, 500 pieces of field artillery, 120 MIG-15-fighters and 50 IL-28 bombers. See, V.A. Zolotarev, “Rossiya (SSSR) v Lokal’nh Voinah / Voennkh Konfliktah Vtoroj poloviy XX Veka” (Moskva: 2000), p. 172 and 303n.

place due to a primitive control system.⁴⁰³ According to another source, a British civilian technician formerly employed by the EAF, a lack of spare parts and ground personnel also hindered the Egyptian effort to use their new aircraft efficiently.⁴⁰⁴

Estimates produced in the middle of August suggested that the Egyptian Army had about 80 000 men overall. This figure did not include paramilitary forces such as the National Guard. The Egyptian Army was divided into four districts and one command: the Sinai Command. The operational structure consisted of four divisional headquarters and seven infantry brigades.⁴⁰⁵

Armoured units subordinated to the divisional headquarters included two armoured car regiments, six armoured regiments and two armoured infantry regiments. The armour was of adequate quality, if not modern. Three of the regiments were equipped with T-34s, and three others with Sherman tanks, Centurions and heavy JS3s. In addition to the 150 SU-100 self-propelled guns, there were about 600–650 tanks in Egyptian service.

The infantry was organised into twenty-five battalions supported by seven field artillery regiments, three anti-tank regiments and four heavy mortar regiments. Three heavy and six light anti aircraft regiments were organised into three anti-aircraft brigades.

In spite of the acquisition of modern hardware and the enhanced moral caused by the deal, Egyptian tactics, the ability to use the weapons in combat, were considered to be poor. When on the defence, which was considered to be easier than conducting offensive operations, the Egyptians would be inflexible, unable to take the initiative through counter-attacks and clumsy in co-ordinating defensive artillery fire plans. The armour would be used in a supportive role, rather than in independent formations. When on

⁴⁰³ On the Egyptian capacity to adopt new aircraft from the Soviet Union, see NA CAB 158/24, JIC (56) 33, 28 February 1956, "Egyptian Effectiveness in the Use of Soviet Aircraft".

⁴⁰⁴ NA AIR 20/9225, Air Ministry, Department of Intelligence, 22 Aug 1956, "Jet Aircraft in Use by the Egyptian Air Force".

⁴⁰⁵ NA WO 288/98, G (Int) HQ 2 Corps, 11 August 1956, "Capabilities, Dispositions and Possible Future Action by the Egyptian Army"; G (Int) HQ 2 Corps, 1215/3, 19 August 1956, "An Estimation of Probable Egyptian Reactions to Present Threat"; and CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 84, 14 August 1956, "Considerations Affecting Action Taken by Egypt in the Event of Armed Intervention".

the offence, Egyptian capabilities would be even more limited. A lack of experience, untested tactical skills and inadequate signals equipment would hinder the Egyptian effort to conduct mobile operations when at war. The will to fight, which was to become one of the main Allied targets at a later stage, was thought to be reasonably high – at least initially. Morale would sink after initial defeats. The command structure or the command culture was not discussed, despite the following opinion: “The fat, dissolute senior commanders of the Farouk era have been replaced by younger professional soldiers, who, while lacking in battle experience, cannot but be better than their predecessors”.⁴⁰⁶

Like the other services, the Navy was in a painful transitional phase. It had not yet absorbed the new equipment. The former British vessels it was using were in poor condition and were not fully serviceable. Two British destroyers that were to be delivered to Egypt were still in Britain being refitted. Due to the poor state of its ships, inadequate technical maintenance and limited tactical ability, it was thought that the Egyptian Navy would take “a defensive and obstructive role”. Apart from limited attacks by the motor torpedo boats near the coast, the navy would concentrate on mining probable approaches and preparing to block the Suez Canal.⁴⁰⁷

It was estimated that the Egyptian army was deployed as follows in the middle of August:⁴⁰⁸

Southern District

- One infantry battalion

Northern District (Alexandria HQ)

- One anti-aircraft brigade (five AA Batteries)
- Two coastal artillery regiments
 - o Five coastal artillery batteries
- Two infantry battalions

Central District

- One anti-aircraft brigade (four AA Batteries)

⁴⁰⁶ NA WO 288/98, G (Int) HQ 2 Corps, 11 August 1956, “Capabilities, Dispositions and Possible Future Action by the Egyptian Army”; G (Int) HQ 2 Corps, 1215/3, 19 August 1956, “An Estimation of Probable Egyptian Reactions to Present Threat”; and CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 84, 14 August 1956, “Considerations Affecting Action Taken by Egypt in the Event of Armed Intervention”.

⁴⁰⁷ NA AIR 20/9229, JIC (ME), 30 August 1956, “Bi-Weekly Intelligence Review No 2”.

⁴⁰⁸ NA WO 288/98, G (Int) HQ 2 Corps, 1215/3, 19 August 1956, “An Estimation of Probable Egyptian Reactions to Present Threat”.

- One infantry brigade (1 Inf Bde) (3 battalions)
- Six training battalions
- One armoured car regiment (three SG battalions)
- One artillery regiment
- One reserve brigade (two battalions)

The Canal Zone District

Headquarters 1 Infantry Division

- 2 Infantry Brigade (three battalions)
- 3 Infantry Brigade (three battalions)
- 3 Armoured Group (7 Armoured Regiment (T-34); 11 Armoured Regiment (JS3) and 10 Armoured Infantry Regiment)
- One coastal artillery regiment
- One anti-aircraft brigade (three AA regiments)
- One infantry battalion
- Four SG battalions
- Some National Guard battalions

The Sinai District (or Command)

Headquarters 2 Infantry Division

- 6 Infantry Brigade (four battalions)
- 7 Infantry Brigade (three battalions)
- 2 Divisional Artillery (three field regiments, one anti-tank regiment, one heavy mortar regiment, one light anti-aircraft regiment)
- 1 Armoured Group (4 Armoured Regiment (Sherman); 9 Armoured Regiment (Centurion) and 6 Armoured Infantry Regiment, 4 Field Regiment, one lorried infantry battalion)

Headquarters 3 Infantry Division

- 5 Infantry Brigade (two battalions)
- 4 Infantry Brigade
- 3 Divisional Artillery (one field regiment, one medium regiment, one anti-tank regiment, one heavy mortar regiment, one light anti-aircraft regiment)
- one armoured regiment

Two Frontier regiments

Nine PAL Battalions organised under three PAL Bde HQ's

Up to ten National Guard battalions

Agaba Area

One infantry battalion

One National Guard battalion

One light anti-aircraft battery

According to the British intelligence estimate, which was hampered by a lack of photographic reconnaissance flights, the Egyptians had strengthened their defences in Alexandria by the beginning of September by withdrawing units from the Sinai. An infantry brigade, an armoured regiment and a National Guard brigade were in the area. Although the plan for the defence of Alexandria was not evident, the British estimated that the defence was based on two lines. Coastal artillery units, heavy anti-aircraft guns in a dual role and

some infantry were deployed in the port area. The Egyptians, realising the importance of both the Amariya junction and Dikheila airfield, had deployed their second infantry echelon and mobile armoured reserve around these sites. The Egyptian defences would be supported by the extensive use of mines, although there were no signs of the use of mines in depth. The intelligence estimate suggested that the Egyptian defence would not be restricted to conventional warfare. Elements of Egyptian intelligence would use "gangsters as their tool" and would be capable of highly sophisticated subversive actions, as the British had experienced during their occupation of the Canal Zone.⁴⁰⁹

One of the main British interests was the location of any Egyptian general reserves that could be directed against the bridgehead. A composite force of three tank regiments and an infantry brigade with supporting arms was detected near the Pyramids, on the western side of Cairo. British intelligence was not sure whether this force was redeployed from the Sinai or the Canal Zone, or whether it was a newly established force. The British were aware of the establishment of the HQ of 4 Armoured Division as part of the Egyptian mobilisation, but it was unclear if the armoured forces were operating under this new command.⁴¹⁰

The question of Egyptian morale, a factor subjected to more detailed discussion later, was constantly raised. The Joint Intelligence Committee estimated that armed intervention could bring Nasser down: "Although the morale of the Egyptian armed forces is at present likely to be high (see Appendix) we consider that the temperament of the Egyptian people is such that were they themselves subject to immediate physical danger, their morale

⁴⁰⁹ NA WO 288/92, HQ 3 (Br) Infantry Division, 5 September 1956, "3 (British) Infantry Division Operation Order No 1" and WO 288/51 2 Corps ISUM No 3, 7 September 1956. It appears that the British had every reason to expect unconventional resistance. According to Charles Tripp, the Egyptians had been very skilful at organising public disorder, which was one means of resistance that was very difficult to control with front line troops. See Charles Tripp, "Egypt 1945–52: The uses of disorder" in Michael Cohen and Martin Kolinsky (ed.) *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East. Britain's Responses to Nationalist Movements 1943–55* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp.136–138.

⁴¹⁰ NA WO 288/98, G (Int) HQ 2 Corps, 1215/3, 19 August 1956, "An Estimation of Probable Egyptian Reactions to Present Threat", and "2 Corps ISUM No 3", 7 September 1956. At the beginning of the first week of September, the Joint Intelligence Committee estimated that the Egyptians had about 200 000 men under arms, although most of the trained reserves had still not been called up; see JIC, Review of Current Intelligence as 6 September 1956, CAB 179/1, NA.

would probably collapse and the downfall of Nasser might result". According to the same document, the Soviet Union would not come to the aid of its client, and a swift change of government in Egypt would have a positive effect on "Arab States, who have natural admiration for strength".⁴¹¹

A naval intelligence source, presumably an officer in the Egyptian Navy, pointed in the same direction by claiming that: "if the West decides to attack they can walk right in. We hope though that the U.S. will hold the others back". The same source guessed that there were pro-US officers ready to seize power if Nasser was removed.⁴¹² But, there were also views that painted an entirely different picture of the Egyptian will to fight. The C-in-C of the Middle East Air Force warned against basing plans on illusions. According to his estimate, the Egyptians possessed a substantial number of modern weapon systems and they were more than willing to use them, if necessary. There was no prospect of an easy collapse of the Egyptian Armed Forces.⁴¹³

5.4 Overlord revisited – the tactical plan for Alexandria

Since the Egypt Committee had accepted the outline plan, the Force Commanders concentrated on the detailed planning. They presented their respective plans at the end of August. The plans were based on five sequential phases. The first phase included preliminary movements and training for the operation. The actual combat operations would commence in phase B, on D-Day. This phase called for the rapid neutralisation of the Egyptian Air Force within two days. Phase C, the amphibious and parachute assaults for gaining a bridgehead at Alexandria, would be followed by an expansion and consolidation of the bridgehead in phase D. The last phase called for a breakout and operations towards Cairo.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ NA CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 80, 3 August 1956, "Egyptian Nationalization of the Suez Canal Company" and DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 78th Meeting, 9 August 1956.

⁴¹² NA ADM 205/120, Director of Naval Intelligence to First Sea Lord, 30 July 1956.

⁴¹³ NA AIR 8/2090, C-in-C MEAF to CAS, 30 July 1956.

⁴¹⁴ NA ADM 116/6135, Office of the Allied Force Commanders, 18 August 1956, "Combined Operational Instruction" and WO 288/91, HQ Allied Task Force, 29 August 1956, "Allied Land Force Operation Order No 1".

The air plan was based on the systematic destruction of the Egyptian Air Force before any landings took place. According to a memorandum by the Air Task Force Commander, the main aim of the air plan was to create a favourable situation in the air. To achieve this, Air Marshall Barnett estimated that the Royal Air Force would need at least 2–3 nights and days. Due to the need to incorporate an airborne operation in the plans, Barnett ruled out the option of delivering just a single blow against the Egyptian Air Force only hours before the landings were to take place. There were not enough planes to conduct an aerial *coup de main*. It is unknown whether a single attack was actually seriously considered among the Task Force Commanders. However, the idea was at least being circulated among planners at the Air Headquarters Levant, who called for a “use of air power in a German model” instead of getting involved in an “unrewarding air attrition campaign of even short duration”.⁴¹⁵

The amphibious assault and airborne landings were to take place in phase C. The assault was to begin with a separate special operation involving 1 Special Boat Section of SBS (Special Boat Squadron)⁴¹⁶ and a detachment from 40 Commando. This force would seize the harbour entrance defences and clear the protective booms thirty minutes before the main assault. The French assault force of three marine commandos⁴¹⁷ and two parachute regiments was tasked to land to the west of Alexandria to capture Dikheila airfield and to protect the western approaches. The British 3 Commando Brigade was to land directly in the Western Harbour. After landing, each of the three Commandos that made up the brigade were to take their respective areas of responsibility. After capturing the most important quays and eliminating the Egyptian defences controlling the approaches at the small cape of Ras El Tin, the brigade would get its vehicles and extend the

⁴¹⁵ Imperial War Museum, Department of Books and Documents, Papers of Air Chief Marshall Sir Denis Barnett (96/10/1), Barnett to the COS-Committee, 9 August 1956 and NA AIR 20/9961, Squadron Leader Penred to Senior Air Staff Officer, AHQ 612/TS/Plans, 17 August 1956.

⁴¹⁶ NA ADM 116/6099, Commandant General, Royal Marines to the Director of Naval Plans, 10 October 1956 and John Parker, SBS, *the Inside Story of the Special Boat Service* (Chatham: Headline Book Publishing, 1997), p.176.

⁴¹⁷ A French Marine Commando was a company-sized unit unlike its British equivalent, which was the size of a battalion.

bridgehead so that it was 5–6 kilometres wide. However, the operations would not extend to the centre of the city.⁴¹⁸

Both the French and the British would conduct parachute landings in connection with the seaborne assault. The French parachute regiment was to be dropped approximately twenty-five kilometres south of Alexandria, in El Amiryah. This area was thought to have various good landing zones. This force could dominate a road junction and protect the bridgehead from any counterattacks from the direction of Cairo. The British parachute force, consisting of two parachute battalions, was to land north-east of El Amiryah and to seize the ends of the two causeways leading to Alexandria. The landings were timed to take place thirty minutes after the first wave of amphibious forces hit the landing beaches.⁴¹⁹

The plan was to use massive fire support to suppress the Egyptian defences. The heavy coastal artillery would be destroyed by a combined air and naval bombardment before the transport ships lowered the assault landing craft. While a portion of the navy's guns would continue shelling the coastal artillery positions, part of the naval bombardment would shift to the parachute landing zones. Air attacks to support the parachute landings would take place on the approach route of the transport aircraft just before P-hour (the time of the airborne landings), after which targets along their routes outwards were to be strafed. Simultaneously, targets of opportunity, armour being the priority, were to be engaged in order to prevent counterattacks. Fire support on pre-selected targets would pause sixty-five minutes after H-hour (the time of the amphibious landing) after which both naval and air support would be available on call.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁸ NA ADM 205/147, Office of the Naval Force Commander, 1 September 1956, "Operation Musketeer, Naval Operation Order (OMNO). WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Task Force, 29 August 1956, "Allied Land Force Operation Order No 1". The French parachute regiment was somewhat stronger than its British equivalent, which was a parachute battalion.

⁴¹⁹ WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Task Force, 29 August 1956, "Allied Land Force Operation Order No 1". For an appreciation of the landing zone, see WO 288/51, Joint Intelligence Bureau, 23 August 1956, "Short Note on the El Amiryah as a potential Dropping Zone". The parachute regiment consisted of four parachute squadrons (companies) supported by C.A. and CCS. The firepower of a French regiment was superior to its British equivalent, as it possessed both light and heavy mortars. The overall strength of the French parachute regiment was 1 200 men, NA WO 288/42, "Organigramme 10 D.P".

⁴²⁰ NA WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Task Force, "Allied Land Force Operation Order No 1", 29 August 1956.

The capture of the bridgehead would be followed by a consolidation and build-up phase. The main force in this part of the operation would be 3 Infantry Division. This division consisted of three infantry brigades: the Guards Brigade Group, 29 Infantry Brigade Group, and 19 Infantry Brigade Group. This force was supported by two armoured regiments, 1 and 6 Royal Tank Regiments, mustering almost 100 Centurion battle tanks altogether. The division's task was to establish a divisional grouping, a defensive and rallying point, for further operations as soon as possible some 40 kilometres south of Alexandria along the desert road leading to Cairo. The divisional commander, Major General John Churcher,⁴²¹ divided his concept of operations into three phases: landing and assembly, extension of the bridgehead by a brigade group and the establishment of the divisional grouping.⁴²²

The build-up of the bridgehead would start ninety minutes after the initial bridgehead had been captured. To counter the Egyptian armour, which was in the vicinity of Al Amiryah according to intelligence, it was essential to land the armour at the first possible moment, and to despatch it to assist the relatively lightly armed airborne forces. As a result, most of the 1 and 6 Royal Tank Regiments (RTR) were to land within five hours of the initial landing. 1 RTR would actually start unloading 90 minutes after the initial landing.⁴²³

The next echelon to land was 16 Parachute Brigade Group, minus the units participating in the parachute landings, and the infantry battalions of the Guards Brigade Group. The parachute brigade was to link up with the units that had parachuted in and establish a strongpoint north-east of El Amiryah. Reinforced with a tank squadron, the Guards Brigade Group and a reconnaissance squadron from the Life Guards were to secure the eastern

⁴²¹ Major General John Churcher had commanded the 3 Infantry Division since 1954. During the Second World War, he held several commands starting with a battalion and ending the war as a brigade commander. After the war, Churcher had commanded no less than five different divisions, *Who's Who*, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1956), p. 552.

⁴²² NA WO 288/92, HQ 3 (Br) Infantry Division, 5 September 1956, "3 (British) Infantry Division Operation Order No 1".

⁴²³ NA WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Task Force, 29 August 1956, "Allied Land Force Operation Order No 1"

flank of the bridgehead by establishing a blocking position some 15–20 kilometres from Alexandria.⁴²⁴

With both of the flanks secured, the rest of the division was to start a series of complicated moves from the original assembly areas into concentration areas east of Alexandria. 19 Infantry Brigade Group would first take over the positions of 16 Airborne Brigade Group, take defensive positions and then cover the movement of the rest of the division.⁴²⁵

In the next phase, 29 Infantry Brigade Group and 1 Royal Tank Regiment were to move behind 19 Brigade Group. From there, the division would march to its final position, 40 kilometres south of Alexandria. This phase called for the deployment of the division into defensive positions. In the final positions, the Life Guards, the armoured car regiment, would be acting as a covering force and advance guard for the main body of 3 Infantry Division. The first line of defence, and presumably the advance force in further operations, was formed by 29 Infantry Brigade Group, which was reinforced by armour from 1 Royal Rank Regiment. In the main defence line, about five kilometres behind the 29 Infantry Brigade Group, lay 16 Parachute Brigade Group, now subordinated to 3 Infantry Division, alongside 19 Infantry Brigade Group and 6 Royal Tank Regiment. This build-up would take between five and seven days. The movement of the brigades would start at D+4/5 and the division would be deployed in defensive positions within a few days. The landing of personnel was not time-consuming; it would only take a day. However, the unloading of the pre-packed vehicles and getting them to their units would be tedious.⁴²⁶

General Churher's further plans for 3 Infantry Division are not known in detail. The advance was considered to be a new operation that would need further appreciation of the situation and planning. The next moves can be inferred from the Force Commanders' operational instructions. 3 Infantry Division was to move along the Cairo-Alexandria Road and to capture the high ground on the western side of the city. In conjunction with the advance,

⁴²⁴ NA WO 288/92, HQ 3 (Br) Infantry Division, 5 September 1956, "3 (British) Infantry Division Operation Order No 1".

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

the French parachute division would conduct a regimental landing and capture the Cairo West-airport, which would be turned into a forward airbase for daily supply flights. Due to the carrier forces' limited endurance, the continuation of offensive air support would be guaranteed by bringing several squadrons of Royal Air Force fighters/ground attack planes to the Dikheila and Cairo West airports. Although the Force Commanders' instruction did not rule out entering Cairo, they did mention the goal of occupying it either: "Subsequent operations will include the crossing of the River Nile, securing a bridge head EAST of CAIRO, an advance to the Canal, the occupation of PORT SAID and reinforcement by 2 (Br) Inf. Div.⁴²⁷

According to the unpublished memoirs of Major General Churcher, the final drive to the Canal would have taken two roads. After crossing the Nile, his division could have been divided into brigade groups and directed towards Ismailia and Suez simultaneously, thus securing the whole length of the Canal.⁴²⁸

5.5 Conclusions

The initial decision by the Chiefs of Staff Committee removed any speculation of an Allied *coup de main* on the Suez Canal. The Chiefs were in agreement with the Joint Planning Staff. Britain was unable to launch such an operation. The question was a logistical one. A quick entry to Port Said or Alexandria could have succeeded, but what could have been done after the capture and consolidation of the bridgehead? An amphibious or parachute assault would only have been a way to enter the hostile area, and no operation could be planned on only an initial entrance. The sustaining of adequate forces would have been a totally different matter and would also have required totally different resources.

⁴²⁷ NA ADM 116/6135, Office of the Allied Force Commanders, 18 August 1956, "Combined Operational Instruction". According to the administrative plans of the Air Task Force, the first G/A squadron of 215 Wing was to be operational by D+7. Later, by D+21, two additional squadrons were to be flown in. In addition, a squadron of Hastings transport aircraft was to be deployed. NA AIR 20/9594, Air Task Force Headquarters, "Addendum to Administrative plan, 6 September 1956" and AIR 20/9561, Air Task Force Headquarters, 24 August 1956, "Administrative plan".

⁴²⁸ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LCMA), Papers of Major General John Churcher, "A Soldier's Story, pp.112–113.

When considering the option of landing in Alexandria, one should also keep in mind the objective of the operation. At the time the Alexandria option was introduced, the ultimate objective was not only to seize the Canal but also to bring Nasser down. To accomplish this, the operations were to extend to Cairo, which was the absolute centre of all power in Egypt.

The British had very extensive experience in amphibious operations and in operations taking place after an initial landing in the Second World War. The failure to pursue the *Wehrmacht* after the Allied breakout during Operation Overlord is often connected with problems in logistics. Due to inadequate logistics, the Allies were not able to exploit their success. Against this background, the Task Force Commanders' suggestion of moving the assault area from Port Said to Alexandria was militarily reasonable. The facilities within Alexandria would have enabled a relatively rapid disembarkation and forming up to launch an attack. Alexandria was also closer to the hub of Nasser's power: Cairo.

It would be interesting to know, and this is pure speculation that is not based on any historical evidence, how seriously the Task Force Commanders considered a large-scale double envelopment. The alternative option of landing the French at Port Said and the British at Alexandria would have divided the Egyptian defences effectively and taken advantage of Allied resources. The French, with their superior airborne forces, could have exploited their better mobility and taken the key points along the Canal. At the same time, the British would have conducted a traditional amphibious assault on Alexandria with subsequent operations towards Cairo. This option would have taken full advantage of the scarce harbour facilities and hidden the main effort. But on the other hand, this option would also have divided Allied resources as well. After all, the main argument against not landing both at Alexandria and Port Said was to keep the limited Allied resources concentrated.

This concentrated force would be needed for the battle of Cairo. The Task Force Commanders realised that the Egyptian Army would fight for the capital. However, the idea was to lure the Egyptians into a mobile battle

outside of Cairo by posing a threat to the capital. This battle could have been won as the Egyptian Army was considered to be incapable of mobile warfare.

The British knew the Egyptian capabilities relatively well. The outcome of the battle would not only rely on the quality of the materiel. In spite of the new, modern equipment, the Egyptian Armed Forces were considered to be in a transition phase. Poorly led and inadequately trained, the forces could not take full advantage of their hardware. Still, Egyptian morale remained a mystery. Would the Egyptians fight for their country? The Egyptian performance in the war in 1948 was considered to be feeble. In spite of being at least initially superior, the Arab armies had been unable to defeat the Israelis. On the other hand, Egyptian morale had been boosted by the revolution. Incidents that occurred during the British occupation of the Canal Zone had shown that Egyptians could fight with courage.

It appears that the Task Force Commanders anticipated that the Egyptians would withstand the attack. As a result, superiority both in numbers and quality was the way to success. This was just like in the Second World War, which had been experienced by every single senior officer only ten years earlier. The worst possible case was taken as the starting point for the planning. This was a reasonable starting point. Nobody ever plans to lose a battle.

British military preparations for the war are often described as being inadequate. This is partially true. They were not prepared to launch an attack at lightening speed on the Canal Zone. The sealift and airlift capacities were inadequate even for a limited operation. According to earlier British estimates, the occupation of the Canal Zone would have required three divisions. Neither Britain nor the United States nor even the Soviet Union possessed such capabilities. It would have been possible to seize only a limited area, such as Port Said, which controlled the entrance to the Canal. But what next after this? The foundations of a military operation of the scale of Operation Musketeer are set at the political level. It is evident that, in late July and early August, the ultimate goal for the operation was not only to seize the Canal, but also to overthrow President Nasser and his regime.

6 THE CHANGE OF CONCEPT – MUSKETEER REVISE

"I understand that the idea originated from the Chief of Air Staff, who was also the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and a protagonist of the 'victory through air power' theory".⁴²⁹

Until the middle of August, the Prime Minister, the Egypt Committee and the Chiefs of Staff had been resolute in their intentions to launch a military operation in the middle of September. Then, their stance became more prudent. Several political factors led to this change: changing public opinion in Britain, American doubts about using force, and the question of bringing the matter before the Security Council. From a military point of view, this was an early sign of a loss of focus on the aim of the military operation. The Egypt Committee soberly realised that the use of force would not be authorised by the Security Council due to the probable Soviet veto. However, the temptation to use the United Nations as a forum to present Britain's case to the world was still too tempting. The long-lasting mission to find a pretext for the invasion had begun. These moments of indecision affected the military planning. General Keightley's request for photographic reconnaissance was denied and D-Day was postponed to 19 September.⁴³⁰

At the same time, doubts about the feasibility of the plan began to surface within the military as well. The First Sea Lord had reservations about the soundness of the political objectives. On 14 August, he questioned the policy of overthrowing President Nasser without having identified a possible successor at the Chiefs of Staff meeting. Ten days later, he expressed his views on the more practical results of a possible military operation. It could lead to a long-term military commitment in the Middle East at a time when the services were trying to find ways to conserve resources. The attitude of the other chiefs during the early crisis is less clear. According to John Cloake, the biographer of General Templer (Chief of the Imperial General Staff), Templer had a very harsh attitude towards Nasser throughout the crisis. One of the reasons for this might have been his own experiences with Arab nationalism during his visit to Jordan at the end of a previous year. However,

⁴²⁹ Andre Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 55.

⁴³⁰ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 19th Meeting, 22 August 1956.

his personal testimony in the immediate aftermath of the crisis shows that he thought that Britain would block the Soviet and communist advance into the Middle East and Africa by opposing Nasser. He, if anybody, was familiar with fighting an anti-communist campaign due to his recent experience in Malaya.⁴³¹

The Chiefs of Staff apparently realised that the postponement of the operation would probably not be the last one and the Joint Planning Staff was asked to quickly produce a report on the implications of postponements. In this report, "Operation Musketeer – Implications of Postponement", the planners expressed their concern about weather conditions in the Eastern Mediterranean. After the middle of October, the weather in the area was expected to deteriorate as winter approached. The present plan would not be feasible due to unpredictable sea conditions. The planners, who were partially trying to avoid responsibility for forecasting the weather, suggested that "We are informed that any plan involving amphibious assault could not be then relied upon before March / April 1957".⁴³² One can only assume that the unpredicted gale that devastated a large proportion of the Allied landing craft and the artificial American harbour during Operation Overlord was still a vivid memory for the planning teams.⁴³³ The planners reminded the Chiefs of the reality of timetables. The decision to invade should be taken twenty days before D-Day. Not only should parts of the invasion force depart about fifteen days prior to D-Day, but the deployments by Bomber Command and the calling up of reservists for 2 Infantry Division should be started on D-20.⁴³⁴

The Joint Planning Staff proposed several alternatives to prepare the military for further postponements. The first option was to continue with the preparations and to load the transport ships without embarking the troops.

⁴³¹ NA DEFE 4/89, COS, 83rd Meeting on 23 August 1956; Ziegler, *Mountbatten, the Official Biography*, pp. 538–541 and Cloake, *Templer, Tiger of Malaya*, p. 347. On Templer's personal view, see NA WO 216/909, "CIGS's Appreciation", 19 November 1956. According to General William Jackson, Boyle, the Chief of Air Staff was undecided and decided to play "straight professional bat", William Jackson and Lord Bramall, *The Chiefs. The Story of the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff* (London: Brassey's, 1992), pp. 297–298.

⁴³² NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 147, 26 August 1956, "Operation Musketeer – Implications of Postponement".

⁴³³ On the effects of this storm, see Kenneth Edwards, *Operation Neptune* (London: Collins, 1946) pp. 207–216.

⁴³⁴ NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 147, 26 August 1956, "Operation Musketeer – Implications of Postponement".

This arrangement would allow a rapid departure, but the troops could not continue training efficiently without their stores and vehicles. Economically, this option would become expensive as a large amount of shipping would stay requisitioned for a longer time. For these reasons, the Joint Planning Staff suggested that this alternative was not feasible for longer than a fortnight. The second option was to assemble 3 Infantry Division and the corps troops in Malta, which was within 5 days striking distance of Alexandria. This alternative left room for diplomacy, but the Joint Planning Staff believed that the option was not practicable for a period longer than a week because of congestion and security concerns. The invasion fleet in Malta would not escape notice. The third alternative called for the unloading of the transport ships. The materiel onboard would be delivered to the troops to allow them to continue with their training. The weakness of this option was that it would postpone the operation for a month. For practical reasons, the minimum time required for training would be fourteen days. The unloading and reloading of the ships would take another fortnight. In practice this alternative would postpone the whole operation until after the winter was over due to the deteriorating weather. In its conclusion, the Joint Planning Staff recommended that the invasion should take place according to the original timetable because this would take full advantage of the incomplete Egyptian preparations and their low level of readiness. Any delay that exceeded fourteen days would postpone the operation until the spring.⁴³⁵

6.1 An alternative to Musketeer – a new concept

The realism of this report, which was presented to the Chiefs of Staff, must have made depressing reading for any politician or officer looking for flexibility. Then, suddenly on 7 September, the Minister of Defence presented a totally different version of the Joint Planning Staff's report to the Egypt Committee. This memorandum provided the basis for a new concept. What had happened in those two weeks? Why and by whom was this change of plans instigated?

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

It is evident that there were reservations about the Alexandria plan from the very beginning. However, it is also clear that this criticism was merely focused on the details of the plan and not on the landing place itself. On 10 August, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff expressed his concerns about the logistics. The planned logistics support would be adequate for the initial advance to Cairo, but it would not be sufficient for any subsequent operations to the Canal Zone if the Egyptians chose to continue resisting. To solve this problem, a large number of Army Emergency Reserve and Territorial Army units should be mobilised. Their deployment would take two months.⁴³⁶

Concerns about the timing of the operation had actually appeared before the Joint Planning Staff was ordered to produce its report. As early as 14 August, the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee explained that there was some anxiety that the planned schedule was too tight and that there was a need for a flexible D-Day mainly for political reasons. Dickson also predicted problems in the future by noting: "there would be great pressure for the time between the opening of the air battle and the landing of first troops to be kept minimum".⁴³⁷ His pessimistic expectations of an uncertain future were reinforced during the Egypt Committee's meeting the same day as the Secretary of the Cabinet, Norman Brooks, presented his memoranda on the problems of co-ordinating political activity and military operations.⁴³⁸ On the one hand, the political operation should allow more time; Dickson even mentioned the possibility of economic sanctions. On the other hand, the time it would take to implement the operational plans after the executive order was issued was too long – about 14 days. Despite this, the Prime Minister had ordered military preparations to continue as planned, but he also wanted consideration given to the practical implications of postponement. Dickson had given this task to General Charles Keightley, the nominated Commander-in-Chief, and not to the Joint Planning Staff, who were asked to quickly do it later.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁶ NA DEFE 11/138, "Limitations of Operation Musketeer", a Note by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 10 August 1956.

⁴³⁷ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 80th Meeting, 14 August 1956, confidential annex: "Meeting with General Charles Keightley".

⁴³⁸ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 15th Meeting, 14 August 1956 and CAB 134/1217, EC (56) 19, 14 August 1956, "Forecast of Time-Table".

⁴³⁹ NA DEFE 11/138 Memorandum by Chief Air Marshall Dickson, EFD/23, 15 August 1956, and Questionnaire by General Keightley, 17 August 1956.

The collaboration of the Chairman and the Commander-in-Chief resumed only a few days later. On 19 August, Keightley passed a short note accompanied by a memorandum to Dickson alone. Claiming the Force Commanders supported his idea, he promoted a totally new concept based on prolonged air operations. According to Keightley, an air offensive that targeted the Egyptian Armed Forces and Egypt's oil supplies could be enough to overthrow Nasser. Most of the armed forces would be demolished even before coming into contact with the Allied ground forces, and the economy would collapse as a consequence of the heavy bombing. As a result, Nasser would be forced to resign in the face of diminishing popular support. Attrition from the air would also reduce Allied and civilians casualties as Alexandria would not be subjected to heavy naval bombardment. With Nasser's power neutralised by the air campaign, it would not be necessary to fight the decisive battle near Cairo or to occupy that city. Therefore, the ground forces could be deployed directly in the Canal Zone by using Port Said as point of entry. Considering the audacious nature of the operation, only a limited number of forces were to be needed. The political advantage of Keighley's concept was obvious. Operations could be implemented at short notice and air force preparations would not be extensively disrupted by any further postponements. Secrecy could also be better maintained and 2 Infantry Division could be left out of the order of battle.⁴⁴⁰

This new formula was soon presented to the Minister of Defence, Walter Monckton⁴⁴¹, who, according to Dickson, "was anxious that General Keightley should take the Prime Minister through the latest plan, the implications of

⁴⁴⁰ General Keightley's message CIC/59335 on 19 August 1956 to Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and Operation Musketeer, Note by General Sir Charles Keightley, Commander-in-Chief MELF, DEFE 11/138, NA. David Carlton, another biographer of Anthony Eden, claims that the initiative to change the concept was proposed by the French due to concerns about how the operation would appear to the public. An attack on Alexandria would look like an attack against Egypt. By focusing the attack on the Canal Zone, this harmful image could be avoided, David Carlton, *Anthony Eden*, (London: Allen Lane, 1981), pp. 420–421.

⁴⁴¹ Walter Turner MONCTON: b. 17 Jan 1891; married 1914 and 1947, one son and one daughter. Education: Balliol College, Oxford (M.A.). Career: South-Eastern Circuit; Recorder of Hythe, 1930–1936; Director General of the Press and Censorship Bureau, 1939–1940; Deputy Director-General (later Director-General) of Ministry of Information, 1940–1941; Director-General of British Propaganda and Information Services at Cairo, 1941–1942; Solicitor-General, 1945; UK Delegate Allied Reparation Commission in Moscow, 1945, MP from 1951, Minister of Labour and National Service 1951–1956; Minister of Defence from the beginning of 1956.

postponement". However, the Task Force Commanders did not consent to the new plan, which caused Keightley to withdraw his note on 23 August. According to Keightley, the Task Force Commanders were worried about Allied capacity to wage a long air campaign due to concerns about logistics and crew resources. However, Air Marshall Dermot Boyle, the Chief of Air Staff, was not troubled by the logistics; he was worried about the whole concept. The limited range of the ground attack planes operating from Cyprus would make neutralisation of the Egyptian Army a very difficult task.⁴⁴²

Only a day later, General Keightley and Lieutenant General Hugh Stockwell, the Land Task Force Commander, presented the original Alexandria plan to the Prime Minister in a private staff conference attended only by the Minister of Defence, the Secretary of State for War, and the Chiefs of Staff. It was quite apparent that timing the operation to correspond to the political moves had become the gravest problem. The Prime Minister decided that the timing question would have to be reconsidered on 27 August. As a consequence, the Joint Planning Staff was ordered to produce the report on the implications of postponement that was discussed earlier in this chapter.⁴⁴³

The Joint Planning Staff's report was reviewed by the Chiefs of Staff together with General Keightley on 28 August. The Joint Planning Staff's recommendations were revised. The Chiefs did not agree with their planning staff on the impossibility of carrying out an amphibious assault during the winter months. The present plan could be executed until the end of October, but after that an alternative option was needed. Winter weather would not only impede the minesweeping operations before the landing, but it would also hamper the French airborne assault, which was to be launched from Tymbou. This airfield was unusable during wet weather. The Chiefs also had a more positive attitude about postponement. Operations undertaken in accordance with the present plan could be postponed for three weeks if the forces had not departed Britain. Once the forces had sailed, they could not be held at Malta for longer than a week. In spite of promising some flexibility

⁴⁴² NA DEFE 11/138, Chief Air Marshall Dickson's note WFD/25, 20 August 1956 to Chiefs of Staff, and Confidential Annex to Chiefs of Staff 8 3rd Meeting on 23 August 1956.

⁴⁴³ NA DEFE 11/138, Minutes of a Staff Conference at No 10 Downing Street, 24 August 1956.

on the postponement, the Chiefs were fully aware that the decision to initiate operations would have to be taken by the politicians about two weeks before D-Day. The Committee also agreed that if the postponements lasted more than three weeks, an alternative plan would have to be prepared.⁴⁴⁴

The Chiefs of Staff's fears about delays become reality on 28 August. The Egypt Committee decided to postpone the operation by a further seven days due to Nasser's agreement to meet the Five Power Committee. The new D-Day would be 26 September.⁴⁴⁵ As a result of this meeting, Dickson had a private meeting with the Minister of Defence in which he became more convinced that further postponements were coming. He concluded that "it is by no means unlikely that the political situation may develop in a way in which it may be essential to continue to hold the ability to use force beyond the date referred above (beginning of October, *author*)". Therefore, he suggested that General Keightley should be given instructions to consider ways of delaying the execution of the present plan, and also to extend his thinking beyond the end of October, when the present concept would not be feasible any longer.⁴⁴⁶

General Keightley saw this as an opportunity to come up with a new concept, which he presented to the Chiefs of Staff on 6 September. As previously mentioned, this concept was based on a naval blockade and an air campaign. These actions would paralyse the Egyptian economy and military. The Russian or East Bloc volunteers feared by Keightley could not operate Egyptian aircraft after they were destroyed on their airfields. The moral arguments of the new concept must have been very appealing as it was explained that the plan "must be capable of being held until our moral case is unassailable and must be put into action at short notice". Only after negotiations failed, which would happen because of Nasser's intransigence of course, would Britain commence hostilities as a last resort. The Arab world would be shown that it was Nasser after all who was responsible for the war, not Britain.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 85th Meeting, 28 August 1956, Confidential Annex.

⁴⁴⁵ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 23rd Meeting, 28 August 1956.

⁴⁴⁶ NA DEFE 11/138, Dickson to the Chiefs of Staff, 1 September 1956.

⁴⁴⁷ NA DEFE 11/138, An undated note (either 4 or 5 September) by General Keightley on Operation Musketeer.

Because of criticisms by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Keightley was compelled to modify his operational concept.⁴⁴⁸ As a result, he presented a new note on 9 September. To a great extent, the concept was still based on an air campaign that would "bring about the downfall of the Nasser Government". The plan was to include three phases:

- (1) neutralisation of the Egyptian Air Force
- (2) an air offensive
- (3) occupation of the Canal Zone.

The concept was based on an essential presumption: the opening two phases, when combined with psychological warfare operations, would bring down Nasser and enable a rather peaceful occupation of the Canal.⁴⁴⁹

The first phase would not be significantly altered from the Alexandria plan. After photographic reconnaissance, the night bombers would immobilise the Egyptian airplanes by damaging their air bases. The Egyptian planes, deprived of their ability to take-off, would then be easy targets for the ground attack planes operating from Cyprus and the aircraft carriers. The second phase, aimed at the Egyptian will to resist, would be launched against the infrastructure of the country. In addition to military targets, the oil facilities, Cairo Radio, which was Nasser's principal means of encouraging resistance, and key communication centres would be subjected to heavy bombing. The Egyptian Army, which was dispersed around the country, was considered to be the most difficult of the targets. Therefore, the main effort would be directed against troop concentrations along the Israeli border or against the Canal crossings. The third phase could be carried out by reduced forces due to the much reduced resistance. An amphibious assault would be directed at Port Said, after which the remainder of the Canal Zone was to be occupied. Three divisions were required to accomplish this.⁴⁵⁰

Keightley suggested that the amphibious assault could not be supported by an airborne operation because the congested airfields in Cyprus would be needed for planes participating in the air campaign. The ground forces

⁴⁴⁸ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 89th Meeting, 6 September 1956, Confidential Annex.

⁴⁴⁹ NA DEFE 11/138, "Alternative to Musketeer", a note by General Charles Keightley, 9 September 1956.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

available would be much the same as those already earmarked for the operation. 3 Commando Brigade and 16 Parachute Brigade Group in Cyprus and both the French airborne and the light mechanised division deployed in the Mediterranean would be ready for operations in Egypt within ten days of receiving orders. 3 Infantry Division in Britain could reach Port Said in sixteen days. In addition, two infantry brigades in Cyprus and 10 Armoured Division in Libya could be made available.⁴⁵¹

The Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Planning Staff discussed the new concept between 6 and 9 September. At the first meeting, only the Chief of the Imperial General Staff doubted that the concept of an air and naval action would achieve such “capitulation and total disintegration of the Egyptian Army as to make any land fighting unnecessary”. The Chief of Air Staff interpreted the concept differently. He claimed that the essence of this new concept was not to force the Egyptian Army to capitulate, but to force the Egyptian government to capitulate. Only then would it be possible to run the Canal under international supervision and to avoid the use of British ground forces. One can assume that the Joint Planning Staff had inadequate time to examine the new proposal. In their short note, the Directors of Plans did not question the validity of the new concept. However, they rather discreetly expressed their doubts about the resolution of the politicians to subject Egypt to severe bombing in the face of world opinion.⁴⁵²

These notes were re-examined in the second meeting on 9 September. This time, the Chairman adopted a more cautious attitude. Because the plan included many uncertain factors, particularly in its second phase, the politicians should be warned of the possible problems. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff had perhaps the most pessimistic views of all those present on the concept. According to him, there were many preconditions for success. The bombing would not achieve its objectives unless it was carried out with resolution and with adequate force. He probably anticipated a long guerrilla campaign due to his own first-hand experience of the Malayan Emergency and warned that the air campaign would not destroy the Egyptian

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 89th Meeting, 6 September 1956, Confidential annex and DEFE 6/39, JP (56) note 6, 9 September, “Alternative to Musketeer”.

Army in the field. The Allies would have to face parts of this force. Some of the fighting would take place in Port Said, which would inevitably cause much damage and many civilian casualties. As mentioned previously, the Chief of Air Staff was the most enthusiastic one present about this new concept. He supported the idea by claiming that there was enough air power to accomplish the mission successfully, and that even the allocated French air units would have enough time to remedy their logistical problems due to the revised scheme.⁴⁵³

The Chiefs of Staff took note of the Joint Planning Staff's warnings. In their memoranda, the Chiefs accepted the new concept and recommended that it be approved. Flexibility, reduced force requirements and meteorological data supported their decision. But, they also emphasised the problems involved with the air campaign. In particular it was especially difficult to estimate the time required to accomplish the aims of this campaign. The main target of the bombing would be the Egyptian oil facilities. According to the Joint Intelligence Bureau, these facilities could withstand such a campaign for one to five weeks if the Egyptian oil storage and transportation systems were bombed. If the Egyptians began rationing, supplies would naturally last longer. In spite of their internal disputes over the matter, the Chiefs were confident enough to predict: "While we cannot forecast the exact period for which the Egyptian Government could withstand this pressure, we feel that capitulation or the downfall of the Government could not be long delayed".⁴⁵⁴

The memorandum survived for only two days without further comments. General Templer suggested that the Chiefs of Staff should not predict that an easy victory was achievable by an air offensive because its effects were unpredictable. The Chief of Air Staff had a totally different view. An air offensive would actually be easier than estimated. He claimed that 80% of Egyptian oil storage could be destroyed in a day and that the rest of the oil, which was preserved in underground bunkers, could be made unattainable by bombing the pumping stations. Cairo Radio and its subsidiary

⁴⁵³ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 90th Meeting, 9 September 1956, Confidential annex. Keith Kyle has quite a different view on this matter. He suggests that not only did the Air Task Force Commander, Air Marshall Barnett, oppose the new concept but that the Chief of Air Staff also shared his view, see Kyle, pp. 240–241.

⁴⁵⁴ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 90th Meeting, 9 September 1956, Confidential annex and COS, (56) 350, 9 September 1956, "Alternative to Musketeer".

broadcasting stations would be made inoperable by 20–30 sorties. The Egyptian railway system would be paralysed by destroying eight railway bridges.⁴⁵⁵

The view of the Chief of Air Staff was presumably based on an earlier evaluation by the Air Ministry. As mentioned earlier, the Chiefs of Staff had asked the Air Ministry to prepare an analysis on the feasibility of disrupting Egypt's oil supplies through bombing during the first days of the crisis. The study, produced in early August, was not delivered to the Chiefs because the Task Force Commanders' plan to land at Alexandria drew all the attention. According to the study, the disruption of Egyptian oil supplies by aerial attack was feasible. Assuming the raids were pressed home at a low altitude and that rocket carrying aircraft were available, very severe damage could be inflicted by only about 150 sorties.⁴⁵⁶

General Templer's worries about the practicality of the new plan came too late. The Egypt Committee had already accepted the original Chiefs of Staff memorandum presented by the Minister of Defence on 9 September. General Keightley's revised note was attached to this report. Although it did not significantly differ from the note presented to the COS-Committee, there were slight changes. Keightley had made his note more acceptable to the politicians by concluding: "This plan has the advantage of giving the maximum political flexibility".⁴⁵⁷

Evidently, General Keightley presented the new concept to the Chiefs. But, with whom did he initiate this idea and who was his ally when this concept was pushed through the reluctant planning machinery? According to Robert Rhodes James, the biographer of Anthony Eden, the Prime Minister was very disturbed when the Chiefs of Staff presented "Muskeeter Revise". James suggests that the military, especially the Chiefs of Staff Committee, let Eden down by supporting Keightley. Had there been a more resolute Minister of

⁴⁵⁵ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 91st Meeting, 11th September 1956.

⁴⁵⁶ NA AIR 8/1948, Air Commodore Widdows (A/ACAS) to the Vice-Chief of Air Staff, 3 August 1956, "Feasibility of disrupting Egypt's Oil Supplies by bombing".

⁴⁵⁷ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 26th Meeting, 10 September 1956 and CAB 134/1217, EC (56) 47, 10 September 1956, "Alternative to Operation Muskeeter".

Defence, the new plan would have been turned down, Rhodes James speculates.⁴⁵⁸

It appears that Keightley had two strong supporters: the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, and above all, the Minister of Defence. According to his note, Keightley initiated his new concept within just a few hours of private discussions between the Minister of Defence and the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 18 August. This was the day after he had met the entire Chiefs of Staff Committee to whom he had given no warning of a total change in plans. At the time, the main argument about changing the concept was the desire to avoid civilian casualties in Alexandria. One can assume that the Minister of Defence, who in general considered the use of force as *ultima ratio*, supported any idea that avoided casualties.⁴⁵⁹

When was the Prime Minister informed of this new concept? One cannot escape the feeling that the concept was slowly “smuggled” into being, just as Robert James claims in his biography of Eden. The Prime Minister held a private staff conference on 24 August, during which the new concept was not discussed. Keightley had actually withdrawn his concept at this point due to his Task Force Commanders’ resistance. Musketeer Revise then reappears on 5 September at the Chiefs of Staff meeting attended by General Keightley. It seems that at this stage the Chiefs were fairly unanimous about the need for an alternate plan due to anticipated further postponements. However, it is not known whether they agreed on the reasons for this change.

It is possible that the Prime Minister heard about the concept for the first time on 7 September. A short note by Eden to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 5 September supports this view. It becomes clear that Eden had anticipated that something was going on in the military establishment, but he was not aware of the magnitude of the changes. Preparing to meet the Chiefs on 7 September, he expected their thoughts to be “tentative at this stage” and

⁴⁵⁸ Rhodes, *Anthony Eden*, pp. 508–509.

⁴⁵⁹ NA DEFE 11/138, Keightley to Dickson, 19 August 1956. On Walter Monckton’s views on the use of force, see, e.g., Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez 1956, A Personal Account* (London: Book Club Associates, 1978) p. 133 and Anthony Nutting, *No End of A Lesson*, (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1967), pp. 106–107.

promised to inform Macmillan whether "any change of significance" emerged.⁴⁶⁰

The is still some uncertainty about what exactly was said at this meeting. However, the paper on which the discussions were based is available. In his note, General Keightley made his case by claiming that "There is, therefore, an increased "piling up" of factors from September 15 onwards which increasingly tend to prejudice the chance of success, and the nearer to October 6 we get the greater are the odds becoming weighted against us until after that date I do not consider it is a sound operation of war". The document played on Eden's suspicions of the French and claimed that the secrecy of the operation was in danger of being compromised. During the weeks of delays, the Egyptians would find out what the Allied objectives were. As a result, they could redeploy their forces, which were described by Keightley as being "very adequate" for a comparatively small front. This would lead to bitter fighting against the Egyptian forces, whose courage should not be underestimated. Egyptian abilities should not be underrated either particularly if they were assisted by foreign "volunteers". The "revived" aerial units and heavily armoured forces could penetrate British defences in the bridgehead or, even worse, the air defence of congested Cyprus. Among other factors that made his new concept better, Keightley mentioned unpredictable weather conditions, deterioration of loaded vehicles and the decline in troop morale during a long wait.⁴⁶¹

According to the diary of the Prime Minister, he was not convinced of the practicality of the new plan even after private conversations with Keightley.⁴⁶² Still, he chose not to confront his senior military advisers and the new concept was presented before the Egypt Committee, which accepted it during the meeting on 10 September.

⁴⁶⁰ NA DEFE 13/238, Prime Minister Eden to Chancellor of the Exchequer, September 5, 1956.

⁴⁶¹ NA PREM 11/1104, EC (56) 43, 6 September 1956, "Operation Musketeer: Implications of Postponement". There are two versions of this document. The one that was to be presented to the Egypt Committee is dated 7 September (NA CAB 134/1216) and it includes "certain omissions" by the Minister of Defence. It appears that the Minister of Defence omitted some sections in order to secure a valid plan rather than to manipulate the Egypt Committee. However, the document was cancelled and, according to the index of the Egypt Committee meetings, it was never presented to the committee.

⁴⁶² Jonathan Pearson, *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis. Reluctant Gamble* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 68–69.

When looking at how the matter was handled, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the British planning machinery was in disarray at the beginning of September when the new concept was being pushed through. The Chiefs had considered the concept of “bombing alone” in the first days of August. They had come to the conclusion that it would not bring Nasser down, although they had not waited for an adequate study, as discussed earlier in this chapter.⁴⁶³ The Egypt Official Committee, consisting of high-level civil servants from the key ministries, still based its work on the presumption that the aim of a military operation was to overthrow Nasser’s regime by advancing on Cairo⁴⁶⁴ The first draft of the political directive to the Commander-in-Chief calling for an advance on Cairo was introduced on 6 September, only a day before the new concept was presented to the Prime Minister. In other words, this was two weeks after Dickson had presented Keightley’s concept to the Minister of Defence.⁴⁶⁵ This supports the impression that the military-political planning process was not proceeding in the right order. The Prime Minister was no longer providing the Chiefs of Staff with clear political objectives, if he ever did. The civil servants were not aware of the radical change in the concept, even though their main task was to assist their masters in political matters in the Egypt Committee and above all to formulate a political directive for the Commander-in-Chief. It was the Egypt Committee, assisted by the Egypt Official Committee, that should have defined the desired political aims and military restrictions for the top military leaders, but it appears that the system operated backwards. One can also assume that the Prime Minister or the members of the Egypt Committee were not informed of these developments as Norman Brook, the chairman of the Egypt Official Committee, belonged to the Egypt Committee Secretariat.

6.2 Was an intelligence failure behind General Keightley’s concept?

The operational arguments in favour of the new concept were somewhat artificial. It is relevant to ask why it would have been so much more difficult to

⁴⁶³ NA CAB 134/1217, EC (56) 5, 2 August 1956, “Action Against Egypt – Outline Plan”.

⁴⁶⁴ NA CAB 134/1225, EOC (56) 1st Meeting, 24 August 1956.

⁴⁶⁵ NA CAB 134/1225, EOC (56) 1, 5 September 1956, “Political Directive to the Allied Commander-in-Chief (draft)”.

hide preparations for an attack on Alexandria than an attack on Port Said? Had the British not mastered deception and concealment during their preparations for Operation Overlord in the Second World War? If any coastal town in Egypt was a true bottleneck, it was Port Said. This port did not provide adequate facilities, and it was at the end of a long causeway that could be blocked comparatively easily. The Egyptian will to fight, which was the centrepiece of the new concept, could not be assessed. Questions about the Egyptian ability to fight are even more controversial. The Egyptians had previously been described as being unable to conduct mobile warfare. Keightley now argued that they would possibly be able to penetrate the Allied defence and to proceed to the harbour and crush the bridgehead with the assistance of foreign volunteers. Even the German panzer divisions had not been able to achieve this in the Second World War.

It would be interesting to know what the real reason behind the change in the plan was. Why did General Keightley change from the trusted concept of an amphibious operation to the unproven concept of an air campaign? Where had he gotten his idea of the superiority of air power from? This is a striking question because Bomber Command's achievements in its campaign on German morale in the Second World War were already being debated in Britain.⁴⁶⁶ Although it is impossible to evaluate all the reasons based on the available evidence, one may suggest that part of the cause was a lack of reliable intelligence.

6.2.1 A fortnight's gap in tactical intelligence

In general, the intelligence picture of the Egyptian Army's deployments was relatively good, taking into account the fact that the information could not be verified by photographic reconnaissance. However, the Egyptians began to redeploy their forces at exactly the same time as General Keightley was promoting his new concept. British intelligence did not know where the Egyptian main effort was being focused for a fortnight. The whereabouts of the division withdrawn from the Sinai front were not known. This means that

⁴⁶⁶ Even a strong advocate of air power, Air Chief Marshall John Slessor, agreed that the British overestimated the effect of bombing on morale. John Slessor, "The Past Development of Air Power", *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, 574/1949, pp. 228–229.

the new concept was introduced without regard to the intelligence picture available to the Chiefs of Staff and to the Egypt Committee.

The intelligence services were able to locate all the Egyptian formations shortly before 15 September. It became evident that the Egyptians had shifted their balance of forces: they had not moved to Port Said or Alexandria, but to Cairo. According to British intelligence, about 80% of the Egyptian Army had been deployed in the Sinai. By the end of September, only approximately 40% of the army remained there.⁴⁶⁷

British intelligence estimated that two divisions, the recently established 4 Armoured Division and the understrength 1 Infantry Division, were concentrated around Cairo. The forces previously deployed against Israel had been reduced from two divisions to only the 3 Infantry Division. The 2 Infantry Division, consisting of two or three infantry brigades and an armoured regiment, remained in the Canal Zone. Port Said itself was fairly lightly defended as only an infantry battalion and a National Guard Brigade were deployed there. The main defence line of two battalions with some armour was estimated to be at El Qantara, approximately forty kilometres south of Port Said. The tactical reserves, which could be used either at the northern or southern end of the Canal Zone, remained in defensive positions at the important communications junction of Ismailia. The defence of Alexandria had been strengthened by a mobile group of 1–2 infantry battalions, an armoured regiment and some National Guard units.⁴⁶⁸

6.2.2 The Egyptian plan

The concept of the overall Egyptian plan is still hazy. The Israeli Defence Forces captured Egyptian Army Operation Order 50, dated 1 September, during Operation "Kadesh". This plan, published in 1990 in an article by Moshe Semesh, reveals the Egyptian deployments in the middle of September. This order does not reveal everything. For example, it does not include the forces on the Sinai front. However, it does validate the British

⁴⁶⁷ NA CAB 179/1, JIC, 27 September, "Review of Current Intelligence as at 27 September, 1956".

⁴⁶⁸ NA WO 288/51, 20 September 1956, "HQ 2 (Br) ISUM No 4 dated 20 Sep 56" and CAB 179/1, JIC, 27 September 1956, "Review of Current Intelligence as at 27 September, 1956".

estimates. The Egyptians thought that Britain and France represented the main threat, although the possibility of Israeli and even American military action could not be excluded. The Egyptians realised that the Allies would have one aim above all: the re-occupation of the Canal Zone. In order to establish air and naval bases, the Allies would threaten Alexandria. The Canal Zone captured, the invaders would turn on Cairo with the ultimate aim of overthrowing the regime.⁴⁶⁹

The Egyptian High Command divided its available forces into six fronts. The forces within the Canal Zone were subordinated to the Commander of the Eastern (Sinai) Front. The reinforced infantry division deployed in the Canal Zone was ordered to defend the Canal Zone against any attack from air or sea. The General Headquarters' directives emphasised the importance of the Suez region and ordered that its occupation should be prevented at all costs. Enemy forces landing at Port Said should be blocked before they entered Ismailia, an important road junction to Cairo and a canal crossing point to the Sinai. Egyptian planners recognised the threat stemming from the Allied ability to launch airborne operations. As a result, the most important airbases in the Canal Zone were to be defended. Apparently, the Egyptians were prepared to demolish the airfields in the event of airborne landings.⁴⁷⁰

The Egyptian evaluation of the importance of Alexandria corresponded well with early British plans. Since it possessed the best harbour facilities, Alexandria offered an attractive opportunity for use as a base for operations against Cairo. It appears that the Egyptians recognised their vulnerability to Allied aerial battlefield interdiction. As a result, the defence of Alexandria was based on repelling the amphibious landings in their initial stages. However, one can only doubt whether the local commander could have performed this task as his resources only included one infantry brigade sized unit and an armoured force of two companies.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ Moshe Shemes, "Annex 1: The Egyptian Army Operation Order 1 September 1956 for the Defence of Egypt" in S.I. Troen & M Shemesh (ed.), *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956, Retrospective and Reappraisal* (London: Frank Cass, 1990), pp. 373–390.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

The defence of Cairo was divided between three sub-commands. Western Cairo was to be prepared to react to both airborne operations and an Allied advance along the desert road from Alexandria. The local commander had relatively strong forces to carry out this task: two reserve infantry brigades and an armoured force of three armoured battalions, one of which was equipped with heavy Josef Stalin tanks. It is not clear whether these forces were subordinated to the headquarters of 4 Armoured Division, which was included in the Western Cairo order of battle. Additional directives called for active action against enemy armour and careful concealment from Allied airpower. Central Cairo was to be defended with almost twenty infantry battalions with special attention given to anti-airborne defences. These battalions were being trained at the time of the order. Eastern Cairo was the weakest point of the defence in the capital. It was to be defended mainly by National Guard Units and by two brigades temporarily detached from the other Cairo defences.⁴⁷²

The general reserve consisted of two infantry brigades and unspecified armoured units. The reserve was ordered to prepare for counter-attacks to both Alexandria and the Suez. The main, decisive battle was to be fought outside Cairo in co-ordination with the armoured units deployed in Western Cairo.⁴⁷³

6.2.3 Confused intelligence on Egyptian morale

As described earlier, the idea of bombing the Egyptians into submission was not based on the physical destruction of Egyptian forces, but on breaking their will to defend their country or the lack of such a will in the first place. The British had noted the poor performance of the Egyptian Armed Forces in the 1948 war. In spite of the Egyptian inferiority to the Israelis, the Joint Intelligence Committee issued the following warning about Egyptian capabilities: "Although it has been customary (!!) to decry the efficiency of the Egyptian soldier in the past, we feel that for the reasons stated above it would be dangerous at this time to underestimate the capability of the Army,

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

which, although untested under fire since 1948, has developed and improved during past few years". In the very same report however, the Joint Intelligence Committee stated that the Egyptian temperament was totally unsuited for the hardships of war.⁴⁷⁴

The intelligence agencies of the services did not evaluate Egyptian morale. Naval intelligence, naturally concentrating its efforts on the Egyptian Navy, had adopted a pessimistic view of Egyptian morale. The Egyptians would not be able to establish a defence that could last. The Director of Naval Intelligence noted that "the Egyptians are not a valorous people and they are not competent in their new weapons". The Arabs would only respect force. Decisive action would unite the Arab world behind Britain rather than create additional enemies.⁴⁷⁵

Army intelligence had a similar view of the Egyptians. According to its intelligence estimates, Egyptian morale was high, but it would be "very brittle in the face of early or severe reverses".⁴⁷⁶ The revolution and Nasser had significantly boosted Egyptian pride, but the Egyptians would abandon Nasser if there was an acceptable alternative available.⁴⁷⁷

But were the service intelligence agencies the right organisations to evaluate Egyptian morale in general? At the beginning of August, the Joint Intelligence Committee had decided that the tactical information for the Task Force Commanders should be provided by the service ministries. This meant that the intelligence departments of the War Office, the Admiralty and the Air Ministry would provide this information. In addition, a representative of the Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB), the agency within the Ministry of Defence responsible for intelligence on economics, war potential and infrastructure, was attached to the Force Commanders' staffs.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁴ NA CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 80, 3 August 1956, "Egyptian Nationalization of the Suez Canal Company".

⁴⁷⁵ NA ADM 116/6137, The Director of Naval Intelligence to the First Sea Lord, 25 September 1956.

⁴⁷⁶ NA WO 288/98, G (Int) HQ 2 Corps, 1215/3, 19 August 1956, "An Estimation of Probable Egyptian Reactions to Present Threat".

⁴⁷⁷ WO 288/98, G (Int) HQ 2 Corps, 11 August 1956, "Capabilities, Dispositions and Possible Future Action by the Egyptian Army".

⁴⁷⁸ NA CAB 159/23, JIC (56) 66th Meeting, 7 August 1956.

In fact, the question of political intelligence, a category that included estimates on Egyptian morale, was very troublesome from the very beginning. For reasons that are not entirely known, the Joint Intelligence Committee provided fairly little information during the crisis, particularly on the Egyptian will to fight. After the initial reports had concluded that the Egyptians were a rather poor lot, Egyptian morale was not re-evaluated in the course of planning. Some evidence hints that the Committee was actually reluctant to produce an evaluation on these matters. In mid-August, the Chairman of the Committee, a representative of the Foreign Office, expressed his doubts "as to whether the JIC was the appropriate body to prepare a report of this nature (post-operational problems of Operation Musketeer, *author*), which was an entirely political question". If the inter-departmental Joint Intelligence Committee, which was jealously monitored by the Foreign Office (the main player in the political game), was not an appropriate body to produce such reports, who was? After all, the Foreign Office received information about Egyptian morale in the reports of the British Ambassador. If the Joint Intelligence Committee did not provide political information, did its local branch do so? The available information, which consists of the Bi-Weekly Intelligence Reviews, suggests that the joint intelligence apparatus in the Middle East provided fairly little information on this subject although this must only be considered to be a small part of the information sent to London. One can suggest that the service ministries' intelligence departments were not capable of evaluating the Egyptian will to fight. They did not possess a deep knowledge of political issues as the representatives of the Foreign Office or the Colonial Office in the Joint Intelligence Committee did.⁴⁷⁹

Due to a lack of written evidence, it is very difficult to establish a solid explanation for the poor handling of political intelligence. Still, there are hints that indicate there were problems in organising the intelligence effort. During a seminar that brought together scholars on the 50th anniversary of the Suez Crisis, Lucas Scott suggested in his keynote address that the Secret

⁴⁷⁹ On the composition and tasks of the Joint Intelligence Committee see, e.g., NA CAB 158/30, JIC (57) 123, 29 November 1957, "History of the Joint Intelligence Committee" and CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 71, 14 June 1956, "Charter for the Joint Intelligence Committee". For information from Cairo warning about guerrilla warfare, see NA FO 371/118999, Trevelyan to FO, 15 August 1956 and Trevelyan to FO, 16 September 1956.

Intelligence Service, MI6, was “a maverick in the Foreign Office”. It is impossible to prove whether his claim is exaggerated but apparently the intelligence apparatus was in a state of disorder to some degree. The probable reasons are discussed later in this work in conjunction with an evaluation of the preparations for psychological warfare.

One can also assume that the intelligence agencies of the service ministries had very limited or no access to the information provided by the Secret Intelligence Service or the Government Communications Headquarters. Therefore, it is not surprising that the intelligence element of the ground forces complained about a lack of political information in the middle of September as the new concept was emerging. The Land Task Force intelligence staff requested access to unevaluated information because it would be vital for the planning of the psychological warfare campaign. Their complaint was discussed at a Joint Intelligence Committee meeting, where it was met with a cautious unwillingness to respond. The transfer of raw intelligence materiel from the Joint Intelligence Committee (Middle East) would clog communications and endanger security. This was particularly the case with signal intelligence materiel (SIGINT), which the British did not want to share with the French.⁴⁸⁰

Both the Land Task Force Commander and the Naval Task Force Commander complained about the inadequacy of the available intelligence in their final reports. The Naval Task Force Commander’s report suggests that part of the reason for this was a general lack of intelligence due to Egyptian counter-intelligence operations. This observation is supported by Lucas Scott’s claim that the Secret Intelligence Service suffered a severe setback at the beginning of August when the Egyptians discovered the existence of its spy ring. According to Scott however, other information sources within the Egyptian Armed Forces remained intact.⁴⁸¹ This situation may have lasted for some time, but the Joint Intelligence Committee (Middle East) reported at the beginning of September that the collection of human intelligence in Egypt had

⁴⁸⁰ NA CAB 159/23, JIC (56) 72nd Meeting, 16 August 1956 and (56) 75th Meeting, 22 August 1956.

⁴⁸¹ NA ADM 116/6209, “Naval Report on Operation Musketeer”, 15 February 1957, pp. 195–197 and Scott, p. 193.

become complicated due to Egyptian countermeasures. Their report claimed that any possibilities for personal contact had become "non-existent".⁴⁸²

Actually, one should recall that the Task Force Commanders and their intelligence staffs were not in a position to judge the amount of intelligence materiel received by the central intelligence machinery. However, they definitely had a basis for evaluating the distribution of this intelligence. The decision to establish an *ad hoc* command structure, discussed earlier in this work, also had negative implications for intelligence activities. As a consequence of the *ad hoc* establishment, there were independent intelligence efforts in various places. Therefore, it is not surprising that the intelligence staffs were not fully staffed. However, it was not only the number of personnel that caused trouble. The Land Task Force Commander summarised the problem facing the intelligence organization as follows: "An intelligence organization, with its many and varied staffs, units and sources of information requires time to weld itself into a smoothly running, co-ordinated whole. On Operation MUSKETEER this organization was hastily thrown together, and began working at full pressure before it had ever time to prepare itself for the task that lay ahead."⁴⁸³

Inept co-ordination of intelligence caused additional work and impaired the flow of information. While the Task Force Commanders were in Britain, their parent service ministries provided them with intelligence. After they moved to Cyprus, the local Joint Intelligence Committee took over this responsibility. This arrangement was not satisfactory because the Joint Intelligence Committee (Middle East) did not know what information was provided to the Task Force Commanders or what information it should provide while the Task Force Commanders were in London. As a result, the Task Force Commanders lacked valuable background information during the planning in London. This situation did not improve as the distribution of information between the *ad hoc* Task Force Staffs partially failed.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² NA AIR 20/9229, JIC (ME) "Bi-Weekly Intelligence Review No 4", 6 September 1956.

⁴⁸³ NA ADM 116/6209, "Naval Report on Operation Musketeer", 15 February 1957, pp. 195–197 and WO 288/78 "2 Corps Commander's Report", Annex 1, Report 3 (GS Intelligence) 1 February 1957.

⁴⁸⁴ NA WO 288/78, "2 Corps Commander's Report", Annex 1, Report 3 (GS Intelligence) 1 February 1957.

Finally, one can also ask what General Keightley's personal influence on the information concerning Egypt was? It appears that he had a special viewpoint on Middle Eastern matters. After all, he was the second most senior general in the army, coming immediately behind the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. He also had long first-hand experience of the Middle East as he had served in Egypt both before and during the Second World War. However, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff did not have personal experience of the Middle East in his career.⁴⁸⁵ It appears that Keightley's expertise was also valued by the Secretary of State for War and the Minister of Defence.⁴⁸⁶

6.3 Musketeer Revise formulated

The decision to abandon Alexandria as the point of entry was passed to General Keightley on 12 September. In addition to producing detailed plans for the operation, the ministers wanted to see a more comprehensive report on the new concept. This report was reviewed on 18 September. By then Keightley had made some important adjustments to his plan, moving it towards a more traditional amphibious concept. The Allies would be prepared to make an assault landing at Port Said instead of counting on the results of the air offensive. He also revealed some of the details of his concept. The air offensive could last up to thirty days during which the available forces would be able to drop 500 bombs and conduct 300 ground attack sorties daily. As previously mentioned, these attacks were to be made against oil facilities, radio transmitters and the transportation system. They aimed to show the impotence of the Egyptian Armed Forces to the civilian population. These attacks and their targets were to be co-ordinated by a team that consisted of a political adviser, the Chief of Psychological Warfare and a French representative. The team was to work under Keightley himself. As before, the concept was based on the assumption that the Egyptian will to fight would be low. Curiously enough, Keightley did not spare much consideration to the

⁴⁸⁵ *The Army List*, August 1956, p. 147 and *Who's Who* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1956), pp. 2930 and 1619–1620.

⁴⁸⁶ NA PREM 11/1104, Anthony Head to Anthony Eden, 14 September 1956. Not surprisingly, the ever self-conscious Field Marshal Montgomery, the Deputy Supreme Commander of NATO at the time, did not apparently think highly of Keightley as a commander. It is also interesting to note the Montgomery was amongst the "hawks" during the crisis, Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: The Field-Marshall 1944–1976* (Sevenoaks: Spectre, 1986), pp. 854–856.

worst scenario, usually a starting point for military operations. What would happen if Egyptian morale was not crushed? Though he warned: "It may be that if Egyptian morale is higher than has been assessed I shall require more latitude to attack targets which will have a more direct impact on the nation as a whole". It is not known what he meant by that sentence. He possibly meant at least the major bridges crossing the Nile, which were to be spared according to his original plans.⁴⁸⁷

Keightley had two substantial arguments in favour of shifting the landing area from Alexandria to Port Said: a direct route to the Canal Zone and a reduced order of battle. The initial assault at Port Said would be made by very similar forces to those at Alexandria. Keightley had even been persuaded to include parachute drops in his revised concept. The largest force reduction was among the follow-up forces. A significant number of administrative units and 2 Infantry Division could be dropped out of the order of battle. However, the most appealing part of the concept was its schedule. The politicians would need to make up their minds only eleven days before hostilities began. Even then, the decision was not irreversible.⁴⁸⁸

6.4 Back to traditional warfare – the Task Force Commanders' appreciation

The new concept worried the Task Force Commanders. They feared that the air offensive would not achieve the objective of the operation.⁴⁸⁹ Due to their persistence, the new concept was changed from being only an air campaign to a more traditional amphibious operation. The Task Force Commanders' estimate that there would be resistance even if the Egyptian regime collapsed resulted in the inevitable conclusion: "A properly mounted and balanced force must be ready to assault and occupy the Canal Zone and may have to destroy the remainder of the EGYPTIAN armed forces"

Army intelligence at least had changed its views on the question of Egyptian morale. Even if the air campaign succeeded, there would still be resistance.

⁴⁸⁷ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 360, 18 September 1956, "Alternative to Musketeer". General Keightley's note is an annex to this document.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ NA ADM 205/120, Vice-Chief of Naval Staff to First Sea Lord, 17 September 1956.

The question was: at what intensity? A report by 2 Corps concluded that the nature and scale of post-bombing resistance would depend on the extent of the damage to the civilians. Although most of the Egyptian population would remain indifferent, assuming their daily way of life was not dramatically altered, the nationalists and extreme religious groups could spark a guerrilla warfare against the invaders.⁴⁹⁰

The Egyptian Armed Forces would continue their resistance if they were not totally annihilated in the field. Army intelligence estimated that due to its increased prestige, the army's "whole standing has been raised to unprecedented heights". Large-scale surrenders could not be expected. Therefore, it would be vital to strike the Egyptian Army at the earliest possible moment and to carefully observe whether it was redeploying inside the cities, as the inhabited areas would provide it with relatively good protection. In the nightmare scenario, the majority of the army would hide itself and its weapons among the general population, only to form guerrilla groups operating under organised command.⁴⁹¹

The concept of a vigorous air campaign resulted in serious practical problems for the Task Force Commanders. The duration of the bombing campaign was unpredictable to even Keightley himself.⁴⁹² There was a demand to conduct landings at short notice in order to respond quickly to an Egyptian collapse, and only the forces deployed in the Mediterranean before the initiation of hostilities could be used for the initial assault. As previously mentioned, British planners estimated that it would not be practical to hold vessels loaded with troops in Malta for more than a week. The assault loaded units in the Mediterranean were divided into three areas. The bulk of these forces, 3 Commando Brigade and 6 RTR, were in Malta and could be deployed within six days after the order was given. For the Algiers and Marseille-based French assault forces, elements of 10 Parachute Division

⁴⁹⁰ NA WO 288/162, A memorandum by General Staff Intelligence, HQ 2 (Br) Corps, 13 September 1956.

⁴⁹¹ NA WO 288/162, A memorandum by General Staff Intelligence, HQ 2 (Br) Corps, 13 September 1956. Although the document itself lacks a date, a date is present in the index of the G (Int) HQ 2 Corps papers. See NA WO 288/79, The War Diary of G (Int), HQ 2 Corps.

⁴⁹² NA DEFE 32/5, "Minutes of a Staff Conference Held as Chequers on Monday 24th September, 1956". This was one of the meetings that was only attended by the Prime Minister and his chief military advisers, the Chiefs of Staff and General Keightley.

reinforced with armour, it would take ten days before they could reach their objective. In other words, the French forces should be concentrated in Malta beforehand if they were to be used in the assault. This would mean that the earliest date for a seaborne assault could be D+6, the actual D-Day being the day on which the first bomb was to be dropped.⁴⁹³

The Task Force Commanders estimated that it would be very difficult to postpone the landings once the assault force had sailed from Malta. The force could be diverted to Cyprus, but it could not stay there for more than four days due to the lack of a sheltered anchorage, the submarine threat and inadequate logistical arrangements.⁴⁹⁴

The other forces in the Mediterranean would not be available for a seaborne assault. 16 Parachute Brigade Group, the rest of the 10 French Parachute Division, 7 French Armoured Division and elements of 10 British Armoured Division could be used in the second echelon, but not in the assault due to a lack of appropriate landing equipment. The UK-based 3 Infantry Division could only be used as a build-up or occupation force. The harbour of Port Said was inadequate for the deployment of follow up forces. The Task Force Commanders estimated that the buildup would take three times longer than would be the case if Alexandria was used. The lack of suitable facilities would force the British to double handle cargoes from the MT and cargo ships.⁴⁹⁵

The more intense bombing campaign decreased the possibilities for an airborne operation. The British parachute force would be reduced to a battalion-sized unit. The airfields at Malta and Cyprus would be even more congested due to an increased number of bombers and ground attack planes. A transport force of 35 Hastings aircraft was to be withdrawn for the duration of the air offensive, which was planned to last up to thirty days for the land-based aircraft. The carrier-based aircraft could not operate efficiently for more than fifteen days due to logistical issues.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹³ NA ADM 205/132, "Operation Musketeer Revise – Appreciation and Outline Plan" by the Task Force Commanders on 14 September 1956.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

The Task Force Commanders did not alter the new concept for the first two phases of the operation. It was essential to neutralise the Egyptian Air Force first. Only that would guarantee freedom of action for the prolonged air offensive aimed at paralysing the Egyptian will to fight. The Task Force Commanders divided the third phase into three stages. The first stage called for the assault and occupation of Port Said. In the second stage, the bridgehead would be extended and Ismailia and an unspecified airfield captured while naval forces opened the Canal. The Canal Zone would be occupied in the last stage. In order to meet the demands to react quickly if Egyptian resistance totally collapsed due to a successful air campaign, the Task Force Commanders produced two alternate options for the capture of Port Said.⁴⁹⁷

Plan A was prepared in case there was an early collapse in Egyptian resistance. The plan could be executed at the earliest from D+4, which the Task Force Commanders considered to be the first realistic date for the Egyptian will to break. The plan could be mounted at 24 hours' notice by forces deployed in Cyprus. Two parachute drops would be followed by the deployment of a tank regiment and the main body of 16 Airborne Brigade Group and a Royal Marine Commando mounted from two aircraft carriers carrying troops. Plan B called for an amphibious assault on Port Said. The parachute drops were to be followed by British and French amphibious landings at Port Said and Port Fuad respectively. This option, due to the time it took to sail from Malta, would be possible any time after D+10, six days after D+4.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

6.5 The concept turned into a plan – Musketeer Revise

6.5.1 The Overall Air Plan⁴⁹⁹

The Task Force Commanders produced their respective plans in late September. The Overall Air Plan aimed to break the Egyptian will to resist and had logistical support for thirty days.⁵⁰⁰ The plan made a clear distinction between psychological warfare and the actual air offensive, as the purpose was to make "clear to EGYPT and the Middle East by a psychological warfare campaign that the Allies have no quarrel with the Egyptian people". This goal led to a natural restriction: only minimum casualties would be inflicted.

The initial phase of the Air Plan concentrated on the Egyptian Air Force, which would be neutralised within two days. The airfields housing the Egyptian light bombers and MIG-15 fighters would be subjected to the first aerial attacks, for it was crucial to annihilate the Egyptian capacity to counterattack the British airfields in Malta and Cyprus at the first possible moment. Attacks on the Egyptian airfields would be made on a round-the-clock basis. Medium and light bombers would take advantage of the night. The land-based ground attack planes and the carrier aircraft would take turns during the day. The initial bombing raids were to be conducted in large formations to saturate the Egyptian air defence. In addition to the air defences, the phase one targets included Cairo Radio and the Egyptian blockships. The psychological warfare measures would include the dropping of leaflets by transport aircraft.

⁴⁹⁹ NA, AIR 20/10219, Headquarters, Air Task Force, "Operation "Musketeer" Overall Air Plan" ATF/TS.165/56, September 1956. This document is problematic due to a lack of dates. The file includes the texts of two separate operational orders, which, however, have the same index number-ATF/TS.165/56. Only one order has any appendices. The first text is from late September and the second one apparently from mid-October. Dates for the appendices are more difficult to determine. Some of them are from September, but are dated 10 October. Apparently, the orders were upgraded for expediency's sake during the course of a long planning process. This is a normal procedure to avoid rewriting everything continuously.

⁵⁰⁰ According to the operational concept, the Air Task Force actually prepared for a prolonged offensive lasting thirty days, NA AIR 20/9589, Headquarters Air Task Force, 19 December 1956, "Report on Operation Musketeer – Logistics and Administration".

In the second phase, Allied air power was to throw all its weight against targets selected by a special Target Selection Committee, following the instructions of the Allied Commander-in-Chief, who in turn would consult his political adviser. The medium bombers, equipped with the most sophisticated navigation systems, would continue to fly at night. When the Egyptian air threat was removed, the light bombers could switch over to daytime missions. The psychological measures were to be increased by using a voice aircraft.

In the third phase, the air effort would turn to supporting the amphibious assault and the subsequent operations aimed at capturing the Canal Zone. Due to the limited range of the land-based attack planes, most of the direct support sorties would be flown by the carrier-borne squadrons. To increase the aerial support, the Royal Air Force Regiment would take the airfield of Ismailia into operational use as soon as it was captured.⁵⁰¹

6.5.2 The naval plan⁵⁰²

After the air offensive took a heavy toll on Egyptian defences, the Naval Task Force, designated Task Force 345, would approach the Egyptian coast. The timing of the operation was arranged according to traditional military nomenclature: D-Day was the day on which hostilities would commence. In other words, it was when the first bombs would be dropped on Egypt. The day on which the landing would take place was designated as L-Day, and H-Hour was the exact time when the first amphibious assault waves were to come ashore.

The naval movement plan was quite complex. In addition to participating in the first two phases with the Carrier Group, the Naval Task Force was responsible for the movement of over 100 vessels. To make things more complicated, the planners had to prepare two different movement schemes:

⁵⁰¹ Ismailia had two airfields, but only one of them, Abu Sueir with its 2 600 meter long runway, was considered to be operational, NA WO 252/1220, Joint Intelligence Bureau, August 1956, "Ismailia: Key Points".

⁵⁰² NA ADM 116/6100, Task Force 345, 23 September 1956, "Operation Musketeer (Revised) Naval Operation Order".

one for a sudden collapse of Egyptian resistance and one for an assault landing.

The preliminary moves were essential. Due to the distance from Malta, various ships and troops would be pre-positioned in Cyprus, which was within a day's sailing distance of Port Said. The other movements prior to the bombing would be:

- D-10 Joint Force Headquarters established in Cyprus
- D-8 The troop carrying aircraft carriers (HMS Theseus and HMS Ocean) sail from Britain
- D-4 The Carrier Replenishment Unit sails from Malta and replenishes the Carrier Group east of Crete one day before hostilities
- D-3 Elements of the 3 Infantry Division sail from Britain

The Naval Task Force was divided into nine separate Task Groups. The Combined Headquarters Group was to command the operations. Based on historical experience, the national origin of the units was taken into consideration when forming the assault groupings, which means both Britain and France had their own assault groups. These consisted of specialised landing vessels carrying troops that would participate in the amphibious assault. The Assault Groups were supported by national Support Groups, which in turn included vessels suitable for naval bombardment. The British Support Group consisted of nine Darings and destroyers led by a cruiser. The mighty battleship Jean Bart led nine destroyers in the French Support Group.⁵⁰³

The aircraft carriers and their escort vessels were pooled in the Carrier Group, Task Group 345.4. This group included five aircraft carriers: Eagle, Bulwark, and Albion from Britain and Arromanches and Lafayette from France. The carriers carried about 160 aircraft.

⁵⁰³ Jean Bart, laid down in 1939, possessed more firepower than any other ship in the invasion fleet even if only one of the turrets with the four 15 inch guns was operational. The era of the capital ships was not completely over in Britain either. At the time of the Suez Crisis, Britain still possessed five battleships in reserve. None of them were activated, David Wettern, *The Decline of British Seapower* (Jane's, 1982), p. 399.

The Minesweeping, Logistics and Submarine Groups were arranged on similar lines to the Carrier Group. About thirty minesweepers were attached to conduct the minesweeping operations preceding the landings. The Logistics Group was subdivided into two subgroups: one for the replenishment of the aircraft carriers and another for base maintenance. Four Maltese-based British submarines and one French submarine were in the Submarine Group.

Task Group 345.9 had a unique double task. If the operations called for a rapid occupation of Port Said, this force would act as a transportation unit for the Cyprus-based British and French airborne units. If the Allies were forced to make an assault, these forces would form part of the national assault groups. The British group was to land a Royal Marine Commando with helicopters from the Joint Experimental Helicopter Unit (JEHU) from HMS Theseus and HMS Ocean. This unit of six Whirlwinds and six Sycamores was originally included in the order of battle for casualty evacuation, but during various trials prior to the hostilities their usefulness in an assault role was noted.⁵⁰⁴

In addition to the vessels in the Task Groups, there were a large number of ships, such as some of the replenishment ships, as well as berthing and salvage vessels, that did not belong to any specific group.

The transportation of the ground forces was based on five convoys. CES (Cyprus-Egypt Fast Convoy) 1 and CES 2 were to sail from Cyprus. CES 1 consisted of the troop-carrying aircraft carriers HMS Ocean and Theseus and the French vessels carrying the French Assault Force (Task Group 345.9). CES 2 consisted of both British and French LSTs, LCTs and requisitioned cargo vessels, which were transporting the main elements of 16 Independent Parachute Brigade Group, reinforced by a squadron from 6 RTR.

Three convoys would sail from Malta. MES 1 (Malta-Egypt Slow Convoy) included the British Assault Group, which consisted of landing vessels carrying the main body of 3 Commando Brigade and 6 RTR. MES 2 was to

⁵⁰⁴ NA WO 288/76, JEHU, S.816/G, 14 January 1957, "Employment of Joint Helicopter Unit on OP Musketeer".

consist of 1 RTR and the vehicles and vehicle parties of the forces that had already landed. MES 1 and MES 2 were slow convoys whose speed was between 6–7 knots, but the third convoy from Malta was a fast one. It was capable of making 14 knots. Each convoy was escorted by a group of destroyers and frigates that would divert to the Support Groups after they finished their escort duty.

The timetables and the compositions of the convoys were tailored to meet two different options. If Egyptian resistance were to crumble, the Cyprus-based forces, 16 Parachute Brigade Group and 45 Commando on the helicopter carriers and the French Assault Group, would hurry to Port Said within twenty-four hours. If the Egyptians continued resisting, plan B would take place. The convoys from Malta would depart six days before the landings and rendezvous with the convoys from Cyprus on L-1 near the Egyptian coast. These ships would then form five columns and start their final approach to the lowering position, where the assault craft and landing tractors would be lowered into the water.

6.5.3 The assault and subsequent operations⁵⁰⁵

The Land Task Force operational order defined the mission as "To effect a landing at PORT SAID to seize the harbour, airfield and exits as a base for subsequent operations to secure the CANAL ZONE". The first stage called for the capture of Port Said either through peaceful occupation (Plan A) or by assault (Plan B). This would be followed by a reinforcement stage when the follow-up forces would be concentrated in Port Said and the bridgehead would be extended to Ismailia. Only then could the third stage, the occupation of the whole Canal Zone, take place.

Plan A – the occupation

The first stage of plan A, designed "for execution when it is apparent that the EGYPTIAN will to resist is broken", was to start with two parachute landings. A parachute battalion from 16 Independent Parachute Brigade Group was to

⁵⁰⁵ NA WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Land Forces, 22 September 1956, "Allied Land Force Operation Order No 2".

seize the Port Said airfield of El Gamil and to secure the western side of Port Said. At the same time, the French parachute regiment was to land on the eastern side of the canal, to the south of Port Fuad, to take control of the southern exits. In conjunction with the parachute landings, the Royal Marine Commando would use a novel technique – a heliborne landing. After dismounting from the helicopters, the commandoes were to secure the crossings leading out of Port Said, which meant capturing the Raswa Swing Bridge and a pontoon bridge. These bridges were the most important exits from Port Said. The swing bridge carried the Ismailia bound rail line, which was capable of taking heavy vehicles including armour. The pontoon bridge had a weight limit of only five tons.⁵⁰⁶

The parachute landings were aimed at isolating the town and at preventing the arrival of Egyptian reinforcements. They were to be followed by the landing of the Cyprus-based 16 Independent Parachute Brigade Group. This unit would dock its vessels along the jetties in the basins and then rush to relieve the British parachute force and to seal the Arab District, which was a potential hub for resistance. Simultaneously, the French seaborne force would consolidate the French positions on the eastern side of the canal. Because most of 3 Commando Brigade would still be at sea, the French would provide the reserves for the force. Two regiments of 10 Parachute Division would be on ten and twenty-four-hour notice. The airborne reserve could also be used to exploit any successes or to secure the flank by capturing the crossings leading to the Sinai Peninsula. According to the Joint Intelligence Bureau, the terrain would not prevent such an operation as there were several potential landing zones in the vicinity of El Qantara, El Firdan Bridge, Ismailia, Suez, and El Kebir.⁵⁰⁷

Plan B – the assault landing

The heliborne landings that aimed at capturing the crossings over the Interior Basin would begin plan B. The first assault wave of 3 Commando Brigade would arrive on the landing beaches ten minutes later, at H-hour. The

⁵⁰⁶ On the capability of the bridges crossing the Interior Basin, see NA WO 252/1217, Ministry of Defence, Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB), August 1956, "Port Said: Key Points".

⁵⁰⁷ On estimates of potential landing zones, see Joint Intelligence Bureau memorandums between 24–25 September 1956, NA WO 288/52.

parachute landings, conducted in a manner similar to that of plan A, were to take place fifteen minutes later. The commando brigade was to make contact with the parachute force and to secure the Arab District, while 16 Parachute Brigade Group would become an immediate follow-up force. It was to assist the marines in clearing Port Said and to advance to the end of the causeway, to El Qantara West.

The ground operation order provides a vague picture of the execution of the second stage, but it is obvious that the buildup phase would have been painfully slow due to inadequate port facilities. According to the preliminary landing tables, the landing of 3 Infantry Division alone would have taken up to four weeks. The transportation staff of 2 Corps estimated that the unloading of vehicles in particular would be much slower than in Alexandria.⁵⁰⁸ As a reminder, the Alexandria plan called for the movement of 3 Infantry Division within about ten days of landing. Due to this tedious process, elements of 1 and 6 Royal Tank Regiments, along with a battalion from the Royal West Regiment would form an *ad hoc* armoured brigade under the command of the Brigadier of the Royal Armoured Corps in 3 Infantry Division headquarters. This force would advance as soon as possible to the southern side of the narrow causeway and attack the Egyptian armoured forces in Ismailia.⁵⁰⁹

6.6 Conclusions

The most important change in military planning took place at the beginning of September, when the concept of prolonged air operations was introduced and accepted. The desire of politicians for more flexibility for political arrangements is quite reasonable, but it was also an indication of declining determination. Politicians expected flexibility from a machinery of tens of thousands of men and hundreds of vessels and aircraft that did not have adequate bases in the region. It is true that warfare is a continuation of

⁵⁰⁸ According to the estimate, the ports available would have had the following daily unloading capacities: Alexandria: 3 000 tons or 1 500 vehicles or 1 200 tons and 750 vehicles; Port Said: 1 000–1 200 tons and 400 vehicles, WO 288/78 "2 Corps Commander's Report", Annex 1, Report 22 (Transportation) 1 February 1957.

⁵⁰⁹ It is interesting to note that initially, at the beginning of August, the HQ RAC 3 Infantry Division was designated to be HQ 34 Armoured Brigade, giving the headquarters a more independent status. To the disappointment of the tankers, this arrangement was apparently vetoed by the Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff in late August. See War Diary of HQ RAC 3, WO 288/121, NA.

policy, but the British military did not possess the required flexibility. Had the British possessed an adequate strategic reserve, which included all services in a high degree of readiness with means for transportation, the situation might have been different. At the time, only one component possessed such flexibility: the Royal Air Force. And, it was ready and anxious to take full advantage of this fact.

Apparently, General Keightley was never happy with the Force Commanders' plan. The reason is clear. He was nominated Commander-in-Chief after the Task Force Commanders had produced their tactical plan for Alexandria. Their plan was not his plan. One can partially put the blame on the politicians and the Chiefs of Staff for nominating the Commander-in-Chief and the Task Force Commanders at different times. This simple error and perhaps the over-hasty acceptance of the Force Commanders' plans were to cause a disproportional amount of inconvenience and unnecessary planning.

Evidently, General Keightley was one of the inventors of the new concept and the airmen within the Chiefs of Staff Committee were quick to ally with him. It is also possible, even though it cannot be proved, that it was either Dickson or Boyle who introduced Keightley to the study on the Egyptian oil supplies. Prime Minister Eden had nothing to do with this invention, even though he sought more flexibility. At the time the new concept was introduced, Eden was still determined to bring Nasser's regime down. Suddenly, a new concept that was also originally aimed at destroying Nasser was presented to him. Why? He had asked for flexibility, but instead he received a plan that not all his military advisors, even all the Chiefs of Staff, believed in. One can assume that the appearance of this plan did not improve the Chiefs' credibility in Eden's eyes.

Unfortunately, the available evidence does not reveal all the motives behind Keightley's actions. Why had an army general who had requested more land forces to execute Rodeo-plans in Egypt two years earlier when he was the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Land Forces turned into a believer in air power? The real reasons are not known. Perhaps the various contingency plans that he was aware of had assured him of the flexibility of the air force. One must also assume that Keightley was either aware of the studies on the

bombing campaign against Germany in the Second World War or was then briefed by the airmen on their study of the feasibility of disrupting Egyptian oil supplies. For this reason, he had chosen the oil and transport systems to be the main targets of a bombing campaign.

Even the supporters of a bombing campaign acknowledged that while the bombing of the oil industry and transport systems of the enemy had been militarily effective in the previous war, that bombing had not broken the enemy will to fight. Perhaps the answer to this contradiction lay in the fact that British military intelligence regarded Egyptians as being irresolute soldiers and people. However good it was in the beginning, their moral backbone would be destroyed during the bombing. However, it is a totally different question whether military intelligence was the right organisation to evaluate such a matter.

Although the full flow of intelligence has not been available for this study, it appears that the intelligence services were not able to provide adequate information at the strategic level or the tactical level during the vital transition phase. British intelligence was not able to provide reliable information on Nasser or his inner circle because its spy ring had been captured earlier. As a result, the estimate on Egyptian intentions was based on predictions rather than facts. Therefore, it is not surprising that the intelligence establishment was not able to provide reliable estimate of the Egyptian will to fight either. At a tactical level, the Task Force Commanders repeatedly complained about the poor quality of information. The general deployment structure of the Egyptian Army was fairly well known, but information on its detailed deployment was not available. This hampered the planning of the assault in particular.

Keightley knew how to sell his concept. By promoting metaphors like "political flexibility", "cassus belli", and "moral justification", he entered the world of rhetoric. It is interesting to note that Keightley was allowed to involve himself in such matters. He, presumably better than some of the Chiefs, had realised the connection between policy and war. Therefore, he promoted the moral issue, although there is no reason to believe that he was not seriously concerned about civilian casualties and the need for a pretext. But was it the

task of the military Commander-in-Chief? Should this not have been done by the Chiefs of Staff? Or the Egypt Official Committee? Instead of providing clear military evaluations and alternatives to the politicians, the Chiefs involved themselves in politics. As a result, the politicians hardly received neutral, professional advice.

In the course of planning the operation, the new concept became more traditional. The Task Force Commanders doubted "victory through air" from the very beginning, even the Air Task Force Commander. The concept of bringing a government down through air power had never been tested before and the Force Commanders were not willing to be the first guinea pigs. If Keightley can be described as a visionary, his subordinates were deeply rooted in pragmatism. They relied on their plans to crush the enemy physically in the field, rather than attacking his will to fight. The question they posed was striking: What would happen if the Egyptian will was not broken, if Nasser's regime in Cairo was left intact and if the army with all its weapons faded into the civilian population? The Allies would face large-scale, organised guerrilla warfare.

The Egyptian planners anticipated the nature of the Allied intentions correctly. Alexandria would offer the best staging area for further operations on Cairo, but the Canal Zone would be the main objective. However, the Egyptians had an unsolvable problem. In spite of mobilising a large number of largely untrained reserves, there were not enough forces to defend all fronts properly. The Egyptians realised that there were three vital fronts. It would be essential to hold Cairo, the hub of political power in Egypt. The Suez Canal was a vital source of income and the reason for the crisis. Militarily, the Sinai was a problem, but politically Nasser was a prisoner of his own policies here. There was no alternative but to retain a sizeable force, an infantry division, to confront Israel there. In that sense, Israel, not yet an ally of Britain or France, was already providing a formidable diversion. The Egyptians could not have concealed a large-scale withdrawal from the Sinai. Such a redeployment would have compromised President Nasser's popular support, as the masses saw Israel as being the main enemy. Militarily, the position of the forces in the Sinai was vulnerable due to Allied air interdiction capabilities.

The decision to defend the Sinai with sizeable forces caused insurmountable difficulties at a tactical level. There would not be enough forces left to effectively defend both Alexandria and the Canal Zone. Recognising, and actually overestimating the Allied ability to launch airborne and amphibious operations, the Egyptian planners faced a problem: where should the main effort be? Should it be in the Canal Zone or in Alexandria? Because the canal crossings leading to the Sinai had to be secured and the Canal itself was the reason for the dispute, most of the best forces outside of the Sinai were deployed in the Canal Zone. Still, the overall concept for Egyptian tactical operations remains unclear. Was it their intention to repel the amphibious attack close to the beaches or after a delaying action with an armour-heavy counterattack? It seems that the Egyptians preferred the latter alternative at the same time that they realised that they had no possibility of doing so. Local forces and reserves were not sufficient to repulse the attack along the shoreline. The local armoured reserve was also not capable of making a rapid counterattack forcibly enough. The decisive battle would be fought, as the Allies had predicted, outside Cairo. If the Allies could not be beaten in the open field, they would face street-fighting and subsequent guerrilla operations.

7 THE WINTER PLAN

*"The Plan is basically the same as MUSKETEER (REVISED) except that PLAN "A" (in Phase III) is no longer operative".*⁵¹⁰

The political manoeuvrings in the Suez Canal User Association conferences and the United Nations' Security Council proceedings delayed the execution of Musketeer. As soon as the Task Force Commanders started their tactical planning for Musketeer Revise, which was intended to be valid for only six weeks, the concept of operations in the winter months was introduced.

7.1 Maintenance and meteorological problems

As mentioned earlier, the postponements had various effects on the preparations. Materiel, especially vehicles that had been loaded into the requisitioned ships, was deteriorating due to lack of maintenance. This problem may seem trivial at first sight, which means it needs further explanation. The main problem with loaded vehicles was their batteries. Before the current service free batteries became available, vehicle batteries required careful maintenance. Even a brand new battery would lose about 50% of its charge within 30–40 days in moderate temperature. As a 30% charge was considered to be adequate to start a vehicle in hot climates such as Egypt, it was unavoidable that the batteries in the thousands of vehicles loaded in early September were becoming unusable before the active operations were to take place. In theory, there were two alternatives to maintain the batteries on board the transport vessels: to disconnect and recharge or to run the vehicles' engines. However, recharging while at sea was considered impossible due to a lack of charging facilities abroad the requisitioned shipping. All such capacity was needed to charge the batteries of the wireless sets. Meanwhile, the running of petrol driven engines at regular intervals would have been impossible due to the toxic exhaust and the flammability of densely packed vehicles. After long storage, not even precautionary measures such as keeping a 10–20% reserve of new batteries

⁵¹⁰ NA ADM 116/6100, Office of the Naval Force Commander, 12 October 1956, "Operation Musketeer, Naval Winter Plan (OMWIP)". It appears that the Naval Task Force did not have time to produce a specific operations order before plans were changed.

or provisions for special starting of lorries would be adequate to start the thousands of vehicles with flat batteries.⁵¹¹ This is a good example of a minor detail having a major effect.

In the early stages of planning, the Joint Planning Staff had used deteriorating weather conditions in the Eastern Mediterranean as a pretext to hasten the execution of the operation. How bad would the weather be and what were its predicted effects on operations? To begin with, it is worth noting that weather always remained a somewhat unpredictable factor. At the time, it was impossible to produce reliable long-term forecasts, as the Director of the Meteorological Office noted in his letter to the Assistant Chief of Air Staff.⁵¹² However, it was estimated that depressions that leading to swells after one day would occur once or twice a week, usually followed by a calm day. The landings should be timed to take place on such a calm day. In the worst case scenario, the assault convoys from Malta would have to wait for two days at sea for the sea to become calmer. This was not an ideal situation for keeping assault troops in peak condition on board vessels prone to heavy rolling. Gales, which usually lasted for up to three days, typically occurred once or twice in October. Smaller vessels, particularly the flat-bottomed amphibious craft, were vulnerable to heavy swell. The lack of a sheltered harbour was a problem. Strong winds could cause havoc among ships in open mooring areas, which was the bitter experience of the post-Overlord storms.⁵¹³ To avoid this, the amount of shipping gathered in Cyprus should be kept to an absolute minimum. This in turn would make the concept of a rapid occupation by the Cyprus-based forces unfeasible: "A rapid occupation in event of early collapse is NOT POSSIBLE unless forces concerned really can look after themselves for up to 12 days".⁵¹⁴

⁵¹¹ NA WO 32/16321, The War Office (SD 2(b)) memorandum on 7 September 1956, "Operation Musketeer: Charging of Batteries" and The War Office memorandum (not dated but presumably early September 1956), "Batteries on M.T. ships".

⁵¹² NA AIR 8/1948, Director of Meteorological Office to ACAS (ops), 20 August 1956.

⁵¹³ During Operation Overlord, an unexpected five-day gale caused considerable damage to the Allied invasion forces in spite of the availability of two artificial harbours. It also delayed expansion of the bridgehead; due to the gale, 140 000 tons of supplies and 20 000 vehicles could not be unloaded. See Norman, Albert, *Operation Overlord, Design and Reality, The Allied Invasion of Western Europe* (Harrisburg: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1952) pp. 183–184.

⁵¹⁴ NA ADM 116/6101, a memorandum by SOP/FO2MED, not dated, "Operation Musketeer–2nd Revise, Preliminary Weather Appreciation".

7.2 Resistance continues at all planning levels

General Keightley dispatched his planning instructions to the Task Force Commanders on 1 October. He ordered them to plan an operation between November 1956 and March 1957. The aim of the operation remained the same: "to produce such a situation in Egypt that the present Egypt Canal Company can be replaced by an International Company and the canal run by its direction and control". The first two phases remained almost unchanged, but the capture of the bridgehead had to be re-planned. Keightley was still optimistic about the effects of an air offensive. He suggested that plan A would be a good option if it was supported by some elements of plan B. For example, the airborne forces could be used.⁵¹⁵

The final objective of the operation had slowly become even more unclear. If the occupation of the Canal Zone was delayed due to inadequate unloading facilities and Keightley was no longer allowed to send forces to Cairo or Alexandria (as he noted), what was to be done after the landings? The reasons given for not entering Cairo are both political and practical as an Egypt Official Committee memorandum in late September reveals. The new order of battle did not enable the Allies to enter Cairo. The inevitable conclusion is that once the air campaign was adopted and 2 Infantry Division was dropped out of the force structure, the military means to overthrow Nasser vanished. This was the inevitable conclusion unless one believed in the air campaign; and there were not many who did.⁵¹⁶

Due to a demand to release some merchant shipping, all the requisitioned vessels were to be unloaded and the maximum number of them were to be let go. Some of these would be replaced by the additional LSTs and LCTs slowly becoming available. In addition to the vessels activated by the Royal Navy, the Ministry of Transport took over almost thirty landing vessels: twelve

⁵¹⁵ NA ADM 116/6101, General Charles Keightley's "Directive to Task Force Commanders", 1 October 1956.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid. and NA CAB 134/1217, EC (56) 53, 25 September 1956 "Political Directive to Allied Commander-in-Chief".

LSTs and fifteen LCTs from the Admiralty reserves. The LSTs were commissioned and handed over to civilian firms, which then provided crews for the vessels.⁵¹⁷ By the end of November, there were to be thirteen LSTs and sixteen LCTs available in the United Kingdom and fifteen LSTs and nine LCTs in the Mediterranean. This arrangement significantly reduced the need for other shipping. Only twenty MT/stores ships would be needed by D+11.⁵¹⁸

Apart from the removal of 2 Infantry Division, the order of battle remained roughly unaltered. However, Keightley suggested that one of the Cyprus-based infantry brigades should also be made available. The reason for this alteration is not known, but presumably he sought to use this force as part of an occupation force sent from Cyprus to Port Said in the event of a rapid Egyptian collapse.⁵¹⁹

7.2.1 The Joint Planning Staff's last resort

The Chiefs of Staff Committee asked the Joint Planning Staff to prepare a new plan. Its members turned to the Commander-in-Chief, but this apparently had no effect. The Joint Planning Staff still doubted the whole concept. The problem would not be the performance of the Allied air forces; it would be a lack of political determination. Hostile opinion from inside and outside of Britain would compel the politicians to order a landing in Egypt before the prolonged bombing campaign had broken Egyptian morale. The weakness of the concept lay not only in its unsound assumptions about the Egyptian will to fight, but also in its predictions of the political resolution to support the military.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁷ A memorandum by the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, (n.d.), "The Suez Canal Crisis, 1956, As it Affected the Ship Management and Contracts Division of the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation", MT 40/187 and "Report by Commander 2(BR) Corps, annex A, Report No 8 (Q Movements)", WO 288/78, NA.

⁵¹⁸ NA ADM 116/6101, General Charles Keightley's Directive to Task Force Commanders, 1 October 1956.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 158, 5 October 1956, "Suggested Alternative to the Winter Plan for Operation Musketeer".

The Joint Planning Staff was suspicious of Keightley's confidence in the Prime Minister's assurances of political resolution.⁵²¹ They described it as "a tenet of faith upon which the plan was based" and predicted that the political resolution "will dwindle until eventually it might disappear". The Joint Planning Staff suggested a different approach that would not leave the military at the mercy of the hesitating politicians. The assault landing on Port Said should be carried out immediately after the Egyptian Air Force was neutralised – within two days of the beginning of the bombing. This move, which could be described as a political *fait accompli*, should be followed by an intensive air operation aimed at bringing the Egyptians to the negotiation table. If this failed, the ground forces should advance from the bridgehead and capture the Canal Zone.⁵²²

The Joint Planning Staff's suggestion, which was a mixture of political and military expediency, was not given proper consideration. It was passed to the members of the Chiefs of Staff Committee only to be cancelled and withdrawn later. One may assume that it was never presented to the politicians as a serious option.⁵²³

It is possible that one of the reasons for the Joint Planning Staff's pessimistic attitude was its distaste for the planning process. The Joint Planning Staff did not actively participate in planning after General Keightley was appointed Commander-in-Chief. Planning was conducted by the Commander-in-Chief's headquarters and its subordinate organisations. Evidently the Joint Planning Staff did not consider the Commander-in-Chief capable of combining military and political objectives. As a result, its members, or at least the Director of Naval Operations, planned to take measures to reduce Keightley's influence and to bring the Joint Planning Staff back into the planning process.⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ It appears that Eden had realised the main weakness of the prolonged air campaign and had given consideration to the political pressures that would arise during it, NA DEFE 32/5, Minutes of a Staff Conference Held as Chequers on Monday 24th September, 1956.

⁵²² NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 158, 5 October 1956, "Suggested Alternative to the Winter Plan for Operation Musketeer".

⁵²³ NA DEFE 11/138, Lee to the members of the COS-Committee, 8 October 1956.

⁵²⁴ NA ADM 205/120, Director of Plans to First Sea Lord, 1 October 1956. It is not known whether this letter was sent, but it clearly shows dissatisfaction with the way the operation was planned.

It appears that resistance to the overall plan was especially persistent in the Royal Navy. The Assistant Chief of Naval Staff expressed his dissatisfaction with the concept by repeatedly attacking its basic assumptions, which he described as more than questionable. In his view, Keightley's over-optimistic view of Egyptian capabilities was based on his experience of fighting the Germans in the Second World War.⁵²⁵ Actually, the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff suggested that the Egyptian defences should not be hard to penetrate with ground forces. Prolonged aerial bombardment would be politically difficult, as world opinion would increasingly oppose it during the campaign. Therefore, the war should be brought to a rapid end. The Assistant Chief of Naval Staff doubted whether Nasser's regime would fall due to the bombing. For political reasons, the amphibious assault had to take place without any pre D-Day bombing; even at the expense of more Allied casualties.⁵²⁶

The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Guy Grantham discussed the aerial concept with General Keightley and was not convinced. In his letter to the First Sea Lord, Grantham criticised the aerial concept. In reality not even Keightley knew what the implications of its execution would be. According to Grantham, Keightley had not given serious consideration to possible Egyptian counter-measures. What would happen if the Egyptian Armed Forces decided to hide among the population? The civilians would have to be targeted in such a case, the Commander-in-Chief had answered. Grantham complained to the First Sea Lord that the bombing of civilians could not be the aim of the operation.⁵²⁷

7.2.2 The Force Commanders' revision is rejected

The grumbling about the concept was not just restricted to the Joint Planning Staff. The Force Commanders' planning teams shared its pessimism and reluctance. They had come to the same conclusion two days before the Joint Planning Staff's assessment: "The sooner that we land after the

⁵²⁵ General Keightley commanded 30 Armoured Brigade and 6 Armoured Division in North Africa and then 78 Division and 5 Corps in Italy.

⁵²⁶ NA ADM 205/120, Assistant Chief of Naval Staff to Vice Chief of Naval Staff on 11 October 1956. This letter was subsequently passed to the First Sea Lord on the same day.

⁵²⁷ NA ADM 205/133, Admiral Grantham to the First Sea Lord, 24 September 1956.

neutralisation of the EGYPTIAN AIR FORCE the better". Obviously, the Task Forces looked at matters from a tactical rather than from a strategic point of view. If the Allied landed early, it would be more difficult for the Egyptians to block the Canal and to demolish its harbour facilities. In addition, all three aircraft carriers would be able to participate in a short, but intense period of air operations that would not leave the initiative to the Egyptians.⁵²⁸

The evaluation of the sustainability of the Winter Plan by the Force Commanders' planning teams was gloomy. Training, maintenance and morale would suffer if the plan was kept open to execution at short notice over the winter. The ten-day warning time suggested by Keightley would not be enough. Instead, a fortnight would be the minimum for administrative reasons. If the Royal Air Force Transport Command was to continue its normal service and the Royal Navy was to arrange maintenance for its ships in a systematic manner, fourteen days warning would be essential.⁵²⁹

Another estimate by the Task Force Commanders' planning teams followed similar lines. The release and unloading of the requisitioned shipping would increase the time required for preliminary notice. Increased cloud conditions and swelling would delay the timetable so that the neutralisation of the Egyptian Air Force could take up to four days. The sailing of the assault convoys from Malta was estimated to take anything from seven to ten days. Although the force allocation remained practically unaltered, the availability of the aircraft carriers would be problematic. First, the Admiralty planned to cut the number of carriers available to two due to a maintenance programme. Second, the carriers operated on a fifteen day operating cycle during active operations due to logistical issues. In other words, the carrier force could not

⁵²⁸ NA ADM 116/6101, Allied Force Commanders, AFC/25, 3 October 1956, "Operation Musketeer. Certain Factors Affecting the Formulation of the Winter Plan" (first draft). One should note that neither this (AFC 25) nor the next (AFC 26) estimate represent the official view of the Task Force Commanders. These documents, still at a draft stage, were produced for planning purposes. It is worth noting that the information on the issue of morale was inconsistent. According to liaison reports, morale was actually rather high among army units earmarked for Operations Musketeer, including the units manned by or containing a significant number of reservists, who totalled some 27 200 altogether in early October, WO 288/71, Points Arising from Visit to 29 Infantry Brigade & Corps units by GSO II Liaison, 28–29 September 1956 and Points from Visit to 1 Guards Brigade by GSO III Liaison 2 Corps, 16 October 1956. For the number of reservists, see WO 288/61, The War Office, AG Statistics, S/273/56, 2 October 1956, "Reserve Call-up Situation at 2 October 1956".

⁵²⁹ NA ADM 116/6101, Allied Force Commanders, AFC/25, 3 October 1956, "Operation Musketeer. Certain Factors Affecting the Formulation of the Winter Plan" (first draft).

support operations lasting more than fifteen days during the winter and even then these operations could only be supported by two carriers.⁵³⁰

In spite of dispensing with Plan A, the Commander-in-Chief had requested the Task Force Commanders to consider different options for occupying Port Said quickly, should circumstances become favourable during the air campaign. To meet this demand, the Task Force Commanders suggested that supplies and administrative personnel should be dispatched to Cyprus, from which they could be deployed rapidly assuming that there was shipping available.⁵³¹ The Force Commanders also promoted an altered staging for the operation. The first stage would include an expansion of the bridgehead beyond the end of the causeway by using all available assets, such as further parachute operations and the use of landing craft along the Canal. In the second stage, the advance would be continued along the Canal to the town of Suez after the build-up of additional forces. The forces participating in the second stage should also be changed. Instead of earmarking the additional shipping for 3 Infantry Division in Britain, these ships were to be allocated to 10 Armoured Division, which could be transported from Libya to serve as the first follow-up force. To make this armour-heavy division a more balanced force, it would be reinforced by infantry units from Cyprus. Later, 3 Infantry Division would be used as an occupation force.⁵³²

This revision was short-lived. The Force Commanders abandoned the idea of using the Libyan-based 10 Armoured Division as a first follow-up force for reasons not entirely known, but which were most likely political. In his final report, Lieutenant General Stockwell explains that any pre-positioning in Cyprus would have required a large number of reservists. Deployment of reservists to the Middle East was not possible without seeking ministerial approval, which was presumably not sought.⁵³³ Although direct reference to Libya is not found in this context, one can assume that the suggestion of assigning the Libyan-based units a more active role than in the previous plans was ruled out for political reasons as well. Actually, the message from

⁵³⁰ NA ADM 116/6101, 5 October 1956, "Main Changes to Operation "Musketeer" (Revise) for the Winter, 1 Nov 56–31 March 57.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ NA WO 288/77, 1 February 1957, "2 (Br) Corps Report on Operation Musketeer", pp. 33–35.

Tripoli was clear and consistent throughout the crisis: the Libyan government and people considered the use of Libyan territory to be a violation of the Anglo-Libyan Treaty. Such a violation would cause serious turmoil.⁵³⁴ The wording of a letter by the British Ambassador in late September is very illustrative: "Libya must be regarded as utterly out of bounds, as non-existent, for military purposes."⁵³⁵

In spite of efforts to make the plan more flexible, the basic problem remained. As the table below shows, four weeks warning was needed before the landings could take place. Only the start of the operation had become more flexible as the first troop movements in the Mediterranean would start at D+3 at the earliest.

<u>Day</u>	<u>Event</u>
D-14	Decision required to mount Musketeer and the requisition of merchant shipping begins
D-5	Naval reinforcements (not incl. requisitioned merchant shipping) arrives at Malta
D-4	D-Day confirmed
D-3	Carrier Group sails from Malta and all the RAF planes are deployed
D-Day	Phase I – Air offensive against the Egyptian Air Force starts
D+2	Assault convoys in Malta placed on 24 hours notice to sail
D+3/4	Air Offensive is shifted to Phase II
D+7	Air Transport Force for the parachute force positioned in Cyprus
D+10	Earliest date for phase III—assault on Port Said.

Table 1: The timing of Operation Musketeer.⁵³⁶

7.2.3 The Commander-in-Chief must defend his scheme once more

While the tactical commanders worked out their detailed plans, General Keightley was compelled to defend his concept once more. In a note attached to the Chiefs of Staff Committee memoranda, he returned to the key factor of the new plan: the effects of an air campaign.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁴ See, eg., ADM 116/6098, Tripoli to Foreign Office, 3 August 1956 and Tripoli to Foreign Office 9 August 1956.

⁵³⁵ DEFE 11/138, Extract from a letter to Mr Watson from H.M. Ambassador, Libya, 25 September 1956.

⁵³⁶ NA WO 106/5986, Office of the Allied Force Commanders, 12 October 1956, "Operation Musketeer (Winter) Combined Operational Instruction".

⁵³⁷ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 380, 12 October 1956, "Operation Musketeer–Winter Plan".

He started by stating that there were three options for attacking Egypt: by land, by sea or by air (followed by ground operations). The land option from Libya or Israel was impossible for political reasons. Keightley ruled out the option of a sea invasion by itself because the Allies did not have sufficient specialised shipping capacity to attack and maintain forces over open beaches. Any attack from the sea had to be directed at a port. A precondition for a successful landing, either on heavily defended Alexandria or on geographically difficult Port Said, would be an intensive bombardment. This would cause heavy civilian casualties. Large-scale airborne operations would not be a potential solution, as the unpredictable weather conditions would prevent them.⁵³⁸

According to this note, Egyptian defences were in good condition. An influx of foreign volunteers had made the armed forces more competent than had been estimated at the beginning of August. The weakness of Egypt lay in its morale and oil. The most appropriate way to attack these targets would be from the air. The Egyptian Armed Forces could put up stubborn resistance on land, but an attack from the air would paralyse them. Aerial attrition would immobilise the Egyptians and “it attacks the Egyptians where we believe they are weakest, that is their morale”.⁵³⁹

But above all, an air campaign would be flexible. One could shorten or prolong it according to circumstances, Keightley reasoned in his note. He did not mention the restrictions on keeping ground forces afloat in a stormy Mediterranean. Counting on Eden’s support, Keightley predicted that the final success of the plan depended on the resolution of the politicians and the Prime Minister to authorise bombing in spite of condemnations from public opinion.⁵⁴⁰

Keightley had realised that civilian casualties would be at the core of Egyptian propaganda. As a result, he produced an evaluation on the scale of civilian suffering that would be caused by the bombing. There would only be

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

light casualties during the neutralisation of the Egyptian Air Force. But, the civilian death toll would gradually raise as the bombing of targets relatively close to population centres began.⁵⁴¹

One has no reason to doubt General Keightley's sincerity about the air plan. He was very concerned both about the flexibility of the plan and about civilian casualties. His private papers, especially a top secret draft report that is totally different in its criticisms from the official report, reveals that the Commander-in-Chief genuinely believed that the political leadership would cope with the pressure from world opinion long enough to enable the air campaign to achieve its objectives.⁵⁴²

7.3 Threats on the horizon

7.3.1 Possible Soviet involvement?

Keightley believed that Egyptian defences were being stiffened by large numbers of Soviet Bloc volunteers. Yet, the Joint Intelligence Committee did not support this view. According to a report on possible Soviet involvement, Soviet support would mainly consist of political and economic aid. In the political arena, the Soviets would try to embarrass the British and the French in the eyes of the world and showcase their own reliability to neutral countries.⁵⁴³

Large-scale Soviet military aid was considered improbable. First, it would be difficult for the Soviets to ship or fly in supplies to Egypt without being attacked by Allied air forces. Second, the Egyptian Armed Forces could not absorb a large number of new weapons rapidly. Replacement aircraft might be flown to Egypt by Soviet or East Bloc pilots, but an extensive flow of volunteers was unlikely. Active military involvement would not take place, as the Soviets would not risk getting involved in a confrontation with the United

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Papers of General Sir Charles Keightley, (not dated) Lessons of Operation Musketeer.

⁵⁴³ NA CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 98, 4 October 1956, "Possible Soviet Assistance to Egypt's Military Effort in Certain Circumstances".

States.⁵⁴⁴ The Joint Intelligence Committee (Middle East) estimated at the beginning of September that an immediate influx of volunteer aircrew and ground personnel could enhance Egyptian Air Force capabilities very quickly, but not even it dared to predict the large-scale use of volunteers in the Egyptian Army.⁵⁴⁵

Claims of "a very sharp increase in the numbers of ships from Russia" did not correspond with the available intelligence either. According to the Joint Intelligence Committee, most of the arms delivery shipments had taken place in August and at the beginning of September. After this, the rate of deliveries had slowed down. Owing to tightened security measures, it was not known whether all these vessels carried weapons, but the Joint Intelligence Committee assumed that they carried arms covered by the original arms contract. There was no evidence of any new purchasing agreements. On the Czech-Egyptian arms deal, the intelligence report bluntly notes: "No intelligence has been available for some months on Egyptian arms negotiations with the Soviet Bloc".⁵⁴⁶

In spite of intelligence problems, some Soviet arms deliveries were noticed. The Egyptian Air Force received a batch of state-of-the-art MIG-17 fighters in late August. In spite of their performance, considered superior to their Allied equivalents in many respects, these aircraft would not pose significant problems for the Allies. The Egyptian Air Force was thought to be in the middle of an operational transition. Therefore, it would not be able to take advantage of its sophisticated hardware.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ NA AIR 20/9229, JIC (ME), 6 September 1956, "Bi-Weekly Intelligence Review No 4". The exact number of Soviet or Soviet Bloc volunteers is not known. According to Major General Zolotarev, there was a small pool of Soviet pilots who flew MIG-15 and IL-28 aircraft. However, he does not mention anything that would allude to large-scale involvement. At the time of the crisis, the most significant military advisory presence was provided by ex-Wehrmacht officers and not by the Soviets, see Zolotarev, pp. 171 and 175; and Aldrich, p.477.

⁵⁴⁶ NA CAB 179/1, JIC, 4 October 1956, "Review of Current Intelligence as at 4 October, 1956"; see also WO 266/98, HQ 2 (Br) Corps, 10 October 1956, "HQ 2 (Br) Corps ISUM No 6 dated 10 October 56."

⁵⁴⁷ AIR 20/9229, JIC (ME), 17 September 1956, "Bi-Weekly Intelligence Review No 7. According to Brian Cull, the author of the best account on air operations during the Suez Crisis, the Egyptian Air Force had about six MIG-17 aircraft in service when the Allied bombing commenced. See Brian Cull with David Nicolle and Shlomo Aloni, *Wings Over Suez* (London: Grubb Street 1996), pp. 111–112. For some reason, the Air Task Force ignored the possible presence of the new MIGs. Either did they not possess information on them or they were simply ignored as non-operational aircraft.

7.3.2 The submarine scare

Of the potential Soviet actions, one possibility concerned British planners above all: the submarines. The Soviet Union was known to have sold three or four submarines to Egypt, but they had not been delivered by the time Nasser nationalised the Canal. Contrary to earlier information, the submarines were still in Poland along with the Egyptian naval personnel undergoing training that were to become crew for the vessels.⁵⁴⁸

Three unidentified submarines left Poland in the first week of September. Their departure was a nasty surprise for naval intelligence, which had just one week earlier anticipated that a submarine threat would be very unlikely.⁵⁴⁹ From a military point of view, the British had more than enough experience with the menace of submarines. These submarines could cause a lot of damage to the invasion fleet. The Admiralty calculated that these W-class vessels had the potential to sink or damage up to eight or ten ships.⁵⁵⁰ Their endurance, 10 000 nautical miles when submerged, enabled them to sail most of their journey under water and still attack vulnerable Allied shipping.⁵⁵¹

The submarines also had a political value, as the Egypt Committee noted gloomily. If they arrived in Egypt in the middle of negotiations, these vessels would not only improve Egyptian naval capabilities but also their morale. Their appearance in an Egyptian harbour would give the Egyptians and the world a sense of the Soviet Bloc's determination and reliability. This would be another propaganda victory for the Egyptians.⁵⁵²

British intelligence found it difficult to assess the intentions of these submarines due to their clandestine nature. First, there was the question of

⁵⁴⁸ NA CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 84, 14 August 1956, "Considerations Affecting Action by Egypt in the Event of Armed Intervention". In August, the Joint Intelligence Committee had reports, which were proved wrong only a little later, that there were submarines in Port Said harbour, NA CAB 159/24, JIC (56) 87th Meeting, 23 August 1956.

⁵⁴⁹ NA ADM 116/6098, A minute by the Department of Naval Intelligence, 29 August 1956.

⁵⁵⁰ NA ADM 205/118, 5 September 1956, The Director of Plans to the First Sea Lord.

⁵⁵¹ On estimates of the performance of the W-and M-Class submarines, see NA ADM 116/6100, Operation Musketeer (Revised) Naval Operation Order annex 5, appendix A.

⁵⁵² NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 30th Meeting, 19 September 1956.

identification. The British could not be certain whether the submarines were actually manned by Egyptians or by members of the Soviet Bloc. They could not even prove that these vessels belonged to the Egyptian Navy. There was a possibility that these submarines were "snoopers": that is Soviet or Soviet Bloc manned vessels gathering intelligence as the Joint Intelligence Committee review put the matter.⁵⁵³ Second, if the crew were Egyptian, it was not known whether they were skilled enough to attack Allied ships, or whether that was even their intention. If such a vessel attacked Allied ships with Soviet "volunteers" onboard, Soviet involvement could probably never be proven even if the Allies intercepted such a submerged vessel.

The Director of Naval Plans concluded that if the submarines were aggressive and capable of attacking, it was highly unlikely that they would torpedo Allied shipping before the bombing had started. The most attractive opportunity for the submarines to use their torpedoes would be near the Egyptian coast, just a few hours before the landing took place, when the escort vessels had already shifted from their escort duty to participation in the naval bombardment.⁵⁵⁴

The Joint Intelligence Committee (Middle East) saw the matter from a more political point of view. According to their estimate, the submarines were more tools of Egyptian propaganda, a façade of credible defence, than efficient military machines. As the submarines would probably be manned by Soviet crews, they would not be used in an offensive role. If, however, the vessels were deployed against Allied shipping, their first priority would be to gather information and to mine the approaches to the Egyptian ports. Attacks against unarmed transport vessels or infiltration of sabotage groups into Cyprus would be a lower priority. The committee probably came to this different conclusion because of its evaluation of Egyptian crew efficiency, which was considered to be low, even if the crew had "probably good morale and fair technical ability".⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵³ NA CAB 179/1, JIC, "Review of the Current Intelligence as at 4 of October".

⁵⁵⁴ NA ADM 205/118, 5 September 1956, The Director of Plans to the First Sea Lord.

⁵⁵⁵ NA AIR 20/9229, JIC (ME), 8 October 1956, "Bi-Weekly Intelligence Review No 13".

The Naval Task Force perceived the threat caused by the submarines the same way. The Task Force, which was responsible for executing naval operations, concentrated on the military aspect of the submarines. Even if the Egyptian crews were technically competent after their relatively short training period, they could hardly master complicated submarine tactics. Therefore, the Soviets would probably not let the Egyptians use the submarines themselves, as there was an obvious danger of them being captured by the Allies. Thus, they would man the key positions with their own "volunteers" and would constitute "a moderate threat". The British knew very little of Soviet tactics, but assumed that they were defensive. As a result, their most likely method of operation would be to establish a defensive patrol in the zone between 20–50 nautical miles from Alexandria and Port Said, if they were deployed against the Allies. Offensive mining operations close to Malta or Cyprus were considered improbable because the origin of the mines could be identified.⁵⁵⁶

Since the task and role of the submarines was unclear, their progress was tracked not only by the British Mediterranean Fleet and the RAF Coastal Command, but also by the French Mediterranean Fleet and the US 6th Fleet.⁵⁵⁷ British submarines detected two of them when they passed the Straits of Gibraltar.⁵⁵⁸ Later, they were spotted close to Sardinia by anti-submarine aircraft. Then contact with the vessels, which were expected to arrive in Egypt in late September, was lost and the search was suspended. Air Headquarters in Malta estimated that the submarines had either sailed directly to Egypt or to Albania, where the Soviets were known to have naval facilities. To confirm their appearance in Albania, Air Headquarters Malta suggested high altitude oblique photography be carried out by a Canberra aircraft.⁵⁵⁹ Whether this suggestion was approved is not known.

⁵⁵⁶ NA ADM 116/6100, Task Force 345, 23 September 1956, "Operation Musketeer (Revised) Naval Operation Order".

⁵⁵⁷ SHD 9 U 4, memorandum by Le Capitaine de Frégate Cuirard, Londres 26 Septembre 1956.

⁵⁵⁸ On submarine detection by HMS Tabard and Thermopylae, see NA DEFE 13/13, First Lord of Admiralty to the Prime Minister, 12 September 1956.

⁵⁵⁹ NA AIR 20/9229, JIC (ME), 10 September 1956, "Bi-Weekly Intelligence Review No 5"; AIR 20/6544, 12 September 1956, AHQ Malta to Air Ministry and SHD 9 U 4, memorandum by Le Capitaine de Frégate Cuirard, Londres, 26 Septembre 1956.

British intelligence was unable to confirm their arrival in Egypt. Therefore, at the beginning of October, the Joint Intelligence Committee (ME) agreed with the earlier estimate that the submarines had been diverted to Durras, Albania, where their Egyptian crews would be trained in Mediterranean operating conditions. After all, isolated Albania would be a better and more clandestine place to improve crew capabilities than Egypt, which was under constant surveillance. The Joint Intelligence Committee (ME) thought that time was against the Allies. The risk of the submarines being deployed offensively would rise as the crews became more capable of using their vessels.⁵⁶⁰ The final destiny of the submarines has not been determined. According to the post-operations naval report, the final conclusion within the navy was that the submarines did not proceed to Egypt. They were in the Mediterranean and were gathering intelligence about Anglo-French fleet movements.⁵⁶¹

It appears that the submarines remained unidentified and were not positively located during the course of the crisis. As a potential miniature “fleet in being”, they caused a disproportional amount of concern to Allied planners. The option of them being used offensively tied a certain amount of already limited resources down in intensified anti-submarine measures.

7.3.3 An Egyptian pre-emptive strike

All the versions of the air plan required large redeployments before the operations were to commence. Most of the bombing force was to be moved to its bases in Malta and Cyprus as late as possible, eight days before D-Day. The main reason for this was that the airfields in Cyprus were within range of Egyptian IL-28 light bombers.⁵⁶² A large concentration of planes would be a tempting target because even a single plane could cause severe damage to rows of aircraft parked on congested airfields.

⁵⁶⁰ AIR 20/9229, JIC (ME), 8 October 1956, “Bi-Weekly Intelligence Review No 13” and AIR 20/6544, 12th September 1956, AHQ Malta to Air Ministry.

⁵⁶¹ ADM 116/6209, *Naval Report on Operation Musketeer*, 15 February 1957, pp. 197–198.

⁵⁶² The combat radius of an IL-28 was thought to be 205–270 nautical miles in a low-level mission and between 570–700 nautical miles in a high-level mission. See, e.g., NA ADM 205/120, “Naval Aircraft Versus Egyptian Air Force”, memorandum by the Director of the Naval Warfare, 3 August 1956.

The idea of a pre-emptive Egyptian strike on the airfields in Cyprus worried the British military and politicians throughout the crisis.⁵⁶³ The transfer of two anti-aircraft regiments and two interceptor squadrons to Cyprus was among the first actions taken.⁵⁶⁴ British intelligence was unanimous throughout the crisis that it was unlikely that the Egyptians were capable of bombing Cyprus. However, “volunteers” from the Eastern Bloc could change the situation.⁵⁶⁵

To prevent the Egyptians or “volunteers” from reaching their targets, Air Headquarters Levant, responsible for the air defence, had to set up an air defence system from nothing. Their report admits: “At the time Nasser seized the Suez Canal there was no effective air defence system in Cyprus”. In late September, Air Headquarters Levant barred civilian air traffic from the airspace, leaving only a narrow flight corridor for air traffic to Nicosia. Due to the mountainous terrain and technical drawbacks, the radar coverage was never perfect. The average range at which a plane at medium height was detected was about 100 nautical miles. However, detection of low-level targets remained a problem although Royal Navy vessels were used for early warning.⁵⁶⁶

Most of the approximately 150 available anti-aircraft guns were deployed around the three available airfields. Nicosia, the base for British bombers and transport aircraft, also housed three fighter squadrons (two day and one night) responsible for air defence. The Allied fighter/ground attack planes and the reconnaissance force were based at Akrotiri air base, which was defended by over 70 anti-aircraft guns. The French transport force used the most primitive airfield, Tymbou, which was re-surfaced in a hurry.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶³ See, e.g., NA DEFE 4/90, COS (56) 97th Meeting, 9 October 1956.

⁵⁶⁴ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 3rd Meeting, 30 July 1956. See also Lee, David, *Wings in the Sun. A History of the Royal Air Force in the Mediterranean 1945–1986* (London: HMSO, 1989), p. 63.

⁵⁶⁵ On the appreciation of Egyptian capabilities to operate Soviet equipment, see NA CAB 158/24, JIC (56) 33, 28 February 1956, “Egyptian Effectiveness in the Use of Soviet Aircraft”; CAB 158/ 25, JIC (56) 80, 3 August 1956, “Egyptian Nationalization of the Suez Canal Company”; AIR 20/9229, JIC (ME), 6 September 1956, “Bi-Weekly Intelligence Review No 4”; and NA AIR 20/9554, Headquarters Air Task Force, October 1956, “Overall Air Plan for Operation Musketeer”.

⁵⁶⁶ NA AIR 20/10364, Air Headquarters Levant, February 1957, “Air Headquarters Levant Air Staff Report on Operation Musketeer (Draft)” and AIR 20/10202, AHQ Levant, TS.311/29/Ops, “AHQ Levant Op.Order 40/56.”

⁵⁶⁷ NA AIR 20/10202, HQ 7 AGRA, 24 September 1956, “Operation Order 1” and Lee, David, *Wings in the Sun. A History of the Royal Air Force in the Mediterranean 1945–1986*, p. 66.

The fear of an Egyptian aircraft strafing one of the Cypriot airfields was not without grounds. In spite of extensive measures to improve the air defences, the system was still unfinished when hostilities began. Problems with identification, briefing of the scrambling aircraft and radar coverage would have made the interception of fast-moving targets difficult. As the AHQ Levant report stated: "the chances of intercepting enemy jet aircraft which may have infiltrated into a stream of strike aircraft returning to Cyprus were by no means optimistic".⁵⁶⁸

The methods available to decrease the vulnerability of the Allied air bases were not only defensive. The "bomber scare" caused the Chief of Air Staff to initiate Operation Goldflake at the end of September. Ministerial approval authorised the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Air Force to order retaliatory night bombings of the Egyptian airfields if the Allied airfields were attacked by the Egyptians. To support this, Bomber Command moved three Canberra squadrons along with four Valiant bombers to Malta, and put another Valiant squadron on alert in Britain.⁵⁶⁹

7.3.4 Problems in acquiring tactical intelligence

As mentioned earlier, failures by MI6 hampered the British effort to acquire political intelligence. Similarly, the lack of photographic reconnaissance impaired the intelligence effort throughout the preparations. Before the existence of intelligence satellites, photographic reconnaissance played a vital role in information collection. The 2 Corps final report described the importance of photographic reconnaissance as "the only reliable means of assessing the enemy deployment, the movement of reinforcements, and his overall military intentions".⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁸ NA AIR 20/10364, Air Headquarters Levant, 31 January 1957, "Report – Air Defence of Cyprus".

⁵⁶⁹ NA DEFE 11/138, 25 September 1956, an accompanying note from R.T Penney to the Chiefs of Staff with a copy of the Directive to Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Air Force and NA AIR 20/10364, Air Headquarters Levant, February 1957, "Air Headquarters Levant Air Staff Report on Operation Musketeer (Draft)".

⁵⁷⁰ NA WO 288/78, Report by Commander 2 (Br) Corps: Staff, Arm and Service Reports, Report No 3, 1 February 1957. The first intelligence satellite was launched by the United States in February 1959, Peter Gudgin, *Military Intelligence, A History* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), p. 100.

According to the timetable of the Winter Plan, British Canberra PR 7s were to start photographic reconnaissance runs over Egypt at the same that Bomber Command started its redeployment to the theatre. French RF-86 reconnaissance planes would join the reconnaissance effort four days later. The main aim of the aerial reconnaissance was to provide an accurate picture of the Egyptian Air Force for mission planning. British intelligence suspected that the Egyptians might fly some of their planes to friendly neighbouring countries. As a result, the photographic missions were to cover airfields in Syria and Lebanon as well.⁵⁷¹ In addition to missions covering the Egyptian Air Force, the reconnaissance effort was to provide vital information on targets that would be attacked in later phases.⁵⁷²

Both the Chiefs of Staff and General Keightley had put continuous pressure on the Prime Minister to permit photographic reconnaissance from the beginning of crisis, but to no avail. In his first questionnaire to the Chiefs of Staff, Keightley sought authorisation to begin photographic reconnaissance immediately. Although systematic and regular reconnaissance could be started as late as D-10, basic information on enemy deployments near potential drop zones and in the amphibious assault area was needed to conduct further planning.⁵⁷³ However, the military was not able to convince the Prime Minister to grant authorisation. Why? In spite of the fact that neither the British nor the French had anything like the American U-2, which could penetrate its opponents' air defence systems without being intercepted, the risk of being caught was considered to be low by the military. At the beginning of August, the Chief of Air Staff explained that even if it was

⁵⁷¹ NA AIR 20/9554, Headquarters Air Task Force, October 1956, "Overall Air Plan for Operation Musketeer". General Keightley was concerned about co-operation between Syria and Egypt throughout the crisis. At the beginning of September, he sent a note to the Chiefs of Staff Committee clarifying his concern over possible Syrian involvement. According to Keightley, Egyptian jets would be able to operate from four airfields. The advantage of using Syrian airfields was two-folded. First, the threshold for escalating into a war with Syria would be politically high. Second, if Syrian airfields were used, the combat radius of the MIG-fighters would be sufficient to reach Cyprus. As these airfields were only about 250 miles from Cyprus, the warning time would also be shorter. See NA DEFE 11/137, September 1956, "Operation Musketeer – Effect of use by the Egyptians of the Syrian Airfields, Note by General Sir Charles Keightley".

⁵⁷² NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 376, 10 October 1956, "Musketeer – P.R.".

⁵⁷³ NA WO 216/907, General Keightley to Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 17 August 1956. Actually, the Egypt Committee authorised photographic reconnaissance but later withdrew this authorisation, NA AIR 8/1939, Air Ministry to HQ MEAF, 3 August 1956 and Air Ministry to HQ MEAF, 16 August 1956.

detected, a British Canberra would probably outmanoeuvre an Egyptian Mig-15.⁵⁷⁴

However, there was a political risk inherit in aerial reconnaissance. Due to radar, there was a possibility of planes being detected. If detected, they might even be intercepted. The risk of being caught violating sovereign air space or being shot down in the middle of political manuevers would have led to a diplomatic setback. It is not surprising that the Prime Minister kept the authorisation of photographic missions to himself.

Even though photographic flights that crossed Egyptian air space were forbidden, the Royal Air Force started using oblique photography at the end of August. This long-range technique took advantage of special cameras that enabled the taking of photographs from a high altitude without entering Egyptian airspace. Even though the results of these so-called "Robin flights" provided useful information on the dispositions of the Egyptians, it was not considered adequate. Traditional vertical photography was needed to confirm the results.⁵⁷⁵

The matter of vertical photographic reconnaissance was re-introduced in conjunction with the acceptance of the new concept for operations. According to a memorandum by Air Vice Marshall Huddleston, the Chief of Staff (Air) for General Keightley, missions covering Egyptian territory should begin on D-8. The first five days of the programme were to be concentrated on the Egyptian airfields to update the information about the deployment of the Egyptian Air Force. Basic coverage of the landing areas was also to be arranged. On D-3,

⁵⁷⁴ NA DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 77th Meeting, 2 August 1956. Richard Aldrich states that the Americans delivered U-2 photos to British intelligence until the beginning of September. This is possible, considering the extensive co-operation between the intelligence services of the two countries. Still, available primary sources do not confirm this claim. See Richard Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London: John Murray, 2002), p. 486.

⁵⁷⁵ NA DEFE 13/47, Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Minister of Defence, 5 September 1956 and AIR 8/1939, Ministry of Defence to HQ MEAF, 25 August 1956. The British had employed oblique photographing in 1953 after installing a large American camera on a specially designed Canberra aircraft. This equipment enabled the photographing of a target from a distance of at least 20 kilometres, NA AIR 19/1106, the letters by Vice-Chief of Air Staff to Secretary of State for Air, 22 June 1955 and 17 August 1955.

the emphasis was to shift to the targets of the bombing campaign, including military deployments.⁵⁷⁶

Constant postponements and changes in plans also increased the anxiety about Egyptian deployments of the Task Force Commanders. Lieutenant General Stockwell, the commander of the Land Task Force, requested in early October an immediate Robin-mission along the coastline to confirm the anticipated movement of the Egyptian Army to positions west of Port Said. Interestingly and quite extraordinarily, his note also has a hint of the source of the previous intelligence: the British military attaché. Apparently, the British military attaché(s) provided a significant proportion of the available intelligence on Egyptian deployments. This would be similar to the French experience.⁵⁷⁷

Due to the lack of solid information, General Keightley sent a note to the COS-Committee. According to the note, the chances of being detected by the Egyptians were "slight" for British Canberras operating at 50 000 feet and "moderate" for the lower-flying French planes. The chances of being intercepted were considered to be "negligible" and "slight". Keightley, apparently frustrated at this stage, expressed his views on the quality of existing intelligence with uncommonly strong language: "At present we are not receiving adequate information for our purpose through intelligence channels. There is no prospect of this situation improving". Keightley suggested that photographic reconnaissance should be begun by a single plane, as it would be very unlikely that the Egyptians could detect or intercept such a small-scale effort. Prolonged reconnaissance would also reduce the quantity of flights required near D-Day. Therefore, he concluded, the most favourable way to operate "is to initiate P.R. by single Canberra aircraft NOW".⁵⁷⁸ The Chiefs of Staff understood the importance of the matter and

⁵⁷⁶ NA AIR 20/10216, The War Office, CR/1117/SD 12/24 September 1956, "Operation Musketeer, Photographic Reconnaissance".

⁵⁷⁷ NA AIR 20/10216, HQ 2 Corps, General Staff Intelligence, 1270/G (int), 4 October 1956, "Photo Recce".

⁵⁷⁸ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 376, 10 October 1956, "Musketeer – P.R, a note by General Keightley". According to an estimate produced at the Headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief, the existing cover for different target categories was as follows:

1. Oil, telephone exchanges, Radio Cairo, bridges – adequate
2. Army deployment, airfields, radar stations – inadequate

approached the Minister of Defence with a memorandum that endorsed Keightley's proposal.⁵⁷⁹

The requests to begin photographic flights finally bore fruit and the first flight was made on 20 October along with a signals intelligence plane that monitored Egyptian reactions. It appears that the Egyptian air defence system did not detect the flight, even though it covered most of the airfields.⁵⁸⁰ Further reconnaissance was authorised six days later.⁵⁸¹ It is possible that one of the reasons for Eden's negative attitude to the continuous appeals was that the military was not able to provide him with accurate information about the possibilities of detection. The Minister of Defence's statement at the Egypt Committee's meeting in mid-August: "there was a strong likelihood of the aircraft being identified" strongly conflicted with Keightley's "negligible".⁵⁸² One can understand Keightley's consternation in this matter, as his whole concept was based on accurate bombing of correctly located targets.

The photographic effort was assisted by electronic intelligence. In the second week of August, the Royal Air Force dispatched a Washington⁵⁸³ aircraft to Nicosia. This aircraft belonged to 192 Squadron, which was part of No. 90 Group. This group in turn was a pooled intelligence effort by the Government Communications Headquarters and the Royal Air Force. The task of the aircraft was presumably to gather communications intelligence during so-called "Ferret-flights". Apparently, the aircraft made at least 11 flights before hostilities commenced. The intelligence gathered on these flights, as well as all the details of the signals intelligence acquired by the Government

3. Blockships – non-existent, see NA 20/10216, SD 12, CR/1126/SD12, 4 October 1956, "Note on Photo Reconnaissance".

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ NA AIR 8/1939, HQ MEAF to Air Ministry, 22 October 1956. It appears that these first flights were flown in extreme secrecy as the report of the Air Operation Centre does not include them, NA AIR 20/10199, Air Operations Centre Episkopi, 16 November 1956, "Report on Photographic Reconnaissance During Operation Musketeer".

⁵⁸¹ NA AIR 8/1939, Air Ministry to HQ MEAF, 26 October 1956.

⁵⁸² NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 18th Meeting, 20 August 1956 and DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 383, 17 October 1956, "Musketeer – P.R, a note by General Keightley.

⁵⁸³ In 1950 the United States lent about 88 B-29 bombers to the Royal Air Force. In Britain, these aircraft was rechristened the Washington. Apart from 6 planes operating in 90 Group, the aircraft had been had been returned to the United States by the time of the Suez Crisis.

Communications Headquarters during the Suez Crisis, still remain secret however.⁵⁸⁴

7.4 The air offensive is slowly watered down

The service plans, including the air plan, remained very much the same as in "Musketeer Revise". The basic order of the phases was the same: the neutralisation of the Egyptian Air Force, the air campaign against the Egyptian will and finally the support for the ground operations. The unpredictable weather, which would slow the convoys from Malta by at least one day and postpone the landings, consequently altered the timetable slightly. According to Musketeer Revise, the assault was to take place at D+9 days but in the "Winter Plan" this was any time between D+10–D+14.⁵⁸⁵

The postponement did not significantly alter the aerial order of battle. The air plan only anticipated reduced forces because one of the British aircraft carriers would not be available during the long winter months. The loss of a carrier diminished the number of participating aircraft from 541 to 514 as shown in the table below.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁴ NA AIR 20/10046, HQ MEAF Main to AHQ Levant, 8 August 1956 and HQ MEAF to Flight Lieutenant Thomas (Washington Detachment), 29 October 1956. On the co-operation between the Royal Air Force and GCHQ, see Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, p. 252.

⁵⁸⁵ NA AIR 20/9554, Headquarters Air Task Force, October 1956, "Overall Winter Air Plan for Operation Musketeer".

⁵⁸⁶ NA AIR 20/9554, Headquarters Air Task Force, October 1956, "Overall Winter Air Plan for Operation Musketeer and AIR 20/9554, Headquarters, Air Task Force, September 1956, "Operation "Musketeer Overall Air Plan".

FORCE	TYPE	BASE	REVISE	WINTER
BOMBER	Valiant (UK)	Malta	24	24
	Canberra B.2 (UK)	Cyprus	42	40
	Canberra B.6 (UK)	Malta	32	32
	Canberra Markers)(UK)	Cyprus	20	20
RECON.	Canberra P.R.7 (UK)	Cyprus	7	7
	Meteor F.R.9 (UK)	Malta	16	16
	R.F. 84.F (Fr)	Cyprus	9	9
GROUND ATTACK	Venom 4 (UK)	Cyprus	48	48
	F. 84 F (Fr)	Cyprus	36	36
	Wyvern (UK)	Carriers	9	9
	Corsair (Fr)	Carriers	32	32
	Sea Venom (UK)	Carriers	25	17
	Sea Hawk (UK)	Carriers	73	50
MARITIME	Shackleton (UK)	Malta	16	16
	Avenger (Fr)	Carriers	12	12
	Skyraider (UK)	Carriers	8	8
TRANSPORT	Hastings (UK)	Cyprus	12	12
	Valetta (UK)	Cyprus	20	20
	Noratlas (Fr)	Cyprus	40	40
	Helicopters (UK)	Carriers	23	18
	Pembroke (voice)(UK)	Cyprus	1	1
	Avenger (Fr)	Carriers	-	2
AIR DEFENCE	Hunter 5 (UK)	Cyprus	25	25
	Meteor NF. 13 (UK)	Cyprus	8	8
	Hunter 4 (UK)	Malta	4	4

Table 2: The composition and disposition of the Allied aircraft according to "Musketeer Revise" and "Musketeer Winter" Overall Air Plans.

The selective bombardment of targets affecting the Egyptian will to fight remained the core of the aerial concept from the beginning of its introduction.⁵⁸⁷ The early estimate provided by the Air Ministry indicated that the disruption of Egyptian oil supplies was feasible. The Joint Intelligence Bureau confirmed the results of this hastily produced estimate at the beginning of September. When the bulk storage capacity was destroyed in Suez, Cairo, Port Said and Alexandria, this would leave Egypt with oil supplies sufficient for only about 1–5 weeks. As most of the oil consumed was distributed by the Cairo–Suez pipeline or by rail, concentrated attacks on pumping stations and transport targets would make the situation even worse. When distribution was paralysed, it would not be necessary to destroy the refineries at all. Consequently, unnecessary long-term damage could be avoided.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁷ NA DEFE 7/138, General Keightley's message CIC/59335 on 19 August 1956 to the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and Operation Musketeer, note by General Sir Charles Keightley.

⁵⁸⁸ NA WO 288/162, Joint Intelligence Bureau, 8 September 1956, "Vulnerability of Egyptian Oil". For a more detailed analysis of the Egyptian oil storage system, see Joint Intelligence Bureau, 22 August 1956, Egypt: A Short Economic Survey.

Another target category was the Egyptian transportation system. The foundations for the planning were good because the British knew the capacity of the Egyptian transportation system well. It was based on an extensive use of railways. According to a Joint Intelligence Bureau estimate, concentrated aerial attacks on the Egyptian railway system, and on railway bridges in particular, would destroy the Egyptian long-haul traffic capacity.⁵⁸⁹ It is also worth noting that oil was an inseparable part of the railway system since all the usable locomotives were oil-burning.⁵⁹⁰ Due to this estimate, the transportation system held an important place in the early planning of the targets. The Chiefs of Staff memorandum in the middle of September called for the bombing of about twenty bridges, although the bridges crossing the Nile were to be spared.⁵⁹¹

As a result of further evaluation within General Keightley's Headquarters, the number of bridges that were to be demolished went down to eight. In conjunction with the destruction of the bridges, the Royal Air Force was to initiate tactical interdiction of the battle area. The aim of the interdiction programme was to prevent the Egyptians from moving their reserves, and their armour above all, to the battle zone by rail. The destruction of the selected bridges, combined with the ruthless employment of ground attack planes, would stop enemy movement to the Port Said–Ismailia region from east and west. Enemy trains approaching the sites of demolished bridges would be subjected to strafing by ground attack planes. Road interdiction would be carried out by conducting armed reconnaissance along the principal routes capable of carrying tank transporters. The interdiction programme would start immediately after the strategic targets were annihilated: some six-seven days after D-day. This would leave four-five days for the interdiction before the main effort of the Air Task Force would be directed against the defences of Port Said.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁹ NA WO 288/162, Joint Intelligence Bureau, 8 September 1956, "The Vulnerability of Egypt's Transportation System". It is worth noting that there was only one permanent road bridge across the Suez Canal – the swing bridge at El Firdan, about 10 kilometres north of Ismailia, see NA WO 208/4890, The War Office, The General Staff, "Military Intelligence Review", February 1956, pp. 40–42.

⁵⁹⁰ NA AIR 20/10217, CR/9518/SD 12, Enclosure 4, 11 October 1956.

⁵⁹¹ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 360, 18 September 1956, "Alternative to Musketeer".

⁵⁹² NA AIR 20/9583, War Office, SD 12, 24 September 1956, "Operation Musketeer: Outline of Air Plan" and NA AIR 20/10217, CR/9518/SD 12, Enclosure 14, (not dated; early October 1956).

By the beginning of October, the number of transportation targets had fallen to two.⁵⁹³ In the end, the idea of subjecting the transportation system to co-ordinated bombing was never executed, not even in the plans, as the Air Task Force's tactical plans listed only two bridges.⁵⁹⁴ Apparently, the long-term damage was considered to be too extensive.

There were also practical reasons for removing the bridges from the target lists. Since there were no sophisticated guided weapons, bridges were very difficult targets to destroy as experience had shown. According to an estimate produced in the middle of October, the destruction of 11 bridges would require about 500 sorties by Canberra bombers carrying 3-ton bomb loads. This estimate was based on an assumption of a bombing error of about 100 yards. If the bombing error rose to 200 yards due to factors such as weather, technical malfunction or flak, the number of planes required could be multiplied by four. Approximately 2 000 sorties by a bomber force of about 70–80 light bombers was hardly an economical use of force. This fact was realised by the air force planners.⁵⁹⁵

Once the transport infrastructure was removed from the target lists, the relative value of eliminating Egyptian oil storage and distribution facilities grew significantly. As one may recall, the Chief of Air Staff had earlier boasted that the available air power would be able to reduce Egyptian oil stores by 83% in a single day.⁵⁹⁶ Unlike the transportation system, the demand to disrupt the Egyptian oil system took shape in the tactical plans.

Both the "Revise" and "Winter" air plans included over sixty oil targets.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹³ War Office (SD 12), CR/1117/SD 12, 2 October, "Operation Musketeer".

⁵⁹⁴ NA, AIR 20/10219, Headquarters, Air Task Force, "Operation "Musketeer" Overall Air Plan" ATF/TS.165/56, September 1956.

⁵⁹⁵ NA AIR 20/10217, An appreciation by the Ops (Bomber) 3, 11 October 1956. Experience was to show the soundness of this estimate. The bombing accuracy during the aerial phase of the Suez campaign was at its best between 100–200 yards. Usually, even during day missions, it was between 300–400 yards, for the post-operation analysis on the effects of bombing, see NA AIR 14/4441, Bomber Command, Operational Research Branch, Report number 355: "Bombing and Ground Attack Operations During Operation Musketeer".

⁵⁹⁶ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 91st Meeting, 11 September 1956.

⁵⁹⁷ NA AIR 20/9554, Headquarters Air Task Force, October 1956, "Overall Winter Air Plan for Operation Musketeer, Annex H" and AIR 20/9554, Headquarters, Air Task Force, September 1956, "Operation "Musketeer Overall Air Plan, Annex H".

Selecting targets was a tedious process. To co-ordinate targeting, psychological warfare, and other military operations, a special Targets Committee was established in late September. It consisted of members from all the services, the French and the Joint Intelligence Bureau. Guidance for the committee was provided by General Keightley. Using the available estimates, the committee made recommendations on which target categories were to be attacked. The table below, an annex from the last Targets Committee's meeting on 11 October, sums up the different target categories that were to be attacked during the aerial phases of the operation.⁵⁹⁸

DAY	Target Category	
D – D+1	Egyptian Airfields Radio Cairo Block ships (2) Egyptian Navy	
D+2	Egyptian Airfields Army Concentrations (3) Radio Cairo (3) Oil targets (17) Transport targets (2)	If required
D+3	Egyptian Airfields Military targets (4) Oil targets (26) Coastal defences	If required

Table 3: Target categories

The importance of Radio Cairo, the voice of the Arabs, had been recognised long before the Suez Crisis. The British considered it to be the principal source of anti-British propaganda. In spite of Nasser's promise to the British Ambassador in early 1956, the radio had continued to promote anti-British notions in the Arab world.⁵⁹⁹ The Joint Intelligence Committee and the Chiefs of Staff had considered the matter during the spring but no actual countermeasures had been taken before the nationalisation. Still, there was a consensus at all planning levels on the necessity of the elimination of Radio Cairo's transmitting stations as soon as the nationalisation occurred. The Egypt Official Committee's draft guidance called for the destruction of "the Egyptian State Broadcasting service at the earliest possible moment".⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁸ NA AIR 20/10215, Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the Targets Committee, 11 October 1956.

⁵⁹⁹ Robert Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden*, pp. 457–458 and Hugh Thomas, *The Suez Affair*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), p. 30.

⁶⁰⁰ NA CAB 134/1225, EOC (56) 53, 25 September 1956.

The rapid neutralisation of Radio Cairo would provide the Allies with three advantages. The Egyptian regime would not be able to inform or encourage its illiterate subjects satisfactorily after the transmitting towers were levelled. Neither could Nasser air his anti-Allied propaganda. The absence of Radio Cairo would offer the Allies an opportunity to disseminate their own propaganda and disinformation. As a result, the radio station was a high priority on the target lists. The largest transmitting station was to be turned into rubble immediately after the first phase, only to be followed by the three short range transmitters after the Egyptian Air Force was neutralised.⁶⁰¹

As the aim of the bombing of the military targets was not only to destroy the Egyptian fighting capability, but also "to discredit and show the impotence of the Egyptian Army in the eyes of civilian population", the first military targets were near populated areas. Large static targets, such as Huckstep Camp, where a large amount of materiel was stored, and Abbassia Barracks, which was the home of the General Headquarters, would be first priority targets. In the later stages, attacks were to be conducted on any army position that could get involved in the landing at Port Said.⁶⁰²

While the overall air plan was subjected to several changes, the assault plans remained practically unaltered. The introduction of the Outline Naval Winter Plan simplifies the essence of the winter concept: "The Plan is basically the same as MUSKETEER (REVISED) except that PLAN "A" (in Phase III) is no longer operative."⁶⁰³

The assault plan was a variation of Plan B in Revise. The first wave of 45 Commando, tasked to secure the bridges over the Interior Basin, would land by helicopter at H-10 minutes. At H-hour, two commandoes of 3 Commando Brigade would land on two parallel landing beaches to the north of Port Said

⁶⁰¹ NA AIR 20/9554, Headquarters Air Task Force, October 1956, "Overall Winter Air Plan for Operation Musketeer, Annex H" and AIR 20/9583, the War Office, SD 12, 24 September 1956, "Operation Musketeer: Outline of Air Plan".

⁶⁰² NA WO 288/98, General Staff Intelligence, HQ 2 Corps, 14 October 1956, "Target Selection".

⁶⁰³ NA ADM 116/6100, Office of the Naval Force Commander, 12 October 1956, "Operation Musketeer, Naval Winter Plan (OMWIP). It appears that the Naval Task Force did not have time to produce a specific operations order before the plans were changed."

– just a few hundred meters from the centre. After the two waves of infantry in the assault craft and amphibians had secured the beach, a squadron of waterproofed Centurions would come ashore.⁶⁰⁴

The British parachute assault, which still aimed to capture the airport and seize the centre from the east, was to take place at H+30 minutes. 3 Parachute Battalion, which was to carry out the mission, would go in two lifts due to the lack of transport aircraft.⁶⁰⁵

When the jetties of Port Said were captured and the communications in all directions were secured, the rest of the 6 Royal Tank Regiment and the anti-tank elements would land in the harbour. The tank regiment and the main body of 16 Airborne Brigade, which would arrive in the immediate seaborne follow-up force, would then first relieve 45 Commando from holding the bridges. The force would then proceed at its best possible speed to El Qantara. As in Revise, the ground operation order offers only a vague picture of further operations. After the tedious unloading, the British forces, 3 Infantry Division and 10 Armoured Division, were to pass Ismailia, capture the airport at Abu Sueir and take the dominating ground at Tel El Kebir. Simultaneously, the French 10 Mechanised Division would advance along the Canal to Ismailia.⁶⁰⁶

An airborne operation aimed at the end of the causeway, at El Qantara, was also at least discussed at the Headquarters of 2 Corps. The Chief of Staff of the 2 Corps, Brigadier Darling, explained his views on the necessity of employing airborne forces at El Qantara at the earliest possible stage in a private letter to Brigadier Butler, the Commander of the British parachute force. Apparently, this option had been suggested to the Commander-in-Chief earlier, but was rejected because Keightley anticipated problems with a rapid link-up with friendly forces. Still, Darling urged Butler to conduct further studies on the option privately.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ NA WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Task Force, 11 October 1956, "Allied Land Force Operation Order No 3".

⁶⁰⁶ NA WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Task Force, 11 October 1956, "Allied Land Force Operation Order No 3".

⁶⁰⁷ NA WO 288/1, Brigadier Darling to Brigadier Butler, 16 October 1956.

7.5 Psychological warfare falters

"The shooting side of this business is only 25% of the trouble and the other 75% lies in getting the people of this country behind us"⁶⁰⁸

It has been suggested that psychological warfare was the other key component in the British concept of breaking the Egyptian will to fight. But was it really? Was psychological warfare so advanced that it could have broken Egyptian morale? The evidence points in a different direction.

7.5.1 The poor status of British preparations

Psychological warfare was by no means new to the British. On the contrary, as Lieutenant General Glubb Pasha the dismissed commander of the Arab Legion sourly noted soon after his return to Britain: "We (British) are being elbowed out of all Asia and Africa by what was called in the late war 'Political Warfare', which Britain had employed successfully during the Second World War."⁶⁰⁹ Psychological warfare had even been used in various theatres since the world war. One example of this was Malaya. However, the systematic development of this particular form of warfare had decayed since its heyday.⁶¹⁰

The British psychological warfare machinery was in disarray or was rather re-organising itself after a decade of deafening silence. The organisation that conducted psychological warfare in the Second World War, the Political Warfare Executive, did not exist any longer. However, the British did have a plan to re-establish a version of the Psychological Warfare Executive under the Foreign Secretary.⁶¹¹ The division of tasks between peace and war were in theory clear. The Foreign Office was responsible for psychological warfare, or rather the propaganda part of it, in peace and in a Cold War. During a war,

⁶⁰⁸ According to the biographer of General Templer, this was Templer's comment on the communist directive promoting the use of propaganda after he had arrived in Malaya in 1952, see John Cloake, Templer, p. 262.

⁶⁰⁹ NA 216/926, Lieutenant General John Glubb to General Gerald Templer, 27 March 1956.

⁶¹⁰ For a short description on psychological warfare, and the methods in the Malayan Emergency, see NA AIR 40/2770, Air Ministry, *Secret Intelligence Summary*, March–April 1956, pp. 10–14.

⁶¹¹ NA FO 1110/981, A memorandum "Psychological Warfare" by Mr J.O. Rennie, 1 February 1957.

psychological warfare would become the responsibility of the military under the guidance of the Foreign Office.⁶¹²

Within the Foreign Office, psychological warfare was handled by the Information Research Department (IRD). According to the Foreign Office List, this department was responsible for "compilation of information reports for Her Majesty's Mission abroad".⁶¹³ That was true, but in practice this semi-secret establishment was founded in 1948 to produce and co-ordinate anti-communist propaganda.⁶¹⁴ Even the IRD had been vigorously involved in the Middle East ever since its foundation. It was primarily a vehicle designed to meet the demands of the day-to-day needs of Cold War operations and its organisations, as General Templer put it, lacked "adequate military representation".⁶¹⁵ In other words, the department was not an appropriate body to combine psychological and military operations.

The preparations of the military itself were even worse. In spite of all the imperial policing operations and an awareness of the vigour of communist propaganda, the military had not been able to conduct psychological warfare operations. The problem had been realised in the Interdepartmental Working Party on Psychological Warfare, which had been working on psychological warfare since the early 1950s. However, the practical results were few. For example, the British lacked a specially trained psychological warfare unit. Three days before Nasser nationalised the Canal, Captain Wilmott, a staff officer in the Directorate of Forward Plans, circulated a large memorandum that revealed the status of psychological warfare preparations.

The memorandum noted post-war experiences in the field of psychological warfare. In spite of a few gains, such as Malaya, British psychological warfare policy had been reactive rather than preventive since the war. It had

⁶¹² NA DEFE 28/11, Forward Planning Staff document no. 35/21/7/1957.

⁶¹³ *Foreign Office List and the Diplomatic and Consular Yearbook* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1956), p. 48.

⁶¹⁴ Stephen Dorrell MI6, *Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service*, (New York: Touchstone, 2000), pp. 71–77.

⁶¹⁵ NA DEFE 28/183, COS (58) 1st Meeting, 2 January 1958, annex 1, "Psychological Warfare in War"; and WO 216/907, 2 August 1956, "Psychological Warfare, a note by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff". For an analysis of the activities of the IRD in the Middle East, see James Vaughan, "Cloak Without Dagger: How Information Research Department Fought Britain's Cold War in the Middle East, 1948–56" in *Cold War History* No. 3 (April 2004), pp. 56–84.

taken two years to set up an *ad hoc* psychological warfare unit in Malaya. According to the memorandum, this late response deprived the British of their best opportunity to influence their opponents.⁶¹⁶

Part of the problem lay in the lack of a central organisation for psychological warfare. Psychological warfare was linked to intelligence. High-value intelligence was handled by the Joint Intelligence Committee or by the regional Joint Intelligence Committees at the theatre level. However, these committees were primarily designed to evaluate military matters and military intelligence. They lacked the competence to handle matters related to psychological warfare. Even if the intelligence machinery had also been able to study psychological warfare, Britain still lacked a strong organisational structure, like the former Political Warfare Executive, to co-ordinate and conduct psychological warfare campaigns.⁶¹⁷

From a military point of view, the most critical problem was the lack of a professional psychological warfare unit that would have the means for overt psychological warfare, such as loudspeaker operations and leaflet dissemination on the battlefield.⁶¹⁸ Overt psychological operations were mainly conducted by RAF aircraft equipped for leaflet dropping and loudspeaker operations. Even these resources were meagre. The few light loudspeaker aircraft available were employed in active counter-insurgency operations in Kenya and Cyprus. The heavier equipment, the Dakota aircraft, were all in Malaya, and some of them were in poor condition.⁶¹⁹

7.5.2 Strategic guidance fails

The organisational problem was fully recognised by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. As a former High Commissioner in Malaya, he had recent experience in employing psychological methods in counter-insurgency warfare. As a result, his call for the rapid establishment of "a high-level official

⁶¹⁶ NA, FO 1110/875, PSW (56) Note 4 A, 26 June 1956.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid. and NA DEFE 28/182, Captain N.C. Willnott to the Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 26 January 1956.

⁶¹⁸ NA, FO 1110/875, PSW (56) Note 4 A, 26 June 1956.

⁶¹⁹ NA 20/10128, HQ FEAFC to Air Ministry, 1 September 1956 and Air Commodore K.J. McIntyre to Chief Air Marshall R Ivelaw-Chapman (Vice-Chief of the Air Staff), 24 August 1956.

committee to co-ordinate psychological warfare effort in all its aspects in respect of the proposed operations" is not surprising.⁶²⁰

Templer's worries about psychological warfare gained support at least in the Air Ministry. According to the testimony of Frank Cooper, a member of the Air Staff Secretariat in the Air Ministry, the Royal Air Force was a staunch supporter of psychological warfare because it promoted the role of the air force. Another reason for supporting psychological operations also became apparent in the course of planning the aerial campaign. According to Cooper, the Air Staff did not see how they could carry on bombing for a week. In that sense, the idea of using psychological operations turned into wishful thinking, and was not based in reality.⁶²¹

The Chiefs of Staff and the Egypt Committee accepted General Templer's proposal and the Foreign Office was asked to establish an advisory committee, which was to provide guidance at the strategic level.⁶²²

By the middle of August, the Foreign Office had set up the advisory committee. It was to include an impressive array of media and intelligence establishment personnel supplemented by the knowledge of unofficial members with experience from the Second World War. Douglas Dodds-Parker, who was an Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, an ex-member of the wartime Special Operations Executive (SOE), and the former chairman of the Psychological Warfare Consultations Committee that operated in 1953–1954, chaired the committee. Members from the intelligence community included Patrick Dean, Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, and Dick White, director of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). The media was represented by Carleton Greene from the BBC. He was a former head of the wartime German Service with plenty of

⁶²⁰ NA WO 216/907, "Psychological Warfare" a note by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 2 August 1956.

⁶²¹ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LCMA), Suez Oral History Project, SUEZOHP 4, an interview of Rt Hon Sir Frank Cooper.

⁶²² NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 9th Meeting, 2 August 1956 and DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 77th Meeting, 2 August 1956. My division between strategic and tactical levels in psychological warfare may be slightly anachronistic and artificial. However, two years later, such definitions were presented in a Foreign Office document dealing with the holistic nature of psychological warfare, see NA DEFE 28/183, "Problems and Principles of Psychological Warfare in Limited War", a note by the Foreign Office, 25 August 1958.

experience in propaganda. Two unofficial members, Donald McLachlan and Charles Hambro, provided additional experience. McLachlan, deputy editor of the Daily Telegraph at the time of the crisis, had conducted propaganda operations against the German Navy in the previous war. Charles Hambro had been head of the SOE. Mr Drew from the Directorate of Forward Plans, Ministry of Defence, provided the necessary link to the military machinery, as did Mr Cockram and Mr. Evans to the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Colonial Office respectively. Michael Oakeshott continued the British tradition of attaching scholars and scientists to their intelligence effort. He held a chair in political science at the London School of Economics.⁶²³

The Advisory Committee was made responsible for formulating a policy for psychological warfare and co-ordinating the effort at the strategic level. The execution of the psychological warfare would be the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer, Mr Rennie, head of the Information Research Department. His staff were to be known as the Information Co-ordination Executive (I.C.E.), which was to be part of the peacetime Information Research Department for reasons of secrecy. The link to the military was to be provided by the members of the Directorate of Forward Plans attached to the I.C.E.⁶²⁴

The practical preparations proceeded on two lines. The Advisory Committee met once a week and formulated a policy and psychological approach at the strategic level. Simultaneously, the military establishment carried out its preparations to co-ordinate psychological warfare and military operations at the tactical level. The necessary co-ordination was carried out in the Information Co-ordination Executive. In practise, the situation was not this straightforward, as will be seen.

The ideas of the Advisory Committee were put into a memorandum entitled "Propaganda and Political Warfare in the Middle East." The committee made some sharp comments. The psychological operations as a whole would have to be conducted with tied hands. Constraints on the media, so typical of

⁶²³ NA FO 1110/880, Record of the Meeting of Mr. Dodds-Parker's Advisory Committee at 10:30 a.m., 24 August 1956.

⁶²⁴ NA CAB 134/1217, EC (56) 17, 13 August 1956, "Political Warfare".

earlier world wars, could not be applied. This matter was sourly noted earlier by Prime Minister Eden, who complained about BBC information policy in a letter to Winston Churchill.⁶²⁵ As a result, the political statements would have to be similar to the planned propaganda. The committee came to the conclusion that the long-term aim was to weaken the position of Nasser and to strengthen British standing in the Arab world. The short-term objective was to improve British prospects in the negotiations and to present the possible results in the best possible light, painting them as a defeat for Nasser. However, if a negotiated settlement was not possible, an all-out effort was to be made on the long-term aims.⁶²⁶

The Advisory Committee drafted a note that can be interpreted as a subtle slap at the policymakers. Due to the experience it represented, the committee was fully aware of the fact that political warfare should be planned systematically and be solidly connected with policy in order to provide the propaganda machinery and its products the longest possible lead-time. After all, British propaganda had been very centralised and well-planned in the Second World War.

What were the themes of British propaganda at the strategic level? According to the committee, the Allies should take full advantage of Nasser's radicalism. In spite of Nasser's popularity among the masses, not all Arab leaders were keen on changes that could jeopardise their own positions. British propaganda was to try to push a wedge between the Arabs by promoting the suspicions of the traditional rulers of the neighbouring Arab countries. Nasser was to be presented as being greedy for power, and at the same time as a collaborator of the Soviet Union. Nasser was also to be blamed for all the economic troubles Egypt had suffered. Due to Nasser's popularity, these themes could not be directly communicated in Western propaganda because this would only boost Nasser's popularity and turn public opinion against the original aim. Only covert dissemination that was attributable to Arab sources

⁶²⁵ Churchill Archives Centre, Papers of Winston Churchill, CHUR 2/216, Anthony Eden to Winston Churchill, 17 August 1956.

⁶²⁶ NA FO 1110/880, EC (56) 62, 24 October 1956, "Propaganda and Political Warfare in the Middle East".

would have a desirable effect. This was an approach followed by the IRD in its propaganda in the Middle East.⁶²⁷

We shall never know whether the recommendations of the Advisory Committee would had worked. The committee delivered its memorandum too late, on 24 October. This was the same day that the political decision to use force in the form of the Sèvres Agreement was made. As a result, the memorandum was never presented to the Egypt Committee and its recommendations were not carried out.

The utter failure in planning psychological warfare at the strategic level demands further explanation. The issue is connected to the grey zone of intelligence discussed earlier in chapters six. Although there is no full account of the discussions as the minutes of the Advisory Committee have not been located, the real reason seems to be in the structure of the intelligence systems. Douglas Dodds-Parker, chairman of the committee, claims that "it was not surprising that the committee didn't produce anything because we (the committee, *author*) had nothing to go on". According to Dodds-Parker, the Permanent-Under-Secretary's Department intentionally cut his committee off from all the information necessary for producing serious recommendations for psychological warfare.⁶²⁸

The reason for the intentional information blockage is more complicated. Mr Dodds-Parker's evidence points in two directions. It was a question of rivalry and, above all, secrecy. The Permanent-Under-Secretary's Department was bthe organisation that was most reluctant to share secret information with other services. Patrick Dean, who wore a double hat as Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, had earlier refused to handle political intelligence at the Joint Intelligence Committee. This, and the logic of Mr. Dodds-Parker's testimony, suggests that these matters were obviously handled in the Permanent-Under-Secretary's Department. Or perhaps in even smaller circles.

⁶²⁷ NA FO 1110/880, EC (56) 62, 24 October 1956, "Propaganda and Political Warfare in the Middle East." and James Vaughan, "Cloak Without Dagger", pp. 60–61.

⁶²⁸ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LCMA), Suez Oral History Project, SUEZOH P 6, interview of Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker.

Dodds-Parker's reasoning provides a picture of a suspicious organisation that wanted to compartmentalise information to extremes. This picture might very well be the right one. For example, Sir Edward Brooks, the retiring Cabinet Secretary, was kept totally in the dark.⁶²⁹ In addition, when an extensive report on service intelligence requirements was produced a few years later, the co-operation between the Permanent-Under-Secretary's Department, MI6 and the services was discreetly criticised.⁶³⁰ It is possible that the ultimate promoter of this ultra-secrecy was the Prime Minister himself. After all, the collusion with the French and the Israelis was very much an affair that the Prime Minister kept to himself and his few trusted men – Patrick Dean among them.

7.5.3 The content of psychological operations

While Dodds-Parker's committee worked on holistic guidance for psychological warfare, the military prepared for actual psychological operations. The initial planning was based on a statement by the Chiefs of Staff, who had directed in early August that the psychological warfare plans should include three phases:

1. An aggressive attack on Egyptian morale, combined with some action to restrain the other Arab states.
2. When military operations commenced, an all out effort on the other Arab states aimed at undermining the Egyptian position, and "some action to disrupt any resistance in Egypt."
3. Rehabilitation.⁶³¹

The Interdepartmental Working Party on Psychological Warfare turned the goals set by the COS-Committee into viable recommendations. According to the working party, the purpose of the psychological warfare conducted in conjunction with military operations was to soften up the morale of the Egyptian Armed Forces. It also aimed to encourage friendly elements in

⁶²⁹ Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall* (New York: Free Press, 1989), p. 145.

⁶³⁰ NA DEFE 23/23, "Review of Service Intelligence by Field Marshall Gerald Templer", 16 December 1960.

⁶³¹ NA ADM 116/6137, PSW (56) 4, 16 August 1956, "Psychological Warfare Arrangements for Operation 'Musketeer'".

Egypt and to suppress any elements that were bound to offer resistance after the Canal Zone was occupied. In order to spare British forces problems with disturbances in other Arab countries and in the British colonies, the psychological operations were also to persuade the rest of the world of the British case.⁶³²

Setting up the organisation for the Commander-in-Chief proved to be more difficult than anticipated. The working party had suggested that General Keightley should be assisted by a psychological warfare officer and a special staff. The question of who was to assume this post became complicated. Donald McLachlan, Sefton Delmer, an ex-PWE master of black propaganda, and Hugh Trevor-Roper, a former MI6 officer and a distinguished historian, were not acceptable to the Foreign Office for unspecified reasons. After considerable delay, Brigadier Bernard Fergusson was proposed in the middle of September. According to the Director of Forward Plans, Fergusson had "no experience of this kind of activity but he is otherwise admirably suited for the job". The last part of this comment probably referred to his extensive experience in special operations.⁶³³ Of course the nomination was spectacularly ill-timed. It was made only a few days before the service plans for Musketeer Revise were finalised. This suggests that the principle of closely co-ordinating the planning of a psychological campaign and military operations was not honoured.

One of the first tasks of the newly appointed Brigadier Fergusson was to establish a Psychological Warfare Committee that would operate under the command of General Keightley. It consisted of members from I.C.E., the task forces, the French intelligence services and the French task force. The committee was given responsibility for the development of a psychological warfare campaign, the selection of materiel and the method of delivery. As the psychological warfare was to be carried out in combination with the aerial

⁶³² NA ADM 116/6137, PSW (56) 4, 16 August 1956, "Psychological Warfare Arrangements for Operation 'Musketeer'".

⁶³³ NA DEFE 13-238, Director of Forward Plans to the Minister of Defence, 17 September 1956. For the war-time activities of Sefton Delmer see, e.g., David Garnett, *The Secret History of PWE. The Political Warfare Executive 1939–1945* (London: St Ermin's Press, 2002), pp. 41–47.

offensive, the committee was to have close links to the newly established Target Committee.⁶³⁴

Because of the sensitive nature of psychological warfare, Brigadier Fergusson established a special staff for psychological operations. It was not an integral part of either General Keightley's Headquarters or of any of the Task Force Headquarters. In addition, the permanent staff remained relatively small. It included three experts from the Foreign Office, presumably from the I.C.E., a former official from the Egyptian police establishment, a Suez Canal pilot, two French officers and an officer with three years of experience in psychological warfare in Malaya.⁶³⁵

It had already been decided that leaflet dropping and broadcasting, which required two specialised aircraft, were to be the main methods used in the psychological campaign.⁶³⁶ The planning of the products to be used in psychological operations was centralised. The Information Co-ordination Executive designed the leaflets and the recorded broadcasts because the tactical or the theatre level did not have the skilled personnel required to produce them. One of the most obvious obstacles was the lack of fluent Arabic speakers. None could be spared for the task forces. Every single one of them was needed to man the Near Eastern Arab broadcasting station that was to replace Radio Cairo after its was taken off the air.⁶³⁷ For reasons that are unclear, none of the attendees of the first Psychological Warfare Staff training course at the beginning of September participated in Musketeer. Thus, the work of the Joint Concealment Centre, the establishment responsible for teaching psychological warfare, went down the drain.⁶³⁸

In late August, the Information Co-ordination Executive suggested that the psychological operations conducted before D-day should emphasise the strength of the Allied force and the fact that the Allied presence in Egypt

⁶³⁴ NA AIR 20-9570, The War Office (SD 12), 21 September 1956, "Formation of Target and Psychological Warfare Committee".

⁶³⁵ Papers of General Sir Charles Keightley, Brigadier Fergusson's memorandum "Psychological Warfare Campaign", 15 October 1956.

⁶³⁶ NA ADM 116/6137, PSW (56) 4, 16 August 1956, "Psychological Warfare Arrangements for Operation 'Musketeer'".

⁶³⁷ NA WO 288/38, A note by the Information Co-operation Executive, 20 August 1956 and Colonel Gillman to the Chief of Staff [2 (Br) Corps]], 1 September 1956.

⁶³⁸ NA FO 1110/982, The War Office letter, 43/Misc/8818, 2 April 1957.

would only be temporary. This Allied message was to be delivered by leaflet and broadcasting. During the post-landing operations, local people were to receive information from the tactical loudspeaker units attached to 2 Corps. The Information Co-ordination Executive considered broadcasting to be the most efficient way of communicating with the local people. Due to illiteracy, only about 15% of Egyptians were thought to be literate, leaflets would only have a limited effect.⁶³⁹

Apparently, the tone of the broadcasts and leaflets softened during the course of planning. The original texts of the first tape-recordings and leaflets were very aggressive and were based on intimidation. The common message for both civilians and the military was that Nasser was to be blamed for all their troubles. Leaflets and tape-recordings directed at the Egyptian military emphasised the hopelessness of resistance as their means to defend themselves had been destroyed. In addition, Nasser was to be personally attacked with claims that he had either fled, died or surrendered. The message for the civilian population was to be more moderate. They were advised not to get involved in the fighting and to keep transport routes open for the Allies, any vehicles would be attacked. The leaflet campaign was to include the distribution of about 50 different types of leaflets.⁶⁴⁰

It soon became evident that the Allies did not have the capacity to produce 50 different types of leaflets. Only about half a dozen different types of leaflets could be produced. It appears that the psychological warfare planners were not unanimous about the practical approach in psychological operations. The I.C.E. thought in terms of causing the maximum disruption, whereas the Task Force planners preferred a calmer approach. The reason for this was practical. Egyptian administration could take over the running of Egypt faster if there was relatively little internal unrest.⁶⁴¹

The latter approach was chosen. The general tone of the leaflets remained neutral and informative and was not based on heavy intimidation. The leaflet propaganda was divided into two categories. Some of them were addressed

⁶³⁹ NA WO 288/38, A note on the I.C.E. meetings on 20 August, 1956.

⁶⁴⁰ NA 288/38, Director of Forward Plans to Force Planners, 28 August 1956.

⁶⁴¹ NA WO 288/38, SD 12 (The Commander-in-Chiefs' Joint Headquarters), 4 September 1956, an assorted collection of minutes from a meeting on psychological warfare.

at the armed forces and some at civilians. A common factor in the leaflets was the aim of the British military operations: "the Allies were not against the Egyptian people, but against Nasser and his regime". The military leaflets aimed to persuade the armed forces to cease all resistance due to Allied superiority. For the civilians, the main message was to keep out of the battle zone and to obey the instructions of the Allied military authorities.⁶⁴²

This view was also pursued by Brigadier Fergusson, the Director of Psychological Warfare. He sponsored a quick psychological campaign mainly directed against the armed forces. His reasoning was based on his personal evaluation of the Egyptian morale and armed forces. Fergusson adopted the early view of the Joint Intelligence Committee: the Egyptian will to fight was bound to collapse if forced to face modern military machinery. As stated by Fergusson, the most rewarding target for the psychological warfare operations would be the Egyptian Armed Forces because he believed that Nasser derived his power from the military forces and not from the people. By sowing mistrust and friction, there would be an opportunity for an early collapse of morale within the armed forces.⁶⁴³

Another feature, classified under "special psychological operations", in Fergusson's concept was the establishment of special safe areas. These were otherwise known as "White areas". Prior to the bombing campaign, some areas were to be designated "White areas", which meant that they would not be subjected to bombing. The idea was to lure civilian refugees to specific strategic roads to cause maximum disruption to Egyptian military movements. The uncertainty and disorder could be augmented by dropping delayed action bombs on the roads.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴² NA WO 288/38, Directorate of Forward Plans to the (Task) Force planners, 29 Aug 1956 and DEFE 28/182, L.F. Sheridan to Lieutenant Commander Vanrenel, 11 December 1956. In spite of the generally mild tone, some of the broadcasts supporting tactical operations were planned to intimidate the Egyptians. According to a note by Brigadier Fergusson, there had been a broadcast on 5 November that promoted the Allied ability to conduct night operations by declaring: "You have discovered what our soldiers can do by daylight. You have not yet discovered what they can do in the dark. They can kill", see NA AIR 20/10369, Allied Forces Headquarters, CR/3508/DPW, 6 Nov 1956.

⁶⁴³ Private Papers of General Sir Charles Keightley, Brigadier Fergusson's memorandum "Psychological Warfare Campaign", 15 October 1956.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

Fergusson also emphasised co-operation between the British units in the field and the psychological warfare unit. The reason for this was mainly linked with intelligence. To attain the best possible results, the psychological warfare campaign in the field was to become "highly topical, completely up-to-date and aimed at individuals and individual units". In order to achieve this, the planners of psychological operations needed the best possible intelligence about the opponent as soon as possible.⁶⁴⁵

7.6 Conclusions

Another doubt crept into the minds of the military planners during the course of planning for Musketeer. The Joint Planning Staff was very quick to realise that the conduct of an aerial offensive was dependant on the resolution of the politicians. Not only was the operational concept dubious and unclear, but now the execution would be subject to a certain degree of uncertainty.

To counter the likely worldwide protest and anti-invasion propaganda, the preferable alternative was to land as soon as possible after military operations had commenced. The Joint Planning Staff reasoned that the best option would be simply to bring the world face-to-face with the reality of the invasion. World opinion would condemn the attack, but the protests would last in the headlines for a short time. It would be better to face the harsh reality than to escape into a world of transparent pretexts.

This reasoning was based on the prevailing estimate of Soviet conduct. British intelligence ruled out the possibility of active Soviet military involvement. Why? Apart from having a nuclear arsenal, the Soviet Union did not have the proper means to intervene militarily. The waves of the Mediterranean were ruled by NATO fleets and the Soviets would have to violate either NATO or Baghdad Pact controlled airspace to provide air support. This would cause a crisis of a totally different magnitude. The Soviet Union would very unlikely to rock the delicate balance of power because it could cause a Global War. Any benefit gained from helping Egypt could not make up for the possibility of being destroyed in a Global War. Had British

⁶⁴⁵ NA AIR 20/9570, A letter by Brigadier Fergusson, CR/3500/DPW/SD12, 2 October 1956.

intelligence known of Nikita Khrushchev's willingness to take risks, as shown only a few years later during the Cuban Missile Crisis, they would have slept much worse at night.

The lack of reliable intelligence remained a problem. General Keightley and the Joint Intelligence Committee were divided on the possibility of foreign volunteers. The fact that there was very little hard evidence on the matter left room for interpretation and manipulation, which is typical of these situations. Keightley, probably recognising Eden's sensitivities and uncertainty at the time, took advantage of this and promoted the aerial concept. However, one can still doubt whether even a fairly large-scale influx of Warsaw Pact volunteers would have mattered in the face of several divisions.

Eden's refusal to authorise photographic reconnaissance hampered the planning at the tactical level throughout the crisis. It is odd that the Prime Minister, who was so determined to invade a foreign country and to overthrow its government, was so cautious about the issue. Without a doubt, it would have been annoying to get caught spying on Egypt during negotiations. However, would it really have mattered? Part of the problem lay with the Chiefs of Staff. Once again, they were not able to provide the Prime Minister with a simple, unified opinion on the risks involved in photographic reconnaissance. This lack of coherent professional advice only decreased the reliability of the Chiefs in Eden's eyes.

The photographic reconnaissance episode illustrates a political dilemma that remained unresolved. The Prime Minister was not able to decide whether to solve the problem diplomatically or through power politics. As a result, the course taken by HM's Government was a peculiar mixture of gunboat diplomacy and diplomatic action. Obviously, Eden and his government had not decided whether Britain was still a superpower capable of taking independent military action or not.

This impression of a lack of general determination is supported by several factors. Instead of making a show of force to indicate British resolution to not tolerate nationalisation of the canal, the military preparations were concealed as much as possible. Instead of taking advantage of the mass media and

manipulating it systematically, solemn secrecy was implemented. In other words, the military preparations were not used as a policy tool during the negotiations. Was this really the psychological message that the Allies wanted to send Egypt?

This same sensitivity applied to Libya. Militarily, the Task Force Commanders' suggestion of using the Libyan-based 10 Armoured Division as the first follow-up force was very reasonable. On the one hand, the British government was unwilling to take risks concerning Libya or the use of reservists. On the other hand, it was prepared to rely on a totally untested concept. The Force Commanders' proposal for using the forces already deployed in the Mediterranean, along with certain additional administrative personnel, would have given the plan more chance of success. The proposal would not have made the landings more feasible, but it would have made the later stages more credible. The acclimatised follow-up forces from Libya could have been used operationally much more quickly than the 3 Infantry Division, which was coming from the British Isles. This option gave the plan the required flexibility, at least in theory. But, the risk of a negative Arab reaction was considered to be too high politically. It would be interesting to know whether Eden really believed that bombing Egypt into submission would not have had any serious repercussions in the Arab world.

The chaotic nature of the planning and execution of the psychological operations was all too apparent. The British realised the importance of psychological warfare. They had plenty of experience in using these techniques in the Malayan Emergency. However, their preparations were totally inadequate in practise. The planning process can only be described as appalling, particularly the role of the Dodds-Parker committee. His committee included true experts on psychological operations, yet apparently their recommendations were *de facto* ignored. The lack of co-operation between the politicians, and Eden in particular, and the psychological warfare planners was also evident. The most obvious example of this was the secret collusion with Israel. Nobody could have seriously believed in the effectiveness of psychological warfare in the Arab world after it had become obvious that Britain was co-operating with Israel.

Even more peculiar is the slow watering down of the air campaign. The decision not to subject the Egyptian transportation system to systematic bombing decreased the prospects of a successful aerial campaign before a single round was fired. There would be no adequate amphibious assault, and there would be no adequate aerial campaign. Yet, there would be more political restrictions, as the future was to show.

8 REVISE RE-REVISED

*"A feature of this operation was the degree to which political considerations affected current operations."*⁶⁴⁶

The Force Commanders had barely finished their tactical planning for the winter, when General Keightley sent them an order on 25 October telling them to return to Musketeer Revise.⁶⁴⁷ The British and French had finally invented a pretext for the invasion by collaborating with Israel. But, did the collusion affect British military planning and how long had it been going on? The use of Israel had been suggested in the early stages of planning. Even if it was not an active ally, Israeli intentions could be used for deception at the strategic level. This was an art at which the British had excelled in the Second World War. Was full advantage taken of deception and diversion? The first phases of Musketeer would only have been the beginning of a long-term commitment in Egypt. Although the British Cabinet had made the decision to use force, what would be done after the invasion had taken place? Was the military prepared for the post-operational problems?

8.1 Collusion

The infamous co-operation between Great Britain, France and Israel is still a controversial question. The contents of the Protocol of Sèvres, the pretext for the Anglo-French invasion of the Suez Canal, are well known. According to the agreement, signed on 24 October 1956, Israel was to commence hostilities against Egypt on 29 October. On the following day, Britain and France would send an ultimatum demanding a cessation of all hostilities, withdrawal of the belligerents and a temporary occupation of the Suez Canal

⁶⁴⁶ NA ADM 116/6209, "Naval Report on Operation Musketeer", 15 February 1957, p. 68.

⁶⁴⁷ NA ADM 205/119, General Keightley's directive to Task Force Commanders, 25 October 1956.

by the Anglo-French forces.⁶⁴⁸ Egypt would naturally decline, which would provide Britain and France an artificial *casus belli* for the invasion.⁶⁴⁹

8.1.1 Co-operation with Israel was militarily sound

The agreement has been described as politically disastrous and immoral. Even the term “collusion” signifies something distasteful and repulsive. But was there a sound military reason for a temporary alliance with Israel? After all, Israel possessed a formidable capacity to wage war in the region. According to British intelligence, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) were far better than their adversaries. The pre-crisis estimates praised the performance of the Israeli Defence Forces. Israel, capable of mobilizing up to 150 000 men, could fight on four fronts simultaneously. The Israeli Army, considered qualitatively superior to its neighbours in all military aspects, consisted of almost twenty front-line brigades and had about 400 tanks. It could defeat any of the Arab armies that might advance on Israel. Its high standard of training was maintained in the Navy and Air Force as well. The weak link was the Air Force, not because of its poor standard of training, but due to a lack of modern equipment. Even this was slowly improving due to generous French arms deliveries.⁶⁵⁰

If Israel chose to attack, its likely military aims would be limited because of logistical problems. Those elements of the Egyptian army that were deployed in the Sinai and Gaza Strip would be the main target. According to the Joint Intelligence Committee’s estimate, the Israelis would have about eight brigades at their disposal for the initial operations against Egypt. This force would first cut off Egyptian communications to the Sinai and then destroy its beleaguered opponent. The Israel Defence Forces would muster almost the same amount of forces against Jordan, but it would not attack Jordan

⁶⁴⁸ Shlaim, Avi, *The Protocol of Sèvres, 1956: Anatomy of a War Plot in The 1956 War. Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East*, edited by David Tal, (Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), p. 140–141. For the text of the protocol, see Anthony Gorst and Lewis Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 100–101.

⁶⁴⁹ The Egypt Committee had already considered the necessity of a pretext as early as 9 August, NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 13 Meeting, 9 August 1956.

⁶⁵⁰ NA CAB 158/22, JIC 55 (68), 9 November 1955, “Likely Israeli Course of Action and Scale of Attack in War with Arab States in the Near Future” and CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 84, 14 August 1956, “Considerations Affecting Action Taken by Egypt in the Event of Armed Intervention”.

automatically. Israel would be careful not to provoke a Tripartite action. If Israel was provoked by Jordan or was confident that Britain would not fulfil its defence commitments, it might initiate military operations. In this case, the IDF would aim to drive the Arab Legion back to the East Bank of the River Jordan.⁶⁵¹

Was the war likely? The Joint Intelligence Committee had produced an estimate on the likelihood of a conflict between the Arab states and Israel just a few weeks before the canal was nationalised. Although an Israeli pre-emptive strike against a re-arming Egypt would be compelling from a military point of view, it was unlikely that the Israelis would launch it. Why? It would not serve Israel's long-term policy of finally reaching an agreement with the Arab states. The policy of reprisal raids would continue, but Israel would not start a war deliberately in 1956.⁶⁵² This assessment, like so many other Joint Intelligence Committee reports on political behaviour, was largely based on reasoning and deduction. It appears that the British were unable to keep track of Israeli or Egyptian troop movements that might indicate an imminent war. Major General John Sinclair, the Director of MI6, admitted that his agency was unable to provide adequate intelligence on the force deployments along the Israeli-Egyptian border. The other intelligence agencies were also not in a position to provide reliable materiel. The only way to verify what was going on was to seek ministerial approval to conduct a photographic reconnaissance mission over the area.⁶⁵³

Despite prolonged tension and intensified border violence along the Jordanian-Israeli-Egyptian borders in August and September, the Joint Intelligence Committee's estimate expected the Israeli Government to adopt a "wait and see" attitude. This would last for as long as the Israelis believed that Britain and France would maintain their hostile attitude towards Nasser. If the Israeli government became convinced that Nasser would escape

⁶⁵¹ NA CAB 158/22, JIC 55 (68), 9 November 1955, "Likely Israeli Course of Action and Scale of Attack in War with Arab States in the Near Future".

⁶⁵² NA CAB 158/25, JIC (56) 73, 22 June 1956, "The Likelihood of War between Israel and the Arab States".

⁶⁵³ NA CAB 159/23, JIC (56) 46th Meeting, 24 May 1956. Major General Sinclair was replaced as director of MI6 only a few weeks before Nasser took over the Canal. Dick White, the former Director-General of MI5, succeeded him. See Harry Ransom, *The Intelligence Establishment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 189–190.

unpunished, it could decide to order an offensive. The Jordanian case was more difficult. The Israeli policy of reacting violently to border incidents was to remain unaltered, but would Israel attack Jordan? The Joint Intelligence Committee reasoned "There is no evidence that the Israelis plan to seize the West Bank and are merely waiting for a suitable opportunity". Such an opportunity would take place during Allied action against Egypt. Still, the Israelis would refrain from attacking, unless it became apparent that Jordan was drifting into internal chaos or under Egyptian control.⁶⁵⁴

8.1.2 The timing of the secret co-operation

It is obvious that Israel was a tempting ally militarily, but to what extent did the alliance affect British military planning? This problem has to be investigated in the context of the timing of the collusion. This is because available assets naturally play a paramount role in sound military planning. A plan made with the assumption that the Israeli Defence Forces would be an ally should be different from a plan that did not include this possibility.⁶⁵⁵

It is evident that the intensive Franco-Israeli co-operation started at the beginning of September. Following the instructions of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, Israeli negotiators responded favourably to the French invitation to co-operate military. This was followed by several visits by various delegations. At the beginning of October, the preparations were taken to a stage where Israel and France planned to commence operations themselves, if hesitating Britain declined to use force.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁴ NA, CAB 158/26, JIC (56) 102, 28 September 1956, "Israeli Attitude Towards Arab States in the Context of the Suez Canal Crisis".

⁶⁵⁵ For the number of Israeli Forces participating in the 1956 war, see Pasi Kesseli, *In Pursuit of Mobility. The Birth and Development of Israeli Operationa Artl. From Theory to Practice*. Doctoral Dissertation published by the Department of War History, National Defence College of Finland, (Helsinki: Edita, 2001), appendix 8.

⁶⁵⁶ Moshe Dyan, *Story of My Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), p. 151. On visits and mutual planning, see Gaujac, Paul, "France and the Crisis of Suez: An Appraisal, Forty Years On" in David Tal (ed.) *The 1956 War. Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East*, (Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), pp. 140–141. On the details of the Franco-Israeli plan, see also Beaufre, Andre, *The Suez Expedition* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), pp. 69–72. Dyan's interpretation of Ben Gurion's acceptance is not shared by Motti Golani, who claims that even if Ben Gurion had authorised co-operation with France, he adopted a wait-and-see attitude about actual military co-operation with France or Britain. He approved further planning with the French only after discussions with Colonel Luis Mangin, aide of Bourgés-Manoury, the French Minister of Defence; see Motti Golani, "Chief of Staff in Quest of a War: Moshe Dyan Leads Israel into War", *The Journal Strategic Studies*, 1/2001, pp. 53–54. According to Martin Van Creveld, the French had suggested co-operation to the Chief of

The story of the British involvement is more confused. Anthony Nutting, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, was one of the earliest British participants to acknowledge the co-operation. He dates the beginning of the collusion to 14 October, when members of a secret French delegation, Mr Albert Gazier, the acting French Foreign Minister, and General Maurice Challe, the Chief of General Staff (*Chef d'état-major des armées*), informed Prime Minister Eden and himself of a new French plan with Israeli involvement.⁶⁵⁷ Jonathan Pearson, in his recent analysis, has come to the same conclusion. Although Eden did not commit to anything during the meeting with the French, his mind and soon his actions were set on a course towards using force.⁶⁵⁸ Selwyn Lloyd, the Foreign Secretary, admits in his memoirs that he was informed by Nutting on the following day, but assumes that the Prime Minister had probably received hints about the co-operation from the French Foreign Minister as early as 21 September.⁶⁵⁹

Hugh Thomas suggests that Eden was informed of the Franco-Israeli plan by Field Marshall Montgomery, the Deputy Supreme Commander of NATO, who had in turn been told about it by General Ely, the French Chief of Staff, on 20 September.⁶⁶⁰ Alistair Horne, Harold Macmillan's biographer, assumes that systematic collusion started at the beginning of October after the British were disappointed by Dulles' press statement on the proposal of the Suez Canal Users Association. Basing his information on an interview of Anthony Head, the Minister of Defence from late October 1956, he claims that the Cabinet and the inner cabinet (Egypt Committee) held several unrecorded meetings about the possible collusion. Horne also concluded that Eden did not know

the IDF General Staff Division only a few days after the nationalisation. Whether this claimed conversation resulted in any actions is not known, see Martin Van Creveld, *The Sword and the Oliver: A Critical History of the Israeli Defence Forces* (New York: Public Affairs 1998), p. 139.

⁶⁵⁷ Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson. The Story of Suez* (London: Constable & Company Ltd, 1967), pp. 91–95 and Victor Rothwell, *Anthony Eden, a political biography 1931–1957* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 224–225.

⁶⁵⁸ Jonathan Pearson, *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis. Reluctant Gamble* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 145–147.

⁶⁵⁹ Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez 1956, A Personal Account*, (London: Book Club Associates, 1978), p. 172.

⁶⁶⁰ Hugh Thomas, *The Suez Affair*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), p. 95.

about the Franco-Israeli military co-operation in September, because the Israelis did not trust the British.⁶⁶¹

Whether Eden was privately informed of the French preparations is not known. However, it is evident that the French were eager to find a proper pretext. At the beginning of October, the French Minister of Defence proposed studies on the planning "of an incident in the Canal which could lead to a genuine pretext to intervene". Since the Egyptians were successfully piloting convoys through the canal against all expectations, they could be provoked into a hostile act against a ship's crew if an accident was arranged in the lead ship of a convoy.⁶⁶² This would give the Allies an excuse to intervene. Walter Monckton, the Minister of Defence, did not think the idea would bear fruit, but he still sought the Prime Minister's authorisation to initiate planning.⁶⁶³ It remains unfortunately a mystery whether this idea was actually planned out. It would presumably have been the responsibility of the Directorate of Forward Planning or MI6.

But were there signs of military collusion before mid-October? According to Dawi Al-Solami, who devoted an entire chapter of his doctoral dissertation to the collusion, there were several indications of this. He points out that the British military recognised the possible advantages of using Israel and continuously considered how they could be benefited from. However, these considerations must be kept separate from actual collusion. Along with signs in the political arena, Al-Solami finds several other military factors that indicate collusion. He claims that the first drafts of the political directives promoted co-operation with Israeli forces. The change of the landing site from Alexandria to Port Said was supposed to be due to the inability of Israeli troops to reach Alexandria. A proposed landing in Haifa, which is discussed later in this work, is also part of Al-Solami's theory.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶¹ Alistair Horne, *Macmillan 1894–1956, Volume I of the Official Biography*, (Frome: Membray Press, 1988), p. 429. For the Israeli distrust of the British, see, e.g., Ariel Sharon, *Warrior*. With David Chanoff (London: Macdonald, 1989), p. 142.

⁶⁶² NA DEFE 13/12, Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Minister of Defence, 2 October 1956.

⁶⁶³ NA DEFE 13/12, The Minister of Defence to Prime Minister, 2 October 1956.

⁶⁶⁴ Al-Solami, Dawi Awaad, "British Preparations for the Suez War—1956" (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 1988), pp. 124–132.

The evidence about the military preparations does not support Al-Solami's claims. There is no reading "between the lines" in the Egypt Official Committee's drafts of the political directives. Apart from the last draft, signed on 3 November, all the drafts anticipate that Israel could take advantage of the situation and attack the Egyptian forces in the Sinai. As a result, the drafts emphasised that "It is politically most important that there should be no association or appearance of association between your forces and Israeli forces". To prevent the Israelis from advancing to the canal, some parts of the Sinai would be declared a combat area where any unit not under Keightley's command would be engaged.⁶⁶⁵

The change of the landing site from Alexandria to Port Said is not linked to Israel either. In both options, the Allied plan called for the destruction of the Egyptian Air Force at the first possible moment. This would have effectively eliminated the main Egyptian threat to Israeli cities, which would have been much appreciated by Ben Gurion. But, which option would have tied more Egyptian forces up with the Anglo-French invasion force and which one would have caused more permanent damage to Israel's main adversary? The answer is simple. From the Israeli point of view, the execution of the Alexandria option would have been more favourable both militarily and politically. The removal of Nasser and the total destruction of the Egyptian Army would have weakened both Egyptian political influence and its military potential. But, how did the situation seem from the Allied point of view? Did Port Said offer better opportunities than Alexandria, assuming that the Israeli Defence Forces participated in the operation? At the tactical level, Israeli involvement would not have made much of a difference. In any case, the Allied air component could have prevented large-scale Egyptian reinforcements from moving to and from the Sinai after the initiation of hostilities. Actually, the British did not take full advantage of Israel's role as a potential aggressor, not even in operations to deceive the Egyptians, due to political reasons. The Egyptians considered the Anglo-French threat to be more dangerous than Israel, and consequently pulled a division out of the Sinai.

⁶⁶⁵ NA CAB 134/1225, EOC (56) 2, 5 September 1956 "Political Directive to the Allied Commander-in-Chief".

In fact, the military campaign, particularly the timing of the movement of forces to the Middle East, points towards a commitment to the French plan soon after the meeting with Gazier, Challe and Eden took place on 14 October. As the table below indicates, the key player in the plan, the Royal Air Force, began to move its bomber squadrons to Malta and Cyprus on 18 October, a week before the Sèvres agreement was signed. It is possible that these forces were intended to be used to deter Israel from attacking Jordan, as the message from General Keightley to C-in-C Mediterranean indicates.⁶⁶⁶ However, this does not explain the movements of the French forces. Why would the French move their air element to Cyprus at the same time? They were hardly prepared to take part in military operations against Israel, since the Israelis were their secret allies.

DATE	POLITICAL ACTION	MILITARY ACTION
14 Oct	14 Oct, Challe–Gazier in Chequers. The plan is presented to Eden. ⁶⁶⁷	
18 Oct		Air Ministry orders the execution of Operation Challenger—redeployment of Bomber Command to the Middle East (10 squadrons) ⁶⁶⁸
19 Oct		The first squadrons of the Challenger Force deploy to Malta and Cyprus. Decision to extend the validity of Musketeer Revise until the beginning of November. ⁶⁶⁹ The French Naval Task Force is put on 24 hour readiness alert. ⁶⁷⁰ The French commence the loading of requisitioned merchant vessels. ⁶⁷¹
20 Oct	Eden and Lloyd in Paris. ⁶⁷²	

⁶⁶⁶ NA ADM 116/6135, Troopers to C-in-C Mediterranean, 18 October 1956.

⁶⁶⁷ Nutting, pp. 91–95.

⁶⁶⁸ AIR 20/10203 Air Ministry to Bomber Command, 2445/ACAS (ops)/TS/Oct 18 1956, "Operation Challenger".

⁶⁶⁹ SHD, 9U4, Force A, 27/FA/CAB/TS/11 Novembre 1956, "Rapport Sommaire sur L'opération Egypte" and NA WO ADM 116/6209, WO 288/77, "2 (Br) Corps Report on Operation Musketeer", 1 February 1957, p. 37.

⁶⁷⁰ SHD 9 U 4, Force Navale D'Intervention, 83/EM 3, 21 Novembre 1956, "Rapport sommaire d'opérations".

⁶⁷¹ SHD 8 S 274, Etat-Major des Forces Armées, 1618/EMFA/3. B.T.M.A/12 Avril 1957, "Les Transports de L'opération 700".

⁶⁷² Jonathan Pearson, pp. 150–151.

21 Oct	A staff meeting at Chequers; General Keightley participates. ⁶⁷³	
22 Oct		The first French naval force departs from Toulon. ⁶⁷⁴ The French fighter squadrons fly from Metropolitan France to Cyprus. ⁶⁷⁵
23 Oct		General Keightley's decision to hold Exercise Boathook 1–3 November.
24 Oct	The Protocol of Sévres is signed in Paris.	

Table 4: Political decisions and their relation to the deployment of forces

8.1.3 Israeli aggression revisited

Anti-Israel planning within the British military machinery in October also points towards Britain's intention to keep Israel out of the conflict during the early stages of the crisis. A major Israeli reprisal raid on a Jordanian police station on 11 October led to a desperate appeal from Jordan's King Hussein, who believed that war with Israel was imminent.⁶⁷⁶ The British planning machinery had no other option but to take the Israeli threat under consideration. However, both the Joint Intelligence Committee and the Joint Planning Staff had been focussed on Israel from the beginning of the crisis.

The difficult political alignment, the Tripartite Declaration and the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, proved to be a real political and military dilemma for the British. What should and could be done if Israel and the Arab states drifted into a war during Musketeer? The Joint Planning Staff's evaluation of the implications of military action and of the possible British courses of action merely clarified the British political disarray in the Middle East. Their report on the Israeli threat perception was similar to the earlier Joint Intelligence

⁶⁷³ Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers Selwyn Lloyd, SELO 6–63, Kathlin Hill to Selwyn Lloyd, 26 April 1967; the letter includes the housekeeping notes, including the list of visitors, at the Prime Minister's residence at Chequers.

⁶⁷⁴ SHD 9 U 4, Force Navale D'Intervention, 83/EM 3, 21 Novembre 1956, "Rapport sommaire d'operations".

⁶⁷⁵ Imperial War Museum, 96/10/1, papers of Air Chief Marshal Denis Barnett, Groupement Mixte No 1, 320/GM1/OPS/TS/27 Novembre 1956, "Rapport du General De Brigade Aerienne Brohon sur la Creation, L' installation et L'activite du Groupement Mixte No 1 a Chypre".

⁶⁷⁶ Kyle, *Suez*, pp. 293–294.

Committee's estimate: Egypt was the main threat to Israel's security. The establishment of a natural eastern frontier along the River Jordan came in only second. The joint planners assumed that Jordan would align itself with Nasser if Israel attacked Egypt. As a result, the Arab Legion would be involved in active operations against the Israeli Defence Forces. If the British and French launched Operation Musketeer, Jordan would probably politically support Egypt, which would result in incidents against British nationals and property in Jordan. The first scenario would entail British military involvement to aid Jordan, in accordance with the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty. The second option would be more complicated. It would force the British both to protect their nationals in Jordan and to aid King Hussein, if Israel seized the opportunity and attacked Jordan.⁶⁷⁷

If Musketeer took place, the Israelis would be winners in any case. Of the military courses of actions available to them, Israel could provoke the Arab Legion into attacking it and thus hope that the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty would not compel the British to aid Jordan. Since the alignment, which was undeniably useful in a military sense, with Israel "could possibly lead to the disintegration of the Baghdad Pact, the loss of our position in Jordan and Iraq and to reinforce the Persian Gulf. It is therefore most important that we should avoid the appearance of any collusion with the Israelis". Militarily, and in the short term, Israel could be useful, but the longer-term consequences of open collaboration could be devastating.⁶⁷⁸

The Joint Planning Staff came to a grim conclusion. There was very little the British could do if the Israelis initiated military operations during the early stages of Operation Musketeer. Most of the Allied air force, the essence of Operation Cordage, would be involved in an air offensive against Egypt. If Israel launched an attack before Musketeer, strong air action and a naval blockade could be used against it. Of course, this would postpone Operation Musketeer.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁷ NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 149, 27 September 1956, "Implications of Israeli Aggression in Connection with Operation Musketeer".

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 149, 27 September 1956, "Implications of Israeli Aggression in Connection with Operation Musketeer".

At the meeting on 2 October, the Chiefs of Staff were not in unanimous agreement about the available options for aiding Jordan. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff had a very clear view of the British position. There was no way the British could fight against Israel and launch Musketeer simultaneously. However, in spite of the military difficulties, there were sound political reasons for preparing the assistance. Mr Hadow, the representative of the Foreign Office, condensed the core of the British Middle Eastern policy into one sentence: "Our aim in the Middle East was to bring about a final settlement of the Arab/Israeli conflict and a pro-Western Arab world, possibly under Iraqi rather than Egyptian leadership. If Egypt's position were sufficiently weakened she would be unable to prevent internationalisation of the Suez Canal".⁶⁸⁰

The aid to Jordan was discussed by the Chiefs of Staff Committee only a week later. The other Chiefs overruled General Templer's views on the ability to assist Jordan during Musketeer. According to the Chief of Air Staff, the Royal Air Force could aid the Jordanian effort by deploying its medium bombers against Israel after the initial phase of Musketeer. To complicate the decision-making process, the First Sea Lord pointed out a very peculiar, although highly unlikely political alignment that could result from Israeli aggression. If Israel attacked Jordan and the United States went to the aid of Jordan in accordance with the Tripartite Declaration, the Allies and the United States would practically be on opposite sides. As a result, the First Sea Lord concluded, "We should be the unwilling allies of Israel and our forces in Jordan would be hostages to fortune".⁶⁸¹

Due to the continuing violence along the Israeli-Jordanian frontier in mid-October, the Chiefs of Staff reassessed the military situation and military options constantly. According to the Joint Planning Staff's estimate, the most viable method of influencing Israel was to neutralise its air force. Direct assistance to the Arab Legion would not be possible because it was thought that the Legion would collapse before any reinforcements could reach

⁶⁸⁰ NA DEFE 4/91, COS (56) 96th Meeting, 2 October 1956.

⁶⁸¹ NA DEFE 4/91, COS (56) 98th Meeting, 10 October 1956, Confidential Annex.

Jordan. As for ground operations, the only practical option was to reinforce the British contingent at Aqaba, which did not lay along the anticipated Israeli main axis of attack, with an infantry battalion before the start of hostilities. In addition, the Middle East Air Force was to be reinforced with the bomber force and a fighter wing earmarked for Musketeer. The aircraft carriers were also to be put on short notice. Interestingly enough, the Chiefs of Staff decided to carry out these measures, not including the reinforcement of Aqaba, without seeking ministerial approval.⁶⁸² Their executive orders were passed down via their respective service ministries. The First Sea Lord put the carrier group on 72-hour readiness alert and the main body of the bomber force was ordered to deploy to the Mediterranean.⁶⁸³

Was Operation Cordage only being used as a façade for Operation Musketeer? According to Richard Powell, the Permanent Under Secretary at the Ministry of Defence at the time of the Suez Crisis, “it certainly wasn’t part of any conspiracy leading to the eventual operation.”⁶⁸⁴ Yet, the movement of forces to the Middle East, and in particular the French forces, makes no sense either militarily or politically unless the decision to use force against Egypt had been taken.

8.2 Post-operational problems recognised too late

Britain and France prepared for a relatively short period of intense operations. Every concept anticipated that the Egyptian Armed Forces would be annihilated within a few weeks. But, what would the military-political scene be like after the active operations were over?

The Alexandria option called for posing a threat to Cairo after a modern mobile version of the “Battle of the Pyramids” had taken place.⁶⁸⁵ In spite of

⁶⁸² NA DEFE 6/39, JP (56) Note 9, 17 October 1956, “Aid to Jordan in the Event of Israeli Aggression”; DEFE 4, COS (56) 101st Meeting, 15 October and (56) 103rd Meeting, 18 October 1956.

⁶⁸³ NA AIR 20/9967, HQ Bomber Command, 20 May 1957, “Report on Operation Musketeer” and ADM 205/ 137, First Sea Lord to C-in-C Mediterranean, 18 October 1956.

⁶⁸⁴ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LCMA), Suez Oral History Project, SUEZOPH 16, an interview of Sir Richard Powell.

⁶⁸⁵ The Battle of the Pyramids took place on 21 July 1798 when the French army under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte destroyed the Mameluke force defending the route to Cairo.

Lord Mountbatten's initial reflections, post-operational problems were given very little attention in the early stages of the planning.⁶⁸⁶ The military planning machinery at all levels was busy enough with preparing plans and orders to fit the tight timetables. The Secretariat of the Joint Intelligence Committee began the evaluation process by introducing the terms of reference on the matter. According to the secretary's note, there were three basic considerations: Would it be possible to establish a government acceptable both to the Egyptian people and to the British Government that would have a positive attitude towards the future of the canal? Or was the only option to establish a Quisling-type government that was unpopular but willing to co-operate with the British? Or was nationalism embedded so deeply in Egyptian minds that neither of these options would be feasible? However, the process did not, at least officially, go any further as the Joint Intelligence Committee refused to consider the matter.⁶⁸⁷ This does not rule out the option of behind-the-scenes activities. In fact, there was apparently at least one semi-official, secret venture aimed at establishing a puppet regime in Egypt after the hostilities. Julian Amery, a Conservative MP and a son-in-law of Harold MacMillan, and Neil McLean, a former intelligence officer, apparently co-operated with the Secret Intelligence Service, MI6 on the prospect of putting a pro-British government into power after Nasser had been overthrown.⁶⁸⁸

Potential post-operational problems fell into the sphere of the *ad hoc* Egypt Official Committee, which was tasked with formulating the principles of civil affairs following a successful intervention.⁶⁸⁹ It concluded, in accordance with a Foreign Office note, that after the Egyptian Armed Forces were neutralised, the Allied forces would withdraw to the Canal Zone and create conditions for the establishment of an international canal authority. The starting point of the planning called for active Egyptian involvement. The Egyptian administrative machinery would be given most of the responsibility for governing. The Allied

⁶⁸⁶ NA DEFE 4/88, COS (56) 80th Meeting, 14 August 1956.

⁶⁸⁷ NA CAB 159/24, JIC (56) 72nd Meeting, 16 August 1956; and DEFE 11/134, Joint Intelligence Committee, JIC/2037/56, 14 August 1956.

⁶⁸⁸ Sue Onslow, "Unreconstructed Nationalists and a Minor Gunboat Operation: Julian Amery, Neil McLean and the Suez Crisis", *Contemporary British History*, 1/2006 (March 2006), pp. 82–84.

⁶⁸⁹ NA CAB 134/1225, EOC (56) 1st Meeting, 24 August 1956.

military involvement with the Egyptian civil administration should therefore be restricted to a minimum.⁶⁹⁰

This recommendation, which General Keightley also agreed with after his appointment, was based on experiences with the impracticability of military government. However, the committee also took note of the enhanced nationalism in Egypt by estimating that “in the modern times with a much more corporate and nationally conscious Egyptian State, the problems would be very much greater”. However, the main reason was the Foreign Office’s opinion that the prospects for establishing a favourable successor government were reasonably good.⁶⁹¹

The first political directive produced for the Commander-in-Chief followed the lines described above. Governance should be left to the Egyptians. Allied forces should enter the centre of Cairo only if Egyptian resistance continued. After the formation of a new government, the military should pull out of Cairo and leave the rule of Egypt to the new government, which would be guided by a British political adviser from the Foreign Office. In order to avoid the creation of a dangerous military vacuum, the Egyptian Armed Forces would not be completely disarmed. The directive obliged the Commander-in-Chief not to impair the communications leading to the Sinai, unless the forces there were hostile. The main task after the formation of the new regime was to protect the canal and guarantee the free passage of shipping.⁶⁹²

As described earlier, the Egypt Official Committee was apparently not consulted when General Keightley introduced his new plan. The committee was worried about the plan because “The new military plan might well result in greater disorder and disruption of administration in Egypt as a whole than had been thought to follow from the original plan, but the Allied Commander-

⁶⁹⁰ NA CAB 134/1217, EC (56) 28, 20 August 1956, “Egypt: Military Planning”.

⁶⁹¹ NA CAB 134/1225, EOC (56) 3rd Meeting, 30 August 1956. It is difficult to establish facts behind the evaluation of the Foreign Office. It may be linked with the exploits of Julian Amery and MI6 on creating a pro-British government. At least the testimony by Patrick Reilly, who was the Foreign Office’s temporarily representative in the Egypt Officials Committee, suggests the Director-General of MI6 was optimistic on the prospects of creating a favourable administration in Egypt, LHCMA, SOHP 18, Interview of Sir Patrick Reilly.

⁶⁹² NA CAB 134/1225, EOC (56) 1, 5 September 1956.

in-Chief would have less resources available for the support of the civil power".⁶⁹³ The documents that are available do not explain the reasons for such a view, but there are several reasonable explanations for it. General Keightley's original concept was, in addition to the military targets, aimed at disrupting communications and the oil installations. Severe damage to these targets would have increased political unrest among the Egyptians. The other reason could be the aim of ground operations. The members of the committee did not believe that the air offensive would bring Nasser down. Instead, he could continue to promote and direct resistance against the Allies, with which Keighley would have to deal with a reduced order of battle, since 2 Infantry Division was no longer available.

The Egypt Official Committee reasoned that the new plan did not call for an advance to Cairo, but neither would the new order of battle have enabled the Allies to do so.⁶⁹⁴ As a result, the tone in the two drafts of the political directives produced in the middle of September is different. The idea of entering Cairo faded away. The Commander-in-Chief would establish a military government within the occupied areas along the Suez Canal, but resistance outside these areas would be dealt with through intensive air strikes and psychological warfare.⁶⁹⁵

Drafts from the Egypt Official Committee did not discuss any of the practical post-operational problems. How long would the occupation last? Was a sizeable military commitment required? It appears that these matters had been neglected in the early planning and were only taken into consideration in late September when the Chiefs of Staff initiated a study on the consequences of carrying out Musketeer. The Joint Planning Staff's paper revealed the grim nature of the question by basing their estimate on recent history. If the Allies wanted to be certain that the canal was not under the control of their political enemy, there might be no other option than to commit a force of two to three divisions to an occupation for an indefinite period.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹³ NA CAB 134/1225, EOC (56) 4th Meeting, 11 September 1956.

⁶⁹⁴ NA CAB 134/1225, EOC (56) 7th Meeting, 24 September 1956.

⁶⁹⁵ NA CAB 134/1225, EOC (56) 6, 18 September 1956 "Political Directive to the Allied Commander-in-Chief" and EOC (56) 9, 26 September 1956, "Political Directive to the Allied Commander-in-Chief".

⁶⁹⁶ NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 153, 4 October 1956, "Problems of Military Occupation and International Control of the Suez Canal Area". Between October 1951 and October 1954, at

Although they did not disagree with the conclusions of the Joint Planning Staff's report, the Chiefs of Staff were not satisfied with the paper. The paper lacked several political considerations as the Directors of Plans had produced it without consulting the Foreign Office. The report did not contain an appropriate political evaluation on what would happen in Egypt after a successful invasion. The Joint Planning Staff was advised to draft a new and more comprehensive report on the subject.⁶⁹⁷

The revised study was ready at the end of October. The Joint Planning Staff estimated that irrespective of who ruled Egypt, the consequences of intense aerial attacks on the Egyptian economy would be severe and long-lasting. Due to the enhanced nationalism, there would definitely be irregular resistance after the active phase of operations was over. The occupation force, three to four divisions, should not only maintain security in the Canal Area, but it should also be prepared to occupy Cairo in order to put an acceptable government into power.⁶⁹⁸ The conclusions of the estimate bear a striking resemblance to an estimate made two years earlier during Britain's troubles in the Canal Zone. At the time, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff explained to General Keightley the consequences of initiating full-scale operations in Egypt: "Such an operation would involve us in a finding of probably four or five extra divisions and we would have to remain in the Delta for years".⁶⁹⁹

The implications of maintaining such a large contingent would be considerable. At least one infantry division would have to be withdrawn from the British Army of the Rhine. A major portion of the strategic reserve, which was even not close to being ready yet, would be tied up in Egypt. This would

the height of the troubles in the Canal Zone, British casualties numbered 64 killed and 124 wounded. See Laurie Milner, "The Canal Zone and Suez, 1951–1956: Disputed Waterway" in Julian Thompson (ed.), *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Modern Warfare: British and Commonwealth Forces at War 1945–2000* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2002), p. 158.

⁶⁹⁷ NA AIR 8/2091, COS (56) 97th Meeting, 9 October 1956 and a Brief for the Chief of Air Staff, 8 October 1956.

⁶⁹⁸ NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 160, 24 October 1956, "Military Implications of Mounting Operation Musketeer".

⁶⁹⁹ NA WO 216/867, "Brief note of meeting between CIGS and General Keightley in War Office", 27 May 1954.

naturally hinder the British ability to meet commitments elsewhere. Some special reservists would have to be retained in active service for long periods of time. The commitment would also make plans to abandon national service impractical.⁷⁰⁰

It is obvious that the political consequences of a prolonged occupation would have been serious, as the Assistant Chief of Air Staff pointed out to his superior.⁷⁰¹ But was it a risk worth taking? The matter was never given proper consideration. It was too late. The document, approved by the Chiefs of Staff, was withdrawn by order of the Prime Minister, who had committed Britain to a secret alliance with Israel.⁷⁰²

8.3 Diversion and deception

One of the reasons for the success of Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of France in the Second World War, had been a carefully planned and executed deception. Operation Fortitude, as the operation to deceive the Germans was called, had involved extensive use of double agents, the creation of a false orders of battle, diversionary movements and force concentrations and the employment of false signal traffic, which had led the enemy to believe that the main Allied landing would not take place on the beaches of Normandy.⁷⁰³

In the early 1950s, the concept of carrying out tactical deception had been put into practice in the Middle East. In 1951, the War Office had established an experimental tactical deception unit called "R-Force". The force was designed to simulate the operations of an armoured brigade group in all fields

⁷⁰⁰ NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 160, 24 October 1956, "Military Implications of Mounting Operation Musketeer". The British Army of the Rhine consisted of four divisions: 2 and 4 Infantry Divisions; and 6 and 7 Armoured Divisions, see, e.g., Malcolm Bellis, *The British Army Overseas 1945–1970* (UK: John Rigby, 2001), p. 39.

⁷⁰¹ NA AIR 8/2091, Assistant Chief of Air Staff to the Chief of Air Staff, 25 October 1956.

⁷⁰² NA DEFE 4/91, COS (56) 105th Meeting, 25 October 1956.

⁷⁰³ The planning and execution of Operation Fortitude and its effect on the German High Command is described in Roger Hesketh, *Fortitude, The D-Day Deception Campaign* (London: St Ermin's Press, 1999). For a more general description, see, e.g., Max Hastings, *Overlord D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), pp. 61–64.

of tactical deception. A signals troop was able to create a false signals network. A visual troop was ordered to build decoys and dummies using artificial, specially designed mock-ups and local materiel. For the simulation of sounds, the troop possessed various devices such as gun flash simulation explosives. In late 1952, the nucleus of this force, about 50 men, was despatched to the Middle East to operate under the direct command of the General Headquarters Middle East Land Forces.⁷⁰⁴ However, this unit had been withdrawn from Egypt by the time of the Suez Crisis. This was just another sad addition to the pool of "lost opportunities".

Although there were sincere discussions within the Chiefs of Staff and the Egypt Committee about using Israeli or Libyan-based British forces for deception, one cannot be certain whether a strategic cover plan aimed at co-ordinating all means of deception existed. It is probable that the lack of a political aim, the fairly short preparation time and the rapidly changing complex political situation prevented the introduction of a strategic deception scheme. Tactical deception and diversion, however, were planned from the very beginning of the crisis.

8.3.1 The Southern diversion

When they accepted the first outline plan of the Joint Planning Staff, the Chiefs of Staff called for an evaluation of the possibility of conducting diversionary operations on the southern end of the Suez Canal. The Joint Planning Staff reasoned that any diversion should take advantage of forces already deployed to the south of the Canal. By employing naval units from both the Far East Station and the East Indies Station, a naval force of three cruisers and three destroyers could be made available. The army component would consist of three infantry battalions without supporting arms. However, a lack of air support would plague any projected operation. Even if an aircraft carrier could be made available, the narrow waters of the Gulf of Suez were not considered suitable for carrier operations. The fact that Aden, the nearest

⁷⁰⁴ NA DEFE 28/38, The War Office, MO1/LM/129/12 b, 19 April 1951, "Deception Organization in the Middle East" and Joint Concealment Centre, 528/10 May 1952, "Visit by Commandant Joint Concealment Centre to the Middle East".

British base in the area, was 1 300 nautical miles from the canal prevented it from being used as a base for air operations.⁷⁰⁵

Due to the lack of forces, the Joint Planning Staff considered the capture of the town of Suez to be impossible. The capture of Port Tewfik in a "Zeebrugge" type raid was considered possible. However, although such an operation would deny the Egyptians use of the port, it would not achieve the main aim of such an operation: the containment of sizeable Egyptian forces. Since the capture of Suez was not possible, the Joint Planning Staff suggested that the landing should take place south of the town of Suez, where two infantry battalions with supporting arms would seize a bridgehead for further operations. Not even this was considered worth executing. The diversion of Egyptian forces could be achieved by posing a potential amphibious threat in the area.⁷⁰⁶

The Chiefs of Staff came to the same conclusion on 9 August, but the Force Commanders' estimate reintroduced the matter. If the main assault was made on Alexandria, a cover plan was to be made to deceive the Egyptians into expecting an attack on Port Said.⁷⁰⁷ In addition, the Force Commanders suggested that an infantry battalion and a squadron of the Special Air Service (SAS) should be reserved for diversionary operations and the occupation of the town of Suez.⁷⁰⁸ The landings were to take place in Abadya, some eight miles west of the Suez. It was the only place in the region that enabled troop-carrying cruisers to quickly come up alongside jetties. Port Taufiq was an alternate, but its usability would be limited because it was on the eastern side of the canal with no obvious means of crossing. The landing would take place on D+7, when re-grouping was taking place in the main operation in Alexandria. After the landing at Abadya, the infantry battalion would conduct harassing operations, while the SAS unit would cut the Egyptian oil pipelines

⁷⁰⁵ NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 140, 8 August 1956, "Operations against Suez".

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 15, 10 August 1956, "Military Operations: Force Commanders' Outline Plan".

⁷⁰⁸ NA WO 288/137, Secretary to Force Commanders to the Secretary to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, 14 August 1956.

in the area. The force would not try to invade Suez unless Egyptian resistance collapsed.⁷⁰⁹

The Force Commanders withdrew their view on active operations near Suez only a few days later, due to General Keightley's discontent with their plan. The recently nominated Commander-in-Chief considered a battalion-sized operation to be "not vital". Instead, it was an unnecessary diversion. When their suggestion was rejected, the Force Commanders proposed that diversionary actions should not be carried out at all. A show of force in the form of Royal Navy vessels would not be a realistic option since it would lack offensive power. In other words, it would not pose a real threat. The Task Force Commanders were also obliged to alter the size of the planned SAS component. Only three patrols of six men each were to be used to sabotage the Egyptian oil facilities. It appears that General Keightley did not oppose the Force Commanders' preparations to occupy Suez, if Egyptian resistance collapsed. An occupation force consisting of an infantry battalion onboard Royal Navy cruisers was to prepare to landing at Suez from D+7 onwards.⁷¹⁰

The Chiefs of Staff discussed the southern diversion on 21 August. The result was a rejection in practice. The Royal Navy's only submarine that was available for the insertion of the SAS teams was participating in an anti-submarine exercise with the Indian and Pakistani navies. Its recall for operations against Egypt would send the wrong kind of political message. Also, a battalion-sized diversion was considered unwise as these forces would probably have to be used for security operations, which meant putting down political unrest caused by Musketeer, in the Persian Gulf after active operations against Egypt commenced. The Chiefs of Staff also considered a diversionary action by a battalion to be too isolated from the main effort. As a result, the Chiefs of Staff invited the Director of Forward Plans to consider what the best diversionary methods were for Musketeer.⁷¹¹

⁷⁰⁹ NA DEFE 11/138, a Force Commanders' memoranda "Operations in the Suez Area in Conjunction with Musketeer" as an annex to letters by the Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Chiefs of Staff on 15 August 1956.

⁷¹⁰ NA DEFE 11/138, Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Chiefs of Staff on 20 August 1956.

⁷¹¹ NA DEFE 11/138, a confidential annex to COS (56) 82nd Meeting, 21 August 1956.

8.3.2 The Eastern diversion

Even if a strategic cover plan was missing, it is still probable that there was a cover plan at the tactical level. The Directorate of Forward Plans developed Operation Abner, which would take advantage of the forces already deployed in the Mediterranean. The Egyptians would be induced to believe that the Allies planned to land their forces on the Sinai Peninsula. A submarine inserted Beach Survey Team was to land at El Arish. There, it would leave behind signs of reconnaissance that would clearly indicate that amphibious preparations were under way for El Arish. The impression of a landing at El Arish would be strengthened by distribution of relevant maps and charts and by conducting amphibious training in Malta that would indicate an Allied intention of landing over beaches.⁷¹²

Although the basic concept of Abner remained unaltered, its practical execution was changed. While HMS Tudor was supposedly carrying out its peacetime patrol orders by cruising off of Cyprus, it was to be secretly diverted to El Arish with members of No. 6 Special Boat Section. The section would then land near El Arish, make clearly noticeable footprints on the beach and leave a damaged dinghy behind to indicate a reconnaissance operation had occurred. In the event of capture by the Egyptians, a cover story was produced. A test for a new locating device for rescuing ditched airmen had failed when the despatch vessel, the imaginary HMS Surprise, failed to show up. If the Egyptians did not believe the cover story, the captured team was to admit that they had actually been carrying out a beach survey. After the submarine conducting the operation had returned, the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean would be ordered to leak some information about the operation, which otherwise was to be kept top secret.⁷¹³

It is not known whether Operation Abner was carried out. According to a note to the First Sea Lord on 11 October; "The C-in-C Mediterranean has laid out

⁷¹² NA ADM 116/6135, Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean to War Office, 28 August 1956.

⁷¹³ NA ADM 116/6135, Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean to Commander, First Submarine Squadron, 13 September 1956.

a deception operation involving a beach survey west of El Arish by a party from HMS Tudor." Yet, according to the logbook of HMS Tudor, the submarine made only relatively short trips before being deployed for Operation Musketeer.⁷¹⁴

On the same day as the message about Operation Abner was sent, the Director of Naval Plans evaluated a possible landing in Haifa, Israel.⁷¹⁵ Dawi Awaad Al-Solami interprets this evaluation as a military preparation for collusion with Israel.⁷¹⁶

Any claim of a serious plan to use Israel's territory as a staging area for operations against the Suez Canal is not realistic. Such interpretations do not take operational realities into account. This change in the landing site would have been almost impossible. A shift of about 500 kilometres to the east of the planned site would have totally changed the administrative concept at the very moment that hectic efforts were being made to diminish the amount of requisitioned shipping. As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons for abandoning diversionary operations in Libya was the amount of administrative support required, and this was only a question of maintaining a single division.

There is also another alternative: the estimate was part of a tactical cover plan aimed at diverting Egyptian preparations to the other side of the Suez Canal. Several factors support this conclusion. It is worth noting that the Egyptians had withdrawn a significant amount of their ex-Sinai forces to the western side of the Canal during the Allied hesitation on whether to use military force or not. The southern and western diversions were abandoned earlier and there remained only one other option. Militarily the eastern diversion was plausible as the Egyptians were not aware of the Allied

⁷¹⁴ NA ADM 173/24588–89, Logbooks of HMS Tudor; NA ADM 205/120, a letter to the First Sea Lord, 11th October 1956. The sender of this letter is unidentified, but was apparently within the Admiraliy. John Parker, the author of SBS, the Inside Story of the Special Boat Service, claims that no SBS operations took place before the invasion; John Parker, SBS, *the Inside Story of the Special Boat Service* (Chatham: Headline Book Publishing, 1997), pp. 174–177.

⁷¹⁵ NA ADM 205/138, the Director of Plans to the First Sea Lord, 11th October 1956, "Appreciation of a Landing at Haifa".

⁷¹⁶ Al Solami, "British Preparations for the Suez War – 1956." p. 132.

administrative problems with shipping and the mobilisation of units. The eastern diversion would take full advantage of Egypt's natural enemy: Israel. Although the idea of co-operation with Israel perhaps lacked political credibility, it was within the range of possible courses of action – as became apparent later on. To be credible, a deception does not have to be the most probable alternative, it only has to be a potential alternative. A rather small technical detail supports the idea of Haifa being part of a cover plan. First, it was issued on the same day as the First Sea Lord received the message about Operation Abner. Second, in the topographic sketch of Haifa, El Arish and Port Said is outlined on the same message.⁷¹⁷ Unfortunately, the truth has still not been revealed.

8.3.3 Operation Toreador

The change of concept and landing site did not significantly alter the plans for a diversion. Although the Force Commanders retained their requirement for the occupation of Suez in conjunction with an advance southwards from Port Said, the idea of active land operations in the Suez area was silently abandoned.⁷¹⁸ The planning shifted from requiring an amphibious operation towards a naval solution. Admiral Grantham, the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, recognised the need for a maritime operation to the south of Suez. A naval force consisting of a cruiser, a Daring, two destroyers, and a replenishment ship would sail from Aden 4–6 days before D-Day. This force, under the direct command of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, would then provide Search and Rescue (SAR) for Allied aircrew, neutralise the Egyptian naval forces south of the canal, bombard coastal artillery installations and protect British shipping. If necessary, an early Egyptian collapse would be exploited by sending landing parties to the town of Suez or Port Tewfik.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁷ NA ADM 205/120, a letter to the First Sea Lord, 11th October 1956. The sender of this letter is unidentified, but was apparently within the Admiralty.

⁷¹⁸ NA ADM 205/132, "Operation Musketeer Revise – Appreciation and Outline Plan" by the Task Force Commanders, 14 September 1956.

⁷¹⁹ NA ADM 205/120, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean to Admiralty, 11 September 1956.

The Admiralty supported the concept of a naval operation south of Suez and it was retained in the final plans.⁷²⁰ The plan was executed as operation "Toreador" by Task Force 324. The composition and tasks of this force were similar to those suggested by Admiral Grantham in early September.⁷²¹

Exercises are often used in deception. Of the Allied exercises, the command and communications exercise "Boathook", which was scheduled to take place just prior to hostilities, would provide essential elements for the pre-planned deception. Why? It took place at a most convenient time and it included most of the key personnel that were required for the execution of Operation Musketeer. General Keightley dispatched a warning order about the exercise on 15 October after first consulting with the French. The exercise aimed to test the operational control of forces allocated to Musketeer. As a general rehearsal, the order of battle for the exercise was to include all the force level headquarters and the most important elements within the fire co-ordination plan. According to the original message, the exercise was to take place between 3 and 6 November. The timing was later changed to cover the period between 1–4 November.⁷²² Whether Boathook was part of a cover plan, and designed for that purpose, is not certain. However, as Lieutenant General Stockwell put it, the exercise was used as a pretext for real operations as it provided a proper excuse for the leading personnel to travel from London to the Mediterranean and to start naval force deployments.⁷²³

⁷²⁰ NA ADM 205/120, Vice-Chief of Naval Staff to the First Sea Lord, 13 September 1956.

⁷²¹ For a narrative of actions taken by Task Force 324 while conducting Operation Toreador, see NA ADM 116/6103, Commander Task Force 324 Report to the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, 21 November 1956.

⁷²² NA ADM 205/130, Troopers to C-in-C Mediterranean, 15 October 1956 and AIR 20/9585, The War Office (SD 12), 19 October 1956, "Command and Signal Exercise – Ex Boathook" and SHD, 9 U 3, MilFrance Londres to Defence National, Paris, 52/503/13 Octobre 1956. The general arrangement of the exercise was (is) typical for staff exercises. According to the plan, some phases were to be rehearsed on an accelerated timetable in order to save time. This means that real time and the time within the exercise were not the same. The neutralisation of the Egyptian Air Force and the air offensive were to be simulated within a day. But the phase that needed the most careful co-ordination, the assault, was to be played out in real-time.

⁷²³ LHCA, Papers of General Hugh Stockwell, Box 8/6/12–13, drafts of two articles by Sunday Times and NA WO 288/77, "2 (Br) Corps Report on Operation Musketeer", 1 February 1957, pp. 39–40.

8.4 Conclusions

It is evident that both the British politicians and the military recognised the possibilities offered by Israel. Militarily, co-operation with Israel offered tempting advantages. Politically, it would have been unsound, and politics played a key role in most of the planning phases. Israel would have been most useful as a short-term ally, but not for a longer period of time. This was because Israel did not control any vital assets, while the Arab countries did.

However, the available evidence does not support the theory of early collusion. The change of the landing site from Alexandria to Port Said cannot be linked with collusion with Israel. It appears that the Allies did not even take full advantage of Israel in their cover plans. On the contrary, the French government, which was more determined to solve the crisis by force, concealed the extent of its collaboration with Israel from the British. One should also look at the matter from an Israeli point of view. It had only been eight years since the British had withdrawn from Palestine. Only eight years earlier, Arab armies, commanded by British officers, had fought Israel. Ever since, British policy in the Middle East had been anything but pro-Israeli.

The military orders and subsequent actions support the generally accepted timing of the collusion. The transfer of the Royal Air Force bomber squadrons was initiated only a few days after the visit of the French delegation that introduced the plan for a secret alliance with Israel. As this transfer took place at about the same time as the French force movement, the only reasonable conclusion is that this force was intended for action against Egypt, not Israel. In this sense, the final preparations for Operation Cordage were used as a cover plan for Operation Musketeer. The same logic applies to Exercise Boathook. Originally, the exercise was planned to be a normal signals exercise but in the course of events it was used as a façade for real preparations. However, this is nothing unusual.

However, the basic problem with British preparations was the lack of a political objective interwoven with a lack of political intelligence. There is no doubt that post-operational problems were given too little attention. The

starting point for planning at the strategic level should have been the final political situation. What kind of a government would co-operate with the Allies in Egypt after Nasser was overthrown? Was such a government available? It is apparent that this question was never properly answered because it is possible that there was no answer to be given. The Joint Planning Staff realised this and indicated that Britain would have to commit the main body of its army to Egypt to occupy the Canal Zone. The price of a free waterway would be enormous.

As previously noted, it is possible that the British lacked a concept for a strategic deception plan. The plans that were produced aimed to increase confusion at a tactical level, but not much else. The lack of a strategic aim was reflected at the tactical level. The value of Israel in diversionary operations was recognised, but not taken advantage for political reasons. Any sign of co-operation with Israel was considered to be politically damaging. Not only would this have made the British position in Jordan even more intolerable, it would also have had negative consequences for the entire Middle Eastern policy. As a result, the Egyptians were actually able to decrease their commitment in the Sinai and withdraw forces to the Canal Zone and Cairo.

Apparently, the Force Commanders and General Keightley were not able to agree on how they would conduct their deception plans. Actually, Keightley made most of the previous planning irrelevant very soon after his appointment. The impression of rather tense relations between the Task Force Commanders and their superior is inescapable.

As a result of the lack of strategic direction, the tactical deception became a "necessary evil" without any real opportunities for success. Constant changes in the operational concept destroyed the foundations for a centrally planned, sustained deception. There was not simply enough time to employ a successful, credible deception operation that took advantage of Egyptian suspicions. The apparent failure in the deception plans is at least loosely connected with the intelligence failures and the inadequate preparations for psychological warfare. A more aggressive deception operation was not

possible because British intelligence did not have a network of double agents who could leak an appropriate version of the invasion plans to Egypt. It takes a relatively long time to establish such a network. But, time had run out.

9 AN EAGER AND CAPABLE ALLY – FRENCH PERSPECTIVES ON PLANNING

“Les Paras made us look a crowd of amateurs when it came to fighting experience”⁷²⁴

This study has focussed on British military planning and preparations. The participation of the French Armed Forces has only been discussed briefly. In this chapter I seek to evaluate the French role in more detail. It is not my intention to describe how French forces participated in the operations, but rather to analyse the French influence on the development of the operational concept. For example, were the French more eager to launch a *coup de main* with their agile, combat-proven parachute forces than the British? What was the French outlook on the change of concept? Did French intelligence estimates about Egyptian capabilities support the development of the operational concept?

9.1 Different options are evaluated

The French government expressed its desire to co-operate militarily with the British just a day after the nationalisation of the canal. The military links were established within a few days. The French established their planning cell in London following the visit of Admiral Nomy to the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 30 July.⁷²⁵

The vindictive attitude of the French government is well documented. The main driver of French thinking was the deteriorating situation in North Africa. Nasser and Egypt were considered to be the key advocates of the Arab nationalism that was causing troubles in the French 10th military district, Algeria.⁷²⁶ The escalating conflict had already sucked the French military into a vicious circle of reinforcements as the number of French troops in the region had quadrupled in two years time.⁷²⁷ These facts were well

⁷²⁴ Sandy Cavenagh, *Airborne to Suez* (Gloucester: Gludy Publications, 1996), p.125.

⁷²⁵ NA DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 74th Mtg, 30 July 1956.

⁷²⁶ Henri Azeau, *Le piège de Suez* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1964), pp. 122–125.

⁷²⁷ Jaques Fréméaux, “La Guerre d’Algérie” in *Histoire Militaire de la France*, 4 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), pp. 328–329.

established within the military participating in the initial planning. On 4 August 1956, a pool of French officers was assembled in Paris for a briefing before attending a bilateral planning conference with the British. General Martin, the chairman of the meeting, made it very clear that the downfall of Nasser's regime was inseparably related to a solution for Algeria.⁷²⁸

The key French role in developing an alliance with Israel has been described earlier in this work. However, the partnership with Israel was only one of the options the French military was considering. Before it began an active alliance with the British, the French General Staff (*L'état-major Général des Forces Armées*) prepared an initial evaluation of the available military options. The study included five alternatives, each with a different political alignment:

- France alone
- France and Israel
- France and Great Britain
- France, Great Britain and Israel
- France, Great Britain and the United States⁷²⁹

The studies very clearly indicated that France was not able to conduct a successful military operation alone. The military explanation for this conclusion was self-evident. The French did not possess adequate air bases within striking distance of Egypt nor did the French Navy have modern aircraft carriers able to rapidly neutralise the Egyptian Air Force, which was considered a prerequisite for victory.⁷³⁰

The second option, co-operation with Israel, was considered to be possible. According to the estimate, there would be major difficulties in concentrating French forces in Israel. For example, the deployment of a division from Algeria or Metropolitan France could take up to 2–3 weeks. Also, plans to fly French military aircraft over European countries to Israel could cause diplomatic problems. The option was considered feasible, but risky. The lack

⁷²⁸ SHD 8 S 273, 1ere Division (EMFA?), 4.8.1956, "Fiche sur la Conférence de samedi 4 Août 1956 préparatoire au voyage à Londres de la Commission de Planning". See also SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome I, pp. 3–4.

⁷²⁹ Paul Èly, *Mémoirs, Suez...le 13 mai* (Plon, 1969), 80–81.

⁷³⁰ Service historique de la Défence (SHD), 8 S 273, an unsigned note, 29 Juillet 1956.

of landing craft would make a combined operation impracticable. A result, the operational concept would be based on a combined airborne-ground operation through the Sinai Peninsula.⁷³¹

The third alternative anticipated the forthcoming alliance with the British. The cost of taking advantage of the British military bases in the Middle East and their naval and aerial assets would be the subordination of French forces to British command. However, the military benefits of acting with the British were significant. The British base system would enable an amphibious assault and a Cyprus-based airborne operation. The fourth alternative was to combine the involvement of Israel with the Anglo-French alliance. This would naturally broaden the available military options because Israeli territory could be used.⁷³²

Option five was considered the soundest militarily alternative. The availability of US military assets in the form of the US 6th Fleet would bring the campaign to a rapid end. Due to the available firepower, the elimination of the Egyptian Air Force and an amphibious assault could be carried out simultaneously.⁷³³

Before fully committing to Anglo-French military co-operation, the General Staff produced two complementary studies that concentrated on the alignments with Israel and Britain. The “*Étude Complémentaire sur l’Hypothèse France–Israël*” was produced on 31 July. The aim of the operation was to bring the Egyptian government down. The operation was to be based on two phases. In the first phase, the Franco-Israeli forces were to advance to the Canal Zone as quickly as possible. The second phase, not covered in the document, was to change the Egyptian regime. In order to achieve sufficient freedom of action in the air, the French Air Force was to deploy about 150 airplanes to Israel prior to the hostilities. The ground forces were to include a parachute division and a light division. The naval component included a carrier group.⁷³⁴

⁷³¹ SHD 8 S 273, an unsigned note, 29 Juillet 1956, 2ème Hypothèse.

⁷³² SHD 8 S 273, an unsigned note, 29 Juillet 1956, 3ème et 4ème Hypothèses.

⁷³³ SHD 8 S 273, an unsigned note, 29 Juillet 1956, 5ème Hypothèse.

⁷³⁴ SHD 8 S 273, État-Major des Forces Armées, 1ère Division, 31 Juillet 1956, “*Étude Complémentaire sur L’Hypothèse France-Israël*.”

The lack of an adequate, modern infrastructure in Israel would restrict the conduct of air operations. As a result, the French planners anticipated that the combined Franco-Israeli air forces would not destroy the Egyptian Air Force entirely. This, in turn, would have several consequences for the general concept of operations. The French would not be able to exploit their airborne capability, because the Egyptian Air Force would not be totally destroyed and also because of a lack of transport aircraft. Therefore, a large-scale airborne operation involving the parachute division as a formation was not considered feasible. The lack of transport capacity and the need to maintain secrecy would be the determining factors in the plans for co-operation between French naval and ground forces. The naval task force was not to enter the Eastern Mediterranean prior to the air offensive to maintain secrecy. In practice this meant that the French naval air arm could not take part in the air campaign aimed at destroying the Egyptian Air Force. Apart from light forces, the thrust through the Sinai Peninsula would be conducted mainly by Israeli forces.⁷³⁵

How soon could operations commence? Because the Israeli Air Force did not have adequate maintenance facilities for the US-manufactured aircraft the French were planning to use, the French would have to transport a large amount of equipment to Israel, some of it by sea. It would take between 20–25 days to accomplish this task.⁷³⁶

At the same time that it was evaluating co-operation with the Israelis, the French General Staff produced a similar study on joint Anglo-French action. While the British Joint Planning Staff adopted a view that endorsed overwhelming superiority, the French planners called for speed. The first step was to send a powerful naval expedition to the Eastern Mediterranean to convince the Egyptian government of Allied determination. At the same time, an intervention force was to be assembled. If this force was to be employed, it should be used decisively because the faster the Egyptian Armed Forces were eliminated, the brighter the prospects for a short conflict.⁷³⁷

⁷³⁵ SHD 8 S 273, *État-Major des Forces Armées, 1ère Division, 31 Juillet 1956, "Etude Complémentaire – sur L'Hypothèse France-Israel"*.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁷ SHD 8 S 273, *État-Major des Forces Armées, 1ère Division, 30 Juillet 1956, "Possibilités de participation Française dans une action Franco-Britannique contre l'Egypte"*.

9.2 Advanced capabilities

The French contingent assigned to Operation Musketeer remained relatively unchanged throughout the crisis. According to the first outline plan produced by the British Joint Planning Staff in the early days of August, the French were prepared to commit a powerful naval task force, including two aircraft carriers and a battleship. The French Air Force was prepared to assign a significant number of its 250 fighter-bombers and a transport force capable of transporting 600 paratroopers to active operations against Egypt. The ground forces' order of battle consisted of a parachute brigade and a light mechanised division.⁷³⁸

By the middle of August, the French order of battle was mostly fixed. The French Air Force established a composite air group (*Groupement Mixte No 1*) in late August to support the upcoming operations. The composition of the French Air Group reflects the difference between the doctrines of the British and French Air Forces. While the British regarded the bomber and offensive bombing to be their primary tools, the French were better equipped to support tactical operations. The French Air Group consisted of two squadrons of F-84 fighter-bombers, a squadron of RF-84 reconnaissance fighters, and a transport force of about 40 Nordatlantique transport planes.⁷³⁹

For the naval operations, the French established a naval task force (*Force Naval D'Intervention, F.N.I.*). At the beginning of the operations, it was to include two aircraft carriers, a battleship, a cruiser, 16 destroyers and frigates, and almost 30 smaller vessels, including a dozen minesweepers. The amphibious element consisted of an LSD, four LSTs, four LCTs and an LCH.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁸ NA DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 135, 31 July, "Action Against Egypt, Outline Plan"

⁷³⁹ Imperial War Museum, 96/10/1, papers of Air Chief Marshal Denis Barnett, Groupement Mixte No 1, 320/GM1/OPS/TS/27 Novembre 1956, "Rapport du General De Brigade Aerienne Brohon sur la Creation, L'installation et L'activité du Groupement Mixte No 1 a Chypre".

⁷⁴⁰ SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome I, Annexe 9. The composition of the French naval forces remained practically unaltered throughout the crisis. For the establishment of naval forces, see SHD 8 S 274, Ministre de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées, État-major général, 3ème Bureau, 610/EMG/ORG/T.S/10 Août 1956, "Instruction."

The French ground forces, Force A, were drawn from two formations (*Grandes Unités*):⁷⁴¹ 7 Mechanised Division (*7 Division Mécanique Rapide*, 7 D.M.R) and 10 Parachute Division (*10 Division de Parachutiste*, 10 D.P.). These units were supported by a versatile pool of different arms and services. An infantry regiment, an armoured regiment that included modern heavy armour and artillery units were among the reinforcements.⁷⁴² As a result, Force A was converted into a balanced formation capable of conducting independent mobile operations.

The organisation of a French mechanised division was completely unlike its British equivalent. Not only was it half the size of its British counterpart, its structure was also completely different. The French had launched a large-scale reorganization of their mechanised units in 1953. The reform aimed to establish integrated units, which meant they included a pool of various kinds of units. The initiative behind the reform was to incorporate different arms within a regiment during peace-time, and thus to promote co-ordination and co-operation. This would remove the prospect of establishing a temporary order of battle by subordinating armour to infantry or *vica versa* during the war.⁷⁴³ The 7 Division Mécanique Rapide was the first formation that underwent this restructuring. Characterised by a high level of motorisation, new weapon systems and a relatively small number of infantry, the formation was designed to fight a mobile war against enemy armour, even in a nuclear environment.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴¹ According to French military nomenclature, army units larger than a division fell into the category of *Grandes Unités*, Réglement du Génie, 3eme Partie (Code: GEN 107, 1953), p. 13.

⁷⁴² SHD 8 S 273, État-major de L'Armee, 3eme Bureau, 15897/EMA/EFO.TS/11 Août 1956.

⁷⁴³ A.F.C. Jackson, "Integrated Units in the French Army", *The British Army Review* 3/1956 (September 1956), pp. 45–46.

⁷⁴⁴ SHD 9 U 7, Force A, 1eme Bureau, "Formations Entrant dans la Composition de la Force A" and Wolf Mendl, *Deterrence and Persuasion. French Nuclear Armament in the Context of National Policy, 1945–1969* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), pp. 75–76 and 107. The division had an aviation (helicopter) unit, an armoured reconnaissance regiment, three mechanised regiments (equivalents of a British battalion), an artillery battalion, an engineer battalion, a signals battalion and a service battalion. The total strength of the division was about 8 600 men. The firepower of the division was based on new weapon systems. In addition to about 200 armoured cars and light tanks, there were some 400 antitank missile launchers in the division.

While the British lost their capacity to launch large-scale airborne operations very soon after the Second World War,⁷⁴⁵ the French put a heavy emphasis on developing their airborne warfare concepts. The French doctrine, combined with a real ability to mount airborne operations, was developed during the conflicts in Indochina and Algeria. The composition of the 10 Parachute Division was well balanced, and the troops were well-trained and battle-tested. According to an estimate produced in the early stages of the crisis, the parachute division's rating was between good and excellent.⁷⁴⁶

The reason for this success was also organisational as General Beaufre clearly illustrates in his report. The French put large-scale airborne operations under a single command. During the Suez Crisis, Général de Brigade Gilles, the inspector of the French airborne forces (Troupes Aéroportées), was put in charge of all French airborne operations, *Commandant d'un d'Opération Aéroportée*. In ideal conditions, the airborne commander would be on the same level as the force commanders. The most important result of this arrangement was naturally the speeding up of the information flow. The airborne forces received their alerts and orders at the same time as the force commanders, which enabled them to start the necessary preparations at the earliest possible stage of planning. Since he acted on the same level as the force commanders, the commander of an airborne operation could also keep in contact more effective with the other services, and with the air force units in charge of transport operations in particular. This command arrangement would also help ensure a sensible employment of the airborne forces in the general concept because of the expertise of the airborne commander.⁷⁴⁷

Integration of command was not the sole peculiarity of the French airborne forces. From the viewpoint of actually executing an operation, the most important factor was the independent air supply system. The French concept called for the establishment of a supply base (*Base aéroportée*) that was

⁷⁴⁵ The British capacity to conduct airborne operations had decreased along with their amphibious capacity. 1 Airborne Division had been disbanded in 1945 and 6 Airborne Division in 1948 after returning from Palestine. The only unit left was 2 Parachute Brigade, which was re-designated 16 Independent Parachute Brigade Group in 1948, Barry Gregory, *British Airborne Troops 1940–1945* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1974), pp. 154–158.

⁷⁴⁶ SHD 8 S 273, Secretariat D'État-major aux Forces Armées "Terre", 1148/EMA/CAB/ 24 Août 1956, "Valeur de la Force A".

⁷⁴⁷ SHD 9 U 12, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome V, Étude particulière 4.

subordinated to the commander of the airborne operation.⁷⁴⁸ The air supply system was advanced. During combat operations, it would possess about 2 000 tons of air portable material. This would be sufficient to support the operations of the division from the air for up to four days. After the initial operations, a delivery of about 120–150 tons daily could be guaranteed.⁷⁴⁹

The independent supply system, the position in the command hierarchy, the close links with the air force and a personal airborne command post enabled the French airborne commander to conduct a series of airborne operations, at least in theory. Without exaggeration, one can claim that the French possessed both a concept and the ability for independent airborne operations. The restricting factor was the size of the transport fleet as General Beaufre notes in his report.⁷⁵⁰

In addition to conventional operations, the French were prepared to conduct special operations, presumably due to their rich experience in counter-insurgency operations in Indochina and Algeria. The available unit for these operations was a special task force called RAP 700. The abbreviation of the force derived from its tasks: Renseignement (intelligence)–Action–Protection. The Headquarters of RAP 700 was divided into two sub-headquarters responsible for planning the operations within the respective headquarters of Admiral Barjot and General Beaufre, who was commander of Force A. The two operational Headquarters, known as DORAPs (Département Opérationnel du service RAP), were responsible for the detailed planning and execution of special operations. One of these was subordinated to Force A, and one was retained as a reserve under the command of Admiral Barjot. Both the RAP and DORAPs included three bureaus. The intelligence bureau, SRO (*Service Renseignement Operationnelle*), was responsible for evaluating intelligence and arranging co-operation with the various intelligence bodies;

⁷⁴⁸ SHD 9 U 12, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome V, Étude particulière 4. An airborne supply base had about 1 000 men and almost 300 vehicles, see SHD 9 U 10, Base de Transit et D'Opérations, Le Colonel, 13 Janvier 1956 (sic), "Rapport D'Opérations de la Base de la Transit."

⁷⁴⁹ SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome I, Étude particulière 15. According to a logistics estimate, an entire parachute division required about 700–800 tons of materiel for an operation lasting for four days. In that sense, a daily supply of 120–150 tons would have been sufficient to maintain the division as not all the elements of the division were likely to be in contact with the enemy simultaneously, SHD 9 U 5, État-major Opérationnel Aeroportée, 14 Septembre 1956, "Note pour le lieutenant-colonel l'E.R.A. (Élément de Ravitaillement par Air)".

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid. and Jaques Massu & Henri Le Mire, *Vérité sur Suez 1956* (Plon, 1978), pp. 55–56.

not only those of the formations but also with national intelligence resources such as SDECE (*Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-espionage*). The second bureau was responsible for action, in other words offensive special operations. The third bureau was in charge of protection, the counter-intelligence operations that were linked with national counter-espionage organisations like the SURETE, the special branch of the Ministry of Interior⁷⁵¹ and the security service of the armed forces, *Service de Sécurité de la Défense National et des Forces Armées*.⁷⁵²

Action by the special forces could be taken either independently or in support of conventional operations. The *11eme Demi-Brigade de Parachutiste de Choc*, a French equivalent of the British Special Air Service, was available for the implementation of special operations.⁷⁵³ This force had been established after the Second World War in co-operation with the SDECE and the armed forces and it had seen ample action in Indochina and Algeria.⁷⁵⁴

A cursory examination provides us with a very good picture of the French forces assigned to the operations. In practice however, there were severe limitations with the French forces participating in Operation Musketeer.

It appears that the French air units, like their British counterparts, were in the best condition of all the services. The fact that the French Air Force took part in the operation with a relatively small detachment, when compared with that of the Royal Air Force, might be one of the explanations for this. However, the French capacity to conduct tactical air operations impressed the British. The matter was well explained in a report by Air Vice Marshal Barnett, the British Air Task Force Commander: "In general the equipment supplied to the

⁷⁵¹ Norman Polmar & Thomas Allen, *Spy Book. The Encyclopedia of Espionage* (London: Greenhill Books, 1997), p. 542.

⁷⁵² SHD 9 U 4, CCFPO, 12 Septembre 1956 , "Service Renseignement–Action–Protection R.A.P. de la Force 700" and CCFPO, RAP 700, 21 Octobre 1956, "Note de Service: Service RAP de la Force 700".

⁷⁵³ 11 Demi-Brigade de Parachutiste de Choc (11 DPC) had been established in October 1955 on the framework of 11 Battalion de Parachutiste de Choc. According to Paul Gaujac, the 11 DPC participated in the Suez operation with an operational group of about 420 men. In addition to command and administrative elements, the group included a mounted company, two combat companies and two detachments of combat divers, *Encyclopédie de L'Armée de Terre*, Vol 3 (Paris: Hachette, 1992), pp. 121–122 and Paul Gaujac, *Suez 1956* (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle, 1986), pp. 238–239.

⁷⁵⁴ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace. Algeria 1954–1962* (London: Papermac, 1996), 189–190.

French Air Force for tactical air operations was so superior to that available in the Middle East that at times the Royal Air Force looked almost Victorian.⁷⁵⁵ It should be noted that this statement perhaps exaggerates the situation.

The reality was somewhat different in the French Navy. The post-action report of Admiral Lancelot paints a grim picture of the very limited assets. According to Lancelot, the French navy did not possess an adequate operational force that could have pursued government policy when the French naval task force was established. Some of the vessels were not adequately equipped or manned. The latest weapon systems, such as the new torpedoes, were still untested. The naval air squadrons used WW 2-vintage piston-engined aircraft and were obsolescent. The capacity to conduct and support assault landings was almost non-existent.⁷⁵⁶

Indeed, the French ability to conduct assault landings and support them was in a sad state. At the end of July, the French landing capacity was restricted to a couple of LSTs. The majority of landing vessels and landing craft were dispersed and in varying shape. It took four weeks to assemble a pool of vessels capable of landing 400 men and a squadron of light tanks. By the first week of September, the time the French assault force was to sail according to the original plan, the landing fleet consisted of shipping capable of carrying and landing about 1 500 men and two light tank squadrons. This situation was not helped by the fact that there were hardly any troops to conduct an assault landing. The French Navy did not possess a force equivalent to 3 Commando Brigade. There were only four marine commandoes, which was the equivalent of a small battalion in all. There was no other option but to establish an *ad hoc* landing force around the versatile paratroopers. This untrained force naturally required a substantial amount of training before it was operationally ready to carry out any tasks. It was not until the end of August that exercises were carried out.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵⁵ Imperial War Museum, 96/10/1, papers of Air Chief Marshal Denis Barnett, HQ Air Task Forces, ATF/TS. 287/56, 21 November 1956, "Report on Operation Musketeer".

⁷⁵⁶ SHD 9 U 4, Force Navale D'Intervention, 83/EM 3, 21 Novembre 1956, "Rapport sommaire d'opérations". See also Paul Gaujac, Suez 1956, pp. 64–65.

⁷⁵⁷ SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome 1, Annexe 15.

Although 7 Mechanised Division was in theory a very capable formation, it was not fit for immediate operations in reality. It was on reduced establishment and had operated for six months in an infantry role while participating in counter-insurgency operations. Large-scale resupply of additional equipment was required before the division was back at fighting strength. And, materiel was only part of the preparations, training was another matter that took weeks to accomplish. Even the elite 10 Parachute Division, generally in good shape, had to undergo an abridged training program to convert back to its proper airborne role.⁷⁵⁸

9.3 The French view on the development of the concept

9.3.1 The French are compelled to adopt the British operational concept

As mentioned earlier, the first British estimate called for landing at Port Said. However, the concept was soon changed due to pressure from the British Force Commanders. The French planners were not in a position to influence this first change of plans, which took place in the first days of August. In principle, the plan had been approved by the Chiefs of Staff on 9 August. This plan was not presented to the French Task Force Commanders due to secrecy. Instead, Lieutenant General Stockwell provided the French with a somewhat confused summary. This awkward situation was made even worse by the fact that the French were compelled to study the British estimate practically without any time to prepare themselves.⁷⁵⁹ As a logical result of this and as a result of the fact that French forces were subordinated to British command, the French were a very silent partner at this stage.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁸ SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome 1.

⁷⁵⁹ The COS-Committee files do not include a document that would confirm the acceptance of the plan. The plan was presented to the COS-Committee on 9 August, but the record of its discussions is not available. The deception by the British is well described by Brigadier (later General) Kenneth Darling, who was Chief of Staff for Lieutenant General Stockwell. The evident French confusion about the status of British planning is well described by Andre Beaufre. NA DEFE 4/89, COS (56) 78th Meeting, 9 August 1956; Imperial War Museum, papers of General Darling, a booklet: "The Suez Canal Crisis, July–December 1956", produced in 1985 and Andre Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956*, pp. 28–30.

⁷⁶⁰ Andre Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 28–29.

Due to the British Task Force Commanders' persistence, the original estimate was rejected and the planning focused on Alexandria. This plan was to take full advantage of French airborne capabilities. A parachute regiment was to be dropped at El Amiryia prior to the amphibious assault. After landing, the regiment was assigned the task of making contact with the British airborne element and of preventing any Egyptian counter-attack from the direction of Cairo, where a large amount of armour was known to be stationed. The French seaborne assault forces would secure the western flank of the main assault by landing at Dikheila, which was about 10 kilometres west of Alexandria. In order to repulse any counterattack by Egyptian armour, the assault echelon, which consisted of two parachute regiments and three commandoes, was reinforced by three tank squadrons. One parachute regiment would be retained as a mobile reserve in Cyprus.⁷⁶¹

The main force, the fighting echelon of 7 Mechanised Division and the logistical tail of 10 Parachute Division, was to land within eight days of the initial assault. During the subsequent fighting, the French forces were to play a double role. The advance along the desert route would be lead by the reinforced British 3 Infantry Division while the French mechanised division would be the main reserve for the Allied Task Force.⁷⁶² During the further advance towards Cairo, the French airborne division would be deployed. Although the Allied plans for operations near Cairo are not known, presumably they were never produced, there are some indications of the French role. According to the Force Commanders' operational instruction, the French parachute regiment was to capture an airport near Cairo. Another option was to use "les paras" to capture appropriate sites for the Nile crossing.⁷⁶³

In his report, General Beaufre claims that that logically, and initially also militarily, Alexandria offered better opportunities than Port Said. However, it should be borne in mind that he was writing in hindsight. The Alexandria option also was suitable from a political angle. This landing and the

⁷⁶¹ SHD 9 U 8, Force A, 3eme Bureau, 51/FA/3/OPE/TS/ 7 Septembre 1956, "Ordre D'Opération No 2"

⁷⁶² SHD 9 U 8, SHD 9 U 8, Force A, 3eme Bureau, 50/FA/3/OPE/TS/ 7 Septembre 1956, "Ordre D'Opération No 1" and 51/FA/3/OPE/TS/ 7 Septembre 1956, "Ordre D'Opération No 2".

⁷⁶³ SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome I.

subsequent operations aimed at advancing on Cairo would cause the collapse of Nasser's regime. Still, several tactical factors were considered to be trouble. The airborne landing sites and the amphibious assault were separated by several kilometres. Although the port of Alexandria was considered excellent, the communications leading to the town were problematic. The town is surrounded by the Mediterranean and Lake Maryut. The three causeways passing over the latter could easily be blocked by the Egyptians. Time also worked in the Egyptians' favour as they took advantage of Allied hesitation and prepared their defences for the invasion.⁷⁶⁴

Beaufre was also concerned about the difficulties facing the Allies in the later stages of the invasion. According to a French estimate, the terrain outside of Cairo offered good opportunities for Egyptian defence. The Allies would also have to cross a significant natural obstacle before they reached the Suez Canal – the Nile. It could take weeks before the Allies could approach the Canal, which would give Nasser sufficient time to completely block the canal.⁷⁶⁵

In this sense, choosing the landing site was a no-win situation. Any action against Port Said could cause the Egyptians to block the Suez Canal, whereas an indirect action from Alexandria on Cairo could yield the political result without interfering with the canal itself. However, leaving the canal in the hands of Nasser for a long period of time would permit him to sabotage it completely.⁷⁶⁶

9.3.2 The change of concept – the French influence

In early September, the plan to use Alexandria as an entry point into Egypt was abandoned. The French role in this series of events remains unclear. In his memoirs, General Ely emphasised the political aspect as a reason for the change of course. In the course of the autumn, Britain and France were dragged into endless negotiations aimed at settling the matter amicably.

⁷⁶⁴ NA NA ADM 116/6135, Office of the Allied Force Commanders, 18 August 1956, "Combined Operational Instruction" and SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome I.

⁷⁶⁵ SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome I, annexe 6.

⁷⁶⁶ SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome I.

Along with the talks, world opinion adopted an attitude of reconciliation. Any operation on Alexandria could be seen as an operation against Egypt and Nasser, which of course was the original idea. However, this could cause severe repercussions around the world. As a result, the concept of a police operation had to be developed. General Ely appears not to have been happy with a concept that he called "une sorte d'opération de police susceptible".⁷⁶⁷

According to General Beaufre, he had nothing to do with the change of plans. On the contrary, he claims to have been most surprised to hear about them during a meeting with Admiral Barjot on 24 August.⁷⁶⁸ It appears that Admiral Barjot's staff worked much like General Keightley's Headquarters. It produced estimates and plans in total secrecy from its subordinate Task Force Commanders. A draft letter from Barjot to Keightley leaves an impression that Barjot was among the first to support the change of the landing site from Alexandria to Port Said. According to the letter, Barjot had put forward a note on 17 August that urged the British not to abandon the idea of landing directly in Port Said. This was two days before Keightley presented a similar idea to the Chairman of the COS-Committee.⁷⁶⁹

In addition to political flexibility, according to Barjot, there were also military reasons for not landing at Alexandria. The Egyptians had significantly reinforced their defences in the region. Not only had the defences in Alexandria been strengthened, but there was also a significant armoured reserve to the east of Cairo.⁷⁷⁰ Barjot was also worried about the Egyptian ability to block the entrance to the port of Alexandria and about the necessity to cross the Nile during the later stages of the operation.⁷⁷¹ This also brings up the issue of intelligence. Was there really an intelligence estimate behind Barjot's evaluation? The confused intelligence picture provided by British intelligence has been discussed previously, but did the French share similar views? What was the French view of Egyptian morale and their ability to wage modern war?

⁷⁶⁷ Ely, pp. 104–105.

⁷⁶⁸ Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956*, pp. 41–42.

⁷⁶⁹ SHD 9 U 4, Projet de lettre de l'amiral Barjot au General Keightley, Novembre 1956.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁷¹ SHD 9 U 4, Note pour L'Amiral Barjot, 14 Août 1956.

9.3.3 Possible Egyptian reactions are evaluated

In general, the views of French intelligence on the combat value of the Egyptian forces were incoherent. Egyptian infantry was described as being robust and durable but not capable of fighting a co-ordinated battle, particularly at night. Like the British, the French considered the young officers to be fairly capable, and driven to learn. However, the Egyptian high command did not impress French intelligence. Their attitude was worsened by the silent dissatisfaction of the high command with Nasser. The transition phase inherit in adopting Soviet materiel made the Egyptian Armed Forces vulnerable. The Egyptians were forced to learn the technical details of their new hardware quickly, but their maintenance skills did not improve at the same speed. This was bound to reduce the serviceability of the hardware. The same phenomenon applied to the doctrine. Even if the Egyptians were able to master their new hardware technically, they had no time to develop their skills to employ the modern arsenal successfully and systematically on the battlefield. In other words, the Egyptian Armed Forces lacked a coherent tactical doctrine.⁷⁷²

According to a French intelligence estimate, the prudent, even defeatist attitude of the Egyptian high command could be changed by two factors: the possibility of Soviet assistance and the prospects of a successful guerrilla war after the initial invasion. For the French, who had an all too vast amount of experience, the challenge of guerrilla warfare was very real. In addition to regular forces specialised in unconventional warfare, such as paratroopers, divers and commandoes, the Egyptians would be able to mobilise guerrilla forces in the occupied areas.⁷⁷³

Actually, French intelligence indicated that the preparations for guerrilla warfare and the Soviet material aid were interlinked. According to a SDECE report produced in September, at least a portion of the foreign volunteers

⁷⁷² SHD 9 U 7, État-major des Forces A, 2eme Bureau, S.P. 87.343/5 Septembre 1956, "Organisation et Potentiel de l'Armée Egyptienne".

⁷⁷³ Ibid.

arriving with the arms shipments were to train local sabotage groups in Egypt and to organise "la guerre de rue" in populated areas.⁷⁷⁴

At a tactical level, the French focus was on Alexandria and the Cairo area. Barjot's concern about the Egyptian preparations in the Alexandria region was not entirely unfounded. According to French intelligence in late August, the Egyptians were preparing several centres of resistance in the area.⁷⁷⁵ French worries are understandable as it appeared that this development was especially taking place in the areas to be attacked by the French forces: Dikheilia, the French landing area, and more seriously in the Al Amariya region, which was estimated to have at least some elements of an armoured regiment present. This was a particular menace to the airborne forces that were to be dropped in the area.⁷⁷⁶

But, what was the general impression of the Egyptians? Would they try to repel the invasion near the landing area or during the later stages of the campaign? French intelligence listed three options. In the first option, the Egyptians would resist the landing by all possible means in the vicinity of the landing areas. In addition, they would use the local reserves of 1–3 infantry battalions and an armoured regiment for counterattacks. The second option was based on the assumption that the Egyptians had decided to fight only a limited battle against the invasion near the bridgehead. The mission of the forces in the Alexandria region was not to repulse the attack but to buy time for the Egyptian high command to prepare for the main battle outside of Cairo. In the third option, the Egyptians would abandon the idea of defending the beaches. The task of Egyptian forces would be to buy time, but this would be achieved by a counter-attack of local reserves outside of Alexandria. The French thought option two was the most probable case. The main battle would not be fought around Alexandria, but outside of Cairo. However, this option did not exclude the possibility of the Egyptians reinforcing Alexandria. The French believed that the Egyptians would be able to reinforce the area

⁷⁷⁴ SHD 9 U 3, État-Major Combiné des Forces Armées, Septembre 1956, "Bulletin de Renseignements".

⁷⁷⁵ SHD 9 U 4, État-Major des Forces Armées, 2ème Division, 29 août 1956, "Note de renseignement". In French military nomenclature, a centre of resistance (*centre de résistance*) had a specific meaning: it was a stronghold of a battalion sized unit, *Définitions relatives aux Formations aux Feux et au Combat* (École D'application du Génie, 1952), p.11.

⁷⁷⁶ SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome I, annexe 5, calque 2 "Implementation ennemie au S.W. D'Alexandrie connue à la date au 6 Septembre".

with a substantial number of forces from Cairo. The first elements of an armoured force would reach the battle zone within eight hours. Within 24 hours, the Egyptians could deploy a brigade-sized composite unit that consisted of up to three regiments of armour into the battle zone.⁷⁷⁷

This amount of armour would be a serious threat to the French paratroopers holding the vital road junctions in the Al Amariya region and it explains the French concept of putting ashore as many armoured units as possible in the assault phase. The idea of a counterattack from the Cairo area was related to the intelligence estimates that anticipated the establishment of a new armoured formation with the substantial amount of hardware arriving from the Soviet Bloc and Spain. French and British intelligence had noted in late August that the Egyptian Army was establishing an armoured division.⁷⁷⁸

Apparently the French were more worried about Egyptian abilities to conduct mobile operations than the British. After all, moving an armoured unit over 150 kilometres through a featureless desert while under air attack would have been no easy task. French intelligence estimated that the Egyptians had several hundred railway cars that were capable of carrying armour and that there were at least two appropriate unloading platforms close to Alexandria. However, transfer of the unit would be limited to railways vulnerable to air attacks. On the road, the situation would be different as it was thought that Egypt only had fifty tank-transporters.⁷⁷⁹ This would leave the Egyptians with no other alternative than to drive the tanks through the dessert to the battle zone. Logistically, this was a very demanding task.

The question of the involvement of foreign personnel was complex. An intelligence report produced in early October estimated that about 400 foreign experts had entered Egypt, but this could not be confirmed. French intelligence interpreted the arrival of these technicians differently from the British Minister of Defence who presented the new concept of operations to the Egypt Committee on 6 September. The French did not consider the

⁷⁷⁷ SHD 9 U 8, For SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome I, annexe 6ce A, 3eme Bureau,, 51/FA/3/OPE/TS/ 7 Septembre 1956, "Ordre D'Operation No 2, annexe T".

⁷⁷⁸ SHD 9 U 11, Force A, Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte, Tome I, annexe 5.

⁷⁷⁹ DHD 9 U 4, État-Major des Forces Armees, 2ème Division, 25 août 1956, "Note de renseignement: Moyens de transport de chars de l'armée égyptienne".

foreign personnel to be an immediate threat to Allied operations or an indication of rapid foreign involvement. They were in Egypt to instruct the Egyptians, who would then be much more able to use their new weapons the following next spring. The gloomy conclusion, which was a factor in French impatience, was "le temps travaille contre nous", time is against us.⁷⁸⁰

9.4 Speed is vital – the French assessment of the ground campaign

The fact that the French adapted to the change in the landing site did not mean that they agreed with the total change of concept. Prolonged aerial operations were hardly in the minds of the French when they promoted a change in the landing site. It appears that the French were kept in the dark, at least as regards the details, while the new concept was being developed. After all, there was not a single Frenchman in General Keightley's headquarters.⁷⁸¹ Beaufre expressed his serious doubts about the new concept as soon as it emerged. First, there was the question of resources. Would 300 planes be sufficient to bring the Egyptians to their knees? The more serious objection, presented on several occasions in this work, was time. World opinion would not take a wait-and-see attitude. According to Beaufre, the solution was to keep the aero-psychological phase as short as possible. He suggested that the forces capable of amphibious and airborne operations should be assembled in Cyprus, from which they could be deployed within 48 hours. However, this would not be enough. The French recognised the vulnerability of Port Said. The breakout would be difficult and slow because of the terrain and poor port facilities. There would be enough time for the Egyptians to sabotage the canal and assemble strong forces in Ismailia, an essential centre of communications. To prevent the Egyptians from taking countermeasures, the first objective for the first day's operations should be El Qantara instead of Port Said.⁷⁸²

⁷⁸⁰ SHD 9 U 4, Forces Francaises D'Intervention, État-Major Groupe Opérationnel, 19/E.M./OPS/T.S., 3 Octobre 1956, "Synthèse de Renseignements, Possibilités des Armees Moyen-Orient".

⁷⁸¹ SHD 9 U 3, A telephone directory of General Keightley's headquarters, compiled in the War Office on 21 August 1956 and interview of General Major Richard Keightley CB, 8 August 2006.

⁷⁸² Andre Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition*, pp. 53–55.

According to Beaufre, he insisted from the very beginning that El Qantara was the real target of the initial operations. His claim has a logical foundation. Even the British manuals emphasised that an amphibious assault was only a means to engage in subsequent decisive ground operations. Apparently, the French were more focussed on this than the British. The French planning machinery produced several appreciations that analysed the development of the operational situation after the landing.

The estimate produced by the 3. Bureau of General Gilles' Airborne Headquarters was based on the assumption that the Egyptians would take active counter-measures before and after the initial landing. The size and intensity of the effort would depend on whether the Egyptians planned to fight only a rearguard action in El Qantara and save their main effort for Ismailia or on whether El Qantara would be the site of the decisive battle. If the Egyptians were to commit to a serious fight over El Qantara, this combat could develop into a major battle. The brigade-sized stronghold at El Qantara could be reinforced from several directions. Two battalion-sized armoured battlegroups (*sous-groupement blindé*)⁷⁸³ from Ismailia would be able to reach El Qantara within six hours. The Egyptian forces on the Sinai front could reinforce the area from the east with the main elements of a brigade within 36 hours and with another three battalions within three days.⁷⁸⁴ The concentration of forces of this magnitude would enable the Egyptians to establish two defence zones of up to eight battalions reinforced by a mobile reserve in the rear.⁷⁸⁵

The natural conclusion from this estimate was to seize El Qantara at the earliest possible moment. This concept was to be based on speed, and on the greatest possible air effort. Port Said and Port Fuad would have to be secured by the evening of the landing. Within 24 hours the forces participating in the attack on El Qantara would be disembarked and would

⁷⁸³ In French military terminology, a "Sous-Groupement Blinde" was a battalion-sized task force containing armour, infantry, artillery observation and engineering elements, *Le Sous-Groupement Blindé* (Edition refondue) (Saumur: Ecole D'Application de L'Arme Blindée et de La Cavallerie, 1954), p.4.

⁷⁸⁴ SHD 9 U 8, *État-Major Aéroporté*, 3eme Bureau, 3 Octobre 1956, "Appreciation de la situation".

⁷⁸⁵ SHD 9 U 8, *État-Major Aéroporté*, 10 Octobre 1956, "Fiche numero 5 relative à l'effectif "El Qantara"".

advance into contact. At the same time two regimental-sized parachute landings would take place on both sides of the canal. The eastern landing would prevent any reinforcements arriving from the Sinai. The landing on the western side was to be made between Ismailia and El Qantara, and was to hold off counter-attacks from Ismailia. With the Egyptian forces besieged from two directions, the main attack by two reinforced regiments on both sides of the canal would follow. Success would also depend on aerial support as numerical superiority could not be achieved. Air interdiction would have to commence very soon after the initiation of the operation to prevent the Egyptians from reinforcing their positions. During the battle, full advantage of close air support was to be taken. In addition, a substantial effort by the transport units would be required.⁷⁸⁶

An early capture of El Qantara would not remove the prospect of heavy fighting in the Canal Zone with relatively weak forces. The French recognised that the main Egyptian defence was concentrated in Ismailia, which dominated communications in all directions. Due to the very limited capacity of Port Said and the lack of amphibious vessels, Beaufre could expect to have only a limited number of forces available by D+2. According to a landing timetable, the main body of the heavy armour, 8 Dragoon Regiment, was to be operationally ready by D+4. It would take almost two weeks to completely disembark the main formation, 7 DMR.⁷⁸⁷

The French anticipated that the battle for Ismailia, an important communication hub, would become the major problem in the campaign for the Canal Zone. According to a French intelligence estimate, the garrison in Ismailia consisted of an infantry brigade, a National Guard brigade and elements of an armoured regiment. Owing to its position, the number of reinforcements would be dependant on the time available. The worst case scenario called for almost a divisional-sized enemy of ten infantry battalions and five tank squadrons reinforced with artillery and engineers.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁶ SHD 9 U 8, État-Major Aéroporté, 3eme Bureau, 4 Octobre 1956, "Fiche 2".

⁷⁸⁷ SHD 9 U 8, Force A, État-Major, 3eme Bureau, 120/FA/3/OPS/TS/ 23 Septembre 1956, "Ordre D'Opération No 4..

⁷⁸⁸ SHD 9 U 8, État-Major Aéroporté, 3eme Bureau, 13 Octobre 1956, "Fiche 6".

9.5 The French – Israeli connection

As mentioned, the very first French evaluations of their options anticipated co-operation with the Israeli Defence Forces. The collaboration between the armed forces commenced within days of the nationalisation, and reached its climax during the actual operation.

The Israeli defence attaché in Paris contacted the chief of 2. Bureau, État Major de L'Armée on 30 July. He suggested decisive action. From the Israeli point of view, the time was ripe for a strike. The Egyptian Armed Forces had not yet become accustomed to their new arsenal. The introduction of new weapons and advisors had also overturned the Egyptian doctrine. This vulnerability, the lack of knowledge about how to fight, should be exploited. However, Israel was not willing to act alone as this might lead to a general conflict between the Arab world and Israel. Israel would welcome any Western action and was prepared to use her armed forces as a "Fleet in being", and to be a diversionary force along the Sinai. Israel would also be prepared to deliver intelligence materiel to the French.⁷⁸⁹

The initial French evaluation did not rule out a combined Franco-Israeli operation. It appears that this option was buried for two months. However, when the British attitude became more hesitant in October, it was re-initiated.

Maurice Bourgés-Manoury, the French Minister of Defence, sent Admiral Barjot a secret directive on 8 October that urged him to study the concept of Franco-Israeli operations.⁷⁹⁰ Admiral Barjot presented his view of this operational concept to the Minister of Defence on 17 October. In Barjot's view, an operation without a British presence was risky due to the feebleness of the Franco-Israeli air forces. In addition to the Israeli Air Force, the French would be able to allocate no more than 130 fighters or fighter-bombers to the

⁷⁸⁹ SHD 8 S 273, État-Major des Forces Armées, 2ème Bureau, 14707/30 Juillet 1956, "Visite de l'Attaché Militaire d'Israël".

⁷⁹⁰ Gaujac, Paul, "France and the Crisis of Suez: An Appraisal, Forty Years On" in David Tal (ed.) *The 1956 War. Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East*, (Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), pp. 54–55.

operation. This was only about 1/3 of the combined Franco-British air forces.⁷⁹¹

The concept, called Operation 750, was based on two assumptions. Britain would be willing to allow the French to use Cyprus as a base and the United States was to remain neutral. The campaign was to open at first light with intensive air operations aimed at neutralising the Egyptian Air Force on its airfields. Presumably for political reasons, all flights would only be flown from Israeli airfields. On day two, the French ground attack planes, based in Cyprus, would join the operations that were aimed at destroying the Egyptian Air Force. Some of the missions would be diverted to the supply system and the armour reserves near Cairo. The ground attack by the Israeli Army would begin the first night following the initial air attacks. The Israeli ground attacks would first penetrate the Egyptian defences in the Sinai. This was to be followed by a thrust towards El Qantara. The French ground forces were to join the operations on day two by capturing Port Said and Port Fuad in a combined operation involving an amphibious assault and airborne landings. After securing the causeway leading to Port Said at El Qantara, the combined Franco-Israeli forces would advance towards Ismailia, the core of Egyptian defences in the Canal Zone.⁷⁹²

Operation 750 was cancelled because the British decided to launch Operation Musketeer after all. However, Franco-Israeli military co-operation during the actual operations was much more significant and more thoroughly planned than the British anticipated.

The Israeli high command was particularly worried about the Egyptian ability to bomb Israeli cities after hostilities commenced. In response to an Israeli appeal, the French moved naval and air assets in total secrecy to Israel prior to the Israeli push into the Sinai Peninsula. The purpose of this operation, codenamed "Archer", was to protect Haifa and Tel Aviv from air attacks. The French naval element consisted of three vessels and the air element included

⁷⁹¹ SHD 9 U 4, Forces Francaises D-Orient, Commandant en Chef, 13 E.M.-CAB/T.S., 17 Octobre 1956.

⁷⁹² SHD 9 U 4, Forces Francaises D'Orient, D'Etat-major, 17 Octobre 1956, "Instruction Secrete Personnelle".

two squadrons of Mystere fighters and a squadron of F-84 Thunderjet ground attack planes.⁷⁹³

The commander of the naval element received his orders directly from Admiral Barjot. According to the plan, two of the French vessels were to sail to Tel Aviv and one to Haifa prior to the beginning of Israeli operations. After resupply in the Israeli harbours, the ships were to participate in the air defences of these two cities in co-operation with the Israeli Defence Forces.⁷⁹⁴

The French air squadrons participating in Operation Archer were flown to Israel in the last days of October. For the sake of secrecy, these planes were even repainted with Israeli insignia. In addition to the air defence assets, the French Air Force provided the Israelis with necessary transport capacity in the form of Dakota and Noratlas transport aircraft.⁷⁹⁵

Communication and co-ordination between the Israeli and French high commands were handled by attaching a French liaison team, Mission X, to the Israeli Defence Forces. The documents do not reveal at which level in the Israeli military hierarchy the French liaison team operated, but the quality of information suggests a connection with the Israeli General Staff. It appears that the French liaison group was mainly an intelligence link that also relayed requests concerning combined Franco-Israeli operations.

The final result of the co-operation between the French and the Israelis was seen at the tactical level. To co-ordinate the battle after the landing along the east bank of the Canal, the French established contact with the Israeli Army attacking through the Sinai Peninsula. The liaison officer had a direct radio connection to the command post of 10 Parachute Division. The task of the liaison officer was to relay intelligence between 10 Parachute Division and the Israelis. In the later stages, he was to help co-ordinate the movements of the French and Israeli forces. The planning directive given to this liaison

⁷⁹³ SHD 9 U 4, 4ème Division D'Escourters D'Escadre, "Rapport de Mission", 14 Novembre 1956.

⁷⁹⁴ SHD 9 U 4, 4ème Division D'Escourters D'Escadre, "Rapport de Mission", 14 Novembre 1956.

⁷⁹⁵ Brian Cull with David Nicolle and Shlomo Aloni, *Wings Over Suez* (London: Grubb Street, 1996), pp. 106–107.

officer can be used to determine how the French saw the development of operations on the eastern bank of the canal. In the first stages on 5 November, the Israelis were to operate against El Qantara with the aim of diverting the Egyptians from the landing site. In the second stage two days later, the Israelis and the French 10 Parachute Division were to co-ordinate their efforts in a combined attack on El Qantara.⁷⁹⁶

9.6 Conclusions

The secret co-operation between Israel, Britain and France is very explainable in hindsight. The French military sought co-operation from the beginning of the crisis since France was not able to conduct effective military operations against Egypt single-handedly. The first evaluations revealed the limitations of the French Armed Forces. French forces were very capable of carrying out tactical operations, but a lack of bases and the relative weakness of the French Navy did not allow them to put adequate forces ashore.

The French had both political and military reasons for co-operating with Israel from the beginning of the crisis. By beginning ultra secret communications with Israel, the French government prepared for the unwelcome possibility of the British abandoning the military option. As a result, the French military was assigned the task of producing sensible and adequate military alternatives for going to war without Britain.

Like the British, the French military considered the Israeli Defence Forces to be the most potent military factor in the region. The military plans of the Franco-Israeli alliance sought to make the best of each other's capabilities. The Israeli Defence Forces were to provide the alliance with most of the ground forces, while the French were to allocate a sufficient air element. This concept remained the basis of Franco-Israeli military co-operation throughout the crisis.

⁷⁹⁶ SHD 1 H 2070, 10 DP, "Operation 700 Bis, Rapport D'opération", 1956, Exact date unknown.

The evidence suggests that the French possessed more advanced capabilities than the British in certain fields. This was particularly the case with airborne operations. It is apparent from the way the French organised their airborne operations that they saw the role of airborne operations in a totally different light from the British. In the British view, airborne operations were to be conducted as part of a larger action within a comparatively limited time frame. They had good reasons for their view: namely a bitter experience in the Second World War. However, the French airborne concept had suffered even worse setbacks recently in Diem Biem Phu. The French command and supply organisation for their airborne operations was developed to support independent or at least semi-independent operations lasting for days or even longer periods of time.

The French military, and General Beaufre above all, focused most of their post-operations criticism on the timetable. The pragmatic British way of planning and conducting operations was interpreted as lack of innovation, and as retrograde thinking. There is a systematic trait in the French views: a drive for speed. But was the obsession with speed only a dead letter with no practical prospects of succeeding? The French Armed Forces were not operationally ready for action in August after all. One should also bear in mind that French intelligence had more respect for Egyptian capabilities than did their counter-parts in Britain.

However, there is a rationale that explains the French approach. According to French intelligence estimates, the Egyptians would be able to concentrate a substantial number of forces in Alexandria or Port Said–El Qantara within a relatively short period of time. At the same time, the Allied disembarkation was bound to be slow, especially in Port Said. As a result, the only way to avoid a totally unfavourable force ratio against the Egyptians was to seek battle at the earliest possible moment and to count on the qualitative superiority of Allied forces. French planners sought to deny the Egyptians the ability to reinforce their positions along the Canal by using all available airborne elements and armour rapidly. This concept aimed to divide Egyptian forces into reasonable portions and to destroy these pieces one at a time instead of fighting one major battle. By preventing Egyptian reinforcements from reaching their positions and fighting a defensive battle, the Allies would

force the Egyptian army to fight a mobile battle that it was not doctrinally suited for. As a result, the battles for Port Said, El Qantara and Ismailia should take place in the shortest possible time period, and preferably even partially simultaneously.

French influence on the general development of the operational concept remains rather small. It appears that the French perspective in developing the campaign was not a governing factor when the landing site was changed from Alexandria to Port Said. The French, without a bomber force or experience in a bombing campaign, could not understand the concept of an aero-psychological campaign. The French pursued a decisive campaign directed at the Canal Zone, but without a air offensive. By accepting perhaps higher risks than the British, the French sought a fast occupation of the Canal Zone before world opinion would gain momentum.

10 REVISE IS EXECUTED

The formal decision to launch Operation Musketeer took place during a full meeting of the Cabinet on 25 October, two days after it had been informed of the collusion with Israel.⁷⁹⁷ Although General Keightley passed his formal planning instructions to the Task Force Commanders on 25 October, things had begun to happen a few days earlier. The Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet had suggested that Plan A, the rapid occupation of Port Said by Cyprus-based forces, was not feasible any longer because the weather had turned bad in the Mediterranean earlier than usual. This plan would need to be abandoned altogether and the timetable of the Winter Plan would need to be adopted.⁷⁹⁸ Grantham received his answer on 24 October, before the Sèvres document was signed or the operation was approved by the Cabinet. According to General Keightley's orders, Plan A was cancelled and the original timetable of Musketeer Revise was retained. Now there was no longer an option of carrying out the air offensive for weeks. The Task Force Commanders were to plan to conduct their assault eleven days after the operation was ordered. In addition, Keightley had received instructions to put a small occupation force into Port Said if there was no opposition.⁷⁹⁹

Due to political demands, the timing was tightened still further and the basic plans were changed before the war started. The timing of the landing proved to be problematic. It had been decided that D-Day was to be 31 October, the day when the Allied ultimatum expired. But due to political pressure, Keightley asked whether the landing could take place only six days after D-Day.⁸⁰⁰ Not only should the landing take place more quickly, but also the bombing scheme would need to be radically altered. Hostilities could not be started earlier than 1500 hours, even though the original air plan called for the first RAF bomber strikes to be conducted before first light. These attacks were to be closely followed by a maximum number of carrier air strikes to

⁷⁹⁷ NA CAB 128/40-2, CM (56) 72nd Conclusions, 23 October 1956 and 73rd Conclusions, 24 October, and CAB 128/30, CM (56) 74th Conclusions, 25 October 1956.

⁷⁹⁸ NA ADM 116/6135, Admiral Grantham to General Keightley, 20 October 1956.

⁷⁹⁹ NA ADM 116/6135, General Keightley to Admiral Grantham, 24 October 1956.

⁸⁰⁰ NA ADM 116/6135, General Keightley to Admiral Grantham, 27 October 1956.

prevent the Egyptians from recovering. The bombing was to start on 31 October at 1500 hours, and the landing was to take place on 6 November.⁸⁰¹

Apart from the radically accelerated air campaign, the basic phasing of the plan remained unaltered. The neutralisation of the Egyptian Air Force was to be followed by an air offensive combined "with a carefully directed psychological campaign". The landing and seizure of the Canal Zone were to come in the third phase, which was to be on 6 November.⁸⁰²

10.1 The air offensive that never was

The Royal Air Force finished the deployment of its bomber squadrons to Malta and Cyprus by 30 October.⁸⁰³ The first bombing missions, which aimed to destroy the Egyptian Air Force, took place on the evening of 31 October due to the changed timetable. Operations continued at an accelerated pace for two days. In spite of the several problems that the Allied air element encountered in this period, the results of the two-day offensive were clear: the bulk of the Egyptian Air Force was annihilated under the strain of almost 800 Allied sorties.⁸⁰⁴

The next phase of the operational concept was abandoned before it had really begun. General Keightley was not allowed to pursue his concept for the air offensive. As mentioned earlier, air strikes on the Egyptian oil facilities, which were the cornerstone of the Egyptian economy, were one of the key parts of the air campaign. On 1 November, the Egypt Committee decided against the destruction of the Egyptian oil installations. Repercussions in

⁸⁰¹ NA ADM 116/6135, Admiral Grantham to General Keightley, 27 October 1956 and Keightley to Grantham 31 October.

⁸⁰² WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Task Force, 31 October 1956, "Allied Land Force Operation Order No 4."

⁸⁰³ AIR 8/2090, A note by Wing Commander Hughes, 12 Nov 1956, "Deployment of Bomber Forces to the Middle East".

⁸⁰⁴ NA AIR 14/4441, Bomber Command, Operational Research Branch, Report number 355: "Bombing and Ground Attack Operations During Operation Musketeer" and AIR 8/2111, Air Ministry, D.D. (Ops), TS 301/III, 17 February 1957, "Operation Musketeer". Mohamed Heikal, an Egyptian historian, has an interesting and quite reasonable explanation for why the Egyptian Air Force remained fairly passive in this phase of the operation. Nasser wanted to spare his pilots for further conflicts with Israel. Evidently, Nasser realised that pilots, he had only 120 fully trained at the time and some 250 in training, were a more valuable asset than planes that could be replaced at relatively short notice, Mohamed H Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*, (London: Andre Deutch, 1986), p. 186.

other Arab countries could damage the United Kingdom's own oil interests.⁸⁰⁵ According to the instructions to the Commander-in-Chief, the bombing campaign should concentrate on military targets. Any targets that resulted in civilian casualties should be avoided all together.⁸⁰⁶ With hindsight, one can only wonder why the strategic repercussions of attacking the oil were not properly evaluated in the planning phase. The idea of an attack on the oil had earlier been abandoned by an *ad hoc* committee consisting of civil servants.⁸⁰⁷

The hectic timetable and the decision to abandon the destruction of the Egyptian oil installations destroyed any chances for success for the psychological operations. Even Radio Cairo had remained on the air during phase two of the operations. General Keightley had placed this radio station on the list of targets that were to be attacked first. However, this request was turned down and the attack took place only on 2 November.⁸⁰⁸ A major raid by twenty Canberra-bombers bombed the facility, but failed to destroy it. Further missions by ground attack planes were not carried out owing to the possibility of causing civilian casualties.⁸⁰⁹

The leaflet operations were also a failure. Over two million leaflets were ordered and apparently produced.⁸¹⁰ However, most of the leaflets were never dropped. Two leaflet missions planned for 1 and 2 November were cancelled because the risk of losing scarce transport aircraft was considered to be not worth taking. A third leaflet mission was conducted on 3 November, but the aircraft were recalled as the airborne assault was to be mounted on the following day. One aircraft did not receive the order to return and it dropped leaflets over Cairo. The airborne assault was also the reason for the cancellation of the fourth leaflet mission planned for 4 November. Finally, the fifth leaflet drop was cancelled because the surrender of Port Said was

⁸⁰⁵ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 37th Meeting, 1 November 1956.

⁸⁰⁶ NA AIR 8/1940, COSKEY 20, 2 November 1956.

⁸⁰⁷ NA MT 59/3121, A draft memorandum by the *ad hoc* Suez Committee, 28 August 1956.

⁸⁰⁸ Papers of General Sir Charles Keightley, Transcripts: rear link communications Episkopi-London.

⁸⁰⁹ See Brian Cull with David Nicolle and Shlomo Aloni, *Wings Over Suez*, pp. 237–239. For a description of the raid from the time, see NA AIR 20/9967, Bomber Wing Cyprus, "Report on Operation Musketeer, annex D", 30 December 1956.

⁸¹⁰ Al-Solami, 216.

expected.⁸¹¹ This failure also included the voice aircraft, which were never used in conjunction with the bombing. The reason is simple. The aircraft available did not have an adequate range to operate from Cyprus.⁸¹²

The initiative in the sensitive field of propaganda was helplessly lost. The reasons for the failure are obvious and were acknowledged by Keightley himself. In his final report, he stated that "psychological warfare is an essential part of the military plan in these days, secondly that it is clearly related to political factors and thirdly that the team to carry it out cannot achieve success without training, experience, and proper equipment."⁸¹³ None of these preconditions were fulfilled. In addition, his preferred method for causing a moral collapse, the attack on the oil, was not executed at all. The lack of proper political guidance was reflected in the planning for the psychological warfare. Complicated psychological operations should not only include measures aimed at the armed forces: they should have diplomatic, economic and foreign policy dimensions.

Due to the abandonment of the initial timetable, the all out air effort on the Egyptian Army installations lasted for only a single day. In this phase, large targets, such as Huckstep Camp and Almaza Barracks, were subjected to aerial attacks. In addition, the air campaign included an extensive number of battlefield interdiction sorties aimed at preventing reinforcements from reaching Port Said from the morning of 3 November.⁸¹⁴

On 4 November, the air effort was redirected because the landing sequence had been altered. According to the Air Task Force's overall plan, most of the attack sorties were directed against the defences of Port Said.⁸¹⁵ Most of the sorties near Port Said were flown by naval aircraft, which strafed the located coastal and anti-aircraft positions and other static defences throughout the

⁸¹¹ NA, AIR 24-2426, HQ Air Task Force Operations Book, App. 16.

⁸¹² Papers of General Sir Charles Keightley, Brigadier Fergusson's memorandum "Psychological Warfare Campaign", 15 October 1956.

⁸¹³ NA DEFE 11/137, COS (57) 220, 11 October 1957, "Part II of General Sir Charles Keightley's Despatch on Operations in the Eastern Mediterranean November–December, 1956".

⁸¹⁴ NA AIR 14/4030, Admiralty, Department of Operational Research, August 1957, Report No.34: "Carrier Operations in Support of Operation Musketeer".

⁸¹⁵ NA AIR 20/10206, Air Task Force Headquarters, 3 November 1956, "Operation Telescope, Overall Air Plan".

day. The land-based ground attack planes were still used for interdiction.⁸¹⁶ The bomber force, whose role diminished after the Egyptian Air Force was destroyed, made nightly raids against large aerial targets such as Huckstep Barracks.⁸¹⁷

ALLOCATION OF BOMBER AND STRIKE MISSIONS ⁸¹⁸			
Day	Bomber Command	Land-based aircraft	Carrier-borne aircraft
31 Oct	Airfields	--	--
1 Nov	Airfields	Airfields	Airfields
2 Nov	Airfields Radio Cairo Army barracks	Airfields Army barracks Radio station	Army barracks
3 Nov	Army barracks Marshalling yard	Interdiction	Interdiction
4 Nov	Radar station Army barracks	Airfields Interdiction Army barracks	Coast defences
5 Nov	Army barracks	Coast defences Interdiction	Close Air Support
6 Nov	--	Coast defences Interdiction	Close Air Support

Table 5: Allocation of bomber and strike missions

10.2 Revise revised

As soon as the bombing started, the Task Force Commanders faced their worst fears. They were asked whether the invasion could take place earlier than ordered. The resolution of the politicians collapsed from the very beginning. It was obvious that the landing day (L-Day) could not take place before 6 November. The assault convoy had sailed from Malta on 30 October, just before midnight. The force could not reach Port Said before dawn on 6 November. The Task Force Commanders responded by producing three contingency plans within a couple of days that took advantage of the only available asset that could be deployed to Egypt rapidly: the airborne forces.

⁸¹⁶ ADM 116/6104, Office of the Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers, 14 December 1956, "Operation Musketeer – Reports of Proceedings – Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers", pp. 23–24.

⁸¹⁷ NA AIR 14/4441, Bomber Command, Operational Research Branch, Report number 355: "Bombing and Ground Attack Operations During Operation Musketeer".

⁸¹⁸ The table has been compiled based on the following sources:

1. NA ADM 1/27051, Admiralty, Department of Operational Research, 1959, D.O.R. Report No. 34, "Carrier Operations in Support of Operation Musketeer".
2. NA, AIR 24-2426, HQ Air Task Force Operations Record Book.
3. AIR 14/4441, Bomber Command, Operational Research Branch, Report number 355: "Bombing and Ground Attack Operations During Operation Musketeer".

Operation Omelette was based on an assumption of no opposition from the Egyptians. It called for the rapid occupation of Port Said. However, only a negligible force of five Hastings and ten Valettes was available due to airfield congestion and other tasks. The first phase of the operation was to be carried out by the French. On the first day, a British parachute force of about 300 men was to seize the El Gamil airfield while a full French parachute regiment would secure Port Fuad. On the next day, the main elements of the Cyprus-based 16 Independent Parachute Brigade Group would arrive on board two troopships and another French parachute regiment would either land at El Gamil or seize the end of the causeway at El Qantara. Finally, on the third day, another French airborne regiment would land in the vicinity of El Qantara.⁸¹⁹

The next contingency plan, Operation Simplex, called for two French parachute regiments and a British parachute battalion to be dropped at El Gamil with the aim of “obviating the need for a full scale assault and minimising casualties and damage in the port and town”. After the landing, the parachute force was to test the defences by probing towards the port of Port Said. If the defences were weak or non-existent, 16 Parachute Brigade would land at Port Said on the following day. If the Egyptians continued to resist, a seaborne assault would be made according to the original plan.⁸²⁰

Why were neither of these contingency plans used, even though there was pressure from both the Prime Minister and the French? The Chiefs of Staff considered the matter on 2 and 3 November. The main reason was that the British did not know what kind of resistance awaited them. The question of the status of the Egyptian morale popped up once again. It would have been politically humiliating to have a light assault force repulsed by the Egyptians. As the result, a French request to speed up the operations was also politely declined.⁸²¹ But the consensus in front of the French was partly a façade. The Chiefs were far from unanimous. The First Sea Lord had sent a personal

⁸¹⁹ WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Task Force, 31 October 1956, “Allied Land Force Operation Order No 5”.

⁸²⁰ WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Task Force, 2 November 1956, “Allied Land Force Operation Order No 6” and WO 288/77, “2 (Br) Corps Report on Operation Musketeer”, 1 February 1957, p. 44–45.

⁸²¹ NA DEFE 11/138, COS (56) 109th Meeting, 2 November 1956.

letter to the Prime Minister, appealing to him to cancel the operation – in vain.⁸²²

On 3 November, the Minister of Defence hosted a staff meeting with the quarrelsome Chiefs. General Keightley had sent his appreciation of the situation the previous day. It claimed that a peaceful entry into Port Said was not practicable. According to photographic reconnaissance flights, the Egyptians were preparing to fight. A massive bombardment would be needed to allow the landing to take place without heavy Allied casualties. Keightley listed three alternatives: to carry out the invasion according to the plans, to delay the assault and carry out a prolonged air campaign according to the concept of Musketeer Revise or to land west of the canal. He claimed that the first alternative was the only one practical one. Because the prolonged air offensive was not given any time to work, “the devastation of Port Said is the price we must pay”, Keightley reasoned.⁸²³ It appears that only the Chief of the Imperial General Staff maintained his resolve. The First Sea Lord called for different options without being able to present his own view clearly. The thoughts of the airmen, Dickson and Boyle, remain unrecorded. General Templer demanded that the operation should be carried out according to the timetable. Shifting to the west of the canal was not possible: for political, and for tactical reasons. To reduce the number of civilian casualties, an issue that had particularly concerned the First Sea Lord, Templer suggested that a warning should be issued before the attack.⁸²⁴ The Minister of Defence brought the matter before the Egypt Committee, which agreed with the suggestions of the Chiefs.⁸²⁵

With the international and domestic tension raising, the new Minister of Defence, Anthony Head, and General Templer, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, flew to Cyprus and arrived there on the morning of 4 November. In a staff meeting with General Keightley and Vice-Admiral Barjot, Head made three clear points. There was no way the original objective, the destruction of Nasser, could be achieved. The military operations were to seize the Canal

⁸²² Ziegler, *Mountbatten*, pp. 544–545 and NA PREM 11/1090, Lord Mountbatten to First Lord of Admiralty, 4 November 1956.

⁸²³ NA DEFE 11/135, Keightley to the Chiefs of Staff (KEYCOS 17), 2 November 1956.

⁸²⁴ NA DEFE 11/138, Minutes of Staff Conference in the Ministry of Defence, 3 November 1956.

⁸²⁵ NA CAB 134/1216, EC (56) 38th Meeting, 2 November 1956.

Zone, nothing more. Due to political pressure, the landings should take place as soon as possible. The third point was an intervention at the tactical level. To avoid civilian casualties, the naval bombardment preceding the landing was to be abandoned.⁸²⁶

The result of the meeting was a new plan: Operation Telescope. The parachute landings were to take place on the morning of 5 November, about 24 hours before the amphibious assault was to take place. The objectives were to seize the El Gamil airfield, to begin a probing attack towards Port Said and to seize the crossings over the Interior Basin. The first tasks would be carried out by the British 3 Parachute Battalion, while the French colonial parachute regiment was to take the crossings. If the Egyptians continued resisting, the assault landing would take place according to the original timetable on the morning of 6 November.⁸²⁷ The alteration of the plan also saw a change in the original command structure. According to the original plan, the British parachute force was to operate under the command of 3 Commando Brigade. It was now necessary to include a small detachment from 16 Airborne Brigade HQ in the parachute assault force to co-ordinate the operations of the French and British parachute forces as the marines were due to land one day later than the paratroopers.⁸²⁸

Apart from the timing of the parachute landing, the assault plan remained roughly unaltered. 3 Commando Brigade was to land two commandoes, 40 and 42, on the two landing beaches on the northern side of Port Said at H-Hour. After the fighting elements of the commandoes had secured the shoreline, the waterproofed Centurions of C Squadron of 6 Royal Tank Regiment were to wade ashore. Then, 40 Commando would advance southward and seize three basins in the port for further build-up. Simultaneously, 42 Commando was to seal the Arab Town to the east. Due

⁸²⁶ SHD 9 U 11, SHD 9 U 11, Force A, *Rapport sur l'opération d'Egypte*, Tome II, Annexe 20.

⁸²⁷ NA WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Task Force, 4 November 1956, "Allied Land Force Operation Instruction No 7".

⁸²⁸ NA WO 288/91, Headquarters Allied Task Force, 31 October 1956, "Allied Land Force Operation Order No 4 and LHCA, Papers of Papers of Maj Gen Charles Whish Dunbar, DUNBAR: File 3 / 4.

to the alteration in the plans, 45 Commando was to remain behind as a floating reserve.⁸²⁹

6 Royal Tank Regiment (minus C Squadron, which was attached to 3 Commando Brigade) was to be next to land on the jetties captured by the commandoes. It was to come under the command of 16 Independent Parachute Brigade on board the Cyprus-based LSTs. After taking the armour under its command, the combined force was to seize the southern end of the causeway. The brigade commander had decided to carry out the mission by establishing a balanced force of paratroopers and armour: 2 Parachute Battalion with a squadron of armour. This task force would advance through the town and relieve the French parachute force at the Interior Basin crossing. Having achieved this, it would advance at its best possible speed to the southern end of the causeway. After reaching its objective, 1 Parachute Battalion would pass through the battalion aiming to advance to El Qantara West.⁸³⁰

Both the parachute landing on 5 November and the subsequent seaborne assault were to be supported by a heavy bombardment scheme. As previously mentioned, the defences within Port Said were subjected to heavy aerial attacks on 4 November. The direct air support would culminate on the following morning when the parachute landings were to take place. The carrier-borne aircraft were to neutralise the Egyptian air defences prior to the arrival of the slow transport force over the designated drop zones. The direct support would continue throughout the day. The hours following the landing, when the parachute force was at its most vulnerable, would be covered by keeping two Cabranks of six aircraft available.⁸³¹

The seaward assault was to be preceded by an even heavier bombardment. The air attacks would hit the coastal defences at H-55–H-45. Then, the naval

⁸²⁹ NA ADM 202/456, Headquarters 3 Commando Brigade, 28 October 1956, "Operation Order Number 3, Operation Musketeer Revise" and ADM 202/455, Headquarters 3 Commando Brigade, 21 December 1953, "3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines Operation Musketeer Report".

⁸³⁰ NA WO 288/95, 16 Independent Parachute Brigade Group, 2 November 1956, "16 Independent Parachute Brigade, Operation Order Musketeer".

⁸³¹ NA AIR 20/10206, Air Task Force Headquarters, 3 November 1956, "Operation Telescope, Overall Air Plan".

bombardment, conducted by seven British vessels, would commence. It would continue until H-Hour and concentrate on the coastal defences and the landing beaches. The air strikes within Port Said were to be discontinued during the naval bombardment, but they would commence immediately after the landing: first against pre-planned targets and then on a Cabrank basis.⁸³² In addition to the pre-landing bombardment, both of the commandoes taking part in the initial landing were allocated fire support vessels whose fire was to be directed by Naval Gunfire Support Forward Observers allocated to each assault unit.⁸³³

10.3 The war ends before it even starts

The international pressure for a ceasefire was intense. The United Nations called for an immediate ceasefire, and the Soviets threatened military intervention. But above all, it was the American pressure that mattered. They had found out about the collusion with Israel and now targeted the British economy.⁸³⁴ Despite all this, the British Cabinet decided to carry out the parachute landings on 5 November in order to occupy Port Said before the end of hostilities.⁸³⁵ However, political guidance nearly eliminated the pre-landing fire programme stubbornly defended by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.⁸³⁶ The parachute landings took place thirty minutes after sunrise. Both the British and the French were able to consolidate their positions and by evening the British were on the outskirts of Port Said and the French had advanced to Port Fuad.⁸³⁷ The Egyptians continued fighting but they still were not in a position to launch an effective counterattack.

⁸³² NA AIR 20/10206, Air Task Force Headquarters, 3 November 1956, "Operation Telescope, Overall Air Plan" and Jackson, *Suez: The Forgotten Invasion*, pp. 101–102.

⁸³³ NA ADM 116/6100, Office of the Naval Force Commander, 27 October 1956, "Operation Musketeer (Revised), Naval Operation Order", Annex 9.

⁸³⁴ John Baylis, *Anglo-American Relations 1939–1980* (London: Macmillan Press, 1981), p. 56 and James Wyllie, *The Influence of British Arms: An Analysis of British Military Intervention since 1956* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1984), pp. 38–39.

⁸³⁵ Kyle, 438–443. For the American suspicions, see NA DEFE 13/12, Admiral Denny, the Head of the British Joint Services Mission in the United States, to the Minister of Defence, 2 November 1956. It is possible that the Americans had noticed the French military presence in Israel as the French apparently operated inside Israel without informing the British, see NA PREM 11/1132, Foreign Office to Paris, 1 November 1956.

⁸³⁶ NA DEFE 32/5, COS (56), 4 November 1956. Note that the meeting is not numbered.

⁸³⁷ For a full account of the fighting by the airborne forces, see (France) SHD 1 H 2070, 2^e Regiment de Parachutistes Coloniaux, "Compte-rendu de L'opération 'Amilcar'", 1956.

However, it became clear that if the Allies wanted to occupy Port Said, there was no alternative to an assault on the following day.

The last revision of the assault plan was in the order of battle and the pre-assault bombardment. For political reasons, the Libyan-based 10 Armoured Division, which had been assigned to the operation as a follow-up force, was dropped out of the order of battle. Also, the whole pre-landing bombardment was in peril. A fear of civilian casualties had earlier resulted in an order that the assault should not be supported by guns larger than 4.5 inches. A new order arrived only shortly before the landing calling off the entire bombardment programme. This order was ignored by the Task Force Commanders.⁸³⁸

Altogether, the landing and occupation of Port Said went smoothly, even though the plans needed some adjustments during the course of events. 3 Commando Brigade landed after the aerial and naval bombardment on the early morning of 6 November. After the landing, the commandoes supported by the tanks of C Squadron, 6 Royal Tank Regiment advanced fairly quickly to their objectives, while 45 Commando was brought in by the helicopters and used to mop-up the centre of the town, which was still the scene of continuous Egyptian sniping. However, the Egyptians had blocked the mouth of the harbour and further landings were delayed as alternate landing places were sought.⁸³⁹ The plans had to be altered. Instead of waiting for the arrival of the paratroopers, a squadron of armour was despatched to advance and make contact with the French at the crossing of the Interior Basin and then to continue the advance to El Tina with a small detachment of French "paras". This force would be followed by the main elements of 2 Parachute Battalion and the tank regiment, which were to reach El Cap, a few kilometres north of El Qantara, before midnight. During the push southward, 3 Commando Brigade was to clear Port Said and make contact with 3 Parachute Battalion.⁸⁴⁰ By midnight, these tasks were accomplished. El Cap was in Allied hands, the contact between the 3 Parachute Battalion and the commandoes had been made and only sporadic resistance remained in the

⁸³⁸ Speller, *The Role of Amphibious warfare in British Defence Policy, 1945–56* p. 192.

⁸³⁹ NA ADM 202/455, Headquarters 3 Commando Brigade, 21 December 1953, "3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines Operation Musketeer Report, Appendix L".

⁸⁴⁰ NA WO 288/78, "2 Corps Commander's Report, p. 54".

centre of Port Said. However, there was no opportunity to exploit the success as the cease-fire was agreed. Operation Musketeer had ended.

11 WINNING THE BATTLE DOES NOT WIN THE WAR

The Suez Crisis caught Britain in the middle of a painful military transition phase. Various post-war strategy papers, the Global Strategy Paper of 1952 perhaps being the most important of them, sought to define the role of Britain in the new world order. The papers put Britain in a very difficult situation. If Britain still sought to retain its status as a global actor in the eyes of the United States and the Soviet Union, there was no other option than to develop a large enough independent nuclear deterrence to ensure credibility. In that sense, the decision to acquire nuclear weapons can be explained more by political desires than by sound military requirements. The actual military commitment and the requirements were in totally different areas. For political and economic reasons, the British still felt compelled to maintain a conventional military presence around the world. The Cold War had also become a shooting war in various parts of the world and was consuming the already scant resources. All these factors came together to demand a vast amount of resources. In other words, there were too many commitments to deal with simultaneously. The evidence also tends to lead to the conclusion that post-war British governments lacked a strategic view. This may be partially correct. Yet, the time factor should also be borne in mind. The transformation of large organisations, such as the armed forces, is a tedious process where five or ten years is a relatively short period of time, even if the direction is well defined.

As a result of its strategic estimates, the British government decided that the nuclear forces were the most important instrument available for deterring the Soviet Union from starting a Global War. However, the armed forces were expected to be able to fight other types of wars, including Limited Wars and the Cold War due to the government's overseas commitments. The Middle East was considered the most important of these commitments because of its economic importance.

The preparations for war in the Middle East were carried out in accordance with three threat perceptions. The Baghdad Pact was established to counter the Soviet threat, which meant a Global War. The British were in no position

to commit themselves to the defence of the Pact, nor were they really willing to do so. As a result, Britain pursued a delicate pseudo-political military policy. The defence of the Baghdad Pact was based on creating the impression of a serious commitment and on promises of a non-existent, imaginary nuclear umbrella. Militarily, the Pact was an example of deception at the strategic level at its very best.

Nuclear weapons could not solve the problems stemming from the rise of nationalism and from Soviet Cold War methods in the Middle East. Britain was prepared to counter these threats both politically and militarily. The Baghdad Pact and the very complicated network of defence arrangements were part of the political effort. The military effort consisted of peacetime deployments, the concept of a strategic reserve and contingency plans.

The leading role of Egypt in the Arab world was acknowledged by the British military. Not only was Egypt the source of Arab nationalism, it also controlled the Suez Canal, which was considered to be vital to the British economy. Thus, it is not surprising that the Limited War scenario in the Middle East was built around Egypt. The plans for Limited War reflect the military thinking of the time quite well although they were not much more than an evaluation of the situation. They were based on a mixture of air power theory and the heritage of the Second World War. The Joint Planning Staff recognised the political and practical limitations of air power. The use of air power would not be sufficient, unless nuclear weapons were employed. In practise however, political considerations would prevent these weapons from being used. This would leave just one option: a joint-operation based on an airborne and amphibious assault by numerically superior forces.

However, Britain could not deploy such forces, at least it could not do so rapidly. The Middle East garrison was in transition after the withdrawal from the Canal Base. The ground forces were scattered and their composition was unbalanced for conventional warfare, as most of them were deployed in Global War counter-insurgency operations. This also meant that the spearhead units of any invasion, the commandoes and paratroopers, had not kept up with their special training requirements. The same shortcomings were also present in the strategic reserve and the transport capacity to

delivery forces to a conflict area. In fact, Britain did not have the ability to fight a medium-sized conventional conflict in the Middle East without making profound efforts. It was also not mentally prepared to launch rapid responses. The experience gained from the Second World War encouraged careful preparations lasting for months.

The tactical doctrines at the time of the Suez Crisis relied almost entirely on the Second World War experience. This is by no means surprising. Actually, the predominance of empirical experience is the nature of any military doctrine. Even if doctrines are produced for the future, they are naturally based on the past. This applied particularly well to the British case. This does not mean that the British had not learned from experience. On the contrary, the experiences gained from the Second World War were carefully preserved in the tactical manuals. Of course there is also the legitimate question of why the British did not adapt the much praised German tactics, which are often described as being more manoeuvre-oriented and flexible. The answer is logical. British doctrines had ultimately resulted in victory in the World Wars, whatever the temporary problems. The time factor also plays a role here. Developing and adopting a totally fresh approach to warfare, which required a change in the fundamentals of the doctrines in use, was (is) a process that easily takes one or two generations. Consequently, British tactical doctrines, particularly those applied in army and amphibious warfare, still relied on firepower, concentration of forces, significant administrative preparations and centralised command.

There also was a flexible element in the British armed forces: the Royal Air Force. The British inability to react quickly with any other means than air power is one of the reasons for the RAF's key role in all of the contingency plans. As a result, the bomber squadrons of the Royal Air Force were also at the core of the Tripartite plans. An extensive use of air power was also politically expedient because it no longer required long-lasting, expensive commitments that caused casualties among the conscripts of the British Army. The doctrine of the Royal Air Force also relied on experience. The bomber was considered the primary tool for moving aerial warfare over enemy territory. The Second World War had seen a bombing campaign that lasted for years. The post-war bombing surveys clearly indicated the futility of

attacking civilian morale by levelling cities through bombing. Instead, several key target categories were identified. Transportation systems and oil facilities were the most important of these targets. This observation appeared in the post-war doctrine of the Royal Air Force.

When Nasser nationalised the canal, the Joint Planning Staff was able to produce an outline plan within a couple of days. It was naturally based on the existing Limited War plan. Prudence, in the guise of establishing a numerically superior task force for conducting the possible operations, was the starting point for the plans. The landings and subsequent operations would be conducted by superior forces after the prerequisites for success, mastery in the air and at sea, were attained. This initial plan was left unfinished. The Task Force Commanders, who were responsible for the tactical planning, considered the facilities of Port Said harbour to be inadequate for a rapid breakout. The post-war cuts had deprived the Royal Navy of the capacity to maintain an invasion force over the beaches. Therefore, another precondition for a successful advance, and it must be emphasised that a landing is only a prelude to the main operation, was the capture of a good harbour. The Task Force Commanders' plan also corresponded better to the strategic objective, which at the time was to bring Nasser's regime down.

The lack of resistance the Alexandria plan caused within the planning machinery is notable. Eden, the Egypt Committee, the Chiefs of Staff and, above all, the Joint Planning Staff, which represented the highest level of professional military planning, accepted the plan. However, the plan was soon changed.

General Keightley, the Commander-in-Chief who had been nominated after the plan to land at Alexandria had been accepted, was not satisfied with the plan. He, the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and, seemingly, the Minister of Defence sought more flexibility. Probably anticipating the faltering political determination, they genuinely tried to introduce a more flexible plan by taking full advantage of the capabilities of the Royal Air Force. The advantages were obvious: a reduced order of battle, less preparation time, and, above all, room for political manoeuvring. The bombing campaign was

directed at the Egyptian transportation system and oil facilities, in accordance with experience, and could be called off, if necessary. This was very appealing in theory. In practise, it was not based on solid facts produced by the intelligence services.

In the Second World War, the Allies had never really been able to evaluate the effects of their bombing campaign on the German economy and moral. The details of the Egyptian economic vulnerabilities were very well understood by the British, but the state of Egyptian morale remained unclear. British intelligence was not able to evaluate whether a bombing campaign would cause the Egyptians to submit to British demands. The question was would the inconveniences resulting from the bombing cause the Egyptians to revolt against their government. British intelligence was not able to produce a coherent estimate about the subject, or at least it could not do so with the information available to it.

The concept of using the air force to suppress the Egyptian will to fight appealed to the airmen, who continued a "Slessorian" heritage of advocating air power and nuclear deterrence as the cornerstones of any sound strategy. After all, the silent battle over the status of the services and their resources was being fought constantly. Neither the First Sea Lord nor the Chief of the Imperial General Staff were in a strong enough position to counter the new concept. Their services were not able to offer such an appealing alternative.

After the air campaign concept was accepted by the Chiefs of Staff, presumably assisted by the Minister of Defence, it was quietly developed within the military. It appears that very little information about this planning process got to individuals outside a small circle of officials. The Egypt Official Committee, which was responsible for formulating political guidance, was unaware of this radical change in plans at the beginning of September when it produced the first draft of the political directive for the Commander-in-Chief. The committee was still under the impression that the purpose of the operation was to bring Nasser down by entering Cairo, if no other means were sufficient for this task.

The change in the concept put Eden in a peculiar situation. In one month, he and the Egypt Committee had willingly accepted two different outline plans. It can only be assumed that the indecisiveness within the military did not assist him in his decision-making, which was already impaired by his poor health. In that sense, the claim that the Chiefs of Staff let him down is valid. His disappointment about the change of plans from Alexandria to Port Said is obvious. Instead of providing him with a unanimous, determined tool to support his policy, the military leadership formulated a concept that even they themselves doubted. By producing a new, unproven concept, the Chiefs of Staff began to formulate policy, even if it was by accident. The ground operations aimed at Cairo were quietly buried as the order of battle was reduced. The strategic objective became more and more unclear.

Both the Joint Planning Staff and the Task Force Commanders opposed the new concept until the very end. In this light, the question of why the Chiefs of Staff accepted the plan is quite important. One reason is an intelligence failure at the strategic level, which was partially caused by ultra-secrecy and partially by a lack of information. Due to British intelligence's inability to assess the Egyptian will to fight, there was at least a possibility that Egyptian morale would collapse if the Egyptians were subjected to intensive bombing. The Commander-in-Chief and the airmen on the Chiefs of Staff Committee wanted to believe this. In other words, the bombing campaign was at least partially based on wishful thinking instead of allowing for the worst case scenario. This approach was not in accordance with the pragmatic tactical thinking of the time. They did not realise the fatal weakness of the concept until it was too late. The problem was not in the concept, it was in the fact that the execution of the concept depended on the political resolve to withstand the pressure of public opinion.

Although an air offensive was retained as the core of the concept, the plans were altered until they included a very traditional assault phase in practice. Because of the Task Force Commanders' persistence, parachute drops, heavy aerial and naval bombardment and an assault landing were included in the plans. These were all the heritage of well-proven joint operations dating back to the Second World War. The essence of the assault plans remained

almost unaltered during the planning process. The Winter Plan was only a variation of Musketeer Revise.

There is no question that the French were more eager to take risks than the British. They also possessed a better and more well-tested tool for rapid intervention. However, it is also clear that not even the French could have acted within days after the Egyptians took over the canal. Although their concept and machinery for airborne operations were well oiled, it would have taken weeks to prepare their forces for action against the Egyptians, who could muster several divisions themselves. Gone were the days when Egypt could be invaded by a few battalions. The French considered Nasser to be a menace and the source of some of their troubles in Algeria. As a result, their political attitude was much more aggressive than that of the British. As the French government was free from the need to consider political consequences in the Arab world, intensive co-operation with Israel was a natural choice. Co-operation with Israel was nothing but *realpolitik* for the French. For the British, it was also a moral issue that reached ridiculous dimensions and caused unnecessary self-pitying for decades to come.

The details of the Allied-Israeli co-operation still remain subject to dispute. We may never know the final truth. However, the available evidence does not support theories of an early collusion. The movement of the bomber squadrons and the activities of the French forces put the collusion, the actual agreement to form an alliance, in mid-October.

There is also the question of whether early co-operation would have changed anything. Nasser realised that the British and French were the main threat to him. As a result, he made a reasonable strategic decision. Two divisions were redeployed to Cairo. If the Allies wanted to bring him down, they would have to enter Cairo. The available evidence tends to lead to an inescapable conclusion. Nasser mastered strategy better than his opponents during the crisis.

Unlike the British, Nasser seemed to begin by thinking about what he wanted the political situation in post-war Egypt to be. He would only have to survive and world opinion would take care of the aggressors. It is obvious that the

British devoted too little thought to post-operational problems. As a result, the magnitude of the military commitment was recognised too late. In this sense, the planning process was ineffective. The politicians should have thought about the post-operational political alignments in Egypt at the very beginning of the crisis. The essential question that needed to be resolved was whether there was a possibility of finding a popular regime that would be willing to co-operate with the Allies. Consideration of this issue would have resulted in a strategic objective for the Chiefs of Staff, who then would have been in a better position to draw up military plans that fit the political objectives.

The British high command was never allowed to see whether the aerial concept would have worked. The bombing of the Egyptian infrastructure and the psychological operations were abandoned for political reasons, just as the Joint Planning Staff had predicted. There is no way to know if the bombing would have broken the Egyptian will to fight. However, it is quite clear that the psychological operations would not have been successful. This is because the preparations and execution were so rudimentary.

The general conclusion is that the main weakness of the plan was the time between the beginning of the bombing and the airborne assault. This is quite true. It appears that everybody had realised this, including General Keightley. By at least the third day of the bombing campaign, the Chiefs of Staff and General Keightley had realised that there would be no air offensive against the Egyptian will to fight. There would be nothing but a conventional preparation of the battlefield aimed at achieving the preconditions for a successful landing, which was now to take place in a totally unfavourable area.

From a British point of view, the airborne and amphibious assaults went reasonably well. The planning machinery was able to respond to the last-minute changes and conduct the landing operation in the right place at the right time. Obviously, the Egyptians were never in a position to launch a properly mounted, co-ordinated counterattack, nor did they seem to be willing to do so. Nasser quite probably realised that he was about to win the war. One other thing also became clear immediately after the landing. The prediction of faltering Egyptian moral was wrong. Although they did not fight a

co-ordinated conventional battle, the Egyptians were far from being submissive.

Apart from the choice of the landing site, which would probably have caused significant post-landing problems, Operation Musketeer was conducted very much in accordance with the amphibious doctrine of the time. Of course, it is a totally different question whether the doctrine and the subsequent actions were valid. The Egyptians were able to prevent the canal from being used for shipping traffic after all. In addition, the strategic setting, the lack of intelligence, the negative attitude of the United States, the unclear strategic objective and the failing resolve were anything but sound. As a result, the battle was won, but the war itself was lost.

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- CAB 128** Cabinet: Minutes (CM and CC Series)
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 - 13 Meetings: 1–6 Jan 28–Nov 18; Papers: 1–62 Jan 22–Dec 18 (1953 Jan 22–Dec 18)
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- 118999 Guerrilla Warfare in Egypt

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- DEFE 6** Chiefs of Staff Committee: Reports of the Joint Planning Staff and successors
- 5 Nos 1–47, (1948 Jan 1–Apr 28)
 - 26 Reports: 51–107 (1954 May– 31 Dec 31)
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- 3121 Suez Canal: minutes of meetings of working party

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- WO 32** War Office and successors: Registered Files (General Series)
- 16319 Operation Musketeer: operational signals
 - 16320 Operation Musketeer: operational signals
 - 16321 Operation Musketeer: operational signals
 - 16584 Suez Canal base: policy for stock holding
- WO 106** War Office: Directorate of Military Operations and Military Intelligence, and predecessors: Correspondence and Papers
- 5985 Withdrawal from the Suez Canal: staff study on implications
 - 5986 Operation Musketeer: planning and record of decisions made
- WO 208** War Office: Directorate of Military Operations and Intelligence, and Directorate of Military Intelligence; Ministry of Defence, Defence Intelligence Staff: Files
- 4890 Quarterly military intelligence reviews
- WO 216** War Office: Office of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff: Papers
- 799 Operation RODEO: plans to protect British interests in Egypt
 - 867 Situation in Egypt: plans for Operation RODEO
 - 907 Middle East emergency: planning for Suez operation
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 - 926 Cold and Limited War
 - 934 Corps tactical battle in nuclear war
- WO 252** Admiralty, Inter-service Topographical Department, and Ministry of Defence, Joint Intelligence Bureau Library: Surveys, Maps and Reports 1913-1968
- 1217 Egypt, British intelligence survey of key points: Port Said
 - 1218 Egypt, British intelligence survey of key points: Alexandria
 - 1220 Egypt, British intelligence survey of key points: Ismailia
- WO 288** War Office: Suez Campaign Headquarters: Papers and War Diaries
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B. PRIVATE PAPERS

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- BUFT 1/39

Papers of Winston Churchill

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Papers of Selwyn Lloyd

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Papers of Major General John Churcher

Papers of General Hugh Stockwell,

- Box 8/6/12

Papers of Major General Charles Whish Dunbar,

- File 3 / 4

**PAPERS OF SIR CHARLES KEIGHTLEY, IN POSSESSION OF MAJOR
GENERAL RICHARD KEIGHTLEY CB, TARRANT GUNVILLE, DORSET,
ENGLAND.**

C. INTERVIEWS

The Suez Oral History Project (Liddell-Hart Centre for Military Archives)

- SUEZOHP 4 Frank Cooper, Head of the Air Staff Secretariat
- SUEZOHP 6 Douglas Dodds-Parker, Joint Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs
- SUEZOHP 16 Richard Powell, Permanent Under Secretary, Ministry of Defence
- SUEZOHP 18 Patrick Reilly, Under Secretary, Foreign Office

Interview with Major-General Richard Keightley CB, 8 August 2006 (Relating to materiel in the possession of the author)

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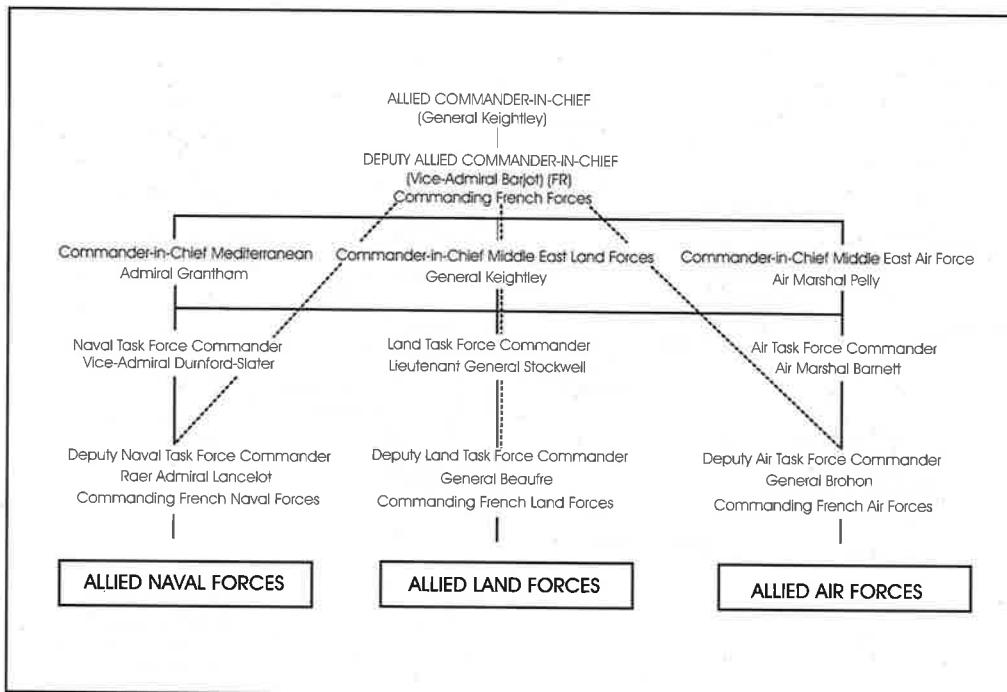
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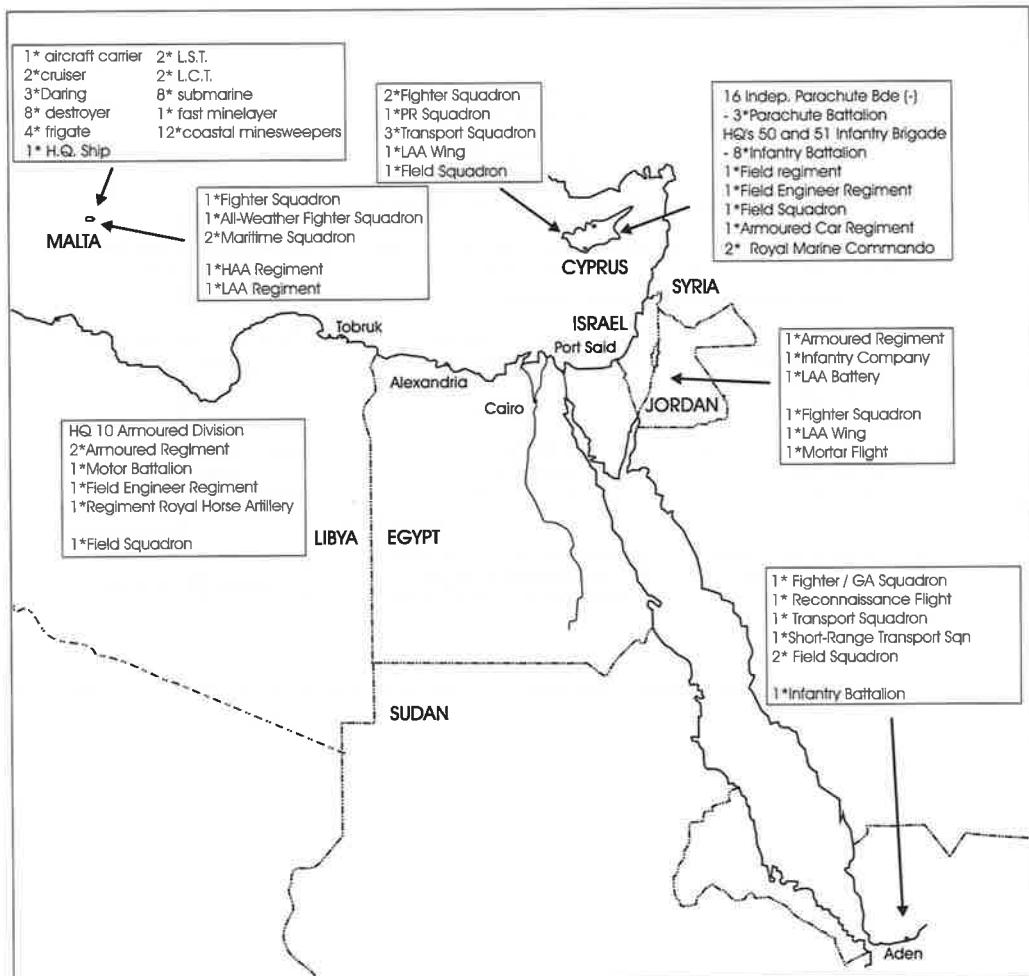
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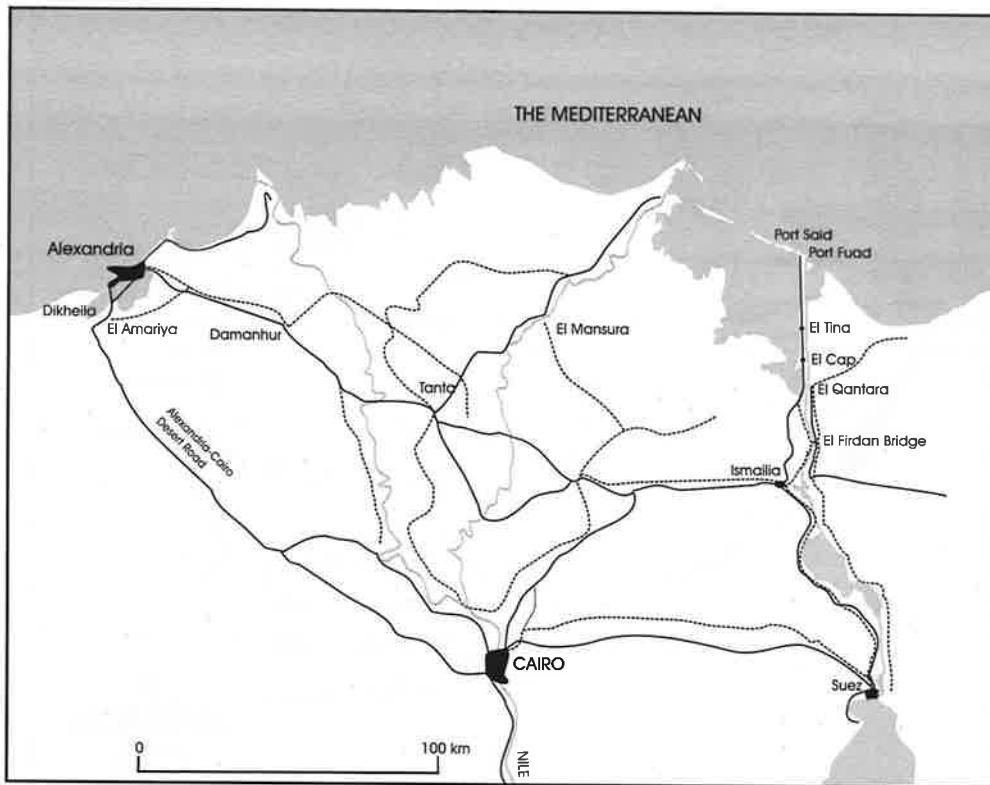
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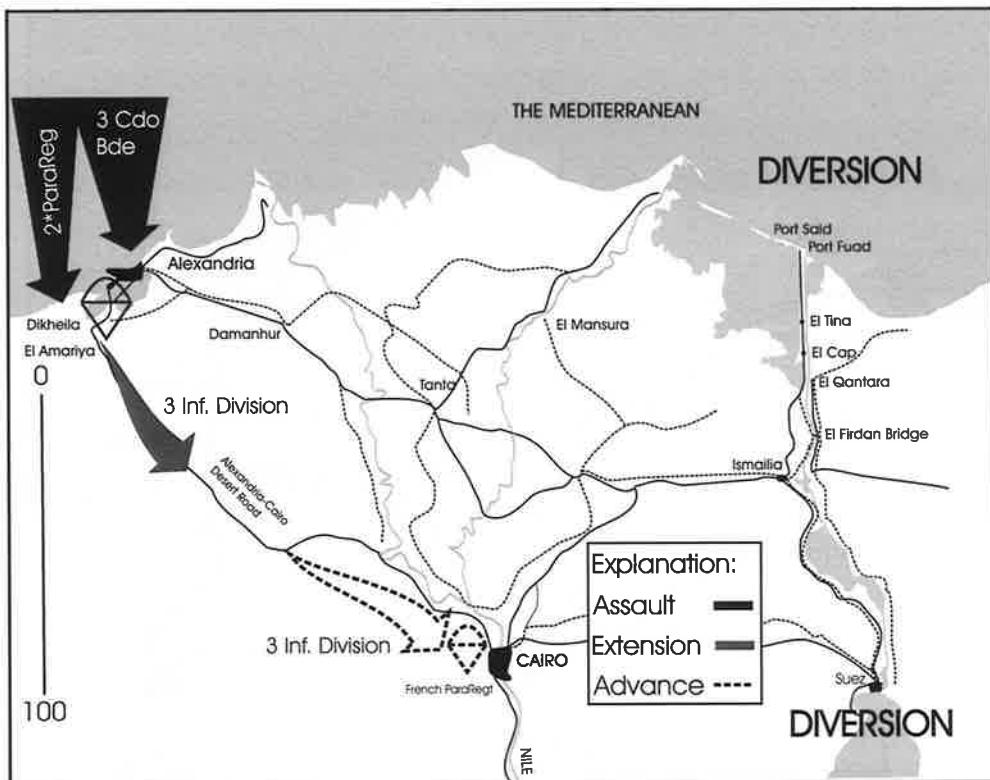
THE BRITISH DEPLOYMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 1956



AREA OF OPERATIONS

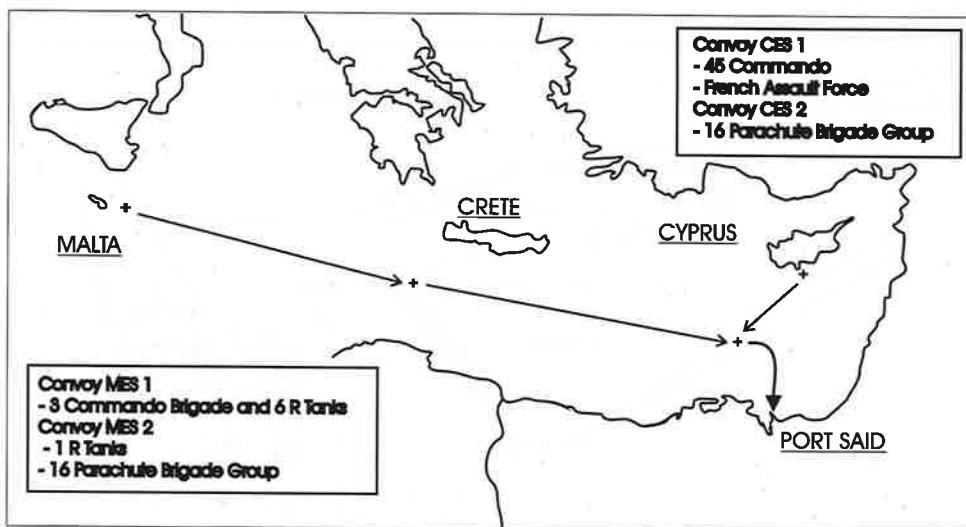


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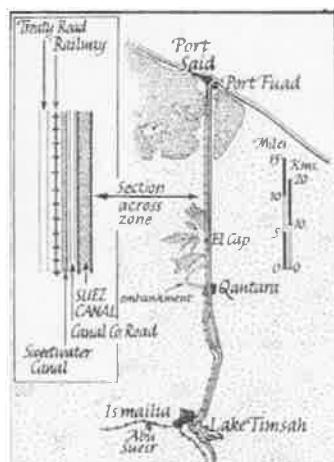
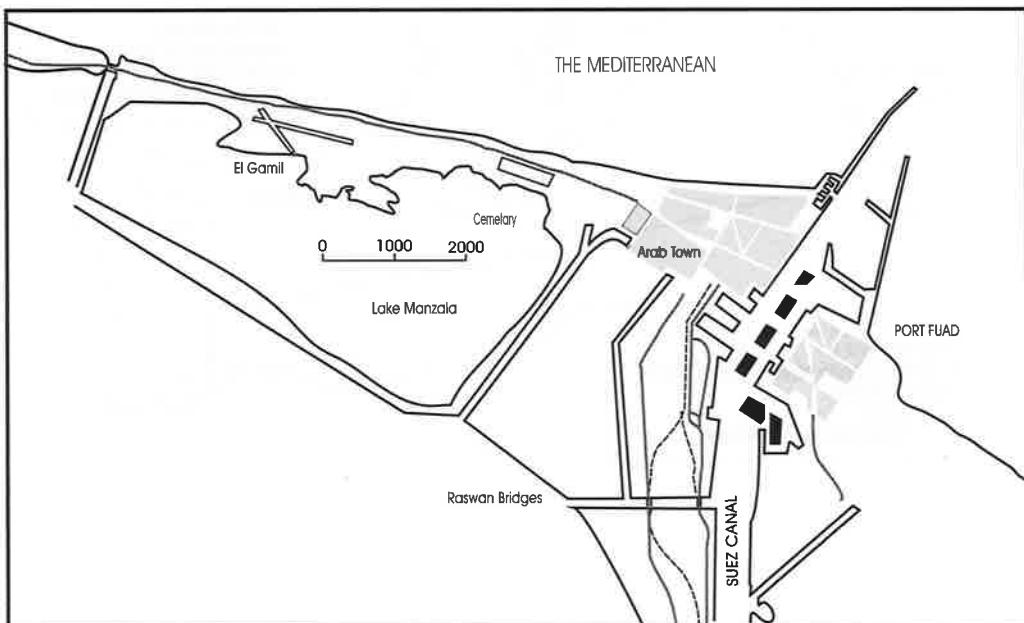


APPENDIX 5

PRINCIPAL CONVOYS (MUSKETEER REVISE)

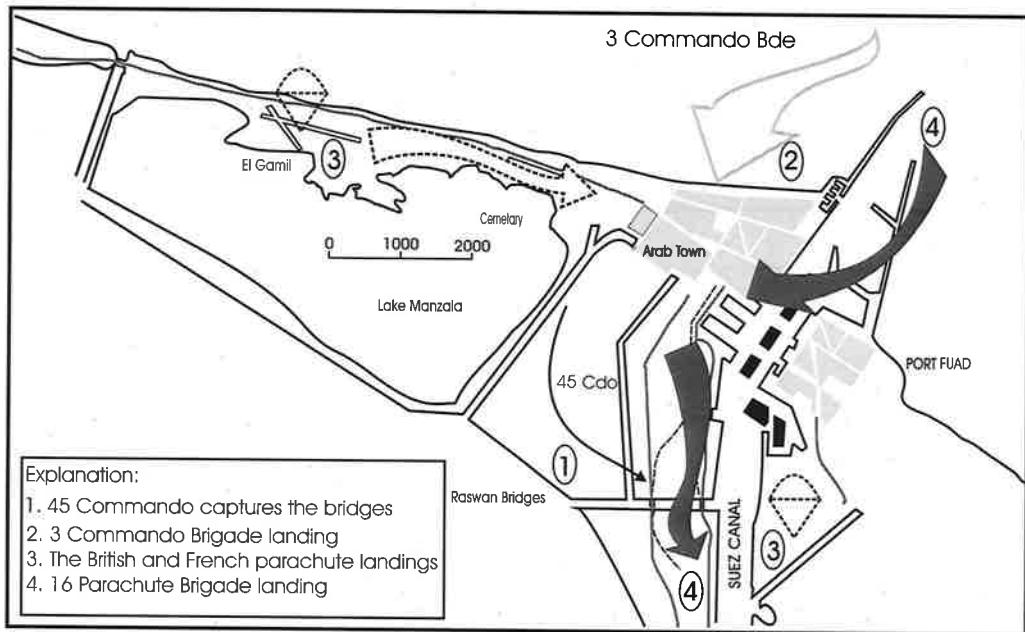


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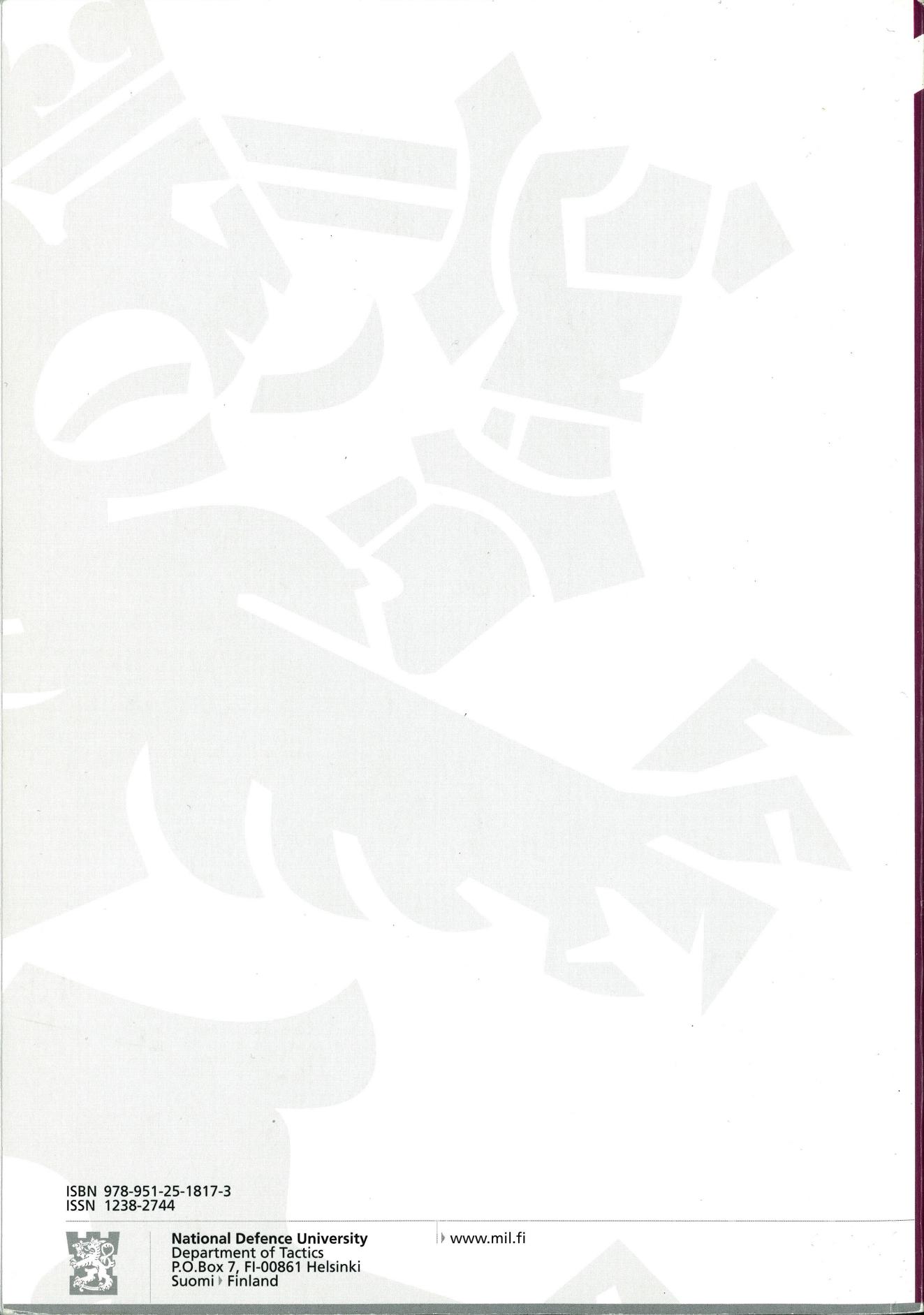
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National Defence University
Department of Tactics
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