Post-Ottoman Transitions

Edited by

Soumaya Louhichi
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Rethinking Nation-State Trajectories in the Arab and Turkish Contexts

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ERGON VERLAG

Cover picture:
Arabic map of the Ottoman Empire and surrounding regions,
by Hafiz Ali Esref, 1893 (detail)

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Pan-Arabism Versus the Baghdad Pact: Turkey, Egypt, and the Struggle for Regional Leadership during the Suez Crisis in the 1950s

Ozan Keskin and Ercan Karakoç[*]

Introduction

The Suez Crisis marked a critical turning point that intensified and redefined the leadership rivalry between Egypt and Turkey in the Middle East during the 1950s. Under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970), Egypt sought to assert political and ideological hegemony in the Arab world by anchoring its foreign policy in the doctrine of Pan-Arabism. Nasser's agenda emphasized Arab unity in opposition to Western imperialist intervention and articulated the broader struggle for independence through a distinctly anti-Western rhetoric. This approach catalysed a surge of nationalist sentiment across the region.

Pan-Arabism offered Egypt a powerful ideological framework through which it projected itself as the unifying force of the Arab world—a role that was significantly reinforced by the Suez Crisis. The nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 constituted a direct challenge to Western colonial interests and dramatically elevated Egypt's regional prestige.

In contrast, Turkey pursued a different strategic alignment. In 1955, it joined the Baghdad Pact, thereby solidifying its ties with the Western bloc amid the Cold War. Although the pact was designed as a collective security arrangement to counter Soviet influence in the Middle East, it also reflected Turkey's ambition to maintain a leading role in regional politics. By aligning with the West, Turkey positioned itself as a pro-Western counterbalance to Egypt's Pan-Arabism. This position brought it into direct conflict with Nasser's vision, as the Egyptian leader viewed the Baghdad Pact as a mechanism for perpetuating Western influence in the region and vehemently opposed its objectives.

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The Suez Crisis thus became a pivotal moment that exposed and sharpened the ideological and geopolitical divide between Egypt and Turkey. While the crisis consolidated Egypt's leadership position in the Arab world, it prompted Turkey to deepen its engagement with the Western alliance. The foreign policy trajectories of the two countries increasingly diverged: Egypt emerged as a leader of anti-Western nationalism, while Turkey strengthened its role as a strategic partner of the West.

To fully grasp the significance of the Suez Crisis as a turning point in the Egyptian–Turkish rivalry of the 1950s, it is necessary to examine not only the geopolitical implications of the Canal's nationalization, but also the underlying domestic and foreign policy orientations that shaped both countries' regional strategies.

1. Egyptian Politics: From the Construction of the Suez Canal to the Free Officers Movement

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 marked a revival of the Eastern Mediterranean's strategic importance, which had waned since the Age of Geographical Discoveries. Originally conceived as a joint initiative between France and the Egyptian Khedivate, the project quickly became pivotal to British imperial interests. Although France initially sought to limit British involvement, the United Kingdom exploited Egypt's escalating financial crisis and, in 1875, acquired the Khedivate's shares in the canal, thereby consolidating its influence over this critical maritime route. This foothold ultimately culminated in the de facto occupation of Egypt in 1882, ostensibly justified by Britain's intervention to suppress the Urabi Pasha (1841–1911) revolt (1879–1882).[1] The occupation significantly eroded Egypt's political and economic sovereignty, while simultaneously reinforcing British hegemony in the Middle East due to the canal's strategic value.[2] For the British Empire, the canal constituted the most secure route to India; for the Egyptian populace, it became a powerful symbol of national pride and the aspiration for independence.

As the region approached the First World War, Britain solidified its presence and expanded its regional influence, most notably through the Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916. Although Egypt obtained limited self-governance during the interwar period, full independence remained out of reach, primarily due to Britain's entrenched political and military dominance. In the aftermath of the Second World War, several factors—rising nationalist sentiment, the trauma of defeat in the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, worsening economic conditions,

[1] Özkaya, "XIX. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Devleti," p. 284
[2] Yurdakul, *İngiltere Ortadoğu'ya Nasıl Girdi*, p. 51.

and increasing institutional dysfunction—created both popular and structural legitimacy for military intervention.[3] These developments culminated in the coup of July 23, 1952, when the Free Officers Movement, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, peacefully overthrew King Farouk and forced him into exile. General Muhammad Naguib (1901–1984) subsequently assumed leadership of the provisional government.

The coup marked the end of Egypt's monarchy and the formal establishment of a republic under Naguib's leadership.[4] However, actual power quickly shifted to Gamal Abdel Nasser, who systematically sidelined Naguib from political authority. Nasser initiated sweeping reforms within the military and internal security apparatus, consolidating the regime's coercive institutions and reinforcing state control. Initially allied with the Muslim Brotherhood, Nasser banned the organization following an assassination attempt against him and imprisoned its leadership. Leftist groups faced similar repression during this period. By eliminating organized political opposition, Nasser established a highly centralized and increasingly authoritarian regime.[5]

One of Nasser's central objectives in securing domestic legitimacy was the complete withdrawal of British forces from the Suez Canal zone. The 1954 Anglo–Egyptian agreement stipulated that British troops would leave within twenty months, a development that significantly enhanced Nasser's reputation among the Egyptian public as a resolute nationalist leader. In the years that followed, he introduced a range of social reforms and, with the promulgation of a new constitution in 1956, formally established a presidential system. A subsequent plebiscite resulted in his election with 99.9 percent of the vote. Through this process, the military regime was institutionalized under the veneer of civilian rule.[6]

Nasser extended his domestically grounded legitimacy into the sphere of foreign policy through a program of Arab nationalism.[7] In response to the Arab defeat in the 1948 war, he advocated a unified Arab front against Israel. His regional policy was based on resistance to colonial domination, opposition to Western powers, and the non-recognition of Israel, thereby bolstering his stature as a leading figure in the Arab world. In 1955, Nasser's participation in the Bandung Conference underscored Egypt's commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement, while his recognition of the People's Republic of China further alienated Western powers. Concurrently, his support for anti-colonial movements in Palestine and Algeria positioned Egypt as a hub of resistance within the broader context of the Global South.[8]

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3 Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, p. 67.
4 Cleveland, *Modern Ortadoğu Tarihi*, p. 339.
5 Vatikiotis, *Nasser and His Generation*, p. 146.
6 Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement*, p. 67.
7 Dursun, "Cemal Abdünnâsır," p. 299.
8 Arı, *Geçmişten Günümüze*, p. 191.

Within the Cold War framework, Nasser deliberately avoided formal alignment with either the Western or Soviet bloc. Instead, he pursued a pragmatic foreign policy aimed at maintaining equilibrium between the superpowers. Although initially viewed by the United States as a potential regional partner, Egypt's confrontational stance toward Israel and its unwillingness to participate in British-led defence arrangements ultimately constrained U.S.–Egyptian relations. In contrast, despite Egypt's domestic repression of communist and leftist movements, the Soviet Union regarded Nasser as a valuable strategic partner. Seeking to expand its influence in the Middle East, the USSR extended offers of military assistance and economic cooperation, laying the foundation for a pragmatic bilateral relationship based on mutual interests.[9]

2. Old Friend: Turkey

Following the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, the new Ankara-based regime abolished the monarchical rule of the Ottoman dynasty and established a republican form of government. Despite Turkey's historical and cultural ties to the Middle East, the post-1923 government adopted a foreign policy oriented toward the West, thereby deliberately distancing itself from regional affairs. During this period, with the exception of specific issues—such as the disputes over Mosul and Hatay, as well as several Kurdish uprisings that required limited cooperation with neighbouring states—Turkey largely pursued a policy of non-involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts.[10]

In the 1930s, Turkey developed close relations with Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, culminating in the institutionalization of this cooperation through the signing of the Saadabad Pact in 1937. During this time, Ankara pursued a cautious foreign policy that prioritized regional stability and peace. However, the geopolitical polarization following the Second World War compelled Turkey to align itself with the Western bloc. The Soviet Union's increasingly assertive posture rendered continued neutrality unsustainable. In response, Turkey sought closer ties with the United States, initiating a series of political and economic reforms aimed at integrating into a liberal international order.[11]

American support under the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, beginning in 1948, played a decisive role in this transformation. U.S. assistance facilitated major infrastructure development, expanded foreign trade, and accelerated Turkey's economic and political integration with the West. As a result,

[9] Mâlik, *Çağdaş Arap Düşüncesi*, p. 155.
[10] Karpat, *Türk Dış Politikası*, p. 161.
[11] Sander, *Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası*, p. 229.

Turkey secured a firm position within the Western alliance during the formative years of the Cold War.[12]

One of Turkey's principal strategic objectives during this period was accession to NATO. However, initial resistance from key member states—such as the United Kingdom and certain Nordic countries—delayed its entry.[13] These powers preferred to enhance Turkey's regional role through the creation of security alliances in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East rather than granting full NATO membership. Nevertheless, such regional initiatives ultimately proved unsuccessful.

The general elections of May 14, 1950 marked a political shift with the Democrat Party (DP) ending the 27-year rule of the Republican People's Party (CHP). Despite differences in domestic policy, both parties shared a strategic consensus on maintaining Turkey's alignment with the Western bloc. The DP, however, adopted a more active and assertive approach toward foreign policy in the Middle East, seeking to complement its Western orientation with stronger regional engagement.[14] Yet, NATO accession remained the overriding priority. In line with this objective, Turkey demonstrated its commitment by dispatching troops to support U.S.-led forces in the Korean War, a move that significantly influenced its successful admission to NATO in 1952.[15]

Although NATO membership provided a heightened sense of security, Turkey's attempts to establish regional security agreements with Arab states ultimately failed. While Ankara's primary concern remained the Soviet threat and the containment of communism, many Arab governments viewed Israel—and by extension its Western allies—as the principal adversary. Turkey, however, maintained political and economic relations with Israel, seeing this partnership as an extension of its alliance with the United States. Despite pressure from Arab states to sever these ties, Turkey consistently resisted such demands.[16]

Sociopolitical and historical differences further shaped Turkey's strained relationship with the Arab world. Its commitment to secularism and alignment with Western policies generated considerable unease among Arab regimes. Suspicion that Turkey acted as a regional proxy for Western powers, coupled with fears of a neo-Ottoman agenda, impeded efforts to forge meaningful regional security frameworks. Turkey's cooperation with the West on contentious issues such as Israel and Algeria further undermined trust. This strategic posture, which failed to adequately consider regional sensitivities, ultimately contributed to the failure of Turkey's initiatives to deepen its engagement with the Middle East.[17]

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12 Lewis, *Modern Türkiye*, p. 419.
13 Erhan, "ABD ve NATO," p. 522.
14 Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye*, p. 271.
15 Karpat, *Türk Siyasi Tarihi*, p. 183.
16 Bilgin, "Turkey's Foreign Policy," p. 254.
17 Keskin and Karakoç, "Bağımsız İsrail," p. 248.

3. The Baghdad Pact: The First Front of the Western Bloc and Its Allies in the Middle East

Following the failure of two British-led security initiatives, the United States sought to expand its influence in the Middle East. In this effort, its lack of a colonial legacy, combined with its considerable economic and military power, afforded it a comparative advantage over Britain and France. U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles visited Cairo in an attempt to forge closer ties with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser; however, the talks ultimately collapsed, primarily due to deep disagreements over the issue of Israel.[18] Disappointed by the reluctance of Egypt and other Arab states to align with its regional vision, the United States shifted its focus toward Turkey and Iran, incorporating them into a strategic alliance structured within the broader framework of its Containment Policy to curb Soviet expansionism.[19]

Determined to extend the defence perimeter from Northwestern Europe to Southeast Asia, the United States identified the Middle East as a crucial front in halting Soviet influence. This vision aimed to establish a coordinated defence architecture that would complement NATO, the Balkan Pact, and SEATO. The realization of this strategy came in 1955 with the formation of the Baghdad Pact. Consisting of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom, the pact served as the first line of defence in the Middle East under U.S. strategic guidance, marking a key development in the global containment effort and a significant shift in Cold War geopolitics.[20]

The Baghdad Pact began to take shape following the joint declaration signed by Turkey and Iraq on January 12, 1955. Turkey's efforts to bring other Arab states—such as Syria and Lebanon—into the pact were ultimately unsuccessful. This failure stemmed largely from the influence of President Nasser's Pan-Arabist ideology, which framed Israel, rather than the Soviet Union, as the primary existential threat to Arab nations. Consequently, Turkey's pro-Western alignment was met with resistance. Nasser vigorously opposed Turkey's involvement in the Baghdad Pact, rallying Arab support against it. The Soviet Union also condemned the initiative, portraying it as a new manifestation of Western imperialism in the region.

Although Turkey's diplomatic outreach in Syria and Lebanon faltered, it succeeded in persuading Iraq, led by Prime Minister Nuri al-Sa'id (1888–1958), by highlighting the potential benefits of U.S. military and economic assistance. This led to the signing of the Mutual Security and Defence Cooperation Agreement in Baghdad on February 24, 1955. The pact subsequently evolved into a formal regional defence organization with the inclusion of the United Kingdom,

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18 El-Feth, *Mısır İhtilâlinin İçyüzü*, p. 134.
19 Yeşilbursa, *İngiltere ve Amerika*, p. 93.
20 Soysal, "1955 Bağdat Paktı," p. 186.

Pakistan, and Iran. The United States, however, opted to participate only as an observer in order to preserve its broader relationships with Middle Eastern countries that remained outside the pact.[21]

Turkey's prior recognition of Israel had already strained its relations with Arab states, and its participation in Western-led initiatives—such as the Middle East Command and the Middle East Defence Organization—further damaged its regional standing. Arab governments increasingly viewed these alliances as continuations of colonial–era strategies. Britain's involvement in the Baghdad Pact, in particular, reinforced this perception and was seen as a critical turning point in Arab opposition. Although Turkey aimed to use the pact to contain Soviet influence, the initiative inadvertently facilitated the USSR's rapprochement with several Arab states.[22]

Turkey's overt anti-communist stance and its failure to accommodate Arab concerns rendered it a target of criticism both from the Eastern Bloc and from Arab League member states. While Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan joined the pact largely in pursuit of Western aid, the alliance was weakened by internal instability and the unpopular pro-Western orientation of its members.[23] In addition, unresolved border disputes among Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, as well as the growing visibility of Kurdish nationalist movements in the region, posed further challenges to the pact's cohesion and credibility. Nasser's continued opposition to Turkey's regional role also influenced Syria's position, further diminishing Turkey's influence in the Middle East and exacerbating regional tensions.[24]

4. Relations Between Turkey and Egypt Prior to the Suez Crisis

At the beginning of the 1950s, relations between Turkey and Egypt were characterized by mutual distrust and cautious diplomacy. Even prior to the overthrow of King Farouk (1920–1965), the Egyptian press had accused Turkey of supporting Britain's continued presence in the Suez Canal as a means of safeguarding its own security. Furthermore, Turkey's authorization of Jewish immigration to Palestine and its establishment of commercial ties with Israel were sharply criticized in Egyptian public discourse. During a meeting with Turkey's ambassador at the time, Hulusi Fuat Tugay (1890–1967), King Farouk identified these issues as the primary sources of bilateral tension. While expressing an understanding of Turkey's concerns regarding the threat of communism, he

[21] Yeşilbursa, *Bağdat Paktı*, p. 217.
[22] Primakov, *Rusların Gözüyle Ortadoğu*, p. 57.
[23] Aburish, *Nasser*, p. 83.
[24] Karpat, *Ortadoğu'da Osmanlı Mirası*, p. 173.

also emphasized the importance of vigilance in relation to potential cooperation with Jewish groups.

Following the coup carried out by the Free Officers Movement, Turkey officially recognized the new Egyptian administration. Nonetheless, this recognition did not translate into improved bilateral relations. Tensions escalated when Turkish Ambassador Fuat Tugay recommended that members of the Revolutionary Command Council pursue cooperation with Britain—advice that caused considerable unease in Cairo.[25] The fact that Tugay's position was backed by Ankara further exacerbated the diplomatic impasse.

Under the 1952 Land Reform Law in Egypt, the properties of the deposed royal family were confiscated. A new crisis erupted when the immovable assets of Tugay's wife, herself a member of the former royal family, were also nationalized. As a result, Tugay was declared *persona non grata* and expelled from Egypt in a manner that violated standard diplomatic protocol. Thereafter, diplomatic relations between the two countries were downgraded and maintained only at the chargé d'affaires level.[26]

Turkey made several efforts to establish joint pacts with Egypt, but initiatives aimed at forming pro-Western defence alliances in the Middle East were met with strong resistance from the Egyptian side. In particular, Turkey's continued diplomatic and commercial engagement with Israel was a major source of friction in Egyptian political circles. A planned visit to Egypt by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes (1899–1961), intended to improve relations, was rejected by President Nasser, who cited negative public sentiment as the main reason. Although Nasser occasionally expressed a desire to maintain amicable ties with Turkey, Egyptian officials privately conveyed to their Turkish counterparts that such remarks were merely diplomatic formalities and that, under the prevailing circumstances, meaningful rapprochement was unlikely.

During this period, the divergence between Turkey and Egypt became even more apparent at the 1955 Bandung Conference. Turkey, represented by a delegation led by Fatin Rüştü Zorlu (1910–1961), emphasized its anti-communist stance and positioned itself as a vocal proponent of the Western Bloc. In contrast, Egypt—alongside non-aligned states such as India and Yugoslavia—advocated for a third, independent path that rejected alignment with either the Western or Eastern blocs. Turkey's position drew criticism from proponents of the Non-Aligned Movement, particularly Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and reinforced perceptions of Turkey as a staunchly pro-Western state.[27]

Egypt, by contrast, pursued a non-aligned foreign policy, particularly in opposition to British influence in the region. The ideological and diplomatic rifts that emerged at Bandung thus further deepened the distance between

[25] Keskin & Karakoç, "1956 Süveyş Krizi," p. 65.
[26] Dikerdem, *Ortadoğu'da Devrim Yılları*, p. 113.
[27] Bağcı, *Türk Dış Politikasında 1950'li Yıllar*, p. 60.

Cairo and Ankara.[28] By the eve of the Suez Crisis, it had become clear that the foreign policy priorities of the two nations had significantly diverged, and bilateral relations had settled into a state of mutual estrangement marked by strategic rivalry and diplomatic reserve.

5. A Turning Point in Middle Eastern Politics: The Suez Crisis

Following Israel's attack on Gaza in 1955, Gamal Abdel Nasser resolved to modernize the Egyptian military. Unable to acquire arms from Western sources, he turned to the Soviet Union—a move that triggered significant geopolitical repercussions.[29] Israel, in particular, regarded a rearmed Egyptian army as a grave threat to its security. Nasser's subsequent military alliances with Syria and Jordan further intensified Israeli concerns and underscored his commitment to fostering Arab unity in opposition to Israel.

Simultaneously, Nasser extended his influence westward by supporting the Algerian independence movement, provoking strong reactions from France. Given that France viewed Algeria not as a colony but as an integral part of its national territory, it responded to the uprising with violent repression. Nasser's support for the Algerian cause culminated in the proclamation of the Algerian Republic in Cairo in 1958, thereby enhancing his stature across North Africa and the broader Arab world. In retaliation, France deepened its ties with Israel, increasing covert arms deliveries to counter Nasser's growing regional influence.[30]

Initially, the United States viewed Nasser's nationalist policies as a potential bulwark against communism and refrained from direct intervention.[31] However, the Egyptian–Czechoslovak arms deal, under Soviet auspices, alarmed Washington. The agreement not only augmented Egypt's military capabilities but also symbolized a growing Soviet presence in the Middle East. In response, the U.S. withdrew its financial commitment to the Aswan High Dam—a project central to Egypt's economic development. U.S. support was made conditional on Nasser abandoning the arms deal and committing to peace with Israel, conditions he ultimately rejected.[32]

For Nasser, cooperation with the West on the basis of reconciliation with Israel was politically untenable. Although no formal Soviet offer was made to fund the dam, he skilfully exploited the perception of such an offer to pressure the U.S., suggesting that American withdrawal would be compensated by Sovi-

[28] Murat, "Bandung Konferansı," p. 372.
[29] Glassman, *Arms for the Arabs*, p. 11.
[30] Özen and Yeşilyurt, "Fransız Dördüncü Cumhuriyeti," p. 102.
[31] Kinzer, *The Brothers*, p. 210.
[32] Heykel, *Kahire Dosyası*, p. 20.

et backing. When the U.S. and the U.K. jointly pulled their support, Nasser retaliated on July 26, 1956, by nationalizing the Suez Canal. This action, which included the closure of the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping, precipitated a regional crisis. France feared a domino effect in its colonies; Israel interpreted the move as a prelude to war; and Britain saw it as a direct threat to Western economic and strategic interests. Given that Britain and France controlled the majority of canal shares and relied heavily on its petroleum traffic, the nationalization was both a symbolic and material challenge to their influence.[33]

In the wake of the canal's nationalization, negotiations were initiated but soon broke down. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden (1897–1977), already facing economic strain at home, viewed Nasser as a personal adversary and refused to accept any solution that would legitimize Egyptian control. Britain imposed financial sanctions by freezing Egypt's sterling reserves. Although Nasser proposed a revenue-sharing agreement, Britain and France insisted on maintaining their previous control structure.[34] On August 16–23, 1956, an international conference was convened in London with 22 participating countries. Egypt and Greece declined invitations: Greece due to tensions over Cyprus, and Egypt in protest against British hostility.

U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles proposed internationalizing the canal under UN oversight, with Egypt participating as a revenue recipient. Disputes were to be settled by the International Court of Justice. However, Nasser refused these proposals, leading to the breakdown of negotiations.[35] Britain and France, increasingly convinced of the futility of diplomacy, began planning military intervention. From August 11 onward, Eden, Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, and French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau met to formulate a strategy. While initial efforts to disrupt canal operations failed, a secret meeting in Sèvres, France, on October 22, 1956, resulted in a trilateral agreement with Israel.[36]

According to the Sèvres Protocol, Israel would invade the Sinai, giving Britain and France a pretext to issue an ultimatum and then intervene militarily. Israel was promised security guarantees and the right to occupy strategic points in the canal zone and the Strait of Tiran. The joint objective was to topple Nasser's regime. On October 29, Israeli forces launched their offensive in Sinai.[37]

In line with the secret plan, Britain and France issued an ultimatum to both Egypt and Israel. When Egypt rejected the demand to withdraw, British and French forces commenced airstrikes on October 31, inflicting substantial

33 Gürel, *Orta Doğu Petrolünü*, p. 92.
34 Güler, *Süveyş'in Batısında*, p. 165.
35 Pearson, *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis*, p. 45.
36 Von Tunzelman, *Blood and Sand*, p. 46.
37 Kyle, *Suez*, p. 316.

damage on the Egyptian air force. Britain then proposed three conditions for a ceasefire: deployment of a UN emergency force, a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel under UN oversight, and the temporary presence of Anglo–French troops until the UN force was established. These demands reflected a blend of military objectives and diplomatic manoeuvring aimed at salvaging Western influence.

Domestically, the British government faced mounting opposition. Foreign Secretary Anthony Nutting (1920–1999) resigned in protest, and Eden encountered growing dissent within the Cabinet and from Commonwealth partners.[38] The United States, firmly opposed to the invasion, exerted economic and diplomatic pressure, calling for an immediate ceasefire at the United Nations. Under pressure from financial markets, anti-war protests, and U.S. disapproval, Eden agreed to a ceasefire on November 6 and subsequently resigned on January 9, 1957. His successor, Harold Macmillan (1894–1986), assumed office amid diminished British global stature.[39]

Although the Soviet Union had been preoccupied with the Hungarian Uprising, it closely monitored the Suez Crisis. Premier Nikolai Bulganin (1895–1975) issued threats of nuclear retaliation against Britain, France, and Israel, heightening international tensions—even though the USSR lacked the capability to follow through. Nonetheless, Moscow effectively exploited the crisis to expand its influence in the Arab world and undermine the cohesion of the Western alliance.[40]

The United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) was deployed to supervise the withdrawal of foreign troops. Britain and France completed their withdrawal by December 1956. Israel, under intense U.S. pressure, fully withdrew by March 1957 in exchange for guarantees concerning access to the Strait of Tiran and the Gaza Strip.[41] Although militarily successful on the ground, Britain and France suffered a decisive diplomatic defeat. They had miscalculated both Nasser's domestic support and Egypt's ability to administer the canal independently. Despite the occupation, Egypt continued to operate the canal successfully.

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[38] Hamilton, *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis*, p. 96.
[39] Kingseed, *Eisenhower and the Suez Crisis*, p. 124.
[40] Fejtö, *1956 Macar İhtilali*, p. 14.
[41] Troen and Shemesh, *The Suez–Sinai Crisis*, p. 10.
[42] Mearsheimer, *İsrail Lobisi*, p. 27.

domestic support and Egypt's ability to administer the canal independently. Despite the occupation, Egypt continued to operate the canal successfully.

On April 10, 1957, the Suez Canal was reopened under Egyptian control. The conflict resulted in heavy casualties: Egypt alone lost approximately 1,650 soldiers and over 1,000 civilians.[43] The Suez Crisis marked the definitive decline of British and French imperial influence and signalled a profound transformation in the postcolonial order of the Middle East.

6. Turkey's Stance During the Suez Crisis

From the outset of the Suez Crisis, Turkey advocated a diplomatic resolution, aware that any military confrontation would place it in a difficult position between two opposing camps. On one side stood its Western allies; on the other, Egypt—a state with considerable influence in both the Arab and Muslim worlds. Seeking to preserve this delicate balance, Turkey privately cautioned Western partners that a military intervention could jeopardize the cohesion of the Western Bloc, while publicly emphasizing the need for dialogue and negotiation among the involved parties. Nonetheless, Ankara viewed Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal with apprehension, interpreting it as a move that could reopen the question of the canal's legal status and broader strategic control.

During this period, Turkey faced serious national security concerns, particularly relating to Cyprus and the Turkish Straits. The growing demands for Enosis (union with Greece) among Greek Cypriots—encouraged, in part, by Egypt's assertiveness in the region—were perceived in Ankara as a direct threat. At the same time, renewed discussions about the status of the Turkish Straits raised alarm, especially in light of broader regional instability. In talks with the Soviet Union, Turkey secured informal assurances that the Straits issue would not be brought before the United Nations, thereby preventing further international scrutiny.

The Baghdad Pact also significantly shaped Turkey's stance during the crisis. Britain's involvement in the Suez intervention provoked widespread protests in Iraq, many of them in solidarity with Egypt, and prompted the Arab League to pressure Baghdad to reconsider its participation in the Pact. Turkey, concerned about alienating Britain—particularly given the ongoing negotiations over Cyprus—refrained from publicly condemning the intervention. However, members of the Baghdad Pact warned London that continued military action could jeopardize the alliance, and some threatened to reassess their bilateral relations with Britain if it failed to withdraw.

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[43] Varble, *The Suez Crisis 1956*, p. 27.

In an effort to signal its disapproval without rupturing key alliances, Turkey took a largely symbolic step by recalling its ambassador from Israel. While this gesture was interpreted as a mild form of solidarity with Arab states, it did not constitute a meaningful political sanction or indicate a shift in Turkey's broader strategic orientation.[44]

7. Post-Crisis Global and Middle Eastern Politics

The escalation of the Suez Crisis into armed conflict triggered far-reaching shifts in both global and regional political dynamics. Although Britain and France achieved tactical success on the battlefield, the crisis exposed their diminished status as global powers. The inability to sustain their intervention without the backing of either the United States or the Soviet Union left Britain, France, and Israel in a diplomatic stalemate.[45] In contrast, the Soviet Union used the opportunity to bolster its reputation across the Arab world, positioning itself as a defender of anti-imperialist causes. Simultaneously, the United States, concerned about the potential spread of communism in the Middle East, introduced the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957, pledging support to pro-Western regimes in the region.[46] While Israel demonstrated considerable military capability, it was widely perceived across the Arab world as an accomplice of Western imperialism.

The crisis also precipitated domestic political upheaval in Europe. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden and French Prime Minister Guy Mollet (1905–1975) both suffered irreversible political setbacks. In the aftermath, Franco–British relations with the United States were strained, weakening the transatlantic alliance. Under President Charles de Gaulle, France responded by adopting a more autonomous foreign policy, distancing itself from NATO's military command structure and accelerating its nuclear weapons program. These developments created fractures within the Western bloc, which the Soviet Union skilfully exploited, mitigating the reputational damage it had incurred from its violent suppression of the Hungarian Uprising in the same year.

In the Arab world, the Suez Crisis marked the apex of Gamal Abdel Nasser's political influence. Celebrated as a hero from Morocco to Yemen, Nasser embodied Arab nationalism and became the undisputed leader of the Pan-Arab movement. His radio broadcasts resonated widely, particularly among younger generations, transforming him into the central figure in regional politics and reinforcing Egypt's leadership role.[47] Prior to the crisis, Arab politics were frag-

[44] Keskin, *Diplomatic Rivalry*, p. 64.
[45] Charlwood, *Suez Crisis 1956*, p. 45.
[46] Arı, *İran ve ABD*, p. 221.
[47] Maalouf, *Ölümcül Kimlikler*, p. 70.

mented into three informal blocs: Egypt–Syria–Saudi Arabia, Lebanon–Jordan, and Iraq, which had aligned with the West via the Baghdad Pact. In the wake of Egypt's perceived victory, Nasser's personal charisma and ideological appeal enabled him to assert influence over these competing factions. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Sa'id resisted Nasser's ascendancy, but his position weakened significantly and eventually collapsed. King Hussein of Jordan (1935–1999), initially inclined to join the Baghdad Pact, reversed his stance under pressure from pro-Nasser political forces and a growing Palestinian refugee population.[48] Although Jordan lost British financial support as a result, it compensated with economic aid from Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, in subsequent years, domestic considerations led King Hussein to seek rapprochement with the West.

In the post-crisis environment, Turkey experienced increasing diplomatic isolation in the Middle East. The Baghdad Pact—originally conceived with U.S. and U.K. backing as a bulwark against Soviet expansion—came under intensified scrutiny and was increasingly perceived as a tool of Western imperialism. The Suez Crisis further inflamed anti-Western sentiment across the Arab world, and Turkey's muted response—limited to the symbolic gesture of recalling its ambassador from Israel—was seen by nationalist Arab regimes as insincere.

Turkey sought to reposition itself by drawing on the resources offered under the Eisenhower Doctrine. Beginning in 1957, it became one of several countries—including Greece, Afghanistan, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Israel, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Iraq—that received U.S. aid.[49] Ankara hoped to leverage this support to foster pro-Western alignment among Middle Eastern states. However, these efforts were largely ineffective. The only consistent ally Turkey retained in the Arab world was Iraq, yet even there, the tide of Arab nationalism—strongly influenced by Nasserism—was steadily undermining pro-Western allegiances.[50]

Conclusion

The Suez Crisis marked a pivotal moment that both intensified and clarified the leadership rivalry between Egypt's Pan-Arabism and Turkey's Baghdad Pact strategy. By nationalizing the Suez Canal and securing a symbolic victory over Western powers, Egypt—under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser—emerged as the uncontested leader of the Arab world. Nasser's nationalist rhetoric, framed as resistance to Western imperialism, greatly enhanced the appeal of Pan-Arabism across the region. Capitalizing on this momentum, Egypt effectively mobilized Arab public opinion against Western-aligned initia-

48 Kürkçüoğlu, *Türkiye'nin Arap Politikası*, p. 83.
49 Çetinkaya, "Soğuk Savaş Döneminde," p. 9.
50 Hourani, *Arap Halkları Tarihi*, p. 470.

tives such as the Baghdad Pact. Nasser's image as a saviour of the Arab cause was further consolidated, accelerating the ideological and political diffusion of Pan-Arabism.

In contrast, Turkey's response to the Suez Crisis remained aligned with its Baghdad Pact commitments and its broader pro-Western orientation. By maintaining a deliberate distance from Nasser's Pan-Arabist project, Turkey reinforced its strategic alignment with the Western bloc, seeking to contain Soviet influence in the Middle East through multilateral security frameworks. However, Egypt viewed the Baghdad Pact as a neocolonial instrument serving Western interests and thus rejected it outright. Turkey's steadfast commitment to the Pact increasingly cast it, in Arab eyes, as a proxy of Western power—thereby eroding its credibility and diminishing its regional influence. The rise of Arab nationalism, spearheaded by Egypt, also placed pressure on other members of the Baghdad Pact, particularly Iraq, where Cairo's ideological influence became increasingly evident.

The Suez Crisis thus exacerbated Turkey's diplomatic isolation in the Arab world and weakened its prospects for regional leadership. Egypt's triumph marked a clear shift in the balance of influence, tipping the leadership rivalry in its favour. While Pan-Arabism gained strength as a regional mobilizing force, Turkey's Western alignment failed to resonate with Arab publics and elites. As Ankara grew closer to the West, suspicion toward Turkey deepened in the Arab world. In the absence of shared ideological or strategic ground with Arab states, Turkey increasingly turned toward its relationship with Israel, formalized through the so-called Periphery Pact.

In conclusion, the Suez Crisis solidified Egypt's ascendancy in Middle Eastern politics and curtailed Turkey's regional ambitions. Nasser emerged as the victorious architect of Pan-Arabism, while Turkey's alignment with the Western alliance further alienated it from the Arab world. The crisis confirmed Egypt's position as the dominant regional actor, reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East for the decades to come.

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