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CONCEALING COLLUSION: THE SUEZ CRISIS, POLITICAL  
MEMOIRS AND OFFICIAL SECRECY, 1956–1969\*

ABSTRACT

The Suez crisis in 1956 has long been recognised as a watershed in British history—precipitating the fall of Anthony Eden’s government, accelerating the end of empire, and underscoring how weak Britain had become on the international stage, especially in relation to the United States, which emerged from the episode as undeniably the senior partner in the ‘Special Relationship’. Less understood is the important role that the crisis played in weakening the foundations of official secrecy in Britain, especially what might be described as the social underpinnings of secrecy. This article explores how sensitive details about Suez eventually came to light in the period 1956 to 1969, despite concerted and sometimes cunning efforts by the Whitehall machine to prevent disclosure. Contrary to conventional wisdom, which suggests that socialist parliamentary firebrands like Michael Foot proved the most difficult to control, it is argued that the greatest challenge to secret-keepers came from senior conservative politicians writing memoirs—chief among them Eden himself—who were headstrong, not easily intimidated, and unafraid to bypass rules and codes of discretion to vindicate their careers. Fascinatingly, memoir writers not only ignored legal mechanisms like the much-feared Official Secrets Act, but, against the backdrop of profound social and cultural change, they also dismissed attempts by mandarins to exploit gentlemanly bonds and loyalties, which in the past had been an effective method of promoting self-censorship by members of the elite.

On 22 October 1956, with orders from the Conservative Prime Minister Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, and his Assistant Private Secretary, Donald Logan, travelled in conditions of the utmost secrecy to a private villa in Sèvres on the outskirts of Paris, once used as a safe house for resistance fighters during the war, to hatch a plan with French and Israeli officials to invade Egypt and seize the nationalised Suez Canal. Anxious for his movements to go unnoticed, Lloyd donned a tatty mackintosh and Foreign Office officials were fed the bogus story that

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he was at home with a cold—although his cover was almost blown by a near-miss car accident on the journey from the French airport. Britain’s co-conspirators took similar security precautions, with the Israeli prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, arriving with a hat pulled down to cover his white hair and his chief of staff, General Moshe Dayan, wearing dark glasses to hide his signature eye-patch.<sup>1</sup>

Three days of talks led to the agreement, on 24 October, that Israel would attack the Egyptian Army near Suez; then—with the *casus belli* established—Britain and France would intervene as peacemakers on the pretext of separating the combatants and protecting the international waterway. Before opening a bottle of champagne to celebrate, the French and Israelis, keen to hold the British to their word, demanded that all parties sign a document setting out the terms of their audacious plot. Written in French and typed in three copies in the villa’s kitchen, the so-called ‘Sèvres Protocol’ was signed by Ben-Gurion, the French foreign minister Christian Pineau, and the senior Foreign Office official Patrick Dean. That evening, in Downing Street, Eden was vexed to discover that a written record of the collusion existed. The British copy was immediately burned in the grate at Number 10; and, in circumstances mixing diplomatic skulduggery with Keystone Cops mishaps, Dean and Logan were ordered back to Paris the next morning to engineer a similar fate for the French and Israeli copies. After waiting for hours without food or drink in a locked reception room at the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the two envoys were told by Pineau—‘coldly’—that the French would not surrender their copy and that Ben-Gurion had already left for Israel, with his guarantee against possible British

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives [hereafter TNA], LCO 67/48, Donald Logan, ‘Suez: Meeting at Sèvres, 22–25 Oct. 1956: Narrative’. See also I. Black, ‘Secrets and Lies at the Heart of Britain’s Middle Eastern Folly’, *The Guardian*, 11 July 2006; I. Black, ‘Sir Donald Logan [obituary]’, *The Guardian*, 3 Nov. 2009.

disloyalty securely tucked in his waistcoat pocket.<sup>2</sup> ‘We got a flea in our ear’, recalled Logan.

Eden’s secret was far from safe. As soon as the war broke out, on schedule, on 29 October, rumours of a prearranged tripartite agreement began to circulate. As Scott Lucas has noted, the disguise of ‘peacekeeping’ in the Middle East fooled no one, since it patently helped the Israelis to move into Egyptian territory.<sup>3</sup> On 31 October, in parliament, the Leader of the Labour Opposition, Hugh Gaitskell, declared that ‘the whole business was a matter of collusion between the British and French governments and the Government of Israel’.<sup>4</sup> Anglo-French–Israeli connivance was widely suspected by the Americans: both the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had reached this conclusion after detecting a spike in cipher traffic between Paris and Tel Aviv.<sup>5</sup> ‘Stories of collusion between French and ourselves and Israelis are spreading widely’, the British Embassy in Washington cabled Lloyd.<sup>6</sup> Reminiscing some years later, Robert Amory, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence from 1952 to 1962, claimed that the CIA Director, Allen Dulles, had been so convinced of foul play by Eden that, after consulting the Secretary of State (his brother John Foster Dulles), he ‘ordered the initiation of clandestine espionage for the first time since the American Revolution and War of 1812 against British forces’, concentrating efforts in Malta, Cyprus and Crete.<sup>7</sup>

With no smoking gun, let alone direct evidence, the coterie of senior ministers and civil servants who knew the truth closed ranks behind the fiction. ‘There was no prior agreement between us about it’, Lloyd said on two occasions in the Commons,

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<sup>2</sup> D.R. Thorpe, *Eden: The Life and Times of Anthony Eden* (London, 2003), p. 517; TNA, FCO 73/205, Patrick Dean, ‘Visit to Sèvres on 24 Oct. 1956’, 24 May 1978.

<sup>3</sup> S. Lucas, *Britain and Suez: The Lion’s Last Roar* (Manchester, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Thorpe, *Eden*, p. 517.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 520.

<sup>6</sup> Black, ‘Secrets and Lies’.

<sup>7</sup> Princeton University, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Robert B. Bowie Papers, ML.2016.029, MC290, Box 9, Robert Amory to Robert B. Bowie, 9 Sept. 1974.

on 31 October and 5 December.<sup>8</sup> On 20 December, in his last appearance in the House, Eden forcefully denied any wrongdoing: ‘There was not foreknowledge that Israel would attack Egypt—there was not’.<sup>9</sup>

In parallel with the deception of parliament, lies and misinformation were spread in other directions. In private discussions with the American ambassador in London, Lloyd ‘said categorically that his recent conversations with the French gave no reason to think the French were stimulating such an Israeli venture’.<sup>10</sup> Tony Shaw has demonstrated that the Information Policy Department at the Foreign Office concocted a number of disingenuous press releases designed to ‘kill the collusion bogey’, including the line that if there really had been collusion, then surely Anglo-French military action would have been better timed (referring to the delay between the first bombings and the actual landings).<sup>11</sup> Anyone who dared to attempt to discover the truth was given the cold shoulder, including those who might have expected to possess the ‘need to know’. When General Charles Keightley, the allied commander-in-chief during the crisis, articulated concerns about operations, ‘Eden gave him a severe dressing down and told him that there were questions with which military commanders should not concern themselves’.<sup>12</sup>

This article examines how details of Eden’s secret accord eventually came to light in the following two decades, in the face of considerable opposition from a band of officials desperate to keep them, and other sensitive information about the crisis, hidden. Drawing on recently declassified records and private papers, it continues and critiques an important conversation started in this journal, in 2009, by Peter Beck, in

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<sup>8</sup> Hansard, *The Official Report: House of Commons* [hereafter Hansard, *Commons*], 5th ser., 31 Oct. 1956, vol. 558, col. 1573; Hansard, *Commons*, 5th ser., 5 Dec. 1956, vol. 561, cols. 1254–379.

<sup>9</sup> Hansard, *Commons*, 5th ser., 20 Dec. 1956, vol. 502, col. 1457.

<sup>10</sup> London to State Department, Cable 2322, reproduced in Lucas, *Britain and Suez*, p. 88.

<sup>11</sup> T. Shaw, *Eden, Suez and the Mass Media: Propaganda and Persuasion during the Suez Crisis* (London, 1996), p. 179.

<sup>12</sup> Lucas, *Britain and Suez*, p. 87.

an article which scrutinised the dogged efforts of backbench Labour MPs to secure a Suez inquiry and official history.<sup>13</sup>

Several arguments emerge in the analysis. One: while the dark cloud of Suez has long been recognised as a climacteric in terms of Britain's standing in the world, hastening the setting of her imperial sun and testing the bonds of US–UK relations, scholars have failed to appreciate fully the episode as a milestone in the conduct of official secrecy. As we shall see, efforts to ensure that nothing came out placed enormous strain on Britain's legal, bureaucratic and cultural infrastructure of secrecy, which was already weakening. Battles with parliamentary campaigners, historians, journalists and politicians-turned-autobiographers would test to the limit the mechanisms for controlling the flow of official information that secret-keepers had at their disposal, including the Privy Counsellor's Oath, the Official Secrets Act and the Public Records Act, as well as *de facto* rules and regulations regarding collective responsibility and ministerial memoirs. Building on a thought-provoking book chapter by Philip Murphy, I suggest that attempts to cover up the discussions at Sèvres put particular pressure on what might be seen as the social underpinnings of secrecy in Britain.<sup>14</sup> Historically, when confronted with the prospect of an unwelcome disclosure, officials had resorted to pulling on gentlemanly heartstrings, in an extension of what Peter Hennessy has called the 'good chaps' theory of government.<sup>15</sup> The logic here, as David Vincent has also maintained, was that a person who had been taught from an early age the importance of loyalty, friendship and fellowship would

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<sup>13</sup> P.J. Beck, "The Less Said about Suez the Better": British Government and the Politics of Suez's History, 1956–1967, *English Historical Review*, cxxiv (2009), pp. 605–40.

<sup>14</sup> P. Murphy, "Telling Tales Out of School: Nutting, Eden and the Attempted Suppression of *No End of a Lesson*", in S.C. Smith, ed., *Reassessing Suez 1956: New Perspectives on the Crisis and its Aftermath* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 195–214.

<sup>15</sup> P. Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London, 1989), p. 352.

self-censor for fear of social exclusion or being labelled a ‘bad chap’.<sup>16</sup> However, this technique had limited success in suppressing the secrets of Suez: against the backdrop of progressive social and cultural change in Britain during the 1960s—which saw the increasing rejection of convention and norms and the corresponding growth of a sense of rebellion, even among some traditional conservative circles—people followed their conscience, not their class.

Two: the biggest challenge to official secrets about Suez came not from backbench socialist firebrands but from front-rank politicians intent on producing revelatory memoirs. Senior political elites were extremely difficult to control. No government had the nerve to use more draconian methods of regulation against them, especially the notorious ‘catch-all’ Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act, which made it a criminal offence for a Crown servant to disclose *any* classified information without lawful authority. The individuals in question realised this and used it to their advantage. As the Attorney General, Sir Hartley Shawcross, acknowledged in 1948, it would take a brave Prime Minister to authorise the prosecution of a former holder of elected office and constitutionally frogmarch them off to court: such a course of action was equivalent to using a ‘Naismith hammer to crack a nut’.<sup>17</sup> More than twenty years later, the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Burke Trend, made the same calculation: ‘Prosecution under the Official Secrets Act, withdrawal of Privy Counsellor status, withholding of pension etc ... are regarded as so incommensurate with the true measure of the technical offence as to make it wholly unrealistic to think of invoking them in practice’.<sup>18</sup>

The issue of major political figures abusing their position to publish sensitive information in memoirs designed, successfully, to boost their pensions had emerged

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<sup>16</sup> D. Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain, 1832–1998* (Oxford, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> TNA, LCO 2/3219, Hartley Shawcross, 7 Jan. 1948.

<sup>18</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1332, Burke Trend to Edward Heath, 18 June 1971.

almost as soon as the Official Secrets Act of 1911 was put on the statute book. During his long tenure as Cabinet Secretary from 1916 to 1938, Maurice Hankey discovered time and again that the Act was in practice inoperable against senior politicians, with Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George in particular proving nigh impossible to control.<sup>19</sup> The scale of the problem was perhaps best summed up by Hankey's attempt to persuade Lloyd George to remove from his memoirs certain statements about the monarchy, to which the ageing war leader replied with characteristic truculence: 'Why should the King [George V] be against my book? He can go to Hell. I owe him nothing; he owes his throne to me'.<sup>20</sup> The post-Suez period represents the critical second chapter in this story. Emboldened by the realisation that, in contrast to the rank and file, the harshest punishments did not apply to them, the attitude of senior memoir-writers who wished to make revelations about the crisis was, at best, obstinate and, at worst, pugilistic. Ironically, it was none other than Eden himself who showed the least restraint and inflicted the most damage to the crumbling foundations of secrecy, bulldozing his way through the rulebook to publish his Suez apologia, *Full Circle*, in 1960.

Three: to make matters worse for secret-keepers, members of the political elite, such as Eden, who wrote books about Suez did so not long after the event. With the notable exception of Churchill, who began writing his Second World War histories soon after that conflict ended, and who officials viewed as *sui generis* on account of his wartime leadership, political autobiographers had hitherto been fairly dilatory in publishing their accounts. This was understood as the gentlemanly thing to do, because it ensured that the personalities they described were no longer active in

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<sup>19</sup> J. Naylor, *A Man and an Institution: Sir Maurice Hankey and the Cabinet Secretariat* (Cambridge, 1984); G. Egerton, 'The Lloyd George "War Memoirs": A Study in the Politics of Memory', *Journal of Modern History*, lx (1988), pp. 55–94.

<sup>20</sup> London, House of Lords Records Office, David Lloyd George Papers, LG/G/212/3, David Lloyd George to Maurice Hankey, 10 Apr. 1933.

government. Moreover, most such works related to the two world wars, where a so-called ‘vindicator’ clause had given individuals the right and freedom to defend their wartime record.<sup>21</sup> Suez, however, irrevocably changed the landscape. The crisis left such a trail of bruised egos and shattered reputations that some of the key actors felt compelled to produce memoirs as soon as possible in their own defence. Unsurprisingly, authors found that the financial rewards were greater for more recent material, with publishers prepared to pay large sums for books that dealt with subjects fresh in the public memory.

The advent of what Trend called the ‘instant history’ of peacetime events represented a major shift in the ecology of political memoirs and caused a myriad of problems for the custodians of official secrecy.<sup>22</sup> As they saw it, memoirs that elaborated on squabbles with the civil service had the potential to inhibit the free and frank exchange of opinions among ministers and officials, who would become wary of what they say for fear of disclosure in the near future. They also worried about precedent: memoirs packed with references to official documents not available in the public domain were likely to prove to be the thin end of the wedge, attracting reprisals from journalists and historians denied access to such information under the provisions of the Public Records Act. Moreover, recollections of the very recent past were more likely to have security and diplomatic implications than accounts published at a distance from the events they described. In the case of instant memoirs about Suez, there was concern about how disclosures would be perceived in Paris, Tel Aviv, Cairo, and, most importantly, in Washington, where diplomatic bridges were being rebuilt. In short, concealing collusion was as much a battle over the future as the past.

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<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed consideration of political memoir-writing before Suez, see D. Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Writing and Fighting the Second World War* (London, 2005); C.R. Moran, *Classified: Secrecy and the State in Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1332, Trend to Heath, 18 June 1971.

## I

The first and greatest challenge to the secrets of Suez came from Eden himself, with his book *Full Circle* (1960), the first in a trilogy of memoirs. Although there was no danger of the former Prime Minister blowing the whistle on collusion, he was determined to speak his mind on a range of sensitive issues. Eden had begun to think about his memoirs as soon as he left Downing Street on 9 January 1957. With small private means and mounting medical bills (stemming from the effects of a botched gall bladder operation in 1953, when the slip of a surgeon's hand had severed his bile duct), he needed the money. Indeed, his friends had offered to create a special voluntary fund to ease his debts, an act of generosity he refused.<sup>23</sup> Having held ministerial office for a quarter of a century and having been witness to Suez and the Munich Agreement, the two most divisive political crises of the twentieth century, he could command a hefty fee. His friend Brendan Bracken told him that Matthew Wellsian, the General Editor of *The Times*, was prepared to pay £100,000 for the world serialisation rights. This, he noted, would enable Eden and his wife Clarissa to go on the hunt for property in Somerset—'a lovely county [with] many delightful small houses which are comparatively inexpensive'.<sup>24</sup> Lord Beaverbrook, it was said, wanted to purchase Eden's complete literary output, including his private papers, for a staggering one million pounds.<sup>25</sup>

Money, however, was not the main motivation for going into print. Of greater importance to Eden was vindicating his short and ill-starred premiership, and

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<sup>23</sup> R.R. James, *Anthony Eden* (London, 1986), p. 602.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 605.

specifically his actions over Suez. According to his biographer David Dutton, he had been passionately concerned with his reputation and the verdict of history his whole life.<sup>26</sup> For a long time, in his own mind at least, his legacy as a ‘Great Briton’ was assured. As a staunch opponent of appeasement, who had resigned in protest at Neville Chamberlain’s *de jure* recognition of Italian policy in Abyssinia, he had been omitted from the cast list of Cato’s ‘Guilty Men’, the famous indictment of the ‘White Paper’ generation.<sup>27</sup> Three terms as Foreign Secretary (1935–8; 1940–45; 1951–5) had established his status as one of the world’s leading diplomats. Indeed, in 1954, his mastery of international affairs was recognised by the queen with a knighthood, a rare honour for a serving Foreign Secretary. While his elevation gave rise to forebodings in some quarters, when he finally succeeded Churchill and became Prime Minister in 1955—a position which he had waited to inherit from the aged giant for so long—political fortune-tellers were generally optimistic about his prospects. Indeed, James Margach has gone as far as to say that, ‘By every conceivable test of history, politics and popularity, Eden should have been one of Britain’s truly great Prime Ministers’.<sup>28</sup>

By the autumn of 1956, everything had changed. After the shortest of political honeymoons, his premiership succumbed to drift and decline, with the traditional Tory mouthpiece, the *Daily Telegraph*, famously accusing him of failing to provide the ‘smack of firm government’. The growing feeling that he was weak and disposed

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<sup>26</sup> D. Dutton, *Anthony Eden: A Life and a Reputation* (London, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Published in July 1940 by ‘Cato’ (a collective pseudonym for three Beaverbrook journalists, including the future Labour Party leader Michael Foot), *Guilty Men* was a celebrated polemical book that attacked fifteen politicians and officials for their failed policies towards Hitler’s Germany in the 1930s.

<sup>28</sup> J. Margach, *The Abuse of Power: The War Between Downing Street and the Media, from Lloyd George to Callaghan* (London, 1978), p. 100. Before he became Prime Minister, concerns about Eden included the view that he had more style than substance and, deep down, was a bit of a lightweight—a natural number two. For example, taking a jaundiced view, John Grigg wrote of him before the Suez crisis: ‘Popularity means much more to him than it ever should mean to a statesman. Since the early days, when he was idolised by millions on account of his personal appearance and blameless views, he has never lost the temperament and outlook of a prima donna’. With his movie-star good looks and dandyish proclivities—fittingly, he lived for a time in a property that was once owned by Beau Brummel—there was no doubting that he rubbed some people up the wrong way. See D. Gilmour, ‘Eden and Suez’, *London Review of Books*, viii, no. 22 (18 Dec. 1986), pp. 14–15.

to dither and scuttle was given further momentum in April 1956 by the so-called ‘Buster Crabb Affair’, when it emerged that the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) had sent a frogman to investigate the hull of a Russian cruiser, wilfully ignoring the order of a Prime Minister they regarded as ‘wet’.<sup>29</sup> Then came Suez. The crisis, which confirmed Britain’s precipitous decline from world power status to that of a second-class nation, was very much a personal defeat for Eden. Ironically, he had failed at the one area of policy where he had shone brightest for over three decades—foreign affairs. The critics had a field day. As Dutton has argued, ‘It was precisely because of the reputation which Eden enjoyed, and had cultivated, that Suez provided so damaging to him’.<sup>30</sup>

Following his retirement, the attacks continued and showed no sign of abating. The journalist Paul Johnson led the first wave of the literary inquest with *The Suez War* (1957), suggesting that Eden had promoted and practised a policy of violence in the Middle East.<sup>31</sup> Derived from off-the-record interviews with French sources, Merry and Serge Bromberger’s *The Secrets of Suez* (1957) claimed that Britain, France and Israel had acted in concert when they invaded Egypt, and referred to secret meetings, arranged by Eden.<sup>32</sup> To the dismay of the notoriously thin-skinned former premier, it became apparent that Suez threatened to colour assessments of his entire career in public life. Randolph Churchill, for example, published a series of hurtful articles in the *Daily Express* claiming that Suez was proof that Eden had lacked the qualities of a statesman in the first place and was never fit to fill the shoes of Churchill’s father.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See M.S. Goodman, ‘Covering Up Spying in the “Buster” Crabb Affair: A Note’, *International History Review*, xxx (2008), pp. 768–84; C.R. Moran, ‘Intelligence and the Media: The Buster Crabb Affair, Secrecy and the Press’, *Intelligence and National Security*, xxvi (2011), pp. 676–700.

<sup>30</sup> Dutton, *Anthony Eden*, p. 100.

<sup>31</sup> P. Johnson, *The Suez War* (London, 1957).

<sup>32</sup> M. Bromberger and S. Bromberger, *The Secrets of Suez* (London, 1957).

<sup>33</sup> See Birmingham University Library [hereafter BUL], Anthony Eden [Lord Avon] Papers [hereafter AP], 33/3/2/128, Alan Hodge to Anthony Eden, 28 Nov. 1958. Randolph Churchill repeated these charges in his book *The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden* (London, 1959).

Other accounts focused on his long history of temper tantrums and nerve storms, to which his personal staff were routinely subjected, and speculated about whether he would have risen to the top had he not been blessed with youthful good looks and impeccable fashion sense, which made him conspicuous in the grey world of the political establishment.<sup>34</sup> D.R. Thorpe has since described these works as suffering from ‘syllogistic inevitability’ (that is, the tendency to write a career backwards).<sup>35</sup>

In October 1957, fearful of leaving his reputation to ‘history’, Eden formed a Literary Trust to administer the publication of three volumes of memoirs. Despite personal misgivings about *The Times*, which had published a series of critical post-mortems on his premiership, he signed a contract with the newspaper worth £160,000—a figure equivalent to £3m today.<sup>36</sup> Concerned that he might not live long enough to finish—and ‘intent on having its Suez pound of flesh first’<sup>37</sup>—*The Times* reserved the right to postpone payments until it received chapters relating to his time as Prime Minister.<sup>38</sup> Since Suez loomed largest in his mind, Eden was happy to follow his paymaster’s instructions by writing out of chronological sequence. As Churchill had done, he recruited a team of research assistants, including the Oxford historians Bryan Cartledge (St Antony’s), Robert Blake (Christ Church) and David Dilks (St Antony’s), as well as Alan Hodge, who had worked on Churchill’s *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*.<sup>39</sup> Owing to his poor health, the Cabinet Office afforded his coadjutors special dispensation to inspect official documents in London on his behalf.<sup>40</sup> ‘I have had a fierce but agreeable letter from [the Cabinet Secretary] Sir Norman Brook’, wrote Hodge, ‘which, under penalty of being sent to the Tower of

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<sup>34</sup> Dutton, *Anthony Eden*, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Thorpe, *Eden*, p. 602.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 533.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1297, J.M. Moss, ‘Eden Memoirs’, 18 June 1975.

<sup>39</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4600, Norman Brook to Harold Macmillan, ‘Disclosure of Information’, 8 Feb. 1960.

<sup>40</sup> TNA, PREM 11/332, Brook to Macmillan, 1 Jan. 1958.

London for indiscretion, will allow me to consult any papers at Cabinet Office that you might wish'.<sup>41</sup>

Following the *de facto* guidelines established by Maurice Hankey, the first Cabinet Secretary, in May 1958 Eden began submitting draft chapters to Brook for pre-publication review.<sup>42</sup> For Brook, the material had a personal resonance. From the moment when Egypt's President, Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, nationalised the Suez Canal Company on 26 July 1956, he had been at the heart of the government's handling of the crisis, not only keeping the minutes of the Cabinet and of an inner Cabinet known as the 'Egypt Committee', made up of the Prime Minister and his most trusted advisors, but also chairing a Defence (Transition) Committee of permanent secretaries which met twenty-nine times during its duration to consider Britain's response to any threat of war.<sup>43</sup> As Kevin Theakston has observed, although Brook had private reservations about the Suez expedition (later calling it a 'folly', and remarking 'I've seen a good many cock-ups in my time but I have never seen anything like this'),<sup>44</sup> such was his devotion to duty that he carried out Eden's wishes without demur, including, after the ceasefire, the destruction of incriminating documents.<sup>45</sup> Edward Heath later noted in his autobiography that, in performing this thankless task, Brook looked 'like an old Samurai who had just been asked to fall on his own sword'.<sup>46</sup>

Brook was alarmed by what he read in Eden's typescript. The general presentation of the Suez story was 'an implied indictment' (Brook's words) of American foreign policy under President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his Secretary of

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<sup>41</sup> BUL, AP 33/3/2/32, Hodge to Eden, 28 Nov. 1957.

<sup>42</sup> Naylor, *A Man and an Institution*, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> K. Kyle, 'The Mandarin's Mandarin: Sir Norman Brook, Secretary of the Cabinet', *Contemporary British History*, xiii, no. 2 (1999), pp. 64–78, at 66.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>45</sup> K. Theakston, *Leadership in Whitehall* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 121–2.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Heath, *The Course of My Life* (London, 1998), p. 234.

State, John Foster Dulles.<sup>47</sup> Eden reproached the US administration for ‘cynically’ undercutting Downing Street’s efforts to undo the nationalisation of the canal by economic and diplomatic pressure, leaving him no option but to use force. Dulles, he claimed, had ‘strung [Britain] along over many months of negotiation from pretext to pretext, from device to device and from contrivance to contrivance’.<sup>48</sup> Dulles’s ‘game’, he charged, was to prevaricate for political reasons, to ensure that Suez did not undermine Eisenhower’s hopes for securing a second term in the November 1956 presidential election.<sup>49</sup>

Eden accused Dulles of giving different messages publicly and privately. In public, Dulles had opposed the Anglo-French invasion, castigating it as the worst kind of gunboat diplomacy, both imperial and inept.<sup>50</sup> Privately, however, Eden’s text suggested that the American was a ruthless realist. According to Eden, after Eisenhower had refused to prop up the embattled pound without an unconditional withdrawal (leading the British to call off the military operation midway, with only about half of the Zone secured), Selwyn Lloyd visited Dulles in hospital on 18 November 1956. Here, showing his Janus-face, Dulles said to Lloyd that he ‘deplored that we [Britain] had not managed to bring Nasser down and declared that he must be prevented from getting away with it’.<sup>51</sup> (The same comments were later repeated to Sir Harold Caccia, the British Ambassador to Washington, leaving him ‘so angry that literally it required a physical effort not to leap up and swarm over the desk’.)<sup>52</sup> Part

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<sup>47</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4234, Norman Brook, ‘Comments on Books II and III of Volume II: The Period of the Premiership’, 20 July 1959.

<sup>48</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1297, J.M. Moss, ‘Eden Memoirs’, 18 June 1975.

<sup>49</sup> For a penetrating analysis of Eden’s relationship with Dulles and the latter’s alleged duplicity, see Wm. R. Louis, ‘Dulles, Suez, and the British’, in R. Immerman, ed., *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ, 1990), pp. 133–58.

<sup>50</sup> D. Reynolds, ‘A “Special Relationship”? America, Britain, and the International Order since the Second World War’, *International Affairs*, lxii (1985–6), pp. 1–20, at 9.

<sup>51</sup> C. Roberts, ‘Suez in Retrospect: Anthony Eden’s Memoirs’, *The Atlantic* (Apr. 1960).

<sup>52</sup> Princeton University, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, The John Foster Dulles Oral History Project, ‘Transcript of a Recorded Interview with Joseph Alsop’.

of a romantic, Churchillian generation of Englishmen who took the Special Relationship as in the natural order of things, Brook questioned the wisdom of including these ‘pretty sharp’ observations, suggesting that they might ‘give rise to quite a lot of difficulty’, especially as both Eisenhower and Dulles were still in office.<sup>53</sup> Eden swiftly and sternly replied that he had been ‘very restrained’ in his treatment of the Americans, remarking that ‘there is certainly much more that I could have said’.<sup>54</sup>

## II

On 24 June 1959, Brook received the full typescript of *Full Circle*, prompting him to send copies to key stakeholders for comment. The feedback had a common theme: Eden had been far too vituperative about the Americans. Lord Salisbury, the former Lord President, worried about the ‘pretty outspoken criticism of Dulles’, especially since the legendary Secretary of State had recently passed away, on 24 May, and was generally held in high esteem at the time of his death.<sup>55</sup> Sir Philip de Zulueta—private secretary to Harold Macmillan, Eden’s successor from January 1957—wrote a note confirming that the Prime Minister was deeply concerned about the text from the perspective of Anglo-American relations. Since becoming premier, he had set great store by healing the wounds that Suez had made in relations with the White House. As David Reynolds has shown, within just a short time he had made considerable progress, aided by the fact that he and Eisenhower were old wartime buddies, having

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<sup>53</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1297, J.M. Moss, ‘Eden Memoirs’, 18 June 1975.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

worked together in North Africa and Italy in 1943–4.<sup>56</sup> In March 1957, the two had met at the Bermuda conference, and Macmillan had agreed to the deployment of sixty *Thor* missiles in Britain, in return for a US commitment to engineer greater British access to American secrets about nuclear weapons. Reportedly, ‘the two elderly gentleman relished their reunion, wandering in and out of each other’s rooms in their pyjamas, chatting old times and new’.<sup>57</sup> By May 1959, fearing a ‘missile gap’ following the Soviet launch of Sputnik, the President had signed agreements with Britain permitting a greater exchange of information, technology and fissile materials.<sup>58</sup> Clearly, Macmillan did not want Eden’s memoir to endanger this renewed rapport. It was essential ‘not to unduly wound our friends’, emphasised de Zulueta, ‘and I think the American people are our friends and the American administration are more co-operative than they were in their more ignorant days’.<sup>59</sup> Controversially, the typescript suggested that Macmillan, as Chancellor during the crisis, had been a leading hawk in the Egypt Committee, opposed to taking the ‘Nasser problem’ to the United Nations for mediation, and relentlessly calling for military action irrespective of attitudes in Washington.

Selwyn Lloyd compiled a lengthy list of grievances, prefaced with the important rider ‘to be shown to no-one except, at Brook’s discretion, the Prime Minister’.<sup>60</sup> As Foreign Secretary, Lloyd was nervous about the possible damage to Britain’s overseas equities. As well as deploring the book’s ‘strong anti-American bias’, which might put at risk Macmillan’s attempts to mend fences with Washington, he feared that the manuscript’s ‘rather crude’ partisanship of the Israelis against the Egyptians and other important Arab constituencies might damage ‘efforts to improve

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<sup>56</sup> Reynolds, ‘Special Relationship’, p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> M. Walker, *The Cold War and the Making of the Modern World* (London, 1994), p. 118.

<sup>58</sup> Reynolds, ‘Special Relationship’, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1297, J.M. Moss, ‘Eden Memoirs’, 18 June 1975.

<sup>60</sup> TNA, FO 800/728, Selwyn Lloyd to Brook, 8 Aug. 1959.

our relations in that part of the world'.<sup>61</sup> Specifically, he was anxious about the claim that the 'Israeli–Egyptian explosion was advantageous to the free world'; this, he speculated, might increase the suspicion that Eden had inspired the crisis and that there had been foreknowledge of the Israeli attack of 29 October.<sup>62</sup>

Lloyd complained that 1960, the date scheduled for publication, was simply too soon. Many of the people quoted in the book, whether in government, opposition, or in other countries, were still active in politics and would probably be upset by the premature disclosure of what they had entrusted to Eden in confidence. For example, there were descriptions of private meetings between Eden and the Shah of Iran, in which the latter spoke negatively about Nasser. Although the Shah would not repudiate his hatred of the Egyptian president, to be quoted to this effect in an official memoir might cause him embarrassment. There were also unflattering characterisations of General Charles De Gaulle, who, having watched Suez from the political sidelines, was now back at the helm as French prime minister and more distrustful than ever of perfidious Albion. 'The difficulty about all this', Lloyd remarked, 'is that had Sir Anthony's book appeared in 1970 or even in 1965 there could not have been any possible objection ... If a statesman chooses to publish his memoirs very soon after the events to which they refer, I think it means he has to accept they will be more jejune than otherwise'.<sup>63</sup> In closing, he commented that he had hoped for a 'broadminded, tolerant, statesmanlike' account, which would 'stand the test of history and benefit Eden's great reputation'.<sup>64</sup> However, the book gave the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

impression of a cantankerous old man, resentful of criticism and full of malice. 'To publish in present form would be a personal mistake', he warned.<sup>65</sup>

Interestingly, while officials panicked about what the memoir had revealed, some of Eden's closest friends and aides were more concerned about what it had *not* revealed. Lord Chandos (Oliver Lyttelton, the former Conservative Secretary of State for the Colonies) questioned whether collusion was not already an open secret and wondered, therefore, whether 'complete silence may tend to provoke more controversy than if you were able to put in something which headed them off'.<sup>66</sup> After all, many people had seen the Suez invasion as a hysterical over-reaction and had never taken Eden at face value when, drawing analogies with Hitler and Mussolini, and equating the nationalisation of the Canal with the remilitarisation of the Rhineland or the annexation of the Sudetenland, he had argued that Nasser was a modern-day dictator incapable of responding to a policy of appeasement. Confident that the inner Cabinet would take the secret to their graves, Eden cagily replied: 'As regards the other charge against us, after much reflection I thought a detached account of events without protestation was the best way to handle the business'.<sup>67</sup>

Robert Blake, one of Eden's research associates, identified three 'mysterious' omissions.<sup>68</sup> First, the exact motive for Anglo-French intervention had not been fully expounded. Although Eden had claimed that the ambition had been to prevent war from spreading across the Middle East and to safeguard free passage through the canal, he had disclosed neither when the Cabinet had reached this decision, nor when or where the concerting of a joint policy with the French had been arranged. Like Chandos, in view of all the allegations about collusion, Blake urged Eden to deal with

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> BUL, AP 23/17/37, Oliver Lyttelton, Lord Chandos, to Eden, 29 Sept. 1959.

<sup>67</sup> BUL, AP 23/17/37, Eden to Chandos, 1 Oct. 1959; Dutton, *Anthony Eden*, p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> BUL, AP 33/3/1/33, Robert Blake to Eden, 2 Mar. 1959.

the matter ‘quite specifically’, to avert ‘skeptical and incredulous’ public reaction.<sup>69</sup> It is fascinating to note from reading the letters of Eden’s research assistants that the former premier had clearly not entrusted them with the truth. In one communication, Blake ridiculed the ‘Left’ for suggesting that there had been ‘some mysterious and sinister plans with French ministers’, using exclamation marks to underscore just how absurd he believed this allegation to be.<sup>70</sup> In another, he scoffed at the accusations of ‘left-wing intellectual moralists’.<sup>71</sup> Elsewhere, he remarked that he had ‘heard something about our extreme secrecy’, and asked Eden to explain why he had once said to him that the Israeli attack ‘did not come as a complete surprise’.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, Alan Hodge delighted in attacking Randolph Churchill’s ‘conjectural rubbish’, ‘squibs’, ‘misconceptions and half-truths’ about collusion.<sup>73</sup> For Eden not to have confided in his assistants adds weight to Philip Murphy’s argument that from the point of view of the chief British conspirator, collusion was as much a ‘private secret’ as an official one.<sup>74</sup> Blake and Hodge, we should not forget, had been given the official ‘need to know’ by the Cabinet Office, allowing them to work in classified state archives. What they were evidently not given, by Eden, was the need to know everything.

Blake’s second problem was that Britain’s reasons for withdrawal had not been adequately explained. In his view, it was hard to believe that Britain pulled out, as Eden claimed, when the fighting stopped between Egypt and Israel. Although she had achieved her announced intention of ‘separating the combatants’, surely she had also hoped to resolve the canal question, dethrone Nasser and return Egypt to

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<sup>69</sup> BUL, AP 33/3/1/152, Blake to Eden, miscellaneous undated memo; BUL, AP 33/3/1/33, Blake to Eden, 2 Mar. 1959.

<sup>70</sup> BUL, AP 33/3/1/152, Blake to Eden, miscellaneous undated memo.

<sup>71</sup> BUL, AP 33/3/1/33, Blake to Eden, 2 Mar. 1959.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> BUL, AP 33/3/2/128, Hodge to Eden, 28 Nov. 1958.

<sup>74</sup> Murphy, ‘Telling Tales’, p. 213.

European hegemony? ‘The ordinary man in the street’, he suggested, recognised that ‘Nasser needed taking down a peg or two and bringing to his senses’. Thus, he would want to know ‘why we did not finish the job, occupy the whole canal, clear it with our own salvage fleet, and then negotiate a settlement with Nasser, or his successor’.<sup>75</sup>

Blake’s final concern was that the military side of Suez had been ignored. Notably, Eden had said nothing about the alleged disagreements between British and French forces over how to stage the intervention. For example, it had been reported that the French had preferred a ‘lightning action’ with forty-eight hours of bombing followed by parachute descents, whereas the British favoured a slow and sustained aerial bombardment. Overall, Blake advised that since ‘the book will be very largely judged by the Suez chapters ... it is, therefore, of paramount importance to make these chapters as clear, candid and readable as possible’. ‘It is absolutely vital’, he continued, ‘to answer the questions still left in people’s minds, and not to give any impression, however unwitting, of evading problems or suppressing facts’.<sup>76</sup>

Eden doggedly resisted all attempts to tell him what he should and should not include. He told Brook that he resented ‘the coldness in the tone of the official comments’, and made it clear that this was his memoir—‘*his* apologia’—and that he was entitled to ruffle a few feathers.<sup>77</sup> Much to the chagrin of the Cabinet Secretary, the attack on the US was left largely intact, including the hatchet job on Dulles, who was the unmistakable *bête noire* of the work. ‘We have failed to tone down the criticism of US policy’, Brook lamented: ‘The tone of the book remains sharply critical of the US administration, which may provoke hostile American reactions’.<sup>78</sup> Eden referred to Dulles as a ‘preacher in a world of politics’ who had ‘little regard for

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<sup>75</sup> BUL, AP 33/3/1/33, Blake to Eden, 2 Mar. 1959.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1297, J.M. Moss, ‘Eden Memoirs’, 18 June 1975.

<sup>78</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4234, Brook to Macmillan, 2 Nov. 1959.

the consequences of his words'.<sup>79</sup> Responding to the late Secretary of State's pronouncements that Suez had been colonialism masquerading as international law enforcement, Eden remarked—*touché*—that 'if the United States had to defend their treaty rights in the Panama Canal, they would not regard such action as colonialism'.<sup>80</sup> Elsewhere, he asserted that Dulles's 'cynicism towards Allies destroys true partnership. It leaves only the choice of parting or a master and vassal relationship in foreign policy'.<sup>81</sup>

By early November 1959, Brook informed Macmillan that 'we really have no alternative but to put up with the book as it now stands'.<sup>82</sup> In a tacit acknowledgment that Eden was above the law, he added that 'our difficulty arises from the fact that the control we can exercise over anyone in Sir Anthony's position cannot be more than persuasion'—shorthand for a combination of polite arm-twisting and *quid pro quo* arrangements.<sup>83</sup> Using the Official Secrets Act was out of the question, as it had been in the cases of Lloyd George and Churchill in the 1930s, and then again after 1945 with Churchill and other distinguished members of the War Cabinet such as Clement Attlee (Deputy Prime Minister) and Viscount Halifax (Foreign Secretary).<sup>84</sup>

In a final bid to secure changes to the text, Brook asked Macmillan to write a letter to Eden—'more in sorrow than in anger'—insinuating that the book was beneath him.<sup>85</sup> The idea was that Macmillan would approach Eden not so much as Prime Minister, but as one Old Etonian to another, concerned about gentlemanly conduct. The tactic of couching censorship in the form of a gentlemanly request had been used with Churchill, albeit with limited effect, the one notable success being to

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<sup>79</sup> Anthony Eden, *Full Circle: The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden* (London: 1960), p. 64.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 499.

<sup>81</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4234, 'Brook Comments on Memoirs', n.d.

<sup>82</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4234, Brook to Macmillan, 2 Nov. 1959.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Clement Attlee, *As It Happened* (London, 1954); Edward Wood, earl of Halifax, *Fullness of Days* (New York, 1957).

<sup>85</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4234, Norman Brook, 'Note for the Record', 3 Nov. 1959.

convince him to edit out from his memoirs the subject of codebreaking at Bletchley Park.<sup>86</sup> Macmillan decided against this, uncomfortable with ‘upsetting Eden’ who, mindful of the need to avoid giving ammunition to the Labour Party, had at least shown the good grace to defer the release of the book until after the October 1959 general election.<sup>87</sup> Instead, Macmillan focused his attention on dealing with the possible fallout from publication. On 5 January 1960, a week before serialisation, he sent a secret telegram to Eisenhower apologising in advance if the book ‘revived some of the old controversies’.<sup>88</sup> It was explained that Her Majesty’s Government had suggested a large number of alterations, especially in relation to comments about US policy, but ultimate responsibility rested with the author. Macmillan paid tribute to the Bermuda conference as evidence of the renewed transatlantic alliance and underlined that he was ‘anxious that our two Governments should not become involved in any recriminations about the past’.<sup>89</sup> In closing, he stressed that he ‘would much have preferred the memoirs to remain unpublished, for some time to come’, before opining: ‘My own feeling is that we should leave history to the historians—you and I have quite enough trouble with the present and the future without going back over the past’.<sup>90</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, it is hard not to see the irony in this last remark, for in his retirement Macmillan had no intention of leaving history to the historians, producing no fewer than six volumes of memoirs.

### III

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<sup>86</sup> D. Reynolds, ‘The Ultra Secret and Churchill’s War Memoirs’, *Intelligence and National Security*, xx (2005), pp. 209–24.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. See also TNA, PREM 11/4234, ‘Record of a Conversation between the Foreign Secretary and Sir Anthony Eden at Broad Chalke’, 30 May 1958. During the conversation, Eden ‘realised that it would be unwise for it [the book] to be published shortly before the election’.

<sup>88</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4234, Macmillan to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 5 Jan. 1960.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

In January 1960, then, Eden steered political memoir-writing into uncharted waters: never before had a statesman of the first rank published an account of a recent peacetime event in which he himself had played such a key part. Commercially, *Full Circle* was a great success, topping the bestseller list and shifting 77,000 copies in just nine months.<sup>91</sup> *The Times* reported that its circulation increased by 15 per cent during the weeks of serialisation—a ‘very remarkable jump’ for a newspaper with usually very stable sales figures.<sup>92</sup>

Privately, officials anxiously waited to see if their concerns about the book had been justified, especially with regard to foreign relations and the potential for upsetting people in positions of power. The early signs were positive. Guy Mollet, the French prime minister at the time of Suez, told Eden that ‘I appreciated and approved the discretion with which you touch on certain aspects of the problem’, almost certainly a reference to the continued silence about collusion.<sup>93</sup> Pleasingly, Winston Churchill reported that he found the references to him ‘fair’ and ‘honourable to his name’.<sup>94</sup> To everyone’s relief, there was little evidence of backlash from American allies. On 10 February—twenty-four hours after Lewis Silkin, a Labour peer, had asked in the House of Lords what ‘mischief’ the book had caused across the Atlantic<sup>95</sup>—Number 10 received a pleasant message from the White House explaining that the ‘general reaction was mild’ and that administration insiders regarded Suez as nothing more than ‘an ill-advised adventure’, long since forgotten.<sup>96</sup> The volume of

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<sup>91</sup> Thorpe, *Eden*, p. 559.

<sup>92</sup> BUL, AP 33/3/1/158, Blake to Eden, 9 Feb. 1960.

<sup>93</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1297, J.M. Moss, ‘Eden Memoirs’, 18 June 1975.

<sup>94</sup> BUL, AP 33/3/2/314, Hodge to Eden, 20 Oct. 1959.

<sup>95</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4234, ‘House of Lords Debates’, 9 Feb. 1960.

<sup>96</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1297, J.M. Moss, ‘Eden Memoirs’, 18 June 1975.

media coverage, it reported, had been ‘relatively small’—in part a reflection of the fact that ‘there was a great deal of other news competing for comment’, including the unfolding presidential election race between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy, but also because, in American eyes, the ‘episode had undoubtedly dropped further back in the national consciousness than was the case in the UK’.<sup>97</sup> In Britain, against the backdrop of decolonisation and the final years of empire, Suez clearly still resonated: indeed, many now interpreted it as the last throw of the imperial dice. In the United States, by contrast, as the renowned scholar Martin Wight wrote in the journal *International Affairs*, ‘Already the Suez expedition seems remote and rounded-off, a failure of high drama but small historical effect, less consequential internationally than the Mexican expedition by Napoleon III, less consequential domestically than the failure to relieve Gordon at Khartoum’.<sup>98</sup>

As Blake had warned would happen, Eden was heavily criticised, in the UK at least, for a perceived lack of candidness about vital elements of the Suez story. Nettled by Eden’s continued denial of collusion and his insistence that Israeli operations were wholly independent of Britain and France, Hugh Gaitskell, the leader of the Labour Party, called the book ‘exceptionally misleading’.<sup>99</sup> In the *New Statesman*, Paul Johnson wrote that, despite being given the full run of the state archives, Eden could ‘make no better case for Suez than such journalists as John Connell and T.E. Utley’.<sup>100</sup> The claim that there had been total unity in the government was plainly dishonest, since the book conveniently failed to mention the resignations of Sir Edward Boyle, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, and Anthony Nutting, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, in protest at the invasion,

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> M. Wight, ‘Brutus in Foreign Policy: The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden’, *International Affairs*, xxxvi (1960), pp. 299–309, at 309.

<sup>99</sup> ‘The Unhappy Memory’, *Time*, 14 Mar. 1960.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Two Views of the Eden Memoirs: Paul Johnson’, *New Statesman*, 5 Mar. 1960, p. 336.

still less the latter's remarkable self-abnegation in refusing to criticise his chief publicly. The notion that during the crisis 'Not a mouse moved in Arab lands' was also pure dissimulation, with the book ignoring the facts that Saudi Arabia had broken off diplomatic relations and that Iraq had tabled a motion for Britain's expulsion from the defence alliance, the Baghdad Pact. 'In narrating episodes', Johnson asserted, 'Eden has been less than frank. His colleagues certainly know it, and he must know that they know it'.<sup>101</sup>

Eden's longtime nemesis Randolph Churchill predictably stuck the knife in. Also writing in the *New Statesman*, he declared that Eden 'adds little to what is already known, and in many issues on which his policy has been questioned or criticised, he makes no attempt to find an answer'.<sup>102</sup> According to Churchill, no one would believe Eden's argument that British intervention, though cancelled after thirty-six hours, was successful because it led to the creation of an international peace force in the region, under the auspices of the United Nations. This, he suggested, was 'certainly a small and fugitive dividend to achieve at such enormous cost and with such high risk'.<sup>103</sup> In common with several reviewers, he pointed out the inconsistency between Eden's explanation of the original intention of the Suez operation as being to bring Nasser to heel and prevent another Munich, and his justification of the operation itself as an unbiased police intervention to preserve the peace.<sup>104</sup> This, to Churchill, was 'disingenuous', 'unconvincing' and 'makes pathetic reading'.<sup>105</sup>

Since it was obvious that Eden had enjoyed privileged access to closed official documents in the compilation of *Full Circle*, many reviewers called for the immediate

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> 'Two Views of the Eden Memoirs: Randolph Churchill, *New Statesman*, 5 Mar. 1960, p. 335.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> See 'The Eden Memoirs', *Political Quarterly*, xxxi, no. 2 (Apr. 1960), pp. 113–19.

<sup>105</sup> 'Two Views of the Eden Memoirs: Randolph Churchill', p. 335.

overhaul of the Public Records Act, which had only come in to force on 1 January 1959, establishing a statutory fifty-year rule for the closure of all government records. In the correspondence column of *The Times*, which had a reputation for staging fiery exchanges between campaigning academics and Whitehall mandarins,<sup>106</sup> the historian A.J.P. Taylor protested that researchers would have to wait until the next century to discover how partisan, if at all, Eden had been.<sup>107</sup> Among the dangers of such favouritism was that, by skilful selection of records, ex-ministers could claim almost anything, safe in the knowledge that outside authentication could not happen for decades.<sup>108</sup> Tristan Jones, the General Manager of the *Observer*, complained that there was ‘one law for the high and mighty and another law for ordinary mortals’. ‘The high and mighty’, he protested, ‘are enabled to put out their version of events and prevent other people, who may have other evidence, from challenging them’.<sup>109</sup>

Officials were acutely aware that *Full Circle* left them a hostage to fortune. On the eve of publication, Brook predicted that the book would deepen the bad blood between the favoured few and the disqualified historical community, as well as embolden future memoirists to demand similar privileges. Accordingly, he emphasised the ‘need to look at the rules’ regarding access by ex-ministers to papers covered by the fifty-year rule.<sup>110</sup> This had to be done urgently, since there was an increasing public appetite for political memoirs in preference to revelations ‘by the soldiers’.<sup>111</sup> As he saw it, a key part of the problem was that ministers had been given

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<sup>106</sup> See, for example, R. Howorth, ‘Cabinet Secrecy: Loyalties not Ended by Dissolution’, *The Times*, 8 Aug. 1952. A former Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Howorth was responding to A.J.P. Taylor’s claim that the dissolution of the Cabinet frees its members from their Privy Counsellor’s Oath.

<sup>107</sup> Thorpe, *Eden*, p. 558.

<sup>108</sup> Interestingly, one of the fiercest critics of the favouritism shown towards Eden was Lord Avon’s future official biographer Robert Rhodes James; see R.R. James, ‘The Fifty-Year Rule’, *The Spectator*, 20 Aug. 1964.

<sup>109</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4660, Tristan Jones to Trend, 4 Jan. 1964.

<sup>110</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1297, J.M. Moss, ‘Eden Memoirs’, 18 June 1975.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

too much freedom to retain official papers when they retired.<sup>112</sup> To bypass the guidelines pertaining to Crown copyright and the custody of official material, Eden, copying Churchill, had taken the precaution throughout his career of instructing his staff to stamp letters, telegrams and minutes as 'Private' or 'Personal'. As a result, he had amassed a large private collection of sensitive documents; indeed, like Churchill, he had needed horseboxes to transport them on the day he left Downing Street.

Macmillan agreed that a tough line had to be taken on the ownership of, and access to, official documents. In 1963 he approved the idea of Burke Trend, Brook's successor as Cabinet Secretary, of prohibiting research assistants from working on behalf of ex-ministers in secret archives.<sup>113</sup> With reminiscences on the horizon by Lord Mountbatten and Viscount Kilmuir (both of whom had occupied arterial positions in 1956 as First Sea Lord and Lord Chancellor respectively), he also introduced the so-called 'Suez Embargo', which ruled that nobody was allowed to consult records relating to the crisis without the express permission of the Prime Minister. Initially, this stopped the bleeding. Mountbatten lost the urge to write, while Kilmuir produced an 'unexceptionable' book,<sup>114</sup> revealing (in the words of the new Prime Minister, Alec Douglas-Home) 'nothing more than all of us said in Parliament at the time'.<sup>115</sup> The respite, however, was short-lived.

#### IV

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<sup>112</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4234, Brook to Macmillan, 2 Nov. 1959.

<sup>113</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4938, Trend to Lloyd, 1 May 1963.

<sup>114</sup> TNA, CAB 21/5848, Trend to Macmillan, 19 Nov. 1963.

<sup>115</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1295, J.M. Moss, 'The Kilmuir Memoirs', 7 May 1975; TNA, CAB 21/5848, T. Bligh, 'Note for the Record', 5 Dec. 1963.

At the time of Suez, Gaitskell boldly predicted that, sooner or later, the people who had been privy to collusion 'are bound to start giving one another away'.<sup>116</sup> It took less than a decade for him to be proved right. The first person to break the bond of secrecy was the former French foreign minister, Christian Pineau. In May 1964, during a television interview promoting his new book *Dulles over Suez*, Herman Finer, a political scientist, held up a letter he had received from Pineau in March of the previous year. In it, remarkably, the Frenchman wrote that in October 1956 he and Mollet had travelled incognito to Paris to reach an agreement with the Israelis and the British on joint intervention.<sup>117</sup> Despite this being the first time that collusion had been acknowledged by one of the main protagonists, surprisingly, the letter failed to make much of an impact. In the House, Labour backbencher Emrys Hughes asked whether an official history of Suez should be commissioned, suggesting that 'students at Eton and Oxford are greatly handicapped' by the absence of such an account.<sup>118</sup> But Douglas-Home easily swatted away the question, responding that since the official history programme dealt with major conflicts of arms, there was no case for one on Suez.

Two years later, with the tenth anniversary of Suez provoking renewed press interest in the subject, Pineau added further pieces to the collusion jigsaw puzzle, this time with greater consequences. In July, in plain defiance of the assurances he had given a decade earlier, he confirmed to the BBC Third Programme that an 'Anglo-French-Israeli Treaty' had been signed before the invasion and added that, 'if one day my English friends of this period accept to say the truth about this, I should agree'.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Cited in E. Monroe, 'Suez Secrets: The Jigsaw Continues', *The Observer*, 24 July 1966.

<sup>117</sup> R. Scott, 'Joint Plan over Suez Admitted', *The Guardian*, 6 May 1964.

<sup>118</sup> TNA, PREM 11/4749, 'Hansard Proceedings', 16 June 1964.

<sup>119</sup> Monroe, 'Suez Secrets'.

In November—believing that ‘for the French, the operation was now old history and devoid of current political content’—he went even further, publishing an article in *Le Monde* in which he disclosed that a secret accord had been signed, at Sèvres, in the ‘last ten days of October 1956’.<sup>120</sup> In view of these revelations, the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, faced calls from Labour backbenchers, led by Michael Foot, to commission an official Suez inquiry, analogous to the Dardanelles Commission of 1916 on the disastrous Gallipoli campaign. Attracted by the prospect of poking the Conservative Party in the eye, Wilson was initially open to the idea. ‘Far from British intervention being to separate the Egyptian and Israeli forces, as we were told, the whole thing was a put-up job’, he raged in parliament.<sup>121</sup> By the end of the year, however, the matter had been quietly dropped. Behind closed doors, senior civil servants including Trend and Paul Gore-Booth, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, had persuaded Wilson that an inquiry could backfire, not least politically. The public, they cautioned, might regard it as a vindictive diversion of time and effort from the government’s domestic agenda. Moreover, there was the risk that two parties could play the game of exposure. Traditionally, governments had been reluctant to investigate their predecessors’ scandals, knowing that they too had secrets to hide and that the tables could soon turn once they were back in opposition.<sup>122</sup> According to Trend, the constitutional implications of abandoning this practice were ‘grave and far-reaching’.<sup>123</sup> Wilson was also warned that an inquiry could rouse ‘very violent international passions’, especially if the *prima facie* evidence of collusion was officially acknowledged. In Israel, for example, to show

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<sup>120</sup> TNA, FO 371/190241, C. Tickell to C. Lush, 9 Nov. 1966.

<sup>121</sup> Hansard, *Commons*, 5th ser., 9 Aug. 1966, vol. 733, cols. 1393–5.

<sup>122</sup> TNA, FO 103/628, Burke Trend, ‘Note’, n.d. See also TNA, FO 370/2807, Paul Gore-Booth, ‘Suggested Enquiry into the Suez Episode of 1956’, 13 July 1965.

<sup>123</sup> TNA, FO 103/628, Burke Trend, ‘Note’, n.d.

strength to the Arab world, politicians had projected the image of a dashing military success; candour about foreign assistance would detract from this.

By 1967, the broad brushstrokes of the events surrounding the Sèvres Protocol could be found in a large body of literature. Notable works included *Le Piège de Suez* by Henri Azeua; *Suez Ultra Secret* by Michael Bar-Zohar, the official biographer of Ben-Gurion; *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Crisis* by Terence Robertson, which had been written with the support of Lester Pearson, Canada's Foreign Minister at the time of Suez; *Diary of the Sinai Campaign* by General Moshe Dayan; *The Suez Affair* by Hugh Thomas; and *Suez: Ten Years On* by Peter Calvocoressi, which was accompanied by a BBC TV series that the Ministry of Defence had wanted to ban.<sup>124</sup> 1967 proved to be a key year, since it also saw the first public confirmation of collusion by a British politician, in a book called *No End of a Lesson* by Anthony Nutting, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs from 1954–6.

Before Suez, Nutting had been a rising star of the Conservative Party, seemingly destined for the highest offices of state. Handsome, stylish, and mentored by Eden himself, to whom he was indebted for his swift political rise and with whom he shared many mannerisms, gestures and idioms of speech (to the extent that cartoonists depicted him as 'Eden's Eden'), Nutting was widely regarded during Churchill's second premiership as the heir presumptive to Eden, the acknowledged heir apparent.<sup>125</sup> The protégé, however, would become one of the great 'casualties' of Suez. On 31 October 1956, two weeks after first learning of the secret plot to invade Egypt, and with British planes in the air, Nutting resigned from office. Despite being urged to stay by Macmillan, who promised 'you will lead the party one day', he was uncomfortable with having to tell lies to defend what he considered 'a sordid

<sup>124</sup> For details of the Ministry of Defence's reaction to the BBC documentary, see TNA FO 371/190241.

<sup>125</sup> D.R. Thorpe, 'Sir Anthony Nutting [obituary]', *The Independent*, 3 Mar. 1999; A. Roth, 'Sacrifice over Suez', *The Guardian*, 26 Feb. 1999.

manoeuvre ... morally indefensible and politically suicidal'.<sup>126</sup> Mindful of breaking the Official Secrets Act with military operations ongoing, and loyal to his Privy Counsellor's Oath (the centuries-old confidentiality pact in which members pledge to 'keep secret all matters committed and revealed unto you or that shall be treated secretly in council'), he did not divulge his reasons for leaving. Indeed, he did not even give a resignation speech in the House of Commons, as was customary. For his silence, he paid a heavy personal price. His unexplained action caused such bewilderment among his constituents that he was forced to give up his safe seat in Melton, while many Tories, in the grip of imperial war fever, regarded him as a traitor. Feeling betrayed by someone he had taken to his bosom, Eden spread the malicious rumour that Nutting had wanted to extricate himself from government before details of a messy divorce hit the headlines.<sup>127</sup> Overnight, aged only 36, the 'second golden boy' became a political outcast. Later, he recalled that he was suddenly 'bereft of friends, a castaway adrift on a sea of anger and recrimination, an object of distrust, torn between loyalty to principle and loyalty to friends and associates'.<sup>128</sup> In a phrase that is testament to the tribal world of Conservative politics, Selwyn Lloyd cynically dismissed his estrangement as a case of 'Much Ado About Nutting'.<sup>129</sup>

Despite the injustice of his fall from favour, and despite ultimately being proved right in all his forebodings, Nutting remained tight-lipped about the secrets of collusion. He took the view that 'as long as any of the chief protagonists of the Suez war still held high office in Britain, it would clearly have been a grave disservice to the nation, which they still led and represented in the councils of the world, to have

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<sup>126</sup> Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson* (London: 1967), pp. 14, 96.

<sup>127</sup> Thorpe, *Eden*, p. 532.

<sup>128</sup> W. Hoge, 'Sir Anthony Nutting, 79, Dies', *New York Times*, 26 Feb. 1999.

<sup>129</sup> Thorpe, 'Sir Anthony Nutting [obituary]'.

told the whole story'.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, it is tempting to view him as the only participant in the affair who took seriously the professed values of honourable conduct. By January 1966, however, with so much being written, and with Britain in the grip of profound social and cultural change that was loosening traditional mores, he had concluded that it was finally time to tell his side of the story. After ten years, he told Trend, it was 'pardonable ... that I should answer charges of betraying my leader and patron'.<sup>131</sup> In his defence, he explained that 'none of those responsible hold office'; he also suggested that it was 'only fair' that he publish while those involved were still alive, to allow them to respond.

With the book still to be written, Trend's immediate concern was whether or not to inform the Labour government. On the one hand, as the matter concerned the actions of a previous Tory administration, 'it was in a sense nothing to do with them'.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, with a general election scheduled for 31 March, Trend was loath to gift them a 'kind of minor Zinoviev letter' with which to sucker-punch their Conservative opponents.<sup>133</sup> On the other hand, a book that came clean about collusion had the potential to affect British foreign relations, something that the government of the day had a right to know. Confident that Nutting could yet be persuaded to abandon the project, and in a classic example of the mandarin logic that the 'need to know' should be the preserve of those who know best, Trend decided against bringing ministers into the loop at this stage.

Trend's optimism stemmed from his lingering faith in what David Vincent has referred to as the gentleman's code of 'instinctive self-censorship'.<sup>134</sup> The youngest son of a wealthy landowner, educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, where

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<sup>130</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1295, J.M. Moss, 'Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*', 6 May 1975.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Gore-Booth to B. Burrows, 7 Mar. 1966.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Vincent, *Culture of Secrecy*, pp. 28–9.

he studied agriculture and owned a pack of hounds, Nutting was a gentleman personified.<sup>135</sup> In the political wilderness, he enjoyed companionship with another upper-class Tory exile, the disgraced Secretary of State for War John Profumo, who accompanied him on salmon-fishing trips near his Sutherland farm in Scotland.<sup>136</sup> Keen to exploit these deep-rooted allegiances, Trend met with Nutting and lectured him on the need to meet certain social obligations, claiming that, irrespective of what had happened to him personally, he owed a ‘certain loyalty to his then political chiefs’.<sup>137</sup> On Trend’s instructions, Macmillan pursued a similar line of attack, suggesting to his fellow Old Etonian that ‘spicy revelations about Suez’ were unseemly for a person of ‘dignified’ stock.<sup>138</sup> Like a naughty schoolboy, Nutting effectively found himself ‘on the bill’, having to explain his misbehaviour to a steely headmaster who brooked no dissent. As hard they tried, however, neither Trend nor Macmillan could convince him not to write the book, although he did promise to ‘show the manuscript up to someone’ (a ‘school-ism’ for handing it to a superior authority, like a form master).<sup>139</sup> Defeat in the March general election, when Nutting unsuccessfully contested the seat of East Oldham, ended any lingering hope of a return to politics and instilled a sense of there being nothing more to lose. Moreover, he was emboldened by Wilson’s comment in parliament that someone from the Conservative Party should now ‘admit that the House was seriously misled in 1956’.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Hoge, ‘Sir Anthony Nutting, 79, Dies’.

<sup>136</sup> A. Roth, ‘Sacrifice over Suez’, *The Guardian*, 26 Feb. 1999.

<sup>137</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Gore-Booth to Burrows, 7 Mar. 1966. See also Murphy, ‘Telling Tales’, pp. 198–200.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Gore-Booth, Miscellaneous Note, 2 March 1967.

<sup>140</sup> Murphy, ‘Telling Tales’, p. 197; TNA, FCO 12/29, ‘Note of a meeting held in Sir Burke Trend’s Room, Cabinet Office, 20 Apr. 1967, 2:30pm’.

## V

Trend received the proofs of Nutting's book on 3 April 1967 and immediately sent copies around the Whitehall village for vetting, as well as notifying Eden and Number 10. Time was of the essence since newspaper serialisation was scheduled to start later in the month, a deliberate ploy by Nutting to limit the opportunity for protracted or arbitrary decision-making by the official machine. The text itself was a bombshell, revealing intimate details of the meeting at Sèvres, as well as the secret manoeuvres that had led up to it. It disclosed, for example, that Nutting had been present at Chequers, the Prime Minister's country residence, on 14 October 1956, when a French delegation had presented Eden with 'The Plan' that Israel would attack Egypt across the Sinai Peninsula, after which the French and the British would intervene on the pretext of 'extinguishing a dangerous fire'.<sup>141</sup> Given his pathological hatred of Nasser, recollected Nutting, Eden 'could scarcely contain his glee', before telling Guy Millard (the Duty Secretary) 'There's no need to take notes'.<sup>142</sup>

The Foreign Office had a litany of concerns. From the perspective of 'Britain's probity and good repute as an ally, actual or potential, and a partner in international relations', they considered the book 'objectionable' and 'damaging'.<sup>143</sup> As key officials saw it, confirmation of collusion could not but adversely reflect upon the methods by which Britain was perceived to practise diplomacy, and would potentially invite the accusation that there had been a breach of international peremptory norms (*jus cogens*). Naturally, there was anxiety about how the revelations would be seen in the Middle East. While recognising that collusion was

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<sup>141</sup> Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*, pp. 91–2.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Trend to Harold Wilson, 'The Suez Episode', 8 Apr. 1967.

widely assumed throughout the region, it was feared that further evidence of British meddling would create a ‘moral bank credit’ for Nasser, which he would exploit to propagate his vision of pan-Arab unity and win the allegiance of the West’s closest Arab friend, Saudi Arabia.<sup>144</sup> An additional concern was that a reminder of British–Israeli duplicity in 1956 might be interpreted by Arab nations, with whom Her Majesty’s Government had to deal, that the British political system was fundamentally Zionist and supportive of a Jewish national state in Palestine.<sup>145</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Eden was horrified. No foreknowledge, no prior agreement: that had been his position in 1956, reiterated in *Full Circle*, and again in the years since. ‘How can he [Nutting] get away with this’, he wrote despairingly.<sup>146</sup> On 14 April, he sent Trend a dog-eared copy of the proofs, the marginalia filled with comments such as ‘This is not true’, ‘This is not accurate’, ‘I do not recall’, ‘I remember no talk’, ‘I have no recollection of this’, ‘This is nonsense’, ‘I never said that’, ‘No such phrase was ever used’, and ‘There was never any such conversation’.<sup>147</sup> Particularly upsetting to him was the clear implication in the book that he had been ‘eager for hostilities with the Egyptian dictator’, constantly ‘putting strong pressure on the Foreign Secretary to favour warlike courses’.<sup>148</sup> ‘The charge of dictatorship on my part can only be described as hysterical’, he fumed in a letter to the now-retired Norman Brook, adding that ‘No member of Cabinet would endorse it for a second’.<sup>149</sup> Reading between the lines of his correspondence—abounding with terms such as ‘inexcusable’ and ‘gross breach’—it is clear that he regarded the disclosures as more than just a professional matter. In his estimation, Nutting had broken one of

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<sup>144</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, ‘Note of a Meeting in the P-U-S’s Office, Foreign Office, at 11:30am, 19 Apr. 1967’.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Cited in James, *Eden*, p. 614.

<sup>147</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Eden to Trend, 14 Apr. 1967.

<sup>148</sup> BUL, AP 20/49/21, Eden to Brook, 24 Apr. 1967.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

the unspoken rules of a gentleman: do not squeal on your friends, much as you would not wear a hat indoors, steal the quarry felled by another man's bullet, or, unless you were a member of the Eton Society (a 'popper'), sit on the wall on the Long Walk. Put another way, while he might have expected to be slighted by someone like Michael Foot, with his unruly shock of white hair and scruffy jackets, he expected much better of Nutting.

Wilson had no problem with Nutting heaping further obloquy on Eden himself. Moreover, unlike the Foreign Office, he was 'rather less worried' about the consequences for international relations, suggesting that 'Nasser is hardly likely to be more intransigent (even if he were capable of it)' and might even be 'thankful for the small mercy of having a non-Suez government in Great Britain'.<sup>150</sup> Given that the content of the book was, in his words, 'highly favourable to the government', one might have assumed, therefore, that he was rubbing his hands with glee. However, that was not the case. Any short-term party political gains, he stressed in a letter to Trend, would be 'bought at a heavy price in terms of the general conduct of public life'.<sup>151</sup> Specifically, he worried about precedent. Like Eden with *Full Circle*, Nutting had ventured into the realm of 'instant history', excusing himself on the grounds of a self-devised '10 year rule'. By allowing books of this nature to be published, Wilson feared, the floodgates would be opened for 'someone even more unscrupulous, and more speedy with his pen, than Nutting'.<sup>152</sup> Fresh in the memory was the embarrassment caused by Christopher Mayhew. In February 1966, Mayhew had resigned as Navy Minister in protest at the Government's decision to slash defence spending, most notably with the cancellation of the CVA-01 aircraft carrier, but still to maintain British strategic commitments east of Suez. No sooner had he left office

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<sup>150</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Wilson to Trend, 10 Apr. 1967.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

than he penned a book, *Britain's Role Tomorrow*, criticising Wilson's defence policy.<sup>153</sup> 'If this had been written by one of my subordinates during my Army days the writer would by now have been back in his barracks', remarked the Paymaster-General, George Wigg, summing up the mood of ministers.<sup>154</sup> In making calculations about Nutting, Wilson was doubtless thinking about Richard Crossman, the Leader of the House, a compulsive diary-keeper and likely future chronicler of the Cabinet. Tellingly, in Wilson's letter to Trend, next to the word 'unscrupulous', the Foreign Secretary, George Brown, had scribbled 'Crossman in mind?'<sup>155</sup>

Wilson and his advisers agonised over what should be done. One option was to intimidate Nutting with the possibility of prosecution under the Official Secrets Act, an approach endorsed by Eden, who argued that the 'more outrageous [the response], the better'.<sup>156</sup> Wilson was loath to do this. First, as we have seen, the Official Secrets Act was a 'brittle deterrent' against the senior political class; Nutting would not seriously believe that Her Majesty's Government would invoke the law against an ex-minister such as himself.<sup>157</sup> And secondly, if it became known that Nutting had been threatened with the Act in order to suppress vital information about Suez ('the publishers would hardly keep it secret'), there would be renewed public pressure for an official enquiry into the whole affair. Moreover, Wilson's enemies in the press would delight in characterising him 'in a 1984 capacity'.<sup>158</sup> Another option was to threaten Nutting with the withdrawal of his Privy Counsellor status by the queen—a solution favoured by Trend, who considered the book, in its current form, a

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<sup>153</sup> C. Mayhew, *Britain's Role Tomorrow* (London, 1967); Murphy, 'Tales Out of School', p. 200.

<sup>154</sup> TNA, PREM 13/911, George Wigg to Wilson, 14 Sept. 1966.

<sup>155</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Wilson to Trend, 10 Apr. 1967.

<sup>156</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1295, J.M. Moss, 'Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*', 6 May 1975.

<sup>157</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Wilson to Trend, 10 Apr. 1967.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

‘flagrant’ breach of the Oath and therefore an ‘insult to the Crown’.<sup>159</sup> Again, however, for fear of being cast as an enemy of free speech, Wilson was reluctant to sanction any remedy that smacked of being heavy-handed. Furthermore, with his own memoir to write one day, self-interestedly he was nervous about the ‘inhibiting effect’ a harsh response would have on future autobiographers, lamenting that it ‘might have the effect of ruling out memoirs such as those of Churchill, Attlee and others, while allowing the Mayhew stuff to get through’.<sup>160</sup>

Nervous about the Labour Government acting unilaterally against Nutting—especially if a tough stance was taken and a row ensued—Wilson consulted Edward Heath, the leader of the Tory Opposition. Heath, who shared the anxiety about aggrieved former ministers establishing their own ten-, five-, or even one-year rules, suggested that, rather than trying to ban publication altogether, the government pursue a ‘death by a thousand cuts’ approach.<sup>161</sup> The idea here was that Nutting would be asked to make so many deletions that the resultant Swiss-cheese quality of the text would render it unreadable. Although Wilson doubted ‘Nutting will prove to be a gentleman’, he thanked Heath for his plan and considered it worth a try.<sup>162</sup>

On 17 April, Trend informed Nutting that he would be required to omit or alter passages that: affected security; revealed the identities and private views of members of the Diplomatic Service; damaged international relations; and breached the convention of collective responsibility.<sup>163</sup> Playing for time, he explained that, while it would be fairly easy for the government to draw up a list of passages relating to points one and two, it was more complex to do so for the latter objections. Nutting replied on the same day, claiming in his defence that Suez was a ‘departure’ from

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<sup>159</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Trend to Wilson, ‘The Suez Episode’, 8 Apr. 1967.

<sup>160</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Wilson to Trend, 10 Apr. 1967.

<sup>161</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Burke Trend, ‘Note for the Record’, 12 Apr. 1967.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*; TNA, FCO 12/29, Wilson to Trend, 10 Apr. 1967.

<sup>163</sup> TNA, FCO 12/29, Trend to Anthony Nutting, 17 Apr. 1967; Murphy, ‘Telling Tales’, pp. 201–2.

every convention that had underpinned British diplomacy throughout history.<sup>164</sup> ‘It was for this reason’, he continued, ‘that I resigned, which clearly absolves me from that “collective responsibility” to which you refer’.<sup>165</sup>

On 20 April, in a bid to ‘reach a meeting of minds’, he and his publisher (Ben Glazebrook) met with Trend and Gore-Booth at the Cabinet Office, but not before everyone had taken lunch at Trend’s private members’ club, a sign perhaps that officials clung to the hope that, even at the eleventh hour, the matter could be resolved by gentlemanly means.<sup>166</sup> According to Gore-Booth’s minutes, Trend ‘showed great skill in taking a firm line while keeping a possibly explosive temperature down’.<sup>167</sup> Nutting nevertheless stood his ground. Under pressure to delete the two chapters on collusion in their entirety—on the basis that they revealed intimate conversations between officials—he countered that this would ‘suppress the essential truth’ and ‘completely ruin the book’, before seizing on the precedents of Churchill, Eden and Mayhew, whose books were replete with departures from the rules.<sup>168</sup> When Trend suggested that historians would eventually discover the ‘truth’ about Sèvres from documents at the Public Record Office, Nutting hit back by saying that, so far as he knew, no records of the talks existed. By the end of the verbal sparring, it was clear that he would not back down. That evening Trend told the Prime Minister, ‘We should assume that Nutting will make a few trivial arrangements but that otherwise the book will appear much in its present form’.<sup>169</sup>

On 26 April, Wilson formally decided not to take legal action against the book, but only after a lengthy discussion with the Attorney General, Elwyn Jones.

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<sup>164</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1295, J.M. Moss, ‘Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*’, 6 May 1975.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> TNA, FCO 12/30, Gore-Booth to Secretary of State, ‘Mr. Nutting’s Book’, Apr. 1967.

<sup>168</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1295, J.M. Moss, ‘Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*’, 6 May 1975; TNA, FCO 12/29, ‘Note of a meeting held in Sir Burke Trend’s Room, Cabinet Office, 20 Apr. 1967, 2:30pm’.

<sup>169</sup> TNA, FCO 12/30, Trend to Wilson, ‘The Suez Episode’, 20 Apr. 1967.

Although we should be careful of taking his words at face value, it is interesting to note that Elwyn later commented that Nutting came within an ‘agonising hair’s breadth’ of being prosecuted and struck off the roll of Privy Counsellors, saved only by a handful of last-minute changes to the text, which government lawyers concluded would reflect positively on him if Number 10 tried to secure an injunction.<sup>170</sup> For instance, he had omitted references to the dates and times of Cabinet meetings, and expunged the names of the Foreign Office officials who had been involved, such as Patrick Dean. Wilson notified senior ministers of his decision the next day, causing what Barbara Castle described as a ‘hoo-ha’.<sup>171</sup> Around the Cabinet table, there was shock that Nutting was ‘prepared to endure any social ostracism that will result from publishing’ the book.<sup>172</sup>

Before serialisation commenced on 29 April, Gore-Booth scrambled to contact Eden’s inner circle, to ask them not to comment about the book. Considering it ‘pretty dreadful stuff’, Dean agreed to stay quiet.<sup>173</sup> So too did Sir John Nicholls, the former British Ambassador in Tel Aviv: ‘over the last ten years I have become quite adept at leaving people in a state of uncertainty as to whether I was privy to the whole deplorable exercise or not, and whether there was anything to be privy to!’<sup>174</sup> Guy Millard—who considered Nutting ‘an old and rather close friend of mine’, admitting that they had dinner in Paris ‘not so very long ago’—was stunned when he learned about the book, remarking ‘I find it astonishing that he did not tell me’.<sup>175</sup> He too was content not to add fuel to the fire. Eden himself proved more difficult to silence. When the fate of the book had hung in the balance, his instinct had been to avoid

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<sup>170</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1295, J.M. Moss, ‘Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*’, 6 May 1975.

<sup>171</sup> Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries* (London, 1990), p. 246.

<sup>172</sup> TNA, FCO 12/30, anonymous correspondence.

<sup>173</sup> TNA, FCO 12/30, Patrick Dean to Gore-Booth, 1 May 1967.

<sup>174</sup> TNA, FCO 12/30, John Nicholls to Gore-Booth, 28 Apr. 1967.

<sup>175</sup> TNA, FCO 12/30, Guy Millard to Gore-Booth, 27 Apr. 1967.

making a statement—for this would require ‘calling in the aid of information which I am not prepared to make use of at the present time’.<sup>176</sup> When publication became a *fait accompli*, he changed his mind and, to Trend’s horror, demanded that secret telegrams between himself and Eisenhower were sent to his seventeenth-century manor house in Broad Chalke, Wiltshire.<sup>177</sup> For two months he laboured over an appropriate reply, receiving advice from Selwyn Lloyd, Heath and others, only to change his mind for a third and final time. In the final analysis, as Nutting had remarked, for Eden ‘to reveal the truth now would invoke an act of confession too mortifying for any man to volunteer’.<sup>178</sup>

In terms of international relations, *No End of a Lesson* did not have the large and deleterious consequences of which the Foreign Office had ominously warned, at least so far as publicly available sources suggest. As David Carlton has claimed, the author’s delay in opening up, however honourable and constitutionally correct, ‘deprived him of his chance to shape history’.<sup>179</sup> By 1967, the secret manoeuvring behind Eden’s squalid little war in Egypt had already been unearthed by a motley band of journalists, historians and opposition politicians, meaning that Nutting’s authentication amounted to reinforcement rather than revelation. Moreover, publication coincided with the Six-Day War, when Nasser’s apparent determination to wipe Israel off the map convinced even some of Eden’s harshest critics to acknowledge that he might have been right about the Egyptian ruler all along. From the perspective of 1967, arguably the most provocative disclosure in the book was in a

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<sup>176</sup> BUL, AP 20/49/21, Eden to Brook, 24 Apr. 1967.

<sup>177</sup> Murphy, ‘Telling Tales’, pp. 209–10.

<sup>178</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1295, J.M. Moss, ‘Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*’, 6 May 1975.

<sup>179</sup> Carlton, *Anthony Eden*, p. 472.

different area entirely, namely Eden's belief that Britain should stay out of the incipient European Common Market.<sup>180</sup>

In terms of official secrecy, however, the impact was considerable. The book was another high-profile example of 'instant history' that officials had been powerless to stop. 'The autobiography is now almost a customary gratuity on retirement from service in high office', reflected the Conservative grandee Lord Butler, delivering the Romanes Lecture at the University of Oxford on 22 November 1967.<sup>181</sup> In Whitehall, it was clear that people would draw encouragement from Nutting's refusal to play by the rules. As Trend lamented, 'We cannot hope to put this particular clock back; we have to bend our efforts to ensuring, so far as we can, that it does not go too far forward'.<sup>182</sup>

It did not take long for confirmation of this reality. After leaving parliament in late 1967, George Wigg began planning his memoirs and bullishly made Trend aware that 'I do not consider myself bound to play cricket when others have abandoned the bat, stumps, and the ball for a shillelagh'.<sup>183</sup> In 1969, officials were powerless to stop the publication of *The Eden Legacy and the Decline of British Diplomacy* by the senior civil servant Geoffrey McDermott, who had been the head of the Permanent Under-Secretary's Department (PUSD), the point of liaison between the Foreign Office and the SIS.<sup>184</sup> Inspired by Nutting, McDermott's book caused secret-keepers particular anguish because he became the first official to talk publicly about the work of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), Britain's senior intelligence assessment

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<sup>180</sup> E. Stock, 'Reviewed Work: *No End of a Lesson* by Anthony Nutting', *Political Science Quarterly*, lxxxiv (1969), pp. 136–7, at 136.

<sup>181</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1294, R.A. Butler, Lord Butler of Saffron Walden, 'The Difficult Art of Autobiography', Romanes Lecture, 22 Nov. 1967.

<sup>182</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1295, J.M. Moss, 'Harold Macmillan Publications, 13 May 1975'.

<sup>183</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1294, 'Drafts: Report of the Committee of Privy Councillors on Ministerial memoirs', 1975.

<sup>184</sup> G. McDermott, *The Eden Legacy and the Decline of British Diplomacy* (London, 1969). See D. Steed, *British Strategy and Intelligence in the Suez Crisis* (Basingstoke, 2016), p. 8.

body. As a result, they were terrified that the lid was now about to come off the secrets of the spy world, which it duly did in the 1970s with insider revelations about the Double-Cross System and Bletchley Park by the ex-intelligence officers John Masterman and Frederick Winterbotham respectively.<sup>185</sup>

In fear of what Richard Crossman might be muttering into the tape-recorder at the weekend down on his North Oxfordshire farm, Wilson instructed key officials to search for a solution, but to no avail. The rule that ex-ministers were duty-bound to respect collective responsibility had ‘very much eroded’, according to Sir William Armstrong, then Head of the Home Civil Service.<sup>186</sup> Meanwhile, despite being drawn up in a way that theoretically criminalised even the most trivial of unauthorised disclosures (for example, the colour of Selwyn Lloyd’s trilby when he visited Sèvres), the Official Secrets Act was a meaningless weapon when dealing with the political top brass. As Trend reported, ‘We have no sanction by which to enforce suggestions for amendment; we have to rely on the goodwill and the sense of public duty of those with whom we are dealing. We are therefore driven, to put it bluntly, to bargain and to compromise’.<sup>187</sup> Problematically, as exemplified by Wigg’s quip about cricket, that ability to settle disputes by means of gentlemanly persuasion had also been shattered. The accusation of ‘letting the side down’—the ultimate insult among members of the British upper class—did not carry the same weight as it had done in the past. Being branded a ‘bad chap’ for communicating privileged information outside of the club was no longer the kiss of death—a reflection, perhaps, of wider changes in British social attitudes and behaviour that occurred in the 1960s. After Suez, with so many

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<sup>185</sup> J.C. Masterman, *The Double-Cross System in the War of 1939 to 1945* (London, 1972); F.W. Winterbotham, *The Ultra Secret* (London, 1974).

<sup>186</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1295, J.M. Moss, ‘Dr. Jeremy Bray, Decision in Government’, 6 May 1975.

<sup>187</sup> TNA, CAB 164/1295, J.M. Moss, ‘Harold Macmillan Publications’, 13 May 1975.

political careers ending in ignominy, the desire for broader public rehabilitation outweighed the social cost of betraying the code of a narrow elite.

## VI

In a 2004 article for the *English Historical Review*, Richard Aldrich described the British secret state as an ‘empire of secrecy’, with the denizens of Whitehall performing the role of colonial governors, battling to protect sensitive information from journalists and other writers who resembled native agitators.<sup>188</sup> In thinking about when this empire started to show signs of overstretch and yield to a rising tide of exposure, it is important to recognise Suez as a significant moment. Just as the crisis functioned as an obituary notice for Britain’s actual imperial possessions and pretensions, it also had lasting consequences for the ‘empire of secrecy’. In its wake, secret-keepers struggled to keep fundamental elements hidden, not only from parliamentary campaigners and outsiders such as historians keen to discover the truth behind the fiasco, but also from senior insiders determined to pen ‘instant’ self-exculpating memoirs, who were more sinned against than sinning and not easily intimidated by the threat of prosecution. The biggest challenge came from an unlikely source in Anthony Eden, the person with the most to lose from public revelation of what took place at Sèvres. Despite being the archetype of a so-called ‘good chap’—son of a Durham aristocrat, Eton ‘popper’, Christ Church, and handsome to boot—Eden flouted the rules of secrecy in a relentless and bloody-minded pursuit of

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<sup>188</sup> R.J. Aldrich, ‘Policing the Past: Official History, Secrecy and British Intelligence since 1945’, *English Historical Review*, cxix (2004), pp. 922–53.

vindication. Even for historians versed in the dying culture of honourable secrecy, it is hard not to be struck by the hypocrisy, dishonesty and self-interest that masqueraded as high principle in his case.

The proliferation of disgruntled former statesmen writing memoirs about Suez damaged the already threadbare structures of secrecy, since every book provided a precedent in terms of what could be disclosed by ex-ministers, while simultaneously whipping up protest from historians who criticised the hypocrisy and injustice of servants of the Crown profiting from information denied to others. Each new book that pushed the boundaries of revelation was a portent of future troubles, which was why officials fought so hard to obstruct such works. Interestingly, from the perspective of foreign relations, the fallout from these publications was less severe than had been predicted. While subsequent Conservative and Labour governments worried that a rehashing of the Suez crisis and allegations of American perfidy might harm current Anglo-American relations, the Americans themselves regarded this seismic domestic disaster as little more than a half-forgotten sideshow.

Suez exposed the flaws in the secret state's arsenal of information control. By the time of the Nutting imbroglio, it was clear that the Official Secrets Act did not hold any deterrent value for senior politicians, because they knew that it would never be invoked against them. Despite its impotence as a weapon against the great and the good, it is nevertheless important to note that officials never seriously entertained abolishing it, for they recognised that it still had a disciplining effect on the Whitehall rank and file. Indeed, one of the postscripts to this story is that while establishment figures escaped prosecution for their secrecy offences, the same cannot be said of relatively junior officials and less prominent civilians. In 1977, for example, in what became known as the 'ABC' trial, charges under the Act were brought against two

left-wing journalists, Duncan Campbell and Crispin Aubrey, plus a former soldier turned social worker, for exchanging information about UK signals intelligence operations.<sup>189</sup> All three were found guilty of breaking the Act, but avoided custodial sentences. In late 2003, Katherine Gun, a young translator for GCHQ, was tried under the Act for leaking to *The Observer* details of a secret US plan to tap the phones of UN Security Council members who might vote against the invasion of Iraq. Although she ultimately walked free, her case, like the ABC trial, hints at a two-tier system whereby smaller fry are prosecuted in the vain hope of intimidating those against whom it is deemed impossible to bring the full force of the law.<sup>190</sup>

Crucially, Suez weakened the social and cultural foundations of official secrecy, upon which legal and bureaucratic mechanisms were ultimately built. In dealing with elites intent on disclosure, the most severe threat had always been that of casting that person into the social outer darkness, perceived by their peers and friends as having betrayed a sacred confidence fostered from infancy, through schooling and beyond. In short, secrecy was as much a personal as professional matter. After Suez, however, which destroyed reputations, and amid social and cultural transformations, respect for the arcane, unspoken rules of gentlemanly conduct dwindled. Anxious to achieve some measure of public rehabilitation, Eden and Nutting were completely unswayed by the social hazards of communicating information outside of the club, horrifying mandarins such as Brook, Trend and Gore-Booth, who were cut from the same respectable cloth, or so they thought, and had banked on the power of the old codes of what was permissible. In broader scholarly debates now taking place about whether, in the twenty-first century, we are witnessing an ‘end to secrecy’ and the rise

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<sup>189</sup> R.J. Aldrich, *GCHQ: The Uncensored History of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency* (London, 2010), pp. 359–61.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 521–53.

of a 'transparent society', 1956 deserves attention, for this was when respect for secrecy, based on a particular set of social structures, friendships and relationships, suffered a serious blow.

*University of Warwick*

CHRISTOPHER MORAN