

IV. History and Culture

When a U.S. President Stopped a Mideast War

Eisenhower and the Suez Crisis of 1956

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Nov. 11—As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's relentless attack on Hamas continues—with increasing casualties among the civilian population of Gaza, with thousands of victims, including children, women and the elderly—the administration of U.S. President Biden continues to give him a blank check, of both money and military support. As most nations in the world are demanding a ceasefire, the U.S. remains the most important backer of Netanyahu's campaign for revenge, his call for "mighty vengeance," in response to the attack on Israel by Hamas on Oct. 7.

The world's attention has certainly been grabbed by this anomaly, even more so than with the Ukraine crisis. There are meetings and conferences to organize a ceasefire, with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation meeting coming up this weekend, and the fact that there are various UN officials speaking out, memos of opposition to Biden's policy from Administration officials in the State Department and the Agency for International Development. Most interestingly, one of the leading U.N. Human Rights officials, Craig Mokhiber, resigned. He talked about the impotence of the United Nations when it comes to protecting human rights.

There is a real potential for a strategic shift today, with large demonstrations around the world. People are becoming aware of this; they're definitely focused on



WEF/Manuel Lopez

As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's genocidal attack on the Palestinians continues, he has turned world opinion against him.

the unfolding of the tragedy, a great tragedy, which shows that the Netanyahu regime places more value on a piece of real estate than on children's lives. That's now being seen through social media, even through some of the media coverage; even in the United States it's getting through. There's a lot of talk, and a lot of potential for a change.

However, there's a problem. Netanyahu is not going to stop doing

what he's doing. He's made it clear. Under pressure, he agreed to a 3–4 hour pause every day to let aid go through. What happens during the other 20 hours of the day? Relentless pounding, hitting hospitals, more children injured and killed. This is defended now by Israeli officials who say the hospitals are used by Hamas as shields to protect their operations. Netanyahu has made clear that they're going to continue this until they completely wipe out Hamas. He also said that Israel does not have an intention of displacing people. How can he say that when already more than a million people have been displaced? Not only displaced from their homes, but sent into areas where they then become targets for bombs, missiles, and now the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). There's a complete fraud coming from Netanyahu on this, which is not surprising.

People who know him—we've quoted [former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's widow] Leah Rabin on this; she said he's a criminal, a murderer, he can't be trusted. Even former Prime Minister [Ehud] Olmert came out and said that Netanyahu's focus—while he talks about security and defense, it was under his

watch that the security and defense was overcome by the Hamas attack.

Olmert added that Netanyahu's intent is to use the war to stay in office. There will be a phase one, a phase two, a phase three, maybe phase infinity, to keep the war going, so that he can say, "You have to keep me in power for security." He's made it clear there will be no ceasefire, just these humanitarian pauses, which have, maybe, limited value, but with the onslaught continuing, that's the best that he's going to offer. And his ultimate goal is that of the Greater Israel fanatics, the ethnic cleansing of



DoS/Chuck Kennedy

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on the U.S. all-in-for-Israel policy regarding the Israel-Palestine war: "No ceasefire. Israel should do what it needs to do."

Gaza, the removal of the Palestinians from Israel.

Now, what about the United States? Well, [Secretary of State Antony] Blinken was just on tour, and when he was confronted—whether by King Abdullah of Jordan, Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority—everywhere he went, including the G-7 Foreign Ministers' meeting, he reasserted, "No ceasefire. Israel should do what it needs to do."

This is, of course, Biden's policy, or whoever it is who is making Biden's policy, which includes the people who are behind Blinken. When Biden was asked about the chances for an end to the hostilities—in other words, a ceasefire—he said, "None. No possibility." Then he said he is pushing for a pause in the fighting. So, the blatant hypocrisy of Biden is on display, but it just adds to the sense of impotence and anger in the world. The total discrediting of institutions such as the UN, the United States, the European countries that are continuing to support this; that hypocrisy,

which has deadly effects, is seen by everyone.

Another Time, Another President

So, what can be done to stop the killing, to prevent the prospect of an escalation to a larger regional war? I want to take a brief look at what happened one time before, when a U.S. President stood up and put his foot down and said we will not support this kind of war. That happened in 1956; the President was Dwight Eisenhower. It occurred around the Suez Canal crisis.

The President of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, was a committed anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist, not just for Egypt, but had a mobilization internationally. He worked with [Indonesian President] Sukarno and [India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal] Nehru to create the Non-Aligned Movement. He was denouncing the French for their attacks on the Algerian liberation forces trying to decolonize Algeria.

Nasser was also at the same time trying to build up the national economy of Egypt. One of the projects was the upgrading of the Aswan Dam. The United States had at one point made a pledge to provide money, to help that happen. But it was pulled back; probably because of John Foster Dulles, maybe Allen Dulles and others in the Eisenhower Administration, who pulled back the money and said they were not going to fund it. At that point, Nasser saw no alternative but to nationalize the Suez Canal; to take it over, as something that should have been in Egypt's control in any case.

This triggered an operation that already had been



The building of the Aswan High Dam and its power plant was a priority for Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers' movement he led, as a step in developing the national economy. Here, a portion of the dam's power plant. The dam, opened in 1971, is on the Nile at Aswan.

planned between the French, the British, and the Israelis. That is, they were using the crisis as an excuse for an intervention. As soon as Nasser nationalized the canal, Israel launched an attack on Egypt across the Sinai Peninsula. The IDF [Israel Defense Forces] seized Gaza; they were involved in fighting right to the edge of the Suez Canal. The British and French called for a ceasefire; Nasser said no, he wouldn't do it, he was not going to accept it.

And then the British and the French started bombing and sent in paratroops. They were intending regime change; their policy was to get rid of Nasser. The French were particularly enraged at him, because of his "meddling" in Algeria, through his support for the Algerian rebels. Anthony Eden, the British Prime Minister, said that Nasser reminded him of Hitler. Sound familiar? They're always called the new Hitler, if they oppose the imperial forces.

British and French Surprised

What happened next was that the Egyptians sank ships in the Suez Canal, to shut down the canal; which caused a big problem for the British. So Eden asked the United States to come in and join them in a war to topple Nasser, to end the nationalization of the canal, and so on. Also at the same time, Nasser was getting support from the pro-Soviet government of Czechoslovakia and from the Soviet Union, so the Brits and French appealed to the U.S. to join them in an anti-Soviet alliance.

To their surprise, Eisenhower did not go along. He did not want the United States to be seen as a force supporting colonialism in a period when colonial regimes were being toppled, and an anti-colonial movement was rippling throughout Africa and Asia. Eisenhower told the British they should stop the invasion. He went to the United Nations and got a resolution put through, condemning the war and calling for it to be ended. Of course, that didn't succeed.

So then, Eisenhower did what a competent President would do. He threatened the British financially. What he said was, that if you continue this, we will start dumping U.S. holdings of British pound sterling bonds, which would create a profound financial crisis for Britain. If we dump your bonds, you would have to use your dollar reserves to buy them back, or the bond



In the 1956 Suez crisis, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower demonstrated the power of the Presidency to stop a war. That power can and must be used again to stop the slaughter underway in Gaza. Here Eisenhower meets with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, New York City, 1960.

market would collapse. Eisenhower hit them in a weak spot; the fact that they were financially very weak at that point, and the United States had the advantage.

The British had no choice then, but to pull back, and persuade the French and Israelis to join them. The Suez crisis was stopped before it blew up into a total war, including a regime change against Nasser. And the result was that Nasser gained more prominence around the world. The British and the French were left to lick their wounds; the Israelis to prepare for another fight in the future.

A Break with Military-Industrial Complex?

The reason this is important is that it shows the power that the United States has if it uses it. Why won't Biden do that? Well, who knows what's going on in terms of his capabilities for strategic thinking. We know a lot of his advisors are part of the same group of people who have refused to negotiate an end to the Ukraine proxy war against Russia, even though Ukraine is practically decimated as a nation. So, there's a push from that crowd to keep the war going.

Keep in mind, by the way—going back to Eisenhower—that a few years later, right before John Kennedy was inaugurated, Eisenhower warned about the dangers to the Constitution and the American republic posed by the military-industrial complex. This was the network which really wanted the United States to join the French, British, and Israelis against Egypt.

Eisenhower didn't do it. Biden is a complete captive of those forces that Eisenhower was warning against.

Is there any chance that Biden would break with this policy? Well, we're seeing incredible pressure being put on the Biden Administration from within. There are career people in the State Department speaking against his full backing for Israel. There are people in the military talking about the need to go for a negotiated settlement in Ukraine, at least according to ABC News and NBC News. So, there are some people there who are beginning to get the picture that these kinds of military interventions don't work. Instead, they're discrediting the United States, they're discrediting the so-called rules-based order that Biden and Blinken say the U.S. is defending.

Is that enough to end the killing? Can we count on these political networks to change things? Look at the Congress. The Congress, which was moving to stop the funding for Ukraine, did a complete flip—including the Trump networks—on the Israel-Gaza war; saying that we have to support it. They previously said we're not going to support wars, but now they're in it. This was used very effectively by the pro-war faction to shift leading elements of the Republican Party away from breaking with the military-industrial complex to being once again a patsy in its hands.

I don't think we can count on the presidential candidates, or congressional forces, so what can we count on? Well, this is going to require a mobilization of the American people far bigger than anything we've seen so far. This includes marches and demonstrations, but it also includes an outreach to people who have been bamboozled by the whole narrative of the Israelis standing up against terrorism and anti-Semitism. The anti-Semitism issue is used to silence debate. Interestingly, some people in the State Department, according to *Politico*, moved almost to touching this third rail of U.S. politics, by saying that Biden should not be afraid to criticize Israel. The U.S. policy should include criticizing Israel when Israel is wrong; and certainly, recognizing Netanyahu for the thug that he is.

The question then is, how do you change it? This is where we can look to [Friedrich] Schiller, and the question of the Rütli Oath: "There is a limit to the tyrant's power"; the arrogance of people who think they can impose their will on the whole world, to go against the natural tendency of human nature, of love and compassion and empathy for our neighbor. This is a central feature of the great religions. Can we mobilize people around that sense of the brotherhood of man? Of the fact that "Thou shalt not kill"? That vengeance does

not belong in the hands of a Netanyahu? Netanyahu may think "Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord" means that he, in his fantasy state, can see himself as the prophet of the Lord. I've got news for you, Bibi—you're not!

Speak Up and Sing Out

This is the moment when the people have to be heard. One time this happened in the recent period was in 2013, when [President Barack] Obama was planning to get an authorization to use military force against Syria, over the hoked-up story of the Assad government in Syria using chemical weapons against its own people. Of course, this was a British intelligence operation; the so-called White Helmets, an arm of British intelligence, claimed that this was the case. Obama was going to go with it. But what happened, before he went to the Congress, was a flood of calls into the Congress—people saying, "We won't support this war." And Obama backed off from it. The Administration still continued, through covert operations, to support the terrorists against the Assad government. But they couldn't do it with an official authorization as they had after 9/11.

One thing we've been told repeatedly is that congressional offices, if they start getting a lot of calls and letters, do feel the need to respond. I think now, because we're in the midst of a presidential campaign, it's completely wide open.

Whatever anyone tells you about it, forget it. The results of the Tuesday elections show that the Democrats, who were thought to be on their last legs, ended up winning in Kentucky and Virginia. There are doubts now in the MAGA world; will Trump be able to survive under the effect of the legal attacks against him? So, don't assume anything, except to know there is a limit to the tyrant's power. That means that we, the people, have an obligation and a duty, a moral responsibility, to speak up for those children, whether Palestinian or Israeli, who are the victims of these wars; the children of Yemen, of Syria, the children of Afghanistan, the children around the world whose lives have been taken because of this imperial, neo-colonial policy. We have a responsibility to speak up and to sing; to inspire people to the higher powers of our human nature.

I think that's what we saw happen in the case of Dwight Eisenhower and the 1956 Suez crisis: Eisenhower demonstrated the power of the U.S. Presidency to act to stop a war. It can and must be used again, to stop the slaughter underway in Gaza.