TWENTY BUSY DAYS

CHAPTER III

Twenty Busy Days

All hell broke loose.
—John Milton

October 20, 1956 was the start of the most crowded and demanding three weeks of my entire Presidency. The drama of those weeks is still so fresh in my memory that I can recite its principal events and our decisions with scarcely a pause—but the best way to see them is as they happened, simultaneously, the major mixed with the minor. It requires a day-by-day, at times hour-by-hour, account to bring the dramatic period alive. Actually, several stories unfold at once, which I shall attempt to keep distinct as best I can. The Presidency seldom affords the luxury of dealing with one problem at a time.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20

On October 20 I left Los Angeles routed to Washington, D.C., with a short stop in Colorado. I was finishing up a campaign tour through the Western states. The preceding evening I had delivered a political address to a large crowd in the Hollywood Bowl. Now I was scheduled to meet with well-wishers at Stapleton Airport, Denver.

Background, Polish Crisis

Shortly after two o'clock on the morning of that same day, Khrushchev, Molotov, Mikoyan, and Deputy Premier Lazar M. Kaganovich

1 All times in the text are local times. At seven o'clock in the evening in Moscow and Cairo, it is six o'clock in Warsaw and Budapest, five o'clock in Paris and London, and noon in Washington.

then in Poland, boarded a plane at the Warsaw airport and flew home to Moscow. They had flown to Poland the day before reportedly to press the heads of the Polish Communist Party (the United Workers' Party) into retaining in the party leadership the Russian Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky—Minister of Defense in the Polish government and a symbol of Soviet control. They had failed.

That failure marked a turning point in a long case history. After World War II Wladyslaw Gomulka, formerly a trade union official, became Secretary General of the Polish Communist Party and Vice Premier in the Polish government. In 1948-49, he was accused of Titoist sympathies and ousted from both posts. In 1949, the Russian Rokossovsky became Poland's Minister of Defense; two years later Gomulka was arrested and imprisoned. With the apparent post-Stalin softening of the Soviet attitude toward Poland, Gomulka was "rehabilitated"; released from prison in April of 1956, he was subsequently invited to enter the government. For this re-entry Gomulka laid down his price: a post in the Party Secretariat and the dismissal of Rokossovsky.

On October 19 the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party was ready to pay this price. At ten o'clock in the morning it opened its meeting in the building of the Council of Ministers. Gomulka was at once elected to Central Committee membership. But just as the Committee was about to proceed with the next order of business—the ousting of Rokossovsky—Edward Ochab, the Party's First Secretary, exploded a bombshell: at that very moment Khrushchev and his three colleagues were touching down at the Warsaw airport. The Central Committee members drove at once to the Belvedere Palace. There, through the next six hours, they held a face-to-face debate with the world's top Communist command. The Russians demanded that Rokossovsky remain. The anti-Stalinist Poles said no. Khrushchev informed the Poles that as he spoke a Soviet division was on the move toward Warsaw. A putsch, Ochab countered, would mean war.

Khrushchev was furious: He is reported to have burst out: "If you don't obey we will crush you . . ." And he leveled the standard Communist charge: "We will never permit this country to be sold to the American imperialists."

The Poles refused to knuckle under, Khrushchev flew home, and in a historic speech to the Central Committee that day (now Saturday, October 20) Gomulka declared: "There is more than one road to Socialism. There is the Soviet way, there is the Yugoslav way and there are other ways." The Polish people, he affirmed, will "defend themselves with all means; they will not be pushed off the road of democratization."
That day, newspaper reports said, Soviet troops crossing the Polish border from East Germany ran into Polish gunfire.

Fragmentary intelligence reports reached me by teletype on the Columbine as we approached the airport in Denver. I delayed leaving the plane until I discussed these developments by telephone on the Columbine with Foster Dulles back in Washington. These reports so filled my mind that to a political talk at the Denver airport I added this comment:

"We read about Poland in our papers, we read about these captive peoples that are still keeping alive the burning desire to live in freedom, a freedom that we [here] have come to take almost for granted, but which they have found is the most difficult thing to sustain in the world. Our hearts go out to them, [we trust] that they at last may have that opportunity to live under governments of their own choosing."

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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21

The next morning I read in the Sunday newspapers that Adlai Stevenson was mapping a sweeping attack on the Eisenhower-Dulles foreign policy. In the course of the day the Polish Communist Central Committee elected a new party Politburo with Rokossovsky eliminated and with Gomulka named First Secretary. In Jordan, a national election returned a large anti-Western majority to the Parliament.

Bulganin Dips into U. S. Politics

From the Soviet Union, Bulganin had sent me a letter on ceasing atomic testing. I had studied the gist of it on the Columbine during my return flight from the West Coast. But before I had a chance to get a full translation, Radio Moscow broadcast the text. It said in part:

"We realize, of course, that an election campaign is being conducted in the United States in the course of which the discussion of various questions of international significance, among them the question of disarmament, acquires the form of a polemic. However, we cannot fail to note the fact that in a number of cases, in speeches by persons in an official capacity, there has been obvious distortion of the policy of the Soviet Union concerning the above-mentioned questions. Unfortunately, this applies particularly to the statements by Mr. Dulles, who does not hesitate to make direct attacks against the Soviet Union and its peace-loving foreign policy....

We fully share the opinion recently expressed by certain prominent public figures in the United States concerning the necessity and the possibility of concluding an agreement on the matter of prohibiting atomic weapon tests and concerning the positive influence which this would have on the entire international situation.

In the White House that Sunday, I drafted the following reply:

I have the letter which your Embassy handed me through Secretary Dulles on October nineteenth. I regret to find that this letter departs from accepted international practice in a number of respects.

First, the sending of your note in the midst of a national election campaign of which you take cognizance, expressing your support of the opinions of "certain prominent public figures in the United States" constitutes an interference by a foreign nation in our internal affairs of a kind which, if indulged in by an Ambassador would lead to his being declared persona non grata in accordance with long-established custom.

Second, having delivered a lengthy communication in the Russian language, you have published it before it could be carefully translated and delivered to me. Because of this, and of the necessity of placing the facts accurately before the public, I am compelled to release this reply immediately.

Third, your statement with respect to the Secretary of State is not only unwarranted, but is personally offensive to me.

Fourth, you seem to impugn my own sincerity.

However, I am not instructing the Department of State to return your letter to your Embassy. That is not because I am tolerant of these departures from accepted international practice, but because I still entertain the hope that direct communications between us may serve the cause of peace....

The United States has for a long time been intensively examining, evaluating and planning dependable means of stopping the arms race and reducing and controlling armaments. These explorations include the constant examination and evaluation of nuclear tests. To be effective, and not simply a mirage, all these plans require systems of inspection and control, both of which your Government has steadfastly refused to accept. Even..."
MONDAY, OCTOBER 22

The Polish unrest spread like a prairie fire. In Wroclaw, thousands of students paraded through the streets shouting, "Long live free Poland!" In Lodz, six thousand textile workers threatened to go on strike unless the Russian troops stationed in Poland were withdrawn. In Warsaw, students rallied under a banner reading "Long live friendship with the Soviet Union on the principles of equality!"

* * *

Rumblings in Hungary

The fire ignited in Poland brought a holocaust to Hungary. Against their Soviet masters, the Hungarian people had a long list of grievances. These included the Russian occupation troops, the Security Police, the attacks on the Roman Catholic Church, the trial and imprisonment of Cardinal Mindszenty, the collectivization of the land, the quotas for the production of crops, the forced crop collections, and the forced industrialization, which had cut living standards. In the three years following the death of Stalin the Hungarian Communist Party had been the arena for a running intramural battle between the Stalinist Matyas Rakosi and the milder Imre Nagy. In 1953 Nagy became Premier. In 1955 Rakosi succeeded him. In 1956 Rakosi was ousted, but his replacement was another Stalinist, Erno Gero.

On October 22 the news of the Poles' successful defiance touched one public meeting after another in the streets of Budapest: students and intellectuals called for the election of Nagy, the punishment of Rakosi, and the departure of the Russian army.

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Revolution in Budapest

The next day excitement grew. Young Communist demonstrators marched through the streets of Budapest shouting: "Down with Gero!" "We want Nagy!" "Out with the Russians!" They headed for Radio Budapest. There they paused outside and sent in a delegation asking the radio to broadcast their demands. Police put the delegates under arrest. The crowd, angered, moved in force to storm the station doors. The police fired. When the smoke cleared several demonstrators lay wounded, one dead.

After this incident the government invited Soviet forces into Budapest to restore order. The Central Committee, while retaining Gero as Party Chief, installed Nagy as Premier. Over Radio Budapest, Nagy promised "democratization and improved living standards"; he urged the mobs in the streets to disperse. But the riots went on.

* * *

Politics at Home

A few hours later that same evening Governor Stevenson, at Madison Square Garden in Manhattan, called for a "new U.S. foreign policy." The gist of his talk was that Israel must have the arms necessary to maintain her territorial integrity.

At the same time, in Washington, after a full day of appointments and conferences, I drove to the Sheraton-Park Hotel to address the anniversary dinner of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. Because Poland was so much on my mind, I spoke of "the fruits of Communist imperialism, now daily become evident in the satellite world. "The day of liberation," I said, "may be postponed where armed forces for a time make protest suicidal. But all history testifies that the memory of freedom is not erased by the fear of guns, and the love of freedom is more enduring than the power of tyrants. . . . "

My "Open Skies" proposal of mutual aerial inspection, suggested as a first step, you rejected . . . . We shall entertain and seriously evaluate all proposals from any source which seem to have merit, and we shall constantly seek for ourselves formulations which might dependably remove the atomic menace.

In reading today the words of that message I find nothing that I would change.
20 BUSY DAYS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25

More Politics

At 8:35 A.M. on the 25th, after early meetings with Colonel Andrew Goodpaster and Governor Sherman Adams, Mrs. Eisenhower and I took a train for New York City; during the journey I worked on a campaign speech to be delivered at Madison Square Garden that evening.

When the train reached New York, we were met by large and enthusiastic crowds, shouting “I Like Ike!” It was a good time to be “liked,” for the warmth of their cheering was encouraging, but I had an uneasy feeling that they might have been thinking exclusively of the political campaign, while my mind was absorbed with the international contests that had broken out in several parts of the earth.

That day I issued this statement on Hungary:

The United States considers the development in Hungary as being a renewed expression of the intense desire for freedom long held by the Hungarian people.

The United States deplores the intervention of Soviet military forces which under the Treaty of Peace should have been withdrawn and the presence of which in Hungary, as is now demonstrated, is not to protect

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26

Hungary against armed aggression from without, but rather to continue an occupation of Hungary by the forces of an alien government for its own purposes.

On that date, we had a report from an Austrian businessman who had fled from Budapest to Vienna, that already as many as five thousand were dead, and that “the whole town echoes with artillery fire.”

As I rode the train to New York, Premier Imre Nagy was announcing over Radio Budapest that he would open negotiations with the Russians for withdrawal of Soviet troops as soon as order returned. He promised amnesty for rebels who would quickly surrender. The rebels refused and called a general strike.

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Accord in the Middle East

That day Jordan, Egypt, and Syria announced the signing of the “Pact of Amman,” which provided that (1) they would increase their military cooperation and (2) in the event of a war with Israel, would place their armed forces under an Egyptian commander. This pact, Ben-Gurion said later, put Israel in “direct and immediate danger.”

* * *

At four o’clock in New York, I greeted a number of groups representing Americans of various extraction—Negro, Italian, Puerto Rican, Armenian, Chinese, Lithuanian, Polish, Slavic, Greek, Hungarian—and then at eight-thirty my wife and I left the Commodore Hotel for Madison Square Garden for a major speech in the ’56 campaign. Crowds thronged the streets and filled the Garden to the rafters.

At 9:35 that evening I left Madison Square Garden for La Guardia Airport and shortly after ten was back aboard the presidential plane for the return trip to Washington.
I then directed the preparation of an immediate, comprehensive analysis of the events in both Poland and Hungary, with the possible types of American action considered.5

Turning to the Middle East, the Secretary of State reminded the Council of the "very worrisome" events in Jordan; a clear danger existed, he said, that the present nation there might disintegrate. The result, he thought, would inevitably be war between Israel and the Arabs. If Hussein in fact been assassinated, the Iraqis, Admiral Arthur Radford felt, would march into Jordan. He added the conjecture that Britain might well increase its forces in Jordan; and Israel would want to secure the west bank of the Jordan River.

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Shortly thereafter I met five representatives of the Pennsylvania Council of Republican Women, who presented a scroll welcoming Mrs. Eisenhower and me to Pennsylvania. (We had definitely established our permanent home at Gettysburg.) Though the heavens fall, I thought ruefully a President's planned schedules must be kept or public interest might turn into alarm.

At four o'clock that afternoon I walked with Jim Hagerty to the Broadcast Room in the basement of the Mansion to record a message to Texas farmers, who were suffering one of the worst droughts in years. But in the back of the minds of all of us was the possibility that Russia might start a military movement to put down her rebellious satellites which could develop to the proportions of a major war. They had lost what hold they had on Yugoslavia, and now there were chains breaking in Poland and Hungary. Though the situation was cloudy, we put the Defense Department and other security agencies on special alert.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27

The beginnings of this day had nothing to do with fighting and bloodshed. At ten o'clock I met Mr. and Mrs. Jackson Wheeler of Los Angeles, their daughter, Judy, and their son, Charles Jackson, the youngest Eagle Scout in the history of Scouting. To respond to this directive, a position paper was developed on Hungary and Poland, reaffirming our reassurances to the Soviet Union that we had no intention of making these countries our allies; and declaring that if the U.S.S.R. used force to suppress the Gomulka regime or any further move toward Polish independence, the United States would be prepared to support UN action—including the use of force—to prevent the U.S.S.R. from reinforcing its control.

Hungarian Revolt Spreads

Shortly after eleven, Secretary Dulles came in to report: "Within Hungary itself," he said, "the revolt has become widespread. Large sections of the Hungarian armed forces have gone over to the dissidents, and throughout the countryside there are large areas in opposition to the regime. Also, signs of condemnation of the Communists are arising all over Europe. In Italy, Spain, and France there are strong demonstrations for the Hungarians. The Nagy government in Hungary includes a number of 'bad' people, associated with the Molotov school, and will have difficulty in attracting support."

Israeli Arms Build-up

The subject then turned to recent reports that had come in of a considerable mobilizing of the military in Israel. Foster suggested that I communicate directly to the Israeli government. At 12:25 P.M. the State Department forwarded my cable to Ben-Gurion, expressing my "concern at reports of heavy mobilization on your side . . . . I renew the plea . . . . that there be no forcible initiative on the part of your Government which would endanger the peace. . . ."

* * *

Meanwhile, fighting had been raging on through the city streets and countryside of Hungary; the revolutionaries faced fifty thousand to seventy-five thousand Soviet troops and political police. On the Austrian border, even some of the political police abandoned their posts. Late in the afternoon, Budapest time, Nagy announced the formation of a new government which included the non-Communist postwar leaders Zoltan Tildy and Bela Kovacs. But the rebels fought on.

* * *

At two o'clock in the afternoon, accompanied by my doctor, General Snyder, I left the White House for Walter Reed Army Hospital for an overnight head-to-toe examination, the last before the election, now only ten days away.
That evening in Dallas, Secretary Dulles delivered a speech which had, as usual, previously reviewed carefully. It declared that "the weakness of Soviet imperialism is being made manifest." He added that East European nations, dissociating themselves from exclusive dependence of the U.S.S.R., could "draw upon our abundance" during their "economic adjustment." The United States would not demand that they renounce Communism.

Suez he called "an unfinished drama of suspense, which illustrates the kind of an effort, often called 'waging peace,' which will be required day in and day out, for many years." in finding acceptable answers to critical international problems.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28

Returning to Washington National Airport from Dallas, Secretary Dulles met reporters who asked his opinion of the Soviet charge that American agents had fomented the Hungarian uprising. The Secretary answered with one word, "Tommyrot." He added that he didn't know how tommyrot would translate into Russian.

Later that day the UN Security Council voted to consider the question of Soviet oppression in Hungary.

Israel ordered a general mobilization of its reserves. Ambassador A. Eban was still telling the State Department that this mobilization was purely defensive. But at that very moment we were getting reports of a sizable increase in diplomatic radio traffic between the Israeli and French. We believed this had real significance.

While I was still at Walter Reed, at 3:30 in the afternoon I sent a second cable to Ben-Gurion, the gist of which I made public: "This morning I have received additional reports which indicate that mobilization of Israel's armed forces is continuing and has become almost complete. . . ." I again urged Israel "to do nothing which would endanger peace." Influenced by the Israeli mobilization, the State Department announced that "as a matter of prudence, . . . measures are being instituted to reduce the numbers of Americans, particularly dependent in several of the Middle Eastern countries . . . persons who are not performing essential functions will be asked to depart until conditions improve." This action shows how far the Middle East situation had deteriorated, in our opinion, for only a week earlier we had opposed as our decision by the British government.

When the physical examination was completed, the doctors told me my condition was excellent. On returning to the White House I dictated two new, stronger paragraphs on civil rights to be included in speeches to be made in the South the next day. I wanted my position on this subject understood with equal clarity in all sections of the country. These passages reiterated my 1952 pledge to "use every proper influence of my office to promote for all citizens that equality before the law and of opportunity visualized by our Founding Fathers."

MONDAY, OCTOBER 29

By 7:30 A.M. I was in my office. At eight o'clock Secretary Dulles telephoned to suggest that we bring to the attention of the Russian hierarchy one paragraph from his Dallas speech, stressing to the Kremlin that every word in it had my approval.

I agreed. Later in the day the Secretary cabled Ambassador Bohlen in Moscow instructing him to convey to Khrushchev and his associates, including Zhukov, these words:

"The U.S. has no ulterior purpose in desiring the independence of the satellite countries. Our unadulterated wish is that these peoples, from whom so much of our own national life derives, should have sovereignty restored to them, and that they should have governments of their own free choosing. We do not look upon these nations as potential military allies. We see them as friends and as part of a new and friendly and no longer divided Europe. We are confident that their independence, if promptly accorded, will contribute immensely to stabilize peace throughout all of Europe, West and East."

Politics and Plane Rides

At 8:20 A.M. Mrs. Eisenhower and I left the White House for a political trip to Miami, Jacksonville, and Richmond. We arrived at the first stop, Miami, at 11:56 A.M. An hour later we were in the air again. I was beginning to campaign more than I had planned.

At 2:24 in the afternoon the Columbine touched down in Jacksonville. One part of my talk referred directly to the Hungarian crisis and to the Democrats' call for a unilateral reduction in American military power:

". . . at this particular stage of the world's history," I said, "where we see a once proud people being trampled down by marching regiments, this is no time to stop the draft—this is no time to stop perfecting our weapons."

In another hour I was airborne again, and at 5:49 P.M. arrived at Byrd Field in Richmond to make the third address of the day. But through-
out the day, using the communications facilities on the Columbine, kept in touch with Washington.

* * *

In the course of the day the French government complained to the UN Security Council that a vessel intercepted off the coast of Algeria contained arms and munitions for more than fifteen hundred men, loaded onto the ship by Egyptian troops at Alexandria, and accompanied by six French-Algerians “who had studied terrorist tactics in Cairo.” The French protested that nearly a quarter of the Algerian rebels’ arms had come from Egypt. The French thought they had a clear culprit for the cause of much of their Algerian struggle: Gamal Abdel Nasser.

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Meanwhile, all non-essential American citizens were being evacuated from Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Israel, in accordance with the State Department’s directive. At the American Embassy at Amman, Ambassador Lester Mallory and a skeleton force of Foreign Service people waited for what they thought was an imminent Israeli attack on Jordan.

An attack did come, but in the Sinai Desert—not in Jordan, but in Egypt.6 The Israelis dropped a parachute battalion in the Mitla Mountain passes forty miles east of Suez. Other Israeli troops driving through the Sinai Desert reinforced them. Still another Israeli force advanced through the desert toward Ismailia. A fourth element struck at the Egyptian bases of Rafu and El Raish near the Mediterranean Coast and sealed off the Gaza Strip. Finally, a force went down the west coast of the Gulf of Aqaba and headed for Sharm el Sheikh, in a maneuver to unblock the Egyptian obstruction to Israeli shipping through the Gulf. In the course of the night, the Israeli had knifed seventy-five miles through Egypt, arriving at a point only twenty-five miles east of Suez. Against an estimated Israeli army of fifty thousand troops, with two hundred sand ready reserves, some heavy artillery and jet fighters, and no bombers, the Egyptian Army could muster seventy-five thousand troops, with ninety MIGs and fifty twin-jet Illyushin bombers.

Word of all this reached me late in the day as the Columbine touched down at Richmond. Deciding not to cancel my scheduled appearance there, by 7 P.M. I arrived back in Washington, where I received further details from Secretary Dulles, Under Secretary Hoover, Secretary Wilson, Admiral Radford, Allen Dulles, and others.

Some of them saw the Israeli attack as a probing action, while others believed it would be a rapid move which would take the Israeli forces to Suez within three days at the most, and this would be the end of the whole affair. Foster disagreed with both.

“It is far more serious than that,” he said. “The Canal is likely to be disrupted and the oil pipelines through the Middle East broken. If these things happen, we must expect British and French intervention. In fact, they appear to be ready for it and may even have concerted their action with the Israelis,” recalling that for the past ten days we had received no news at all from the British and French.

Some at the meeting speculated that the British and French might be counting on the hope that when the chips were down, the United States would have to go along with them, however much we disapproved. But we did not consider that course. Under the 1950 agreement the United States was pledged to support the victim of an aggression in the Middle East. The only honorable course was to carry out that pledge, and I approved a White House statement of the United States’ determination to do so.

In the course of the meeting, I decided that we should telephone Mr. J. E. Coulson, who, in the absence of the British ambassador, was serving as chargé d’affaires, ask him to come to the White House, and tell him what we planned to do.

At the close of this meeting I met with him, Secretary Dulles, and Colonel Goodpaster.

“... The prestige of the United States and the British is involved in the developments in the Middle East,” I said. “I feel it is incumbent upon both of us to redeem our word about supporting any victim of aggression. Last spring, when we declined to give arms to Israel and to Egypt, we said that our word was enough...”

“In my opinion, the United States and the United Kingdom must stand by what we said. In view of information that has reached us concerning Mystères and the number of messages between Paris and Israel in the last few days, I can only conclude that I do not understand what the French are doing.”

“I do not know about the messages,” Mr. Coulson interposed.

“If I have to call Congress in order to redeem our pledge, I went on, “I will do so. We will stick to our undertaking.”

“Would the United States not first go to the Security Council?” Mr. Coulson asked.

“We plan to get to the United Nations the first thing in the morning—when the doors open,” I replied, “before the U.S.S.R. gets there.”

6 Map, “Crisis in Suez, October 29, 1956,” appears following page 360.
Simultaneously up in Boston, Governor Stevenson, on a political tour, charged that the administration had given the American people reassurances on the Near East which were “tragically less than the truth.” He “assumed” that I was unaware of what Foster Dulles was doing and of his “incredible blunders.” Happily for my disposition, the details of this allegation were not called to my attention for days.

In Cairo the American ambassador delivered my note to Nasser urging him to refrain from any action which would lead to full-scale war.

And the British Mediterranean Fleet was moving from Malta toward Cyprus.

This night of October 29 some prominent Republicans called on me to say that for the only time in the political campaign they thought I might not win the election. Their reasoning was simple: the Israeli build-up committed aggression that could not be condoned. Perhaps it would be necessary for the United States, as a member of the United Nations, to employ our armed force in strength to drive them back within their borders. If this turned out to be the case, much of the responsibility would be laid at my door. With many of our citizens of the eastern seaboard emotionally involved in the Zionist cause, this, it was believed, could possibly bring political defeat. None of them, however, urged me to abandon my position.

I thought and said that emotion was beclouding their good judgment. In any event, their uncertainty would be temporary; the next few days would give us a definite answer.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 30

The Ben-Gurion Position

At 4:39 the next morning, a cable from David Ben-Gurion answered my messages. Nasser had “created a ring of steel” around Israel, Ben-Gurion said:

“With Iraqi troops poised in great numbers on the Iraq-Jordan frontier, with creation of joint command of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, with decisive increase of Egyptian influence in Jordan, and with renewal of incursions into Israel territory by Egyptian gangs, my government would be failing its essential duty if it were not to take all necessary measures to ensure that declared Arab whim of eliminating Israel by force should not come about. My government has appealed to people of Israel to combine alertness with calm. I feel confident that with your vast military experience you appreciate to the full the crucial danger in which we find ourselves.”

State Department reports arriving that day were still referring, somewhat anachronistically, to the difficulties in working out agreements concerning the Canal among Britain, France, and Egypt. Selwyn Lloyd had reportedly tried to convince Pineau of the need for further negotiations toward a peaceful Suez settlement; the French Cabinet, however, had been reluctant to negotiate, preferring “stronger measures, presumably economic.” Furthermore, Egyptian Foreign Minister Fawzi had told our ambassador in Cairo, Raymond A. Hare, that Egypt would have been willing to meet with the British and French in Geneva, were it not for the unreasonable British and French demands, including in his statement the charge that the British and French wanted to make the Users Association an “instrument of coercion or economic warfare.”

Shortly after ten o'clock that morning I met with Secretary Dulles and other advisers. One thing the conference reflected: our lack of clear understanding as to exactly what was happening in the Suez area, due to the break in our communications with the French and British. We were in the dark about what they planned to do.

Before the meeting ended, therefore, at exactly 10:15 A.M., I sent Anthony Eden a long cable (the text hitherto unpublished), asking his help in “clearing up my understanding” about what was happening between the United States and its European allies. After mentioning the Israeli build-up with illegal French help, I said:

Last evening our Ambassador to the United Nations met with your Ambassador, Pierson Dixon, to request him to join us in presenting the case to the United Nations this morning. We were astonished to find that he was completely unsympathetic, stating frankly that his government would not agree to any action whatsoever to be taken against Israel. He further argued that the tri-partite statement of May, 1950, was ancient history and without current validity.

Without arguing the point as to whether or not the tri-partite statement is or should be outmoded, I feel very seriously that whenever any agreement or pact of this kind is in spirit renounced by one of its signatories, it is only fair that the other signatories should be notified. Since the United States has continued to look upon that statement as representing the policies and determination of our three governments, I have not publicly announced several times that it represents our policy, but many of our actions in the Mid East have been based upon it... We have had no thought of repudiating that statement and we have none now.

All of this development, with its possible consequences, including the possible involvement of you and the French in a general Arab war, seems
to me to leave your government and ours in a very sad state of confusion, so far as any possibility of unified understanding and action are concerned. It is true that Egypt has not yet formally asked this government for aid. But the fact is that if the United Nations finds Israel to be an aggressor, Egypt could very well ask the Soviets for help—and then the Middle East fat would really be in the fire.

Because of all these possibilities, it seems to me of first importance that the UK and US quickly and clearly lay out their present views and intentions before each other, and that, come what may, we find some way of concerting our ideas and plans so that we may not, in any real crisis, be powerless to act in concert because of misunderstanding of each other. [see Appendix G for the complete text of this letter].

This cable crossed one from Anthony which argued: "Egypt has to large extent brought this attack on herself . . . we cannot afford to see the Canal closed or to lose the shipping which is daily on passage through it." He felt "decisive action should be taken at once to stop the hostilities." As he wrote later, he believed Israel justified in its invasion: "The marked victim of the garrotter is not to be condemned if he strikes before the noose is around his throat." Eden believed Israel could probably defeat Egypt. The chief peril, as he saw it, was the extension of war by the intervention of other Arab states.

At 12:09 P.M. I replied, reiterating that our two governments differed on the Tri-Partite Declaration.

But by that time the British and French—Mollet and Pineau had flown to London—had made their decision: they would issue Egypt and Israel an ultimatum demanding that, within twelve hours, both sides withdraw ten miles from the Suez Canal and permit Anglo-French occupation of the key points along it. The United Kingdom decided against any consultation before taking this action, Eden argued later, because only swift Israel military success and Anglo-French action within twenty-four, or at the most forty-eight, hours could prevent the spread of the war to Syria, Jordan, and Iraq.

Yet another cable, this time from Mollet, said that in agreement with the British Government the French had decided to address to the Israeli and Egyptian governments a "solemn appeal" for them to end hostilities and for them both to withdraw their troops from the Canal Zone. To guarantee the effectiveness of the cease-fire, he said the French and British were also asking to assume "temporarily control" of the key positions of the Canal. He said that this demand "is but too well justified by a long experience with failures to honor international agreements and with provocations by Arab States in the Near East . . . ."

Somewhat backhandedly, I thought, he added the hope I would endorse the ultimatum: "I entertain the firm hope that the measures jointly

decided on by the French and British Governments will receive your approval and that you will support them with your high authority."

Far more candidly Mollet admitted afterward: "If your government was not informed of the final developments, the reason . . . was our fear that if we had consulted it, it would have prevented us from acting."

In his second cable, Sir Anthony, after the delivery of notes to the Israeli and Egyptian ambassadors, also told me of the ultimatum. At the end he expressed hope that when the dust settles, there may well be a chance for us doing a constructive piece of work together." He did not support or condone Israel, Eden protested; he simply wanted to stop the fighting.

In New York City the UN Security Council was considering a resolution, drafted by the United States, asking all members of the United Nations to refrain from using force in the Middle East. When the vote came, the Soviet Union supported it; the British and French used their veto. They used it also to defeat a Soviet resolution calling on Israel to pull back behind the armistice line.

At 4:45 that afternoon, I telephoned Foster Dulles to say that I felt I owed Eden an answer after Eden's second explanatory cable had crossed the American message. This exercise, I said, was getting to be "a sort of transatlantic essay contest."

To both Eden and Mollet I sent a warning:

I have just learned from the press of the 12-hour ultimatum which you and the French Government have delivered to the Government of Egypt requiring, under threat of forceful intervention, the temporary occupation by Anglo-French forces of key positions at Port Said, Ismailia, and Suez in the Suez Canal Zone. I feel I must urgently express to you my deep concern at the prospect of this drastic action even at the very time when the matter is under consideration as it is today by the United Nations Security Council. It is my sincere belief that peaceful processes can and should prevail to secure a solution which will restore the armistice con-

Though the British government was the largest single shareholder in the Suez Canal Company—44 per cent—private French citizens held more than 50 per cent of the shares. Incidentally, it is to be remembered that, although the British-Egyptian Pact which empowered the British to re-enter the Canal Zone in the event of an attack, specifically excluded an attack by Israel, the tri-partite Declaration of 1950 pledged the British, French, and Americans to take action to prevent any violation of the Egyptian-Israeli frontiers and armistice lines. The present trouble was that the British and French demanded not that both sides withdraw behind their frontiers, but rather that they withdraw only ten miles from the Canal. In the circumstances, the Israelis accepted the ultimatum—on condition Egypt accept it. Nasser scornfully ignored it; if the British and French tried to seize Suez, he promised them a fight.
dition as between Israel and Egypt and also justly settle the controversy with Egypt about the Suez Canal.

Then Jim Hagerty released to the press a statement, somewhat milder, on the United States reaction to the ultimatum and on our intention to work out a cease-fire through the United Nations.

When Eden heard that the substance of my final message had been released, he cabled me that in view of the publicity, he "must be free to make public the substance" of his two earlier messages.

In longhand I wrote out at the bottom of his cable: "My answer is, by all means use any part you see fit."

Some hours earlier Eden had broken the news of the ultimatum to the House of Commons:

"Unless hostilities can be stopped," he said, "free passage through the Canal will be jeopardized. . . . Her Majesty's Government and the French Government have called upon [Israel and Egypt] to stop all warlike action . . . forthwith and to withdraw their military forces to a distance of ten miles from the Canal. . . . We have asked the Egyptian Government to agree that Anglo-French forces should move temporarily into key positions. . . . If at the expiration of [twelve hours] one or both have not undertaken to comply . . . British and French forces will intervene in whatever strength may be necessary."

The Labor Party went through the roof. Labor MPs charged that the government was using the Israeli invasion as a pretext for reoccupying the Canal Zone. Late that evening, after two hours of debate, the House (despite Eden's Conservative Party majority) gave Anthony only a shaky vote of support, 270 to 218.

* * *

Meanwhile the American political campaign went on. I heard that Jacob Javits, running for the Senate, had made a courageous speech in New York City defending the administration, refusing to condone the Israeli attack, and urging bipartisanship.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31

Conciliatory Statement from Moscow


It affirmed that Russia and its satellites could "build their mutual relations only on the principles of complete equality . . . and of non-interference in one another's internal affairs." It admitted "downright mistakes, including mistakes in mutual relations among socialist countries."

It declared that the Soviet Union stood ready to discuss the further presence of Soviet "technical advisers" in satellite countries. And it affirmed the general principle that troops should be stationed in other countries "only with the consent" of the host state.

Though the statement alleged that Soviet military units had gone into Budapest only to bring order to the city, at the Hungarian Government's request, it promised that the Soviet Government would withdraw its troops as soon as the Hungarian Government considered that withdrawal necessary.

"This utterance," Allen Dulles declared, "is one of the most significant to come out of the Soviet Union since the end of World War II." "Yes," I replied, "if it is honest."

The Hungarian revolution was, at that moment, at its high-water mark. How cynical would their statement appear within a matter of days.

* * *

Israel Moves On

At dawn that Wednesday morning, the Israeli forces were still driving westward across the Sinai Peninsula.

At 9:47, Washington time, Senator Knowland telephoned me from California.

"Will it be safe," he asked, "for me to get on a plane, away from the telephone for three to four hours, in case you decide to call Congress back?"

"Yes," I told him. "But keep in touch."

"I'm shocked by the actions of our allies," he went on.

"I understand your feeling," I answered, "but I don't think it will do any good to be bitter toward the British."

At 11:45 Ambassador Lodge telephoned from the United Nations that there was enthusiastic and well-nigh unanimous approval of the policy we had adopted before that body—calling upon Israel and Egypt to cease fire, upon Israel to withdraw behind the armistice line, and upon all UN members to refrain from the use of force and from military, economic, and financial aid to Israel until it complied with this UN resolution.

Meanwhile, in the British House of Commons, the Laborites continued their onslaught against the government. Hugh Gaitskell called the
Suez venture “disastrous folly”; Philip Noel-Baker censured the government for failing to inform the United States in advance. Against these attacks Eden countered that the government wanted the military action to be “temporary”; but he insisted it was his intention “that our action to protect the Canal and separate the combatants should result in a settlement which will prevent such a situation arising in the future.”

In Washington I dictated still another cable to Anthony. It was never sent because the next event overtook it, but the draft is worth quoting, perhaps, as evidence of my thoughts at the time.

The most pertinent passage was, “I must say that it is hard for me to see any good final result emerging from a scheme that seems to antagonize the entire Moslem world. Indeed I have difficulty seeing any end whatsoever if all the Arabs should begin reacting somewhat as the North Africans have been operating against the French.”

Then, as dusk fell over Egypt, British planes based on Cyprus launched a bombing raid against Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, and Ismailia, striking airfields, ports, railways, communication centers, and the radio towers of the “Voice of the Arabs” at Abu Zabel near Cairo.

The British reported no resistance in the air and only weak and erratically anti-aircraft fire from the ground. But in the Suez Canal near Lake Timsah, the Egyptians quickly sunk a 320-foot-long ship, the Akka, which more than two months before had been loaded with cement and rocks and towed to the spot for a voyage to the bottom should events so require. The Suez Canal was blocked. In the next few days, the Egyptians were to send thirty-two ships to the floor of the Canal and blame all of the sinkings on the British.

* * *

To the People

In Washington I spent the day preparing for a broadcast that night. Because of my preoccupation with the developing situation, it was not until ten minutes before the program began, at 7 o’clock, that the last page was typed. Beginning with Poland and Hungary, the address described our readiness to give economic help to new and independent governments in Eastern Europe without demanding any particular form of society. It further assured the Soviets once more that we wished to be friends with these new nations but did not regard them as potential allies.

Turning to the Middle East, I reiterated our fundamental policy of friendship for Israeli and Arab alike. And then I focused on the current attack against Egypt, pointing out first that “the United States was not consulted in any way” about the military actions.

It was the right of those nations to make such decisions, I said, and our right to dissent. We recognized the grave anxieties of Britain and Israel and France, we knew that they had been subjected to grave provocations, and we believed, without minimizing our friendship, that they were in error.

“We are forced to doubt that resort to . . . war will for long serve the permanent interest of the attacking nations,” I added. There would be no U.S. involvement in the hostilities, I would not call the Congress into special session, and though we had been rebuffed the day before in the UN—because of a veto by Great Britain and France—we did not believe that organization’s processes were exhausted. (We would take our request that Israel withdraw and hostilities end before the General Assembly, where no veto operated.)

I then stated my belief in the United Nations as the soundest hope for peace. Though the society of nations had been slow to accept it, the truth was that:

The peace we seek and need means much more than mere absence of war. It means the acceptance of law, and the fostering of justice, in all the world.  

* * *

But politics still had its moment in the day. Adlai Stevenson sent me a wire cautioning against hasty use of our armed forces. Such incidents one could expect at the climax of a presidential campaign.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 1

Hungarian Appeal to the UN

On Thursday, November 1, an eventful day, Imre Nagy informed the Soviet ambassador that Hungary was renouncing the Warsaw Pact, declaring its neutrality, and appealing to the United Nations for help in defense of that neutrality.

A mutual defense treaty signed in 1955 by the Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Rumania. It set up the Warsaw Treaty Organization—the Communist parallel to NATO.
Egypt Regroups

Egypt broke its diplomatic ties with Britain and France; Nasser ordered the bulk of Egyptian forces withdrawn from the Sinai Peninsula to fight the British and French in defense of the Canal.

In the House of Commons Anthony Eden pleaded that Britain and France would welcome eventual United Nations control of the Suez area, but only after Israeli and Egyptian forces had been separated and peace had been restored. The Laborites called for a vote of censure. Bitter debate followed, with Gaitskell and Bevan heading the attack. The censure motion failed 324 to 255.

* * *

At nine o'clock that morning a meeting in my office began with an intelligence review by Allen Dulles. "The occurrences in Hungary," he said, "are a miracle. They have disproved that a popular revolt cannot occur in the face of modern weapons. Eighty per cent of the Hungarian Army has defected. Except in Budapest, even the Soviet troops have shown no stomach for shooting down Hungarians."

The problem in Hungary, he concluded, was the lack of a strong guiding authority for the rebels; Imre Nagy was failing, and the rebels were demanding that he resign. Cardinal Mindszenty, if supported by the Roman Catholic ardor of the Hungarian people, was a possible leader. Newspapers that morning were reporting his release from house arrest and his return to Budapest.

Turning to the Middle East, Foster Dulles reviewed the history of recent weeks. Much of what he said was an estimate only because of our having been practically cut off from normal diplomatic connections with Britain and France, except for my personal communications with Eden.

He referred to the vast increase in diplomatic traffic between France and Israel. Then, he said, "Israel mobilized and struck. We believed that Israel would attack Jordan, not Egypt," he said. "The Anglo-Jordanian treaty probably prevented that attack and caused Britain, France and Israel to agree on an Israeli strike against Egypt and on the British and French use of this strike as a pretext to protect the Canal. In all probability," the Secretary went on, "these moves were concerted; the French did the planning, the British acquiesced, and the French, in violation of the 1950 agreement, covertly supplied the Israelis with arms."

Under the rules of the United Nations, he continued, if a veto prevents action by the Security Council, the General Assembly can be convened within twenty-four hours. The Assembly could therefore meet that afternoon at five.

... It is nothing less than tragic," he concluded, reminding us all of a somber fact, "that at this very time, when we are on the point of winning an immense and long-hoped-for victory over Soviet colonialism in Eastern Europe, we should be forced to choose between following in the footsteps of Anglo-French colonialism in Asia and Africa, or splitting our course away from their course. Yet this decision must be made in a mere matter of hours—before five o'clock this afternoon."

We could not permit the Soviet Union to seize the leadership in the struggle against the use of force in the Middle East and thus win the confidence of the new independent nations of the world. But on the other hand I by no means wanted the British and French to be branded as naked aggressors without provocation. I therefore instructed Foster to draft two statements: an announcement of our suspension of all military and some governmental economic aid to Israel; and a moderate resolution for submission to the General Assembly in an effort to block a resolution—certain to be an objectionable one—by the Soviet Union.

At 11:10 Foster telephoned me to read the draft text of our statement on mild sanctions against Israel. It seemed satisfactory to me. I then told him to send the text of our proposed United Nations resolution to Cabot Lodge at once so that he could rally support for it before Secretary Dulles would personally present it to the General Assembly later that day. The resolution called for an immediate cease-fire, withdrawal of all troops behind the armistice lines, a ban on all military shipments into the area of hostilities, and action to open the Canal.

That night, with a feeling of relief, I delivered my final platform speech of the campaign in Philadelphia. I canceled the rallies still on my calendar.

Speaking about the tangled situation that had developed out of Middle East difficulties, I said:

We cannot—in the world, any more than in our own nation—subscribe to one law for the weak, another law for the strong; ... There can be only one law—or there will be no peace. ...

We value—deeply and lastingly—the bonds with those great nations [Britain and France], those great friends, with whom we now so plainly disagree. And I, for one, am confident that those bonds will do more than survive. They can—my friends, they must—grow to new and greater strength.

But this we know above all: there are some firm principles that cannot bend—they can only break. And we shall not break ours.
That evening I sent personal letters to two of my close friends—Swede Hazlett and Al Gruenther. While these letters dealt mainly with the Middle East, a few paragraphs were definitely descriptive of my feelings about the election, then only days away.

November 2, 1956

Dear Al:

... I am not going to bore you with reciting all of our Mid East troubles ...

Strangely enough, I have seen some of my old British friends in the last few days and most of them are truly bitter about the action taken by their Government. ... I believe that Eden and his associates have become convinced that this [Canal seizure] is the last straw and Britain simply had to react in the manner of the Victorian period.

If one has to have a fight, then that is that. But I don't see the point in getting into a fight to which there can be no satisfactory end, and in which the whole world believes you are playing the part of the bully and you do not even have the firm backing of your entire people.
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4

On this date Syrian saboteurs blew up the British oil pipelines running through their country from Iraq to the Mediterranean, except for a small one which we thought would likely be put out of action soon.

In Britain, Anthony Eden rejected the UN cease-fire proposal, but he added that the British and French would stop firing as soon as (1) Egypt and Israel agreed to accept a UN force to keep the peace; (2) the UN decided to maintain such a force until an Arab-Israeli peace settlement could be reached, along with an agreement on "satisfactory arrangements" for the Suez Canal; and (3) Israel and Egypt agreed to accept a limited number of French and British troops on Egyptian soil until the UN force came into being.

Democratic Views on the Crisis

Still campaigning, Estes Kefauver claimed he saw the origin of the whole crisis in the United States' "preoccupation with oil." Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt voiced her opinion that Israel had acted in self-defense, and that the administration had favored the Arabs. After American policy failed, she asked, what else could Britain and France do but march in.

All commentary lost any importance to me when the news arrived that Secretary Dulles had just entered Walter Reed Army Hospital for an emergency operation.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5

At 3:13 in the morning in the UN Security Council, began a meeting in which the Soviet Union, using its veto for the seventy-ninth time, torpedoed an American resolution calling upon the Russian government at once to withdraw its forces from Hungary.

At about four that morning the State Department received from our legation in Budapest a cable saying that the "British Military Attaché called and stated that he had heard officially that the Soviets had given the Hungarian Government an ultimatum of 0800 to the effect that if the Government did not capitulate within four hours, the Soviets would bomb Budapest."

9 By the time of this writing (November 1964) the Soviet Union had used its veto 102 times, the United States never.

The Revolt Crushed

The Soviet Union promptly launched a major assault on Hungary: two hundred thousand troops and four thousand tanks reportedly moved into Budapest "to help the Hungarian people crush the black forces of reaction and counter-revolution." Imre Nagy took refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy; Cardinal Mindszenty fled to the American Legation. A new Communist government—the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers and Peasants Government—under the command of Janos Kadar came into existence. That one day, it was reported, there were fifty thousand Hungarians dead and wounded in the streets of Budapest.

At once I wrote to Bulganin:

I have noted with profound distress the reports which have reached me today from Hungary.

The Soviet's declaration of October 30, 1956, which restated the policy of "non-intervention in internal affairs of other states," was generally understood, I said, to promise the early withdrawal of Soviet forces from Hungary:

Indeed, in that statement, the Soviet Union said that "it considered the further presence of Soviet Army units in Hungary can serve as a cause for an even greater deterioration of the situation."

This statement we regarded as an "act of high statesmanship," I added, and consequently we were inexpressibly shocked by the reversal of this policy—all the more so because their renewed use of force against the Hungarians took place while negotiations were going on between the Soviets and the Hungarian government for the removal of Soviet military units. "I urge in the name of humanity and in the cause of peace," my letter ended, "that the Soviet Union take action to withdraw Soviet forces from Hungary immediately. . . ."

* * *

Operations in Sinai

By November 4 Israel had occupied nearly all the Sinai Peninsula and all the Gaza Strip. It had captured Tiran and Sanifar, two islands in the Gulf of Aqaba used by Egypt to blockade the Israel port of Eilat. It had taken more than five thousand Egyptian prisoners and quantities of Soviet-manufactured arms.

The British and French ground forces, however, had not yet entered
the fight. The British and French armada from Cyprus—one hundred warships and troop transports—approached the Egyptian coast. Though the United Nations had adopted both the Canadian resolution calling for the creation of a UN force, with a six-thousand-man ceiling, within forty-eight hours, and an Afro-Asian resolution calling upon the Secretary-General to arrange a cease-fire within twelve hours, and though Egypt announced its acceptance of the cease-fire resolution of November 2, Anthony Eden refused to postpone his invasion: “If we draw back now,” he said to me in the second of two cables, “everything will go up in flames in the Middle East. . . . We cannot have a military vacuum while a UN force is being constituted.”

That evening, in Trafalgar Square, the British Labor Party put on a giant rally demanding that Prime Minister Eden resign.

* * *

At 4:31 in the afternoon the UN General Assembly approved the United States resolution calling on the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops from Hungary, 50 to 8 (the Soviet bloc, including Poland, opposed; fifteen abstentions).

The Problem of the Use of Force

The twin problems of Hungary and Suez now became more acute and, in addition, created an anomalous situation. In Europe we were aligned with Britain and France in our opposition to the brutal Soviet invasion of Hungary; in the Middle East we were against the entry of British-French armed forces in Egypt.

The launching of the Soviet offensive against Hungary almost automatically had posed to us the question of employing force to oppose the barbaric invasion.

The Hungarian uprising, from its beginning to its bloody suppression, was an occurrence that inspired in our nation feelings of sympathy and admiration for the rebels, anger and disgust for their Soviet oppressors. No one shared these feelings more keenly than I; indeed, I still wonder what would have been my recommendation to the Congress and the American people had Hungary been accessible by sea or through the territory of allies who might have agreed to react positively to the tragic fate of the Hungarian people. As it was, however, Britain and France could not possibly have moved with us into Hungary. An expedition combining West German or Italian forces with our own, and moving across neutral Austria, Titoist Yugoslavia, or Communist Czechoslovakia...
We speculated that they might try to stage fighter planes into Egypt. I told Allen Dulles to order high-altitude reconnaissance flights over Israel and Syria to see whether Soviet planes and pilots had landed at Syrian bases. "Our people should be alert in trying to determine Soviet intentions," I said. "If the Soviets should attack Britain and France directly, we would of course be in a major war."

Later in the morning, my wife and I drove the eighty miles to Gettysburg to vote. I returned to Washington at about noon by helicopter. Andy Good- paster met me at the airfield and reviewed the major developments on the way in to the White House—particularly the prospects for a cease-fire, and intelligence reports received during the morning of jet aircraft of unknown nationality overflying Turkey. (Later reports had not confirmed these overflights, although all intelligence agencies continued to be particularly watchful.)

In an immediate meeting in the White House Cabinet Room, Admiral Radford said the Joint Chiefs had been reviewing our military state of readiness and had concluded that measures for its improvement, as I had directed, were indicated. He read off a list of twenty or thirty steps of this character.

"These," I said, "should be put into effect by degrees—not all at once, in order to avoid creating a stir. Units can be put on alert, and the number of ships and aircraft on ready status should be increased."

Though I questioned whether movements should be started to the Persian Gulf and other areas, and though many of the measures were simply precautionary, I believed that we should progressively achieve an advanced state of readiness, starting the next morning. Many precautionary items would escape notice but I suggested that the military services might call back personnel from leave, an action impossible to conceal which would let the Russians know—without being provocative—that we could not be taken by surprise.

In the course of the meeting, Admiral Radford remarked, "It is very hard to figure out the Russian thinking in connection with their proposal. For them to attempt any operations in the Middle East would be extremely difficult, militarily. The only reasonable form of intervention would be long-range air strikes with nuclear weapons—which seems unlikely."

His reasoning proved sound.

Meanwhile British forces were reaching El Cap, twenty-three miles south of Port Said, and they and the French were claiming control of the Canal area. At the very moment we were meeting in the White House staff. We discussed a proposed White House statement in reply to the Bulganin note.

"This statement," I said, "ought to include a clear warning—a passage that would make it unmistakably clear that the United Nations, including the United States, would oppose with force any attempt to violate the UN plan for getting a cease-fire. The Soviets," I went on, "seeing the failure in the satellites, might be ready to undertake any wild adventure... [they] are as scared and furious as Hitler was in his last days. There's nothing more dangerous than a dictatorship in that frame of mind."

Accordingly, the White House called the Soviet plan for joint American-Soviet action "unthinkable," and warned that the entry of new troops into the Middle East would oblige all members of the United Nations, including the United States, to take effective countermeasures.

In England, Eden also rejected Bulganin's threats, asked him to support the proposal for a United Nations police force, and proceeded to deliver a scathing attack on the hypocrisy of the Soviet Union's coming as a peacemaker into the Middle East while its hands were still stained with Hungarian blood.

* * *

Throughout the campaign Governor Stevenson had declined to touch what he must have considered a politically powerful argument in favor: my health. On election eve, reportedly against the advice of some of his aides, he raised the issue, pointing out the "scientific evidence" that I couldn't last another four years, and declaring that he "recollected the thought of Richard Nixon's directing the destiny of America as serving as guardian of the hydrogen bomb.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6

Increased Fighting

It was Election Day. Israel's part in the fighting had ended. But in the early morning hours, additional British assault forces from Malta were landing at Port Said, and running into heavy Egyptian fire. French commandos landed at Port Fuad, meeting no resistance.

In Washington at a meeting which began at 8:37 A.M., Allen Dulles gave me late intelligence reports. The Soviet Union had told the Egyptians, he believed, that they would "do something" in the Middle East...
House the British government was ordering a cease-fire, to take effect at midnight unless the Allied forces should be attacked by the Egyptians.10

During the noon meeting I telephoned Anthony Eden. I told him of our satisfaction that he found it possible to order the cease-fire. He replied that the decision involved some risk, but felt that the situation justified it.

"I hope that you will now go along with the United Nations resolutions without imposing any conditions," I said. "This I think would be highly advisable so as to deny Russia any opportunity to create trouble. The United Nations is making preparation for the concentration of a caretaking force."

Anthony felt that the size of that force would have to be considerable, and said, "I hope you [the Americans] will be there," he said. "Are we going to go?"

"What I want to do is this," I replied. "I would like to see none of the great nations in it." My thought was that if any of the large nations provided troop contingents the Soviets would try to provide the largest and say to him, "When we see you coming in with enough troops to take over, we'll leave."

If anyone then made an aggressive move, I said, the attack would be a challenge to the whole United Nations. This, I felt, no one would want to make.

The Prime Minister asked time to think this suggestion over and then said, "If I survive here [remain as Prime Minister] tonight I will call you tomorrow." Referring to our election he asked: "How are things going with you?"

We had been giving all our thought to Hungary and the Middle East, and said, "I don't give a damn about the election, I guess it will be all right.

Later that afternoon Prime Minister St. Laurent of Canada called. "Things are pretty encouraging," I told him. "Never have I seen on the part of a government that excited me more than the rapid way"

10 Eden later announced that he arrived at the cease-fire decision because he had accomplished the British purpose: to separate the combatants and prevent the spread of the war. He also mentioned a great drain in British gold and dollar reserves, which had fallen by $57 million in September, 84 million in October, and 279 million in November—an amount equal to 15 per cent of the British reserves tot.
In any event, I again telephoned Eden at 10:27, to say that we should have to postpone our meeting. I gave him the gist of my advisers’ conclusions, and then mentioned one further point which had persuaded me of the wisdom of a postponement:

“Although I had a landslide victory last night, we are not like you, and we have lost both Houses of Congress. Therefore, I have to have the Senate and House leaders in right now. We have already issued the invitation [to them]. They are to be here Friday and Saturday, and I have to be meeting with them. . . . I have got to get them to back up whatever we agree to. My Congress won’t be back in session until January 6.”

Obviously the congressional leaders should be advised and consulted before we could commit ourselves to any kind of program requiring legislative congressional action.

I ended by saying, “I am very anxious to talk to you and Mr. Eden about our future. But I believe, in view of what my people say, we’ll have to postpone a little bit. I am sorry . . . .”

After the phone calls Anthony cabled, “I do hope it will be possible for us to meet in the very near future.” I agreed, on the condition that first the United Nations Resolution be carried out.

At 11:10 I went to Walter Reed Army Hospital to confer with Secretary Dulles, who was recuperating from his operation. I remained on the postponement of the Eden trip.

“When Eden comes,” I said, “he will want to talk about what the Bear will do and what we should do in the face of the Russians’ . . . . There’s no point now in making any recriminations against the British. What we need now is to prepare for whatever action we will take. Russia should enter the Middle East while British, French, and Israeli forces remain there. We also need a coordinated Anglo-American intelligence effort in the region.”

Israeli Refuse to Budge

That day I received reports that Ben-Gurion had rejected the United Nations order to withdraw Israeli forces from the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip and to permit the UN force to enter. I cabled Ben-Gurion at once telling him the United Nations forces were being dispatched to Egypt, urging him to comply with the United Nations resolution, and letting him know the United States viewed Israel’s refusal to withdraw “with deep concern.”

Israel Agrees to Withdraw

After conferring with his Cabinet for nine hours, Ben-Gurion announced that Israel would withdraw from Egypt immediately after the United Nations force arrived. Ambassador Eban transmitted a message to me from Ben-Gurion saying that Israel welcomed my statement that the United Nations force was on its way. “We have never planned to occupy the Sinai Desert,” he said, adding that “upon conclusion of satisfactory arrangements with the United Nations in connection with this international force entering the Suez Canal area,” Israel would willingly withdraw her forces.

Results of the Suez Battle

Anthony Eden later wrote that the British and French together had landed twenty-two thousand troops in Egypt, that the British had sixteen killed, ninety-six wounded; the French ten killed, thirty-three wounded. By November 8 a thousand Egyptians and fewer than two hundred Israelis reportedly had died in the fight. The Suez Canal was completely blocked by sunken ships. The British pipeline from Iraq had been sabotaged, and three of its pumping stations destroyed. (The Arabian-American Oil Company pipeline, running from Saudi Arabia through Syria to the Mediterranean, was at the moment still unaccountably intact.) This destruction meant that as soon as a cease-fire could be arranged and the United Nations force stationed, the United States
would have to consider putting into effect a crash plan, drawn up months earlier, for shipping more oil to Europe.

Now all of us were looking ahead. That day I dictated two pages of ideas on actions we might take after the cease-fire in the Middle East.

November 8, 1956

(1) Information, not yet official, indicates that both Israel and Egypt have now fully accepted the terms of the United Nations cease-fire plan, and that peaceful conditions should prevail soon in the Mid East.

(2) If the above hope is borne out by events of the next day or so, we should be promptly ready to take any kind of action that will minimize the effects of the recent difficulties and will exclude from the area Soviet influence.

(3) Measures to be taken under these elements would be:

(a) Rapid restoration of pipeline and Canal operation. This might have to be done almost wholly by American technical groups, but we should think that we might also mobilize some people from Germany and Italy. This work should begin instantly.

(b) Push negotiations under the United Nations so as to prevent renewed outbreak of (Mid-East) difficulty.

(c) Provide to the area, wherever necessary, surplus foods, and so on, to prevent suffering.

(4) Simultaneously we must lay the several governments information and proposals that will establish real peace in the area and, above all, exclude Communist influence from making any headway therein. There are a number of things to do [in this particular purpose]...

We must make certain that every weak country understands what can be in store for it once it falls under the domination of the Soviets.

And beyond this, however, are the constructive things that we can do once these nations understand the truth of the immediately preceding paragraph.

For example, we can provide Egypt with an agreed-upon amount of arms—sufficient to maintain internal order and a reasonable defense of its borders, in return for an agreement that it will never accept any Soviet offer.

We should likewise provide training missions. . . .

We could assist with technicians in the repair of damage done in Egypt. . . and could even make an economic loan to help out.

In Israel we could renew the Jordan compact (Eric Johnston plan) and take up again the $75 million economic loan that they desire.

We could possibly translate the tri-partite statement of May 1950 into a bilateral treaty with each of the countries in this area.

We could make some kind of arms agreement—particularly maintenance and training—with Israel of exactly the same type we could make with Egypt.

We could explore other means of assisting the Arab States of Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon, and develop ways and means of strengthening our economic and friendly ties with each of these countries, either on a bilateral or group basis.

These notes pointed toward a Mid-East doctrine we would formally evolve in early 1957.

The Middle East crisis was now starting downhill. Gomulka and his government in Poland were hanging in midair with their revolution. And the Soviet Union had murderously throttled the Hungarian drive for freedom. On the morning of November 8, two hundred thousand Russian troops were still inside Hungary; Hungarian refugees were fleeing to Austria at the rate of three thousand to four thousand a day; the fighting there would leave forty thousand Hungarian families homeless and twenty-five thousand Hungarian patriots dead. It was not going to be easy to pick up the pieces of those twenty days.

... * * * ...

AFTERMATH

In the days immediately following the cease-fire the Soviet Union threatened to send "volunteers" into Egypt. We had, of course, already warned about the consequences of any such move.

On November 11, I wrote in formal reply to Bulganin's letter of November 5, which suggested Soviet-American intervention in Egypt: "Any such action would be directly contrary to resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations which have called for the withdrawal of those foreign forces which are now in Egypt. The introduction of new forces under these circumstances would violate the United Nations Charter, and it would be the duty of all United Nations members, including the United States, to oppose any such effort."

Two days later, in his final press conference at SHAPE, General Alfred M. Gruenther issued the same warning without diplomatic varnish: If the Communists attacked the West, he said, the Soviet Union and the Soviet Bloc would be "destroyed... as sure as day follows night."

The Soviet threat proved to be nothing but words. Indeed Nasser himself seemed to want no important Soviet help, for he said to Ambassador Harr in early as November 8, "Don't worry about these Soviet moves: I don't trust any big power."

Late in November, in violation of a pledge of safe conduct, the Soviets seized Imre Nagy. In an exhibition of pure, barbaric vengeance, he was later tried in secret and executed. On December 1, I announced that the
United States, under existing law, would offer asylum, as a start, to more than twenty-one thousand Hungarian refugees—that we would bring to the United States with all possible speed refugees who sought asylum here; and that I would request emergency legislation to permit qualified refugees who accept asylum to obtain permanent residence in the United States. By the end of the year 150,000 Hungarians had left their homelands.

By the end of November we were satisfied that the British and French would rapidly and unconditionally withdraw their troops from Egypt. Accordingly I approved a “Middle East Plan of Action,” which had been prepared by the Department of the Interior, the Office of Defense Mobilization, and the Department of Justice in August. It was a plan to add two hundred thousand barrels of oil a day to the quota of the hundred thousand then being shipped to Western Europe from ports on the Gulf of Mexico and in South America.

Private industry cooperated to the full with the Government to make a success of this effort in the face of enormous difficulties, including tanker shortages, the long haul around the Cape of Good Hope, the dislocation of North and South America petroleum outlets, and the need to reroute tankers and reverse pipeline flows.

We now began financial help to the British.

By December 22 the British and French were completing their withdrawal, and a week thereafter the Egyptian government agreed to an immediate start on a full-scale clearance of the Suez Canal.

* * *

Looking backward to those days, it is easy to see that the British and French won battles but nothing else. Israel, also winning battles, succeeded in unblocking the Gulf of Aqaba and temporarily halting the jedaay raids across her borders.

There are a number of fascinating “might have beens” which will, of course, probably never be answered. If the British and French had intervened, could the Israeli alone have completed the defeat of the Egyptians? If so, what would have happened under the terms of the Three-Power Declaration of 1950? My belief is that we would have taken such action as would have induced withdrawal, possibly initiating a blockade.

Did the British and French actions provide an excuse for the Russians to move with massive force into Hungary? If the Russians had moved into Hungary with no Suez problem preoccupying all Western Europe, would the reaction of the West have been more intense? To both of these questions my own answer has always been negative.

Some critics have said that the United States should have sided with the British and French in the Middle East, that it was fatuous to lean so heavily on the United Nations. If we had taken this advice, where would it have led us? Would we now be, with them, an occupying power in a seething Arab world? If so, I am sure we would regret it.

During the campaign, some political figures kept talking of our failure to “back Israel.” If the administration had been incapable of withstanding this kind of advice in an election year, could the United Nations thereafter have retained any influence whatsoever? This, I definitely doubt.

* * *

On November 23 Winston Churchill wrote me a long letter urging that we leave to historians the arguments over recent events in the Middle East and that we take action in harmony to forestall a Soviet triumph there; it would be folly, he said, to let the great essentials be lost in bickerings, and to let misunderstanding make a gulf in the Anglo-American alliance.

I replied at once in a letter [contained in Appendix H] which I closed: “I hope that this one may be washed off the slate as soon as possible and that we can then together adopt other means of achieving our legitimate objectives in the Mid-East. Nothing saddens me more than the thought that I and my old friends of years have met a problem concerning which we do not see eye to eye. I shall never be happy until our old time closeness has been restored.”