SUEZ PACT ALTERS DEFENSE PLANS
By ROBERT C. DOTYSpecial to The New York Times.
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Evacuation of British Calls for Revision Of Our Strategy

CAIRO, July 31 — Britain's agreement this week to withdraw her military forces from the Suez Canal zone, keystone of Western defense in two world wars, caused profound political and diplomatic reverberations in Britain and Egypt.

In London a Conservative Government found itself under attack from within its own party ranks for ceding control of an area that had been a major imperial link for nearly three-quarters of a century. Cairo's military junta saw itself strengthened in popular favor by the agreement to end foreign military occupation.

Setting political considerations to one side, the attention of Western military planners was focused on a basic revision of defense strategy in the Middle East that became necessary in light of the British decision to evacuate the Canal zone by early 1956, except for a small force of civilian technicians assigned to the maintenance of supplies and installations on a stand-by basis.

A Nuclear Bullseye

From the military standpoint, the decision to pull out of the Canal zone grew from the conviction of British military men that it was unhealthy for large armies to live at the center of a nuclear bullseye. The Canal Zone would be bound to be a high priority target for a nuclear attack in the event of a new world war.

For this reason and because of the pressure of Egyptian hostility to British forces, London decided the time had come to redeploy. Approximately two-thirds of the British land forces now in the Canal zone are expected to return to the United Kingdom.

Shift to Cyprus

Headquarters of the Middle East land forces will be transferred from Fayid to the vicinity of Nicosia, Cyprus. Cyprus, immune from a surprise ground attack, bristling with air defenses, centrally located and well equipped with communications, seems well fitted to serve as the "brain" of the new British and Western defense organization in the Middle East.

The rest of the combat units in the Canal zone, including much of the armor, are to be redeployed elsewhere in the area—to Aden and Malta, where Britain has full control, and to Libya and possibly Jordan, where Britain has base rights under treaties of alliance. Many of the Royal Air Force squadrons now based in the Canal zone will be reassigned to Aden.

"We have long wanted to release our fighting troops from the Canal zone in the interest of greater world-wide strategic flexibility," said Gen. Sir Charles F. Keightley, Commander in Chief, in a recent interview.

General Keightley discussed at some length anticipated military advantages in the redeployment of the British forces, the strategic importance of the Middle East and Britain's determination and ability to fulfill her treaty commitments with Iraq, Jordan and Libya under the changed conditions that will exist after the evacuation of the canal zone.

Some observers gained the impression that some of the military enthusiasm for the withdrawal from the canal zone was spurious and was being officially encouraged to provide military and strategic sanction for a decision that was largely political in motivation.

According to this view, if the future of the canal zone were to have been settled on a basis of military considerations the result would have been quite different. The military still might have chosen to disperse more widely the combat strength, but it was doubtful that the military leaders ever would have approved a complete turnover of the base to Egyptian control with only British civilian technicians—probably fewer than 2,000—maintaining a British foot in the door.

Theoretically, according to terms of the agreement the door would swing open to readmit British troops if any Arab state or Turkey were to be attacked. Actually, Western strategy, to quote General Keightley, "depends on a relationship of trust and confidence with Egypt and the Arab world based on a full respect for their independence and sovereignty and an acknowledgment of mutual interests."

Arab Reluctance

Since World War II there has been very little evidence in this part of the world of the relationship of "trust and confidence" or of respect by the Western powers for the independence and sovereignty of the Arab world. Consequently there has been reluctance on the part of the Arab leaders to acknowledge "mutual interests."

The importance of the Suez accord lies not in the supposed immediate military "advantages" but in the opportunity it offers during the next few years to create an atmosphere in which real military cooperation between the North Atlantic powers and the Arab states will become possible.



Associated Press
Premier Nasser of Egypt.

In 1951, when the Western powers invited Egypt and other Arab states to join with their arch enemy, Israel, in a proposed Middle East Defense Organization, the idea was rejected with contemptuous haste. Egypt and the Arabs saw in the proposal only an attempt to rivet permanent Western domination on the area under the guise of common defense.

Military Rulers

The present military government in Egypt, headed by Lieut. Col. Gamal Abdul Nasser, is more realistic and less demagogic than its civilian predecessors. As military men, the present rulers realize that the talk of a Middle East defense system without the help of forces from outside the area is illusory. Similarly, Colonel Nasser, at least, has said that a policy of neutrality is feasible only for the strong, whereas Egypt is weak.

The signing of the accord, bringing to an end seventy-two years of British occupation, has done much to remove the irritation and resentment against the West here. It also has given Egypt the promise of full sovereignty within two years. It will fulfill the principal condition for collaboration by Egypt with the West in any sphere, namely the right of Egypt to deal as an equal.

But Egypt still is not ready to join a Western-sponsored defense pact, in the opinion of most diplomatic observers. There exists here a residue of suspicion of Britain and her Allies that makes such action unlikely for some time. At the same time there is a tendency among all classes of society to yearn unrealistically for a policy of neutrality that somehow would divert the tides of war from this critical area—virtually floating on oil and joining together three continents.

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