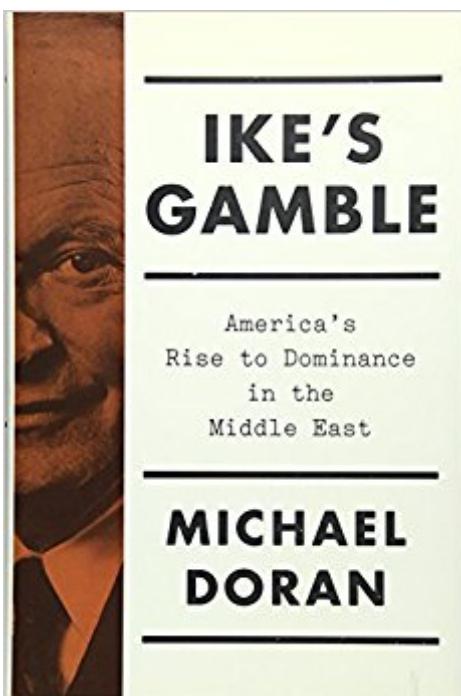


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# Ike's Gamble: America's Rise To Dominance In The Middle East



## Synopsis

This major retelling of the Suez Crisis of 1956— one of the most important events in the history of US policy in the Middle East— shows how President Eisenhower came to realize that Israel, not Egypt, is America’s strongest regional ally. In 1956 President Nasser of Egypt moved to take possession of the Suez Canal, thereby bringing the Middle East to the brink of war. The British and the French, who operated the canal, joined with Israel in a plan to retake it by force. Despite the special relationship between England and America, Dwight Eisenhower intervened to stop the invasion. In *Ike’s Gamble*, Michael Doran shows how Nasser played the US, invoking America’s opposition to European colonialism to drive a wedge between Eisenhower and two British Prime Ministers, Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden. Meanwhile, in his quest to make himself the strongman of the Arab world, Nasser was making weapons deals with the USSR and destabilizing other Arab countries that the US had been courting. The Suez Crisis was his crowning triumph. In time, Eisenhower would conclude that Nasser had duped him, that the Arab countries were too fractious to anchor America’s interests in the Middle East, and that the US should turn instead to Israel. Affording deep insight into Eisenhower and his foreign policy, this fascinating and provocative history provides a rich new understanding of how the US became the power broker in the Middle East.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 304 pages

Publisher: Free Press (October 11, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1451697759

ISBN-13: 978-1451697759

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 37 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #306,715 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #118 in Books > History > Africa > Egypt #596 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Middle Eastern #1173 in Books > History > Middle East

## Customer Reviews

“This book is subversively revisionist history with sharp relevance to the present. . . .

[A] deeply researched, tightly argued and accessibly concise book. . . . [Doran] writes with the

authority of a scholar and the familiarity of a senior policy adviser. (David Frum The New York Times Book Review) Mr. Doran illuminates a narrative with which very few non-specialists will be familiar. . . . A thoroughly researched, closely argued work of traditional diplomatic history. (James Traub Wall Street Journal) "This is a story that has been told many times, but seldom with the depth and stylistic elegance of Ike's Gamble. Michael Doran does not just challenge the prevailing historiography, he turns it on its head." (Ray Takeyh The Weekly Standard) "The failure of the British-French invasion of Egypt in 1956 was one of the seminal events of the second half of the twentieth century: it marked the end of Britain's and France's aspirations to world leadership. America's involvement is brilliantly described in Ike's Gamble, a thoughtful and articulate account of the evolution of America's role in that fateful period. (Henry A. Kissinger) "Deeply researched, well-written and powerfully persuasive, this book revises everything we've come to accept about America's role in the Middle East in the 1950s. This highly readable and remarkably forthright book explains how America changed from being a mere 'honest broker' in Middle Eastern affairs to being a committed player. (Professor Andrew Roberts, Lehrman Institute Distinguished Fellow, New-York Historical Society) "[Doran] fits the Suez crisis into a broader argument about American policy in the Middle East during the Eisenhower administration. . . . Ike's Gamble [is] a timely intervention into current debates. Obama won't read it, but Hillary Clinton should." (Adam Kirsch Tablet) "Ike's Gamble is a brilliant and fascinating story, compellingly told, of American politics, government, and foreign policy. Doran paints a fascinating portrait of how American foreign policy is designed, how mistakes are made, and how Eisenhower came to understand the errors that had strengthened America's enemies. (Elliott Abrams, Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, Council on Foreign Relations) "Riveting, original, and deeply relevant. . . . This is a history of the formative Cold War years that continue to shape current conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and other parts of the region. Anyone interested in the contemporary Middle East and U.S. foreign policy should read this book. (Jeremi Suri, Author of Liberty's Surest Guardian: American Nation-Building from the Founders to Obama) "With this highly original and persuasive new book, Mike Doran offers a fresh interpretation of Eisenhower's Middle East policy. Doran also sheds new light on the complexities of the Middle East and American policy challenges there today. This is a compelling history by an accomplished scholar. (William Inboden, Executive Director and William Powers, Jr. Chair, the Clements Center for National Security at UT-Austin) "Doran is so good

at bringing Eisenhower and his challenges to life that one can't avoid making comparisons with the tough choices confronting the United States today. I can't think of another book that so thoroughly challenged my assumptions about America's role in the Middle East. (Will McCants, author of *The Isis Apocalypse* and Director, Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World at The Brookings Institution) "A detailed analysis of the context for the Suez Crisis of 1956. . . . A disturbing history that clearly reveals the dangerous collective American delusion" about the Middle East, which the author believes still persists today. (Kirkus Reviews)

Michael Doran has served as a Middle East advisor in the White House and as a deputy assistant secretary of defense. An alumnus of Stanford and Princeton Universities, he has held several academic positions and is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, where he specializes in Middle East security issues. He lives in Washington, DC.

Michael Doran is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. Doran reviews Eisenhower's Middle East strategy mainly from a US perspective. It is a riveting read. When Eisenhower became president in 1953, the Arab world was still tied to the West. Britain and France still had significant influence. The Soviet Union did not have any allies in the region. By the end of his second term, Britain and France were no longer players in the region and Egypt, Syria, and Iraq had moved into the Soviet camp. Doran believes that Ike misunderstood the Middle East and later admitted to Nixon and the Israeli ambassador that he made a mistake in backing Egypt over Britain, France, and Israel during the Suez Crisis of 1956. Doran criticizes Ike for abandoning America's friends. John Foster Dulles was Eisenhower's Secretary of State. Dulles believed that there were three problems in the Middle East: Soviet communism, European imperialism, and Zionism. He wanted to move the Arabs into America's orbit. Ike and Dulles concluded that the Arabs hated the imperialists (e.g., Britain and France) and the Jews. They concluded that the US had to side with Arab nationalists like Egypt's dictator Gamal Abdel Nasser. Ike and Dulles decided that for the US to win friends in the Arab world they had to throw Britain, France, and Israel under the bus. Eisenhower assumed that the Arabs behaved as a unified bloc, especially with respect to Israel. Ike and Dulles wanted Nasser to be their partner, like the Shah of Iran. Nasser came to power via a coup in 1952. Ike and Dulles gave Nasser everything he wanted. However, Nasser wanted to be more than an American puppet. He wanted to lead the Arab world and believed in pan-Arab

nationalism. He also sought to eliminate other Arab rivals. Ike persuaded the British to leave Egypt. The British had a military base which guarded the Suez Canal. Doran does not stress the importance of the canal to the Europeans. The Suez Canal was built by the French in 1869 and was owned by French and British investors. The canal was 100 miles long and an important waterway between Asia and Europe. Two-thirds of Britain and France's oil came through the canal. The US built Nasser a powerful, state-of-the-art broadcasting system, expecting that Nasser would use this equipment to help unify the Arabs behind the US. Instead, Nasser used it to broadcast his pan-Arab propaganda, which was anti-Western and anti-Israeli. Every Arab household in the region heard his message. Nasser was undermining the Western position in the Middle East and Ike was helping him. Nasser wanted to destroy Israel and was the instigator of the Six Day War in 1967. In 1956 Israeli intelligence believed that Nasser planned to attack Israel. Egypt was acquiring military equipment and a new Air Force from the Soviets. The Israelis wanted to strike before the Egyptian military became too powerful. Two weeks after British troops had left Egypt, Nasser nationalized the canal. Britain and France decided to help Israel and also retake the canal. The three countries met in Paris to coordinate the use of military force against Egypt. Britain was worried that the pro-Soviet Nasser would interrupt Europe's oil supplies. Nasser was also stirring up trouble in France's North African colonies. The three countries did not tell Eisenhower what they were doing although the CIA claimed that Ike knew what was going on. The Israelis launched a ground attack. Britain destroyed Egypt's air force which had Russian fighter bombers. Britain and France followed up by landing troops in Egypt. Britain was a third of the way through capturing the canal when it pulled the plug on the operation because of American pressure. Eisenhower went ballistic. He demanded that the attacking forces evacuate Egypt immediately and imposed crippling economic sanctions on France and Britain. Against Israel, Ike threatened sanctions. At the United Nations, he sided with the Soviet Union. Eisenhower pondered, "How could we possibly support Britain and France if in doing so we lose the whole Arab world?" Eisenhower brought Britain's economy to the verge of collapse and it cost British Prime Minister Anthony Eden his career. Nasser emerged from the conflict much stronger and more hostile to American interests. The president expected gratitude from the Arabs, instead, Nasser got the credit and became a pan-Arab hero. The main problem was that Nasser had already decided to work with the Soviets. Empowered and emboldened by his "victory" over the imperialists, Nasser immediately began to undermine other pro-Western countries in the region, particularly Syria, Iraq, and Jordan. Eventually, the US woke up to Nasser's duplicity. Dulles noted in 1958 following

the fall of the Iraqi government that Nasser “enjoyed an unbroken series of successes, due largely to our support. Our actions had enabled Nasser to emerge as a great hero, who seemingly took on the great powers and came out with a victory.” Years later, Richard Nixon wrote in the 1980s, “I talked to Eisenhower about Suez; he told me it was his major foreign policy mistake.” Anthony Eden was concerned about maintaining world order in a post-colonial world which contained nationalist third world dictators. Eden had been British foreign secretary 1935-1938 and resigned over Chamberlain’s policy of appeasement. Eden spoke German and had met Hitler in 1935. He and Hitler discovered at a dinner that they had served in trenches opposite one another in WW1. They happily sketched out their respective positions on the back of a dinner card. Eden was a captain and Hitler a corporal. However, Eden realized that Hitler was a threat. His French counterpart at the dinner suggested that had Eden shot Hitler at the time it would have saved everyone a lot of trouble. Eden also spoke Farsi and Arabic and understood the Middle East. He met Nasser in 1955 and compared to him to Mussolini. He believed that appeasing Nasser, just like Hitler, was a mistake. According to Doran, the US would continue to pay for its mistake and not just in the Middle East. Doran notes that when the United States was stuck in Vietnam, Britain and France had refused to help. Doran does not discuss how Suez was viewed in Europe. The lesson that the French, Germans, and Israelis took away was that they could never fully trust the Americans. German Chancellor Adenauer completely supported the attack and was appalled that the Americans had sided with Nasser and the Soviets. The Soviets threatened Britain and France with nuclear war and that seemed OK with Ike. The creation of the EU started out as a reaction to Suez. Germany and France concluded that the only way to have influence and avoid being bullied was to work together. France left NATO in 1966. Israel has kept its distance as well. In the words of Moshe Dayan, the Israeli general who delivered victory in the Six Day War: “Our American friends give us money, arms, and advice. We take the money, we take the arms but we decline the advice.” Doran implies that many people in Washington still don’t understand the Middle East. He mentions that Chuck Hagel, who was a US Senator and Obama’s Defense Secretary, believed that Ike handled Suez brilliantly.

The book draws a great picture of how misconception or a paradigm can mislead policy. The State Department Arabist were so in love with Arab Nationalism that they became shills for Nasser made him into a hero and led Ike to the greatest policy fiasco until Bush. Unfortunately Obama did not read history of the Near East, he would have learnt that it is counter productive to be an honest broker

between Arabs or between them and Israel. Either way the book paints a great scenario of the historical events with the perspective of time. Finally it is clear that the US intervention of 1956 Suez Crisis planted the seeds of the Six Day War and the rest is history. Loved the honest impartial narrative.

I just finished Mike Doran's Ike's Gamble about the Eisenhower administration's faulty approach to the Middle East. It is a must read for any Israel advocate. I have consistently maintained that President Eisenhower was the worst President for the US-Israel relationship, and this book proves it. As for the book itself, it flows smoothly and is an easy read. Doran puts you in the room for high powered meetings. You feel like you are back in the 1950's and are incredulous at the mistakes being made. I was impressed by the author's highlighting of alternate theories and why he chose his approach. I highly recommend it!

Excellent book, which provides insight into the diplomacy of the USA in the Middle East in the 1950s. It shows how, by waving the flag of democracy and anti-imperialism, Washington muzzled the British and French aspiration to recover grip on the Suez canal and topple Nasser, while it replaced them as the major Western player in the region. However it misses the wider picture; namely, that the main purpose of the US was to keep the influence of the USSR in the World, even if it meant supporting dictators. The trouble is that such policy, which worked in Latin America didn't work with Nasser, who had a mind of his own and craved to become the Arab World leader, regardless of where he could muster support. While reading this book, as well as Alex Von Tunzelmann's "Blood and Sand", one wonders how so many lessons on the Middle East issues have been forgotten.

Very good book on the developments of American interest in the Middle East. Most reading it would be surprised at the anti-Israel bias that existed in the UK foreign office as well as in the US state department. I was half hoping mention would have been made that President Truman recognized the state of Israel over the objections of his professional diplomats as a direct result of a fact-finding mission report and recommendation by then well-known pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fort Worth and prominent pro-Israel Christian leader J. Frank Norris.

Sorry, folks, this book is "bad read." It appears to have been cut down from a longer manuscript, and is now VERY tightly written. The focus is almost exclusively on what one person said or wrote

to another, with little intervening descriptive material and context setting. I am generally familiar with the history of the Middle East, with Nasser's rise to power, and the Suez crisis, etc., and can't really say I learned much from this book. It would be hard to agree with the reviewers' blurbs that the book is "deeply researched," "well written," "powerfully persuasive," "riveting," etc. If you want to grasp the basic interpretation about Eisenhower's ideas about the Middle East, and how they changed over time, do read the Conclusion (15 pages). In my opinion, this is a 260-page book that should have been an article.

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