**Rewriting history? Admiral Lord Mountbatten’s efforts to distance himself from the 1956 Suez crisis**

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*The First Sea Lord’s offer to resign as an Anglo-French taskforce sailed to seize the Suez Canal in November 1956 became known following his retirement. Mountbatten oversaw naval preparations with consummate professionalism, although his praise for British forces’ seizure of Port Said was tempered by admiration of the French, and not shared by all Combined Operations veterans. The Observer’s David Astor actually opposed the invasion, and was passed information by a dissenting Mountbatten. An ageing Mountbatten’s criticism of collusion led to his advancing an alternative version of events highly favourable to himself, which protagonists such as Lord Hailsham publicly contested.*

An official photographer at Chequers on 24 September 1956 caught the Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Lord Mountbatten with his guard down. In an informal shot of the Prime Minister and his military advisers, only the First Sea Lord acknowledges the camera. The bespoke suit seems ill-fitting, the cigar appears incongruous, and the stance belies self-assurance. For once the photogenic aristocrat looks older than his 56 years. Unusually for Mountbatten, the photograph conveys the impression of a man uncomfortable with himself. It’s a rare moment, but in retrospect revealing. The Prime Minister has his back to the camera, and Mountbatten’s body language signals indifference to whatever Anthony Eden is saying.[[1]](#footnote-1)

With the benefit of hindsight one can read too much into a single image. Yet, according to Mountbatten, that Sunday was the only occasion during the Suez crisis that he found himself alone with Eden, addressing him bluntly as a friend and not in the measured tones of a military adviser.[[2]](#footnote-2) Mountbatten’s views were well-known, witness an early telephone call to Eden expressing his fears that Nasser’s nationalisation of the Suez Canal in late July would lead ultimately to an attack on Egypt. Within the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) and Eden’s de facto ‘war cabinet’, the Egypt Committee, the First Sea Lord urged a diplomatic solution, fearing that an Anglo-French seizure of the Canal Zone would destabilise the Middle East, undermine the authority of the UN, divide the Commonwealth, and diminish Britain’s global standing. However contradictory Mountbatten’s behaviour at the time there seems no reason to question the sincerity of his beliefs. Here after all was a chief of staff uniquely qualified to comment upon the prevailing force of anti-colonial, nationalist sentiment across the developing nations of southern Asia and the Middle East.[[3]](#footnote-3)

On two occasions he drafted letters of resignation; the second time on the eve of battle, only for Lord Hailsham as First Lord of the Admiralty to insist, with Eden’s full backing, that he remain at his post. The question arises as to how seriously Mountbatten considered leaving the position his whole career had been focused upon attaining; not least because he continued to fulfil his responsibilities as head of the Royal Navy in a suitably professional and efficient manner. Indeed the paradox regarding Mountbatten’s behaviour throughout the Suez crisis is highlighted by his being the first chief of staff to learn of the protocol signed with the French and Israelis at Sèvres on 25 October. In retirement he was highly critical of collusion, and yet following the United Nations ceasefire he was characteristically thorough in removing from Royal Navy records evidence of conspiracy.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Mountbatten’s credentials as a stalwart opponent of invasion are further compromised by his insistence later in life that Eden should have accepted his initial advice to stage a rapid *coup de main*. When the chiefs of staff met ministers in Downing Street late on the night of 26 July Mountbatten proposed that the Mediterranean Fleet sail from Malta to collect the two Commandos stationed on Cyprus, and with carrier based air support secure a bridgehead on the Canal from Port Said south to Qantara. For Sir Gerald Templer, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, an isolated assault force signalled another Arnhem. The belief of both the Army and the RAF in the need to deploy overwhelming force meant a lengthy delay in the arrival of armoured support, with suitable logistical back-up. Nevertheless Eden insisted that two battalions of Royal Marines could easily withstand any Egyptian counter-offensive. However, a cautious Mountbatten now lined up alongside the other chiefs and withdrew his original suggestion. Despite extensive documentary and oral evidence that he changed his mind – including his own recollection of the meeting, as recorded seven weeks later – an elderly Mountbatten insisted this not to have been the case, and that an early opportunity to negotiate from strength was lost.[[5]](#footnote-5)

‘A great man’s well-attested habit of improving the historical record’ is not unusual, but for Mountbatten this was the norm.[[6]](#footnote-6) His respect for accurate recollection was at best cavalier and at worst malign, witness nearly four decades refusing to accept any criticism of the disastrous Dieppe raid in August 1942.[[7]](#footnote-7) This essay focuses upon the aftermath of the Suez crisis, linking the operation with arguably Mountbatten’s most controversial tenure of command, at Combined Operations from late 1941 through to the autumn of 1943.

Mountbatten’s solipsistic perspective on events in the summer and autumn of 1956 began to reach a wider audience after his retirement as CDS nine years later. In his 1966 account of the Suez episode he insisted that any personal disagreement with the nature and purpose of the mission had at no time affected his obligation as head of the Royal Navy to ensure all personnel under his command performed to the highest standard of operational efficiency.[[8]](#footnote-8) This was the view he had formally placed on record even as the crisis was unfolding; and which he asked Sir William Davis, the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, to endorse in a post-operation memorandum.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Four years after leaving the MOD Mountbatten informed television viewers that his status as a former chief of staff prevented him from commenting upon the Suez crisis; and then did precisely that. Mountbatten projected to a primetime audience, doubtless including an incandescent Eden, an image of ultra-professionalism. Faced with a policy ‘inspired by very different ideas’ from those he held himself, ‘I carried out my duties, but it would be foolish to pretend that I did not have very grave doubts about the whole thing.’ Experiencing ‘the extraordinary position of being neither at war nor peace,’ the armed forces faced a unique challenge, and yet ‘the operation went forward with great efficiency. The Services did not let the country down, I am sure of that.’ This was the view reiterated in 1972 when Mountbatten was filmed providing a franker, more contestable account of Suez, with a view to posthumous screening.[[10]](#footnote-10)

As a serving chief of staff Mountbatten had enjoyed an unusually prominent profile. Highly political, he cultivated a keen sense of history. Having adroitly moved from the periphery to the heart of the Royal Family, survived the vicissitudes of wartime command, and emerged from the violent partition of India with his reputation intact, he was deeply conscious of the power and influence he wielded at both ends of The Mall. Ever his father’s son, the First Sea Lord enjoyed the trappings of office, yet remained the ultra-conscientious officer and loyal servant of the crown; in time of war bearing ultimate responsibility for the combat performance of the Navy and of the Royal Marines.

In 1956 the Corps was still very much the creation of Combined Operations, hence Mountbatten’s keen personal interest. In the November assault on Port Said two Commandos spearheaded British forces’ first major amphibious operation since the Second World War, while the other pioneered carrier-based helicopter landings. What by 1960 would become the new orthodoxy was seen only four years earlier by many within the Admiralty as the First Sea Lord’s costly obsession. The speed of deploying airborne troops vindicated Mountbatten’s insistence on Royal Navy helicopters’ offensive potential, with *Bulwark* and then *Albion* converted from fixed-wing to commando carriers before deployment on active service in the Middle and Far East. In this instance at least Mountbatten was entitled to boast of his pioneering role.[[11]](#footnote-11) True to form he rarely missed an opportunity to point out the full extent of his achievement, albeit initially relying on others to do the job for him. Thus Bernard Fergusson’s quasi-official history of Combined Operations, *The Watery Maze*, highlighted the dramatic descent of 45 Commando on to the quay, and the speedy evacuation of wounded marines back to the carriers.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Given Mountbatten’s heavy involvement in the drafting of *The Watery Maze*, it comes as no surprise that Fergusson portrayed the seizure of Port Said as a stunning triumph over adversity.[[13]](#footnote-13) The book located the landings within the history of an organisation moulded by Mountbatten, restating a familiar message that the lessons so painfully learnt at Dieppe in August 1942 would never be forgotten. The Senior Service’s belated embrace of air power (‘The Fleet Air Arm covered itself with glory’) enhanced its reputation, *and* that of its most senior officer. Furthermore, *The Watery Maze* allowed its patron to criticise Eden at a distance. Thus the assault upon Port Said, ‘was a model operation. Its worst feature was not a professional military one: it was the degree of control which the Government sought to exercise throughout.’[[14]](#footnote-14)

For this reason as Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) in the early 1960s Mountbatten urged a thorough reappraisal of the Suez episode. In 1963 he protested vigorously when Macmillan over-ruled the COSC’s approval of a Joint Services Staff College decision to re-examine the 1956 campaign.[[15]](#footnote-15) Mountbatten was confident that operations undertaken since 1956, most recently in Borneo, bore out his immediate post-invasion assessment: that at sea, on land, and in the air the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines had performed to the best of their ability, determining their lead role in any future amphibious operations.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Following retirement in 1965 Mountbatten’s attitude towards criticism of the Suez expedition was no different from his response to any sceptic questioning the other military operations for which he held direct responsibility, not least the raid on Dieppe. All hostile opinion was dealt with by the exercise of gentle persuasion or ruthless pressure, a relentless search for favourable evidence, and an uncompromising restatement on screen or in print of the most favourable own version of events. Nor did this refusal to countenance criticism in any way diminish, as Mountbatten’s correspondence from the 1970s confirms. The more exaggerated the ageing hero’s claims, the more assiduous his search for supportive documentation.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Spurred on by the Suez expedition’s C-in-C, General Charles Keightley, in the spring of 1973 Mountbatten maintained a spirited correspondence with regius professor Michael Howard in the spring of 1973. He complained that a review in *The Times* had made reference to the armed forces’ ‘humiliating performance’ against the Egyptians. Howard was suitably respectful, muting his formidable intellectual firepower. More sympathetic was the playwright Ian Curteis whom producer John Brabourne took to meet his father-in-law on 28 May 1975. At this point Curteis was not the controversial figure he later became, hence Mountbatten’s readiness to discuss Suez. Methodical and meticulous, Curteis promised his screenplay would indicate how well the three services had performed. In December 1977 he warned Mountbatten to expect a delay in screening: ‘As it’s still such a sensitive subject – people I talk to about it get terribly worked up almost immediately, as if it’s still happening – I suspect it could be a bumpy run.’[[18]](#footnote-18)

Clearly it was important for Mountbatten to demonstrate that his professional conduct was in no way affected by his personal beliefs, but as in every other aspect of the Suez episode his recollection of the three services’ fighting efficiency more and more reflected the ideal rather than the real. Had Mountbatten revisited the Admiralty’s final assessment of the Royal Navy’s contribution to Operation MUSKETEER he would have found the relevant fleet commanders qualifying his initial enthusiasm. They didn’t pull their punches when lambasting ministerial micro-management (‘…there is the danger that political considerations may so emasculate our plans, organisation and the conduct of operations as to render them impotent’); but neither did they shrink from highlighting failures unique to the Navy, not least regarding logistics and communications. On the positive side, ‘the whole operation provided compelling evidence to all of the flexibility and ubiquity of carrier-borne air power.’ On the negative, no less than seventy-two recommendations emphasised an urgent need to rebuild reserves of landing-craft and Royal Fleet Auxiliary support ships, revive continuous commando training in amphibious landings, and restore purpose-built communications headquarters.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The lamentable record of HMS *Tyne* as an ad hoc taskforce headquarters, and the breakdown in sea-land-air signals at critical moments during the fight for Port Said, reminded planning staff of the *Calpe*’s misfortunes at Dieppe; Combined Operations had responded speedily in the autumn of 1942, providing a purpose-built off-shore command centre in time for the North African landings. Although not the author, the First Sea Lord’s influence was obvious in almost every paragraph of the Royal Navy’s post-Suez wake-up call. The admirals’ conclusions were consistent with those arrived at by the Way Ahead Committee, commissioned by Mountbatten the previous year with a remit to reduce manpower and render the Navy fit for purpose. This was scarcely surprising seeing as the report was signed off by Sir Guy Grantham, as C-in-C Mediterranean Fleet an ardent advocate of reform.[[20]](#footnote-20)

In reality the seizure of Port Said was marred by a succession of fatal errors and miscalculations, many of them involving the RAF. But neither were the Navy and the Marines exempt or unaffected, with the most serious incident involving men of 45 Commando coming under attack from aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm. Regret in the Admiralty report and then in *The Watery Maze* that marines sacrificed commando training to conduct counter-insurgency operations in Cyprus hinted at Mountbatten’s original frustration over the time taken to secure a bridgehead, and the subsequent insistence that a swift *coup de main* could have occurred had his initial advice been accepted.[[21]](#footnote-21) Also pursuing Eoka guerrillas were units of the Parachute Regiment, in early August 1956 brought home to retrain for jumping into a hostile landing zone. As Fergusson tacitly acknowledged, the contrast with Jacques Massu’s Algerian-based 10th Para Division was striking.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Fighting the FLN for 18 months had not blunted the French paratroopers fighting ability, nor their ruthlessness (as confirmed by the murder of Egyptian civilians in Port Fuad). Carrying superior weaponry and flown in tail-loading aircraft, the elite French forces were used to regularly jumping at low altitude, rapidly securing an offensive base, and then pressing home their advantage. For many British observers the catastrophic defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 had compounded post-1940 prejudices regarding the French Army. Yet the all too obvious crisis of command and control within the Fourth Republic had obscured the Expeditionary Corps’ previous successes when fighting the Viet Minh.[[23]](#footnote-23) The most remarkable aspect of Dien Bien Phu was not that the colonial regiments and the Foreign Legion surrendered, but that they were able to maintain control of the perimeter and then the actual air base for so long.[[24]](#footnote-24) In planning and then implementing MUSKETEER the French were the junior partners, curbing the offensive instincts honed in Vietnam and deferring to British planners haunted by Arnhem. Templer, Keightley, the taskforce’s land commander Sir Hugh Stockwell, and their staffs, were all in agreement that any airborne vanguard must be relieved by overwhelming force as speedily as possible, and only then should a major assault be launched to seize the Canal Zone.[[25]](#footnote-25) Naturally there were exceptions to the stereotype story of a *misentente* *cordiale*, witness French officers’ suspicion of the cerebral and unashamedly anglophile André Beaufre, the deputy taskforce commander. The colonial veterans’ fear that a general with no experience of the war in Indo-China might be tainted by Anglo Saxon caution was ironic given Beaufre’s later indictment of the British.[[26]](#footnote-26) Equally ironic was General Massu’s support late on 5 November for British efforts to secure a formal surrender of Port Said, and when this failed not to launch a night-time offensive.[[27]](#footnote-27)

To suggest the invasion was simply a story of British consolidation and French frustration is too crude an interpretation, but this was how the failure to advance south was perceived in Paris. In 1957 Mountbatten read *Le Figaro*’s serialisation of *Les Secrets de l’Expedition d’Egypte* by Merry and Serge Bromberger. Rapidly translated into English, this was a lively, readable account of the expedition by embedded war correspondents insistent that the veterans of the Régiments Parachutistes Coloniaux were more offensive-minded than their British counterparts, and that the planned drop at Qantara should have gone ahead. A similar view was expressed by Terence Robertson when the Canadian journalist moved on from exposing incompetence at Dieppe to uncovering collusion at Sèvres. By the late 1960s few in Britain fretted over the taskforce’s failure to seize the Canal Zone, as the prevailing view was that it should not have been there in the first place. Nevertheless those still insistent that Anthony Eden and Guy Mollet should have negotiated from a position of strength found further reason to admire France’s aggressive posture when General Beaufre’s *L’Expédition de Suez* appeared in English.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Beaufre detailed fundamental strategic differences between respective command structures, with the British service chiefs and their staffs prioritising political convenience over military necessity. He highlighted the contrast between the respect shown to French forces in the field and the cavalier treatment of their commanders at every stage of the operation. A rapid response at the outset would have created a *fait accompli*, but the longer Nasser negotiated the more Britain required serious provocation in order to justify armed intervention. Like the less enthusiastic members of Eden’s Egypt Committee, Beaufre recognised that UN diplomacy and an open Canal negated any obvious *casus belli*. He readily acknowledged that because of Algeria the French had a different agenda to that of the British, but scarcely mentioned the scale of support provided to Israel between 1948 and 1956.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Neither did Mountbatten when recalling Suez, because either the Royal Navy scarcely appreciated the full extent of French-Israeli collaboration, or more likely it chose to turn a blind eye. In Cyprus the taskforce’s deputy naval commander, Vice Admiral Barjot, maintained a communications link between Tel Aviv and his headquarters; and on 31 October the cruiser *Georges Leger* was allowed to leave the convoy and support the Israelis’ advance into Gaza. Any evidence that the Admiralty tolerated such activities reinforced the charge of collusion, which naturally Mountbatten sought to disassociate himself from. In any case the Israeli air force’s ‘friendly fire’ attack on the frigate HMS *Crane* revived a scarcely muted antipathy towards ‘the Jews’: CORDAGE, the operational element of Britain’s diplomatic and military support for King Hussein, had called for a rigorous naval response when ‘aiding Jordan against Israeli aggression.’[[30]](#footnote-30)

Beaufre was measured yet telling in his criticism of the British, as befit a soldier-intellectual well known to Mountbatten in the late 1950s and the early 1960s as a NATO technocrat and strategic thinker. He shared the former viceroy’s pragmatic view of decolonisation as a ‘disease’ by no means fatal to the west, and warranting accommodation not aggression. In this respect Beaufre and Mountbatten shared a common view of the Egyptian expedition: ‘Its defeat, due first to the disarray of the West, and secondly to belated and over-deliberate execution, far from curing the disease, definitely aggravated it.’[[31]](#footnote-31) Where they differed was in the lesson of Suez for their respective nations’ ambitions to acquire a credible nuclear deterrent. By mid-1957 Macmillan had secured Eisenhower’s agreement to revive technical collaboration. Meanwhile Mountbatten focused upon repairing relations with the US Navy, as construction of *Dreadnought*, Britain’s first nuclear-powered submarine, depended heavily upon American technology. Across the Channel a chastened Beaufre welcomed Mollet’s decision in December 1956 to sanction the construction of prototype thermonuclear weapons, thereby reducing France’s dependence upon the United States. Over the next decade, as one of the most senior generals in the Fifth Republic, he articulated the strategic thinking behind de Gaulle’s commitment to a genuinely independent *force de frappe*.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Fluent in the language, and a former NATO commander in the Mediterranean, Mountbatten’s close contact with France’s military elite dated back to Combined Operations’ commando training of the Free French; and later SEAC’s problematic transfer of power following the surrender of Japanese forces occupying Indo-China. Recognised as a Francophile, Mountbatten was the initial contact for the French military on the first weekend of the crisis.[[33]](#footnote-33) Unlike the other service chiefs the First Sea Lord was surely appalled by the heavy handed and duplicitous treatment of the French delegation prior to General Keightley assuming overall command in mid-August. Security fears meant that on 8 August newly arrived French planners were told the taskforce would seize Port Said and not the actual objective at that time, Alexandria. French officers’ unhappy experience of subordinate command, culminating in adherence to an acquiescent Britain’s acceptance of a UN ceasefire, fuelled a residual anti-Atlanticism; the consequences of which Mountbatten was forced to confront when CDS.[[34]](#footnote-34) Inside Whitehall in the summer of 1956 he witnessed a clash of military cultures, with British planners’ inter-service collegial system the antithesis of France’s presumption that strong leadership meant swift action. With hindsight, Mountbatten’s subsequent promotion of service integration within the Ministry of Defence can be seen as an over-ambitious attempt to secure the best of both worlds: clear lines of accountability within an essentially functionalist model.[[35]](#footnote-35)

France’s contribution to MUSKETEER clearly influenced Mountbatten’s view of the operation. Mountbatten reconciled his insistence that all three services, not least his own, performed in exemplary fashion with a tacit acknowledgement that once the fighting began battle-hardened French elite forces had the edge. Their rapid seizure of Port Fuad and Raswa, while the British were still mopping up resistance in Port Said itself, signalled that once the Royal Navy had transferred control of the operation to Stockwell and his staff the momentum for swiftly moving forward waned. The French paras’ offensive mentality was seen as confirmation that a *coup de main* could have worked. France’s political and military elite thought so at the time, with Mountbatten in later life convincing himself that he too had always been of the same opinion.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The belief that speed and resolution had fallen victim to political expediency was a view shared by the writer, farmer and former staff officer at Combined Operations, Robert Henriques. A very different view of the expedition was expounded by Colonel Henriques’ junior colleague at Combined Operations Headquarters (COHQ), the *Observer*’s editor and proprietor, David Astor. Their respective attitudes towards Suez help inform our understanding of Mountbatten’s role in the affair. In *The Watery Maze* Fergusson noted how key figures from COHQ found themselves *dramatis personae* in the Suez episode, with Robert Laycock, Mountbatten’s successor at Richmond Terrace, the Governor of Malta, and a hawkish Antony Head elevated from the War Office to Minister of Defence in October 1956.[[37]](#footnote-37) Fergusson might have added General Charles Haydon, one-time commando chief and in 1956 responsible for Middle East intelligence. Mountbatten was aware how the Suez expedition drew upon the legacy of Combined Operations, one of whose members at a critical moment in the crisis replaced Sir Walter Monckton, the sole member of the Egypt Committee sensitive to the First Sea Lord’s gravest fears and doubts.

Brigadier Anthony Head had ended the war as COHQ’s most senior planner, and in parliament from July 1945 he put his military expertise to good use. He was clearly more involved than the other two service ministers in planning the invasion, and was often invited to attend meetings of the Egypt Committee. Yet it was only on 18 October that he replaced the unhappy Monckton, and entered the cabinet. The Prime Minister, ‘had no doubt that Anthony Head was the man for the job.’ Eden judged his new Minister of Defence a staunch ally, admired when bearing the full brunt of Labour’s anger in the Commons and entrusted on the eve of battle with joining the CIGS in Cyprus to brief Keightley on the terms of engagement. Forty-eight hours later, on the morning of 6 November, it was Head who articulated the most convincing case in cabinet for not accepting a ceasefire until the whole of the Canal Zone had been secured. Having shared the War Office’s fear of another MARKET GARDEN, Head now read the reality on the ground as suggesting rapid advance and early success.[[38]](#footnote-38)

In this respect the Minister of Defence’s thinking paralleled that of his old boss at Combined Ops, except that Head’s concern over civilian casualties never caused him to question the whole enterprise. It is unlikely he knew that the First Sea Lord had considered the intensity of military intervention, and then the act of invasion itself, as reason to resign. The tone and content of later correspondence over Suez suggests Head knew little if anything regarding Mountbatten’s threatened resignation.[[39]](#footnote-39) In any case Mountbatten would never have confided in his one-time subordinate in the same way that he shared his concerns with Walter Monckton, an old friend seen as far more of an equal. In 1956 Whitehall convention still allowed a troubled chief of staff to deal directly with his service minister and Downing Street, thereby negating any obligation to discuss such matters with the Minister of Defence. Mountbatten was perfectly entitled to seek advice on a personal basis from Monckton, but not necessarily from his successor.

Head was the one veteran of Combined Operations as intimately involved in the Suez operation as its former C-in-C. Robert Henriques’ credentials as a staff planner had been similarly impressive but his perspective on British intervention proved radically different, and much more that of the outsider. Henriques’ deep dislike of Mountbatten had prompted his eventual departure from COHQ, and in 1956 he judged the First Sea Lord as incompetent as the other chiefs of staff. Henriques asked why, with a convoy taking five days to sail from Malta to Egypt, the Admiralty had not demanded deep-water harbour facilities on Cyprus ahead of Britain evacuating the Canal Zone.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Henriques was a member of a well-known, long assimilated Anglo-Jewish family and previously indifferent to Zionism. However a visit to Israel in early 1956 made such a deep impression that the following September he undertook to offer his military expertise at a moment of national emergency. Haydon and Head each urged caution, but then the latter, at this point still outside the cabinet, gave Henriques a message for David Ben-Gurion. The Israeli premier was urged to avoid war with Jordan and to time an attack on Egypt to coincide with British military action. Britain would publicly condemn Israeli aggression but be supportive in subsequent peace talks. Head’s reputation for calmly thinking through every option was such that it seems hard to imagine this initiative was not sanctioned by Downing Street and/or the Foreign Office. In Tel Aviv the clandestine envoy duly delivered his message to a sceptical prime minister.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Henriques interpreted Head’s apparent indiscretion as one element within what he saw as a formidable body of evidence disproving the charge of collusion. In his version of events Ben-Gurion’s influenza had ruled out any secret trip to France, the delivery of military equipment had been delayed, and the Israeli Defence Forces’ last minute improvisation had indicated no foreknowledge of French let alone British intentions. Henriques dismissed the case for conspiracy in his reminiscence of the Sinai campaign written almost as the war unfolded. His celebration of Israel’s unique triumph over adversity appeared early in 1957, with extracts serialised in the *Daily Telegraph*. He was similarly dismissive in October 1959 when the *Spectator*, having advised readers not to vote Conservative in that month’s general election, revived its original charge of collusion. A lengthy article by Erskine Childers concluded that the French and Israeli governments had clearly conspired together, with the British a *de facto* partner. A heated correspondence between Childers and Henriques extended to other readers, including Bernard Fergusson.[[42]](#footnote-42)

The *Spectator*’s call for Eden to resign may have sent shock waves through the Carlton Club but its impact was muted, and today is largely forgotten. Not so the *Observer*’s op-ed pages in the issue of 4 November, the eve of British forces going into action. That Sunday’s editorials reflected David Astor’s pent-up fury. In the words of his biographer, ‘The leader [‘The Fallacy’] made such an impact precisely because of its tone; the *Observer* had always prided itself on its moderation and reasonableness.’[[43]](#footnote-43) Not only did the paper launch a fierce personal attack upon Eden, urging his party to cast aside their leader, but it accused Britain and France of conspiring with Israel: ‘This is surely the strangest police action in history.’[[44]](#footnote-44) For all the furore regarding the tone and language adopted in this and subsequent issues, the *Observer*’s principled opposition was consistent with its sympathetic coverage of anti-colonial movements in Africa and the Middle East. The instinctively liberal Astor had prioritised withdrawal from empire when repositioning his paper as a well-informed commentator on world events. Yet, as Richard Cockett recognised, Astor’s enlightened view of decolonisation remained compatible with the whole family’s ‘essential Atlanticism.’ Not only was Eden’s folly alienating Arab opinion and dividing the Commonwealth but it threatened the very fabric of the western alliance.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Cockett recorded David Astor asking Monckton on 1 November for confirmation of collusion, and only when the invasion was launched receiving a sympathetic but unhelpful reply.[[46]](#footnote-46) They may have moved in the same patrician circles but the former Minister of Defence and the editor of the *Observer* were not natural allies in the same way that Astor and the Mountbattens clearly were. It’s not known whether Astor attended a party on 30 October hosted by Dickie and Edwina, but the philanthropic educationalist and economist Mary Stocks did. The *Observer* trust’s newly appointed chair recalled the mood at Wilton Crescent that night: ‘…that was the moment I decided we were being governed by lunatics.’[[47]](#footnote-47) Lady Mountbatten saw no reason to disguise her instinctive opposition to military intervention, especially among friends; but as head of the Royal Navy her husband was clearly obliged to exercise discretion, not least regarding matters of national security.[[48]](#footnote-48)

If Mountbatten was foolish enough to try and undermine Eden’s position by leaking information to the press then David Astor was the most obvious confidant. On 19 August 1942 it had been Astor whom Mountbatten entrusted with controlling press coverage of returning Canadian regiments decimated in the debacle at Dieppe.[[49]](#footnote-49) Throughout the immediate postwar years the two men had proved of like mind regarding decolonisation in Africa and Asia, and Astor retained a healthy respect for his old boss. The two men came across each other in the normal course of events, but they clearly became a lot closer after 1956. Mountbatten would brief *Observer* correspondents and even while still on active service was interviewed by Kenneth Harris for a controversial profile in the paper’s inaugural colour supplement. From 1957 Astor became a weekend guest in Romsey. In July of that year he was invited by Mountbatten to have lunch at Broadlands with Nehru, after which he thanked his host ‘for the confidence you showed in me.’[[50]](#footnote-50)

That confidence had been evident ten months earlier when the First Sea Lord advised Astor as to whom the *Observer*’s Washington correspondent should contact for the US Navy’s view of the deteriorating crisis. An interview was arranged with no less a figure than NATO’s supreme commander in the Atlantic, Admiral Jerauld Wright. As instructed, Astor destroyed the letter, but Mountbatten typically ignored his own advice and preserved the reply. Wright and Mountbatten seemingly got on well, but that was no reason for the Chief of the Naval Staff to compromise his position by arranging for an American admiral to give an off the record briefing potentially critical of British foreign policy. Senior naval staff in Washington had initially approved of the Royal Navy’s preparations for war, but by early October the admirals had acceded to presidential insistence that a more detached, even hostile attitude be adopted.[[51]](#footnote-51)

If Astor and Mountbatten saw more of each other after 1956 perhaps it was because they shared a conspiracy of silence. A chief of staff, however distinguished and well-connected, was taking a huge risk in advancing his personal agenda via a Fleet Street ally. Such action was singularly ill-advised, and revealed a great deal about Mountbatten’s supreme self-confidence. It also constituted a breach of the Official Secrets Act. Not that Mountbatten was alone in leaking to the press, and thereby breaking the law. Monckton maintained regular contact with Mirror Newspapers’ senior executives, Hugh Cudlipp and Cecil King. Also, while the Foreign Office’s minister of state Anthony Nutting decided not to put the Americans in the picture, Monckton is assumed to have passed privileged information to the ambassador in London, Winthrop Aldrich.[[52]](#footnote-52)

In private and via his newspaper Astor charged Eden and Selwyn Lloyd with malpractice. The *Observer*’s lead editorial on 11 November, ‘The Question of Collusion’, is noteworthy for its accuracy and for its dependence upon unnamed sources in the United States. In later years the paper’s editor never revealed that on at least one occasion, possibly more, the First Sea Lord had acted in an inappropriate manner. The irony is that Astor was always adamant William Clark never compromised his position as Eden’s press secretary.[[53]](#footnote-53) Whatever the Prime Minister’s suspicions there is no evidence that Clark passed information to the newspaper which he had left the previous year and to which he would return in 1957. As the crisis came to a head Eden’s staff restricted Clark’s access to offices and meetings, leaving him dependent on veiled hints and informed guesses. His letters to Astor signalling a fear of collusion and an intention to resign were actually written after the editorials for the 4 November issue had been drafted.[[54]](#footnote-54) In point of fact Clark was singularly underwhelmed by his old employer’s diatribe: ‘…the *Observer* seemed hysterical and I was really too tired to read it, so I took it home and fell asleep reading that Eden must go. But me first.’[[55]](#footnote-55)

Clark, like Astor, found Monckton deeply unhappy but reluctant to resign: ‘He replied that even the rats (“and I am a rat”) must stay on the ship now, but the government would fall soon.’ The same day, 6 November, he found Mountbatten with more than a hint of *schadenfreude* relishing the next phase of the operation, namely its closure: ‘“I can’t think why they haven’t sacked me. I’ve said such outrageous things.”’ What’s striking about such a remark is that a chief of staff could say this to someone who, for all his credentials as an experienced journalist, was significantly junior to him in the Whitehall hierarchy. Clark’s diary records a surprising degree of candour and intimacy on Mountbatten’s part throughout the crisis. A refreshing egalitarianism perhaps, but the gravitas and discretion of his fellow chiefs of staff surely constituted more appropriate behaviour. Mountbatten wasn’t naïve re off the cuff remarks. He wanted Whitehall if not the wider world to know that he disapproved of Eden’s actions, and he could pose as the maverick secure in the knowledge that he would not – and could not – be sacked given the huge political ramifications.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Mountbatten could of course have forced the Prime Minister’s hand, as signalled by the letter of dissent he handed to the First Lord of the Admiralty on 2 November. Other than Mountbatten himself, the one person with a clear knowledge of whether or not he seriously intended resignation on the eve of invasion was Lord Hailsham. In early 1980 the former First Lord was invited by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, to read the transcript of a programme based upon Mountbatten’s filmed reminiscences of Suez. By now Lord Chancellor, Hailsham described the recently deceased Mountbatten’s remarks as ‘not history but fiction.’ His annoyance extended to writing a memorandum of correction, but in so doing he exposed his own lapses of memory.[[57]](#footnote-57)

That autumn the BBC pulled the second part of its late night series *Lord Mountbatten Remembers*. Edited and framed by Ludovic Kennedy, this extended tribute to a fallen hero was originally intended as six half-hour programmes of Mountbatten speaking from beyond the grave. In fact footage of the loquacious Lord Louis had been shot at Broadlands in the spring of 1972. Mountbatten had asked his son-in-law, the film producer John (Lord) Brabourne, to reunite for two weekends in May the same team that had made his much heralded TV life. The intention was to film a less inhibited record of Mountbatten’s career, suitable only for posthumous screening.[[58]](#footnote-58) The tongue was clearly a lot looser than in previous television appearances. Even so, Mountbatten’s comments in front of the camera were more temperate than the pre-production notes recorded on his cue cards. Nowhere was this more evident than in the episode on Suez which the BBC agreed not to broadcast: Mountbatten may have courted controversy by accusing Eden of abusing prime ministerial power, but at least he dropped the idea of declaring him ‘mad’.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Screened twice in August 1979 following Mountbatten’s assassination, Ludovic Kennedy’s film obituary had attracted warm praise. With his wartime experience in the Navy and past acquaintance with Mountbatten he seemed an obvious choice to work on *Lord Mountbatten Remembers*, recruiting the Prince of Wales to introduce the first episode. The series was seen as a coda to Kennedy’s obituary, but in fact Mountbatten had signalled shortly before his death an eagerness for the film footage to be screened in a suitable format. Prince Charles’s quiet decision to withdraw became known, but not Mountbatten’s request shortly before his death that the film shot seven years earlier be aired in his lifetime. In June 1979 the trustees of the Broadlands Archives and the BBC had agreed a contract, with the producer accepting that no programme would be broadcast if the Cabinet Office objected. Lord Brabourne admitted to Armstrong in July of the following year that, if not seriously injured when the IRA blew up Mountbatten’s boat in Mullaghmore harbour, he would have terminated negotiations with the BBC. Had this proved impossible then Brabourne would have insisted the Corporation respect the Cabinet Office’s power of veto. In the event no final signing took place, and in the convalescent Brabourne’s absence Kennedy and colleagues had pressed ahead with producing the six programmes.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Lord Brabourne clearly feared the series would portray his late father-in-law in an unfavourable light. One suspects the same view was held by the Queen given the access to all relevant correspondence enjoyed by her private secretary Sir Michael Palliser. The depth of briefing provided to Downing Street suggests a parallel concern on Mrs Thatcher’s part that such a high profile victim of Republican terrorism should so speedily become mired in controversy. The Broadlands trustees clearly sought to accommodate the Cabinet Office’s reservations regarding every programme, but most especially the episode on Suez. Sir Ian Trethowan, the BBC Director General, was similarly sympathetic to government concerns, witness the time of broadcast. Trethowan was wary of excessive editorial control at the behest of Whitehall, especially over an episode seen by his generation of broadcasters as television’s finest hour. No doubt he felt reluctant to go beyond asking that Kennedy accommodate specific requests to tailor the shooting script. Eventually, however, Trethowan had to order the programme be dropped. The Broadlands trustees had acceded to the wishes of the Cabinet Secretary and withdrew their permission to use the relevant film footage. Ironically therefore the absence of a legal agreement proved in the event to Brabourne’s advantage.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Armstrong’s principal concern regarding the Suez programme was the impact of Mountbatten’s trenchant comments upon Arab opinion at what the Foreign Office judged an especially sensitive time in the Middle East. Kennedy and his eventual champion at *The Times*, Bernard Levin, insisted that the situation was always sensitive; and hostile Arab opinion towards Britain might shift after hearing such a prominent figure denounce Eden’s adventurism. Both Kennedy and Levin rejected Armstrong’s insistence on a ‘breach of confidential relationships,’ as defined four years earlier in the *Report of the Privy Counsellors on Ministerial Memoirs*. They pointed out that Lord Radcliffe’s committee, set up in response to the furore surrounding publication of Richard Crossman’s diaries, had recommended ministers and officials wait 15 years before airing their views in public.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Armstrong and his advisers rejected this argument on the grounds that all the ministers named except Eden were alive, and in the case of Lord Hailsham still holding high office. Kennedy and his director cut some of the harsher remarks concerning Hailsham, Macmillan, and the Earl of Selkirk, but their refusal to remove Mountbatten’s repeated criticism of Eden was seen by Armstrong as confirmation that the programme could not be broadcast in a meaningful and mutually acceptable form. Aware of Mrs Thatcher’s concern for the impact on a now elderly Macmillan, and urged on by the Lord Chancellor, the Cabinet Secretary refused further compromise.[[63]](#footnote-63) Buckingham Palace continued to monitor a dispute that had begun just four months after Mountbatten’s death, but was only picked up by the press the following summer. It finally became a matter of public and parliamentary debate over a fortnight in November, when Levin’s column included Mountbatten’s leaked comments regarding Eden and collusion. The size and prominence of Levin’s first article generated letters to *The Times*, above all Hailsham’s lengthy explanation as to why, ‘Lord Mountbatten’s memory must have played him completely false by the time that the programme was recorded.’ The Lord Chancellor’s carefully crafted blend of respect and rebuttal had been seen and approved by the Cabinet Office. Prior to this Armstrong had himself appeared in the correspondence columns of the *Listener* when he agreed to Ludovic Kennedy replicating a letter within the latter’s postscript to an account of the affair published the previous week.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Neither Kennedy nor Levin debated the accuracy of comments made in the programme, although this was crucial to their argument that ‘the truth’ was being suppressed ‘in the teeth of Lord Mountbatten’s wishes.’ Noting that ‘the Establishment censorship machine had won a notable victory,’ Levin insisted that his intention was not to adjudicate in a conflict of testimony, but merely allow ‘Mountbatten be heard posthumously through the gag that had been tied round his words.’[[65]](#footnote-65) The controversy was shortlived, and rates only a passing mention in Mountbatten’s official biography. Armstrong was particularly sensitive to the feelings of Lady Avon, and to the scarcely disguised view among Mountbatten’s relatives that his performance across all six programmes could be construed as unflattering and perhaps even demeaning. However, the Cabinet Secretary’s abiding concern remained the impact of the Suez programme upon all parties in the Middle East conflict, both Arab and Israeli. On this matter the Cabinet Office, Downing Street and the Foreign Office were all in agreement, with Buckingham Palace hardly likely to demur.[[66]](#footnote-66)

The harsh reality was that, however flawed or faithful his memory of Suez, an elderly Mountbatten found it increasingly hard to distinguish between exaggeration and actuality. This was especially ironic given his obsession with bequeathing to both family and nation a definitive archive of his life. That same archive, replete with duplicates of official documents, contained the evidence contradicting his most extravagant claims.[[67]](#footnote-67) Mountbatten was of course by no means alone in insisting that all three services, led by the Royal Navy, had performed in exemplary fashion when securing control of Port Said and its immediate hinterland. The long shadow of Dieppe lay over any amphibious attack on a large port, especially when the build-up to the actual landings was so ponderous, prolonged, and problematic. Yet the overall operation, not least the use of carrier-based commandos, was testimony to the lasting legacy of Combined Operations. The First Sea Lord’s strong sense of personal satisfaction was tempered by French forces signalling a potentially much greater degree of success, whether at the time *or* at the onset of the crisis.

Mountbatten’s objections to military intervention were essentially strategic, with Cold War calculation matching post-imperial insight. This principled yet pragmatic dissent was distorted late in life by his claim that Eden should have resolved the Suez crisis in a swift and satisfactory fashion, pre-empting any rupture in relations with America and the Commonwealth. Contrary to the impression given in the 1972 film footage, the Prime Minister did not exacerbate the crisis by ignoring Mountbatten’s initial advice to strike hard and strike fast. The reality was that the First Sea Lord had almost immediately changed his mind, but in later years this inconvenient truth did not fit his preferred version of events. The need for ultimate vindication demanded a necessary distortion of the narrative, as Lord Hailsham pointed out after the great man’s death. The irony is that Mountbatten had no need to rewrite history in that his opposition to military intervention was largely vindicated, and his reputation for fresh thinking enhanced by the deployment of an airborne assault force. Yet to enjoy quiet satisfaction in being proved right was never an option – as with every other aspect of Dickie Mountbatten’s career, he had to be seen to be right.

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1. Photograph taken at the PM’s official country residence replicated in Thorpe, *Eden*. Mountbatten was not as yet an admiral of the fleet, his promotion being confirmed in mid-October 1956. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ‘File on the Suez affair of 1956’, 1966, BA, MB1/N106; the transcript of ‘Lord Mountbatten Remembers: 2 Suez’, CAB164/1501. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ‘First Sea Lord’s part in the Suez crisis’, 7 or 8 September 1956, BA, MB1/N106. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Re criticism of collusion, see 1972 comments in the transcript of ‘Lord Mountbatten Remembers: 2 Suez’, CAB164/1501; and re removing RN evidence, see the author’s forthcoming ‘Resignation of a First Sea Lord: Mountbatten and the 1956 Suez Crisis’ in the *English Historical Review*. Older and briefer accounts of Mountbatten’s behaviour during the Suez crisis are Grove and Rohan, ‘The Limits of Opposition’, and Ziegler, *Mountbatten*, 537-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ziegler, *Mountbatten*, 537-8; Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand*, 143; Pearson, *Sir Anthony Eden*, 24; the transcript of ‘Lord Mountbatten Remembers: 2 Suez’, CAB164/1501; ‘First Sea Lord’s part in the Suez crisis’, BA, MB1/N106. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Kyle, *Suez,* 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Smith, *Mountbatten*, 231-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. ‘File on the Suez affair of 1956’, BA, MB1/N106. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ‘First Sea Lord’s part in the Suez crisis’, and Admiral Sir William Davis to Admiral of the Fleet Lord Mountbatten, 20 November 1956, BA, MB1/N106. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Morley and Terraine, *The Life and Times of Lord Mountbatten*, episode 11, ‘Full Circle (1955-65); the transcript of ‘Lord Mountbatten Remembers: 2 Suez’, CAB164/1501. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Smith, *Mountbatten*, 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Fergusson, *The Watery Maze*, 399-400. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Smith, *Mountbatten*, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Fergusson, *The Watery Maze*, 402 and 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Mountbatten blamed the Foreign Office not Downing Street. Beck, ‘‘The Less Said about Suez the Better’’, 615. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. ‘Briefing from First Sea Lord for Chiefs of Naval Staff and Commanders-in-Chiefs’, Taranto Day [11 November] 1956, BA, MB1/N108, 1-4, particularly para. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Re Mountbatten’s defence of the Dieppe raid, see Smith, *Mountbatten*, 242-7 and 134-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Admiral of the Fleet Lord Mountbatten to Professor M. Howard, 16 February and 1 March 1973, and I. Curtis to Mountbatten, 24 November and 22 December 1977, BA, MB1/N108. Curteis, *Suez 1956*: screened by the BBC in November 1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. ‘Naval Report on Operation Musketeer’, 15 February 1957, TNA, ADM116/6209, 1, 5, and 11-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Re the Army’s evaluation of HMS *Tyne*’s signals deficiencies see Kyle, *Suez,* 474. Ziegler, *Mountbatten*, 530-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For a succinct account of the fighting in Ports Said and Fuad on 5-6 November 1956, see Kyle, *Suez*, 444-52, 461-4 and 473-6. Fergusson, *The Watery Maze*, 399 and 403; ‘Naval Report on Operation Musketeer’, 1, para. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. 2nd Parachute Battalion and 45 Commando were both on an extended deployment in Cyprus. Fergusson, *The Watery Maze*, 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Re the structure of the French Army in the 1950s see Windrower, *The Last Valley*, 164-82. RAF Transport Command’s lack of tail-loading aircraft meant no artillery could be dropped and British paratroopers jumped carrying too much kit. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Bromberger, *Secrets of Suez*, pp. 66, 102, and 114; Kyle, *Suez*, pp. 444-7 and 463. Veterans of Indo-China commanded the regiments making up ‘Force A’, most notably 3 RPC’s colonel, Marcel Bigeard. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. ‘Action against Egypt’, 1 August 1956, CAB134/126, quoted in Lamb, *The Failure of the Eden Government*, 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Gaujac, ‘France and the Crisis of Suez’, 50, 52 and 57; Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956*. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Kyle, *Suez*, 449. Yet Massu also told Randolph Churchill, ‘that the greatest regret of his life was not to have disregarded orders and marched to Cairo, or at least to Ismailia.’ Alastair Horne, ‘Collusion The Suez Crisis: Part 2’, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. First Sea Lord’s press cuttings re the Suez crisis, BA, MB1/N108; Bromberger, *Secrets of Suez*; Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy*. Qantara marked the exit from the causeway, and its seizure would have facilitated the rapid advance along the Canal to Ismailia cancelled once Eden bowed to American pressure and agreed to the UN’s ceasefire. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956*, 16, 18, 70, 80-1, and 92-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Golani, ‘The Sinai War, 1956’, 171-2 and 179; ‘Naval Report on Operation Musketeer’, 162; ‘Israeli aggression in connection with Musketeer’, October 1956, TNA, ADM205/137. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956*, 132-8, 143, and 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For a justification of the *force de frappe* see Beaufre, *Deterrence and Strategy*. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. ‘First Sea Lord’s part in the Suez crisis’, BA, MB1/N106; Kyle, *Suez*, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Vaisse, ‘Post-Suez France’, 335-40; Kyle, ‘Britain and the Crisis’, 115-16. Although France left NATO’s integrated military command in 1966, tensions were evident prior to Mountbatten’s retirement a year earlier. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Gaujac, ‘France and the Crisis of Suez’, 49-50; Smith, ‘Command and Control’, 307-12. Mountbatten himself signed off a typically inflexible, over-cautious and contingency-driven planning document that required frequent amendment, on 27 September 1956: ‘Anglo-French Intervention in Suez Canal Dispute, 1956 (Operation Musketeer): Military Action – Preparation and Plans’, TNA, ADM116/6100. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. As late as 26 September 1956 Mollet and his Foreign Minister Christian Pineau were urging Eden to accept France’s preference for a surprise *coup de main* from the air. Kyle, *Suez*, 261-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Robert Henriques, ‘The Ultimatum: A Dissenting View’, *Spectator*, 6 November 1959; Fergusson, *The Watery Maze*, 389. Re Henriques at COHQ see Smith, *Mountbatten*, 180, 182 and 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Head blamed a machiavellian Macmillan for the ceasefire. In the Commons Head was obliged to defend the operation’s termination by claiming that it would have taken eight days to reach Suez, despite British field commander General Sir Hugh Stockwell having already told reporters that he could have been there in two – for which he was reprimanded by the Minister of Defence. Colville, ‘Head, Antony Henry’; Smith, *Mountbatten*, 187, 219, 262-3; Clark, *From Three Worlds*, 31 July and 2 August 1956, 167 and 169; Eden, *Full Circle*, 519-20; Kyle, *Suez*, 304, 388, 415, 435 and 465; Horne, *Macmillan*, 441-2; Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand*, 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Correspondence between Admiral of the Fleet Lord Mountbatten and Rt Hon Antony Head MP re the Fleet Air Arm and the assault on Port Said, December 1958, BA, MB1/N07. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Henriques, ‘The Ultimatum: A Dissenting View’. Re deep-water facilities in Cyprus, Eden noted on 9 June 1975 for a future authorised biographer: ‘I had to admit that I had not thought of it, and Admiralty never suggested it.’ Quoted in Dutton, *Anthony Eden*, 438. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand Britain*, 204-5; Henriques, ‘The Ultimatum: A Dissenting View’. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Although a Tory, owner-editor Ian Gilmour argued that Macmillan had not publicly apologised for his role in the Suez invasion, and therefore he did not deserve to win the 1959 election. Erskine Childers, ‘The Ultimatum’ and letter to the editor, *Spectato*r, 30 October and 20 November 1959; Robert Henriques, ‘The Ultimatum: A Dissenting View’ and letter to the editor, *Spectator*, 6 November and 4 December 1959, and *A Hundred Hours*, 20, 39, 41-5 and 157. Courtaulds, *To Convey Intelligence*, 46-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. ‘The Government’s War The Fallacy’, *Observer*, 4 November 1956; Cockett, ‘The *Observer* and the Suez Crisis’, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. ‘Eden’ and ‘The Government’s War The Facts’, *Observer*, 4 November 1956. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Cockett, *David Astor and the Observer*, 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Astor-Monckton correspondence quoted in Cockett, *David Astor and the Observer*, 217. Monckton had become Paymaster General, and to his relief left the Egypt Committee. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Baroness Stocks quoted in Brandon, *Suez Splitting of a Nation*, 91. Stocks, who accepted the resignation from the trust of Mountbatten’s wartime colleague on the chiefs of staff committee Lord Portal, applauded Astor’s indignation, seeing ‘November 1956 as the *Observer*’s finest hour.’ Ibid., 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Re Lady Mountbatten’s radical politics in the 1950s, see Morgan, *Edwina Mountbatten*, 458-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Smith, *Mountbatten*, 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. David Astor to Admiral of the Fleet Lord Mountbatten, 1 June and 7 July October 1957, and mutual correspondence re the *Observer* 1957-65, BA, MB1/I11 and J317. Mountbatten wanted Nehru to meet likeminded critics of Eden such as Astor, but after a good lunch both men fell asleep mid-conversation. Cockett, *David Astor and the Observer*, 247-8 and 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. David Astor to Admiral of the Fleet Lord Mountbatten, 9 October 1956, and Mountbatten correspondence with Admiral J. Wright 1954-7, BA, MB1/I11 and I588. Kyle, *Suez*, 181; Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand Britain*, 147, 163 and 266.. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*, 107-8; Pearson, *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis*, 200 ft. 130; Barnett, *The Verdict of Peace*, 491; Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand*, 254. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. ‘The Question of Collusion’, *Observer*, 11 November 1956; David Astor to Iain Macleod, 14 November 1956, and to Richard Lamb [nd], quoted in Lamb, *The Failure of the Eden Government*, 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Cockett, *David Astor and the Observer*, 143-4, 211-12 and 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Clark, *From Three Worlds*, 3 November 1956, 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Clark, *From Three Worlds*, 5 and 6 November 1956, 210 and 211-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Most obviously Hailsham’s claim that in September 1956 he was at the Admiralty three weeks, and not in fact three days, before Eden authorised his briefing re MUSKETEER. Memorandum of Lord Hailsham, 16 January 1980, CAB164/1501. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Correspondence of Lord Mountbatten and Lord Brabourne re filming at Broadlands 6-8 and 12-15 May 1972, BA, MB1/I85. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. The transcript of ‘Lord Mountbatten Remembers: 2 Suez’, CAB164/1501; ‘Suez Fiasco’ cue cards, 1972, BA, MB1/I85. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ludovic Kennedy, ‘Mountbatten’s filmed memoirs ‘On what grounds is this important programme not to be shown?’, *Listener*, 23 October 1980; Cabinet Secretary to the PM, ‘Lord Mountbatten’s Memoirs’, 23 July 1980, CAB164/1501. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Kennedy, ‘Mountbatten’s filmed memoirs’; Shaw, ‘Eden and the BBC During the 1956 Suez Crisis’; author’s conversation with Lord Armstrong of Ilminster, 15 November 2011; Cabinet Secretary to the PM, ‘Lord Mountbatten’s Memoirs’, 23 July and 6 November 1980, CAB164/1501. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ludovic Kennedy, letter to the editor and ‘Mountbatten’s filmed memoirs’, *Listener*, 30 and 23 October 1980; Bernard Levin, ‘Lord Mountbatten and the Suez fiasco: how the truth was suppressed’, *The Times*, 5 November 1980; *Report of the Privy Counsellors*. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Author’s conversation with Lord Armstrong of Ilminster, 15 November 2011; Cabinet Secretary to the PM, ‘Lord Mountbatten’s Memoirs’, 23 July and 6 November 1980, CAB164/1501. The Earl of Selkirk succeeded Hailsham as First Lord of the Admiralty in January 1957. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Peter Dunn, ‘Mercury Arts Notebook’, *Sunday Times*, 29 June and 19 October 1980; Lord Hailsham, letter to the editor, *The Times*, 7 November 1980; P.J. Wright to Sir Robert Armstrong, 5 November 1980, and Cabinet Secretary memo on ‘Lord Mountbatten’s memoirs’, 11 November 1980, CAB164/1501; Ludovic Kennedy, letter to the editor and ‘Mountbatten’s filmed memoirs’, *Listener*, 30 and 23 October 1980. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Bernard Levin, ‘Mountbatten and the Suez fiasco’ and ‘A desperate plea to Eden: ‘I beg you to turn back’’, *The Times*, 5 and 11 November 1980. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ziegler, *Mountbatten*, 546; author’s conversation with Lord Armstrong of Ilminster, 15 November 2011; Cabinet Secretary, memo on ‘Lord Mountbatten’s memoirs’, 11 November 1980, and correspondence with Countess Avon and Earl of Selkirk, November 1980, CAB164/1501. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. In 1965 the now retired CDS acceded to the request of the Cabinet Secretary Sir Burke Trend that all papers from 1956 marked ‘Government Property’ be returned. First however he had two sets photocopied: one was held with Mountbatten’s other Suez files in the Romsey branch of Lloyds Bank, and the other placed in the Royal Archives. Further papers were forwarded to Windsor in the spring and early summer of 1967. Admiral of the Fleet Lord Mountbatten to Lieut. Colonel the Rt. Hon. Sir Michael Adeane [HM Queen’s secretary], 21 April and 27 June 1967, BA, MB1/N108. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)