

HIS311- Jan 21, 2016

# The Dissolving Commonwealth, 1945-1963



# The Dissolving Commonwealth: Lecture Overview

- Shifting international order (Post-WWII)
- The decline of the British Empire \***EXAM**
- **Meet Mike Pearson** \***EXAM**
- Canadian view on the changing IR order \***EXAM**
- Time travel to Egypt....
- Anthony Eden & British presence in Egypt \***EXAM**
- Meet General Nasser & nationalization
- The Aswan Dam & Soviet-Egyptian relations
- **The Suez Crisis** \***EXAM**
- Pearson's proposal & UNEF \***EXAM**
- Public reaction at home & the Election of 1957
- Recap & Exam prep

# Shifting international order \*EXAM

- IR of the 1950s: easy to focus on the Cold War
- The confrontation btw the US & the Soviet Union dominated international affairs, but:
  - Decline of old European colonial empires
  - Continued decline of Great Britain
  - The dominance of the US
  - Arab-Israeli conflicts & rise of nationalism
  - NOTE: anti-American sentiments / residual imperial sentiments in Canada
  - Cold War did not start these problems

# The decline of the British Empire

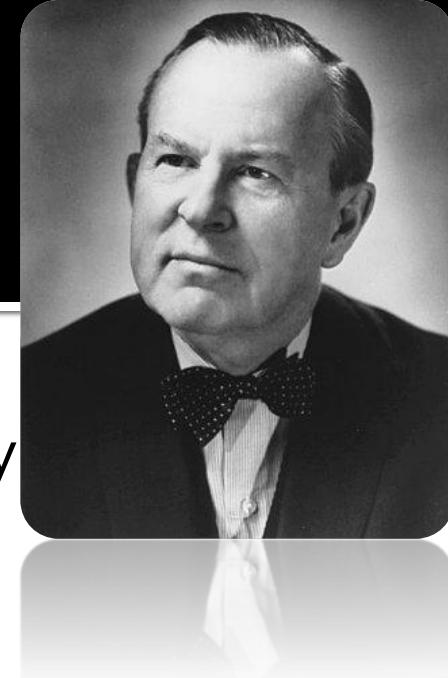


# The Roots of the Commonwealth



- **1926 Imperial Conference:** The **equality of British and dominion status** recognized as the “principle governing our Inter-Imperial relations...Every self-governing member of the Empire is now the master of its own destiny.”
- **Early 1950s: a loose association** – all the old dominions were playing independent roles. Ireland left in 1949; India, Pakistan and Ceylon became republics but stayed in the Commonwealth. Britain’s former colonies in Asia and Africa also joined the Commonwealth.
- **Traditional confidential relationship between the old Commonwealth capitals no longer seemed to be as viable but...**
- By 1950: The Commonwealth had less on its agenda but still had conferences, minor programs, forum for aid program (i.e. **The Colombo Plan** – aid for Asian countries and connection between developing countries and the aid givers)
- **Canada still looked to the Commonwealth as a viable organization, even more so once its exclusively white character vanished**
- Canada tried during the 1950s to create a special relationship with India (Nehru)

# Lester B. Pearson \*EXAM



- “Mike” Pearson (1897-1972)
- Son of a Methodist parson, charming personality
- **Studied history @ U of T (BA 1919)**
- Oxford fellowship >> History Prof @ U of T
- Joined the DEA & quickly promoted
- **1935**: Served in London as first @Canadian High Commission
- **1945**: Canadian ambassador to the United States & went to the founding conference of the UN @San Francisco.
- **1946**: Under-Secretary of the DEA
- **1948**: Minister of External Affairs & M.P. (Algoma East, ON)
- **1952**: President of the UN General Assembly
- **1956**: **Suez Crisis & Proposal for UN Peacekeeping Force**
- **1957**: Nobel Peace Prize
- **1963–6**: Prime Minister of Canada

# Canadian view on the shifting international order \*EXAM

- Britain & France: substantial colonial powers in 1950 and faced colonial rebellions. **Britain's inability to adjust to the lesser international status** + the constant danger of the Middle East
- The Cold War's danger could be mitigated if the West could manage **anti-colonialism & forces of nationalism**
- Americans focused on containing communism and were tempted to support Brits/French; pursuit of the “American solution”
- The **negative example of the West**: colonial connection can be a handicap for the Cold War and the adjustment of the international system
- On both sides, communist and anti-communist, **ideological approach distracted resources & attention**

# Canadian view on the shifting international order \*EXAM

- Canadian position and its diplomatic service on the “Third World”  
= **more ambiguous than any other Western powers.**
- Canada wanted to establish ties but wanted to remain non-communist rather than anti-communist to avoid the appearance of neo-colonialism
- **Death of Stalin – March 1953** >> Pearson: better prospect for peace?
- Without lessening Canadian commitment to the Cold War, **Pearson wanted to build small bridges from the West to the East bloc**
- **Canada’s handicap: linked by history, ideology and alliance to colonial powers.** Revolutionary forces in the Third World = also revolutionary Communists. Communism offered a sign of change
- Canadian government and people took the Cold War seriously, and were bound to the Brits; **Canada wanted to guard the connection to Great Britain, bilaterally but also through the Commonwealth**
- American way of life and its unprecedented material abundance was admired and American leadership was trusted but **differences existed.**

# FOCUS on: EGYPT

- **transcontinental country** spanning the northeast corner of Africa and SW corner of Asia, via a land bridge by the Sinai Peninsula





The Nile River runs 6,853 km; a major source of water for Egypt

# Time travel to Egypt...



- **Cradle of ancient civilization, rich cultural history**
- Egypt has one of the longest histories of any modern country, arising in the **tenth millennium BC** as one of the world's first nation states (ruins in Luxor, Memphis, Valley of Kings, etc)
- A **unified kingdom arose circa 3200 B.C.**, and a series of dynasties ruled in Egypt for the next three millennia.
- The **last native dynasty fell to the Persians in 341 B.C.**, who in turn were replaced by the Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines.
- The **Arabs introduced Islam and the Arabic language in the 7th century and who ruled for the next six centuries.**
- A local military caste, the **Mamluks** took control about 1250 and continued to govern after the conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman Turks in 1517.
- With over 90 million inhabitants, Egypt is the **most populous country in North Africa and the Arab World**
- **90% + desert, most of the population live along the Nile River**

# Karnak, Luxor (~2000 B.C.)





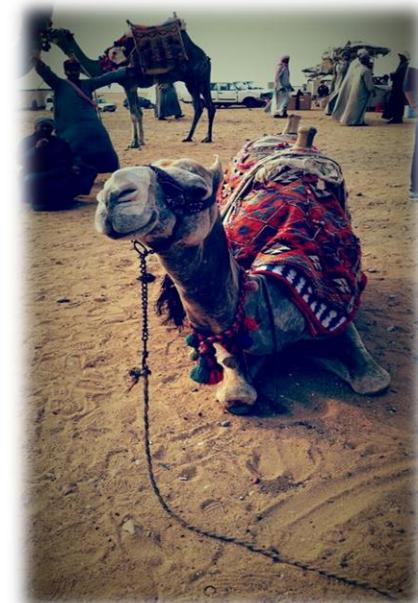
# Focus on: the Nile

- The Nile is an "international" river as its water resources are shared by **eleven countries** (Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, Kinshasa, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan and Egypt).
- **Egyptian civilization** depended on the river since ancient times.
- Most of the population and cities of Egypt lie along those parts of the Nile valley north of Aswan, and nearly all the cultural and historical sites of Ancient Egypt are found along riverbanks.

# Egypt & Great Britain



**Completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 = Egypt as an important world transportation hub.** Ostensibly to protect its investments, Britain seized control of Egypt's government in 1882, but nominal allegiance to the Ottoman Empire continued until 1914. **Partially independent from the UK in 1922, Egypt acquired full sovereignty from Britain in 1952.**



# Cyprus & Great Britain

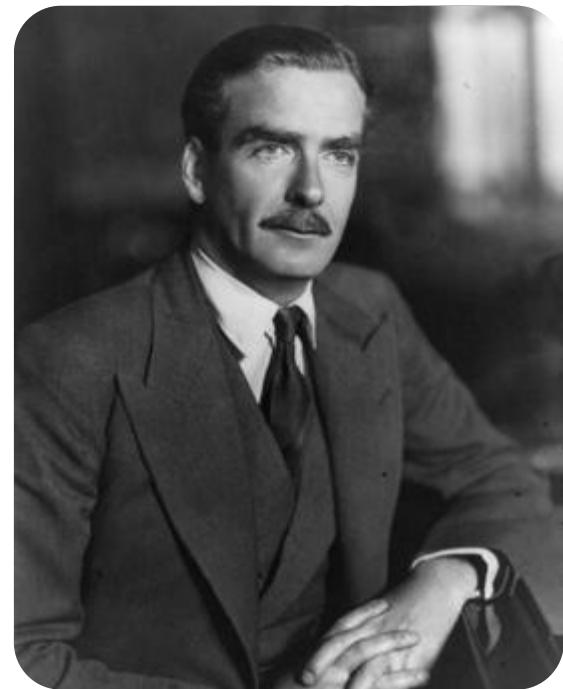


- Rebellion in Britain's former protectorate of Cyprus 1954
- Britain found itself short of troops/money
- Solution: withdraw 80,000 person garrison that had been protecting the Suez Canal
- Egypt's leader, **General Gamal Abdel Nasser**, promised to respect the continued British control
- Brits saw the Suez Canal as the **gateway to Far East and passage to get Arab oil to Europe**

# Anthony Eden (British PM 55-57)

- After Churchill, Eden was much younger, old friend of Pearson/Canada, foreign secretary during WWII; Canadians hope for a realistic foreign policy
- **NOT quite the case!** Eden is under a lot of illusions
- **Arnold Smith:** Canada's High Commissioner in London

“The British had been a dominant world power and instead of recognizing the change in their role, Eden continued to believe in old ways of thinking...”



# General Gamal Abdel Nasser

- 2<sup>nd</sup> president of Egypt 1956-70
- a man of “verbal theatrics” & great orator
- Cultural boom in Egypt & large-scale industrial projects
- an iconic figure in the Arab world, particularly for his strides towards social justice and Arab unity, modernization policies, and anti-imperialist efforts



# Nasser & Nationalization \*EXAM

- Nasser rose to power through a military coup (**July 23 revolution in 1952** >> overthrew King Farouk, end of the British occupation, birth of the Egyptian Republic, new “Nasser era” in Egypt)
- Believed it important that Egypt appears independent from any foreign influence (Revolution wave across Arab world)
- Nasser saw himself as the leader of the **Arab nationalism**
- The U.S. **feared the spread of communism** in the M.East (Nasser portrayed himself as a tactical neutralist, non-aligned)
- **Negotiated a development loan from the US/GB to build a High Dam in Aswan (Loan of US\$270 million)**
- Also purchased arms from Communist Czechoslovakia (1956)
- Also supported guerrilla action against Israel and supported an **Algerian rebellion against France**, recognized Communist China
- Nasser's actions: 1) Made Israel very nervous 2) Upset the U.S.
- Egyptians deal with the Communist bloc, **the U.S. pulled out \$\$ from the Aswan High Dam project**

# TRAVEL TO: ASWAN!



# Aswan High Dam \*EXAM

- Aswan Dam constructed 1898 and 1902
- Before the dams were built, the Nile flooded every year during late summer
- Construction of the **Aswan High Dam** became a key objective of the Egyptian Government following the Egyptian Revolution of 1952
- Took 10 years for construction (1960-70)
- Important for the ability to **control floods, provide water for irrigation, and generate hydro-electricity** >> pivotal to Egypt's industrialization

# Aswan High Dam \*EXAM

- June 1956 the Soviets offered Nasser **\$1.12 billion** at 2% interest for the construction of the dam; **25,000 Egyptian engineers**
- **Some 300 Soviet engineers come to help**; Enormous rock and clay dam was designed by the **Soviet Hydroproject Institute**
- **SPECs**: 3,830 metres long, 980 m wide at the base, 40 m wide at the crest and 111 m tall. (**US\$587 million/yr economic benefit**)



# Soviet-Egyptian friendship



**Nasser and Soviet leader Khrushchev at the ceremony to divert the Nile during the construction of the Aswan High Dam on May 14, 1964. Khrushchev : "the eighth wonder of the world".**



**A central monument of the Arab-Soviet Friendship, commemorating the completion of Aswan High Dam.**

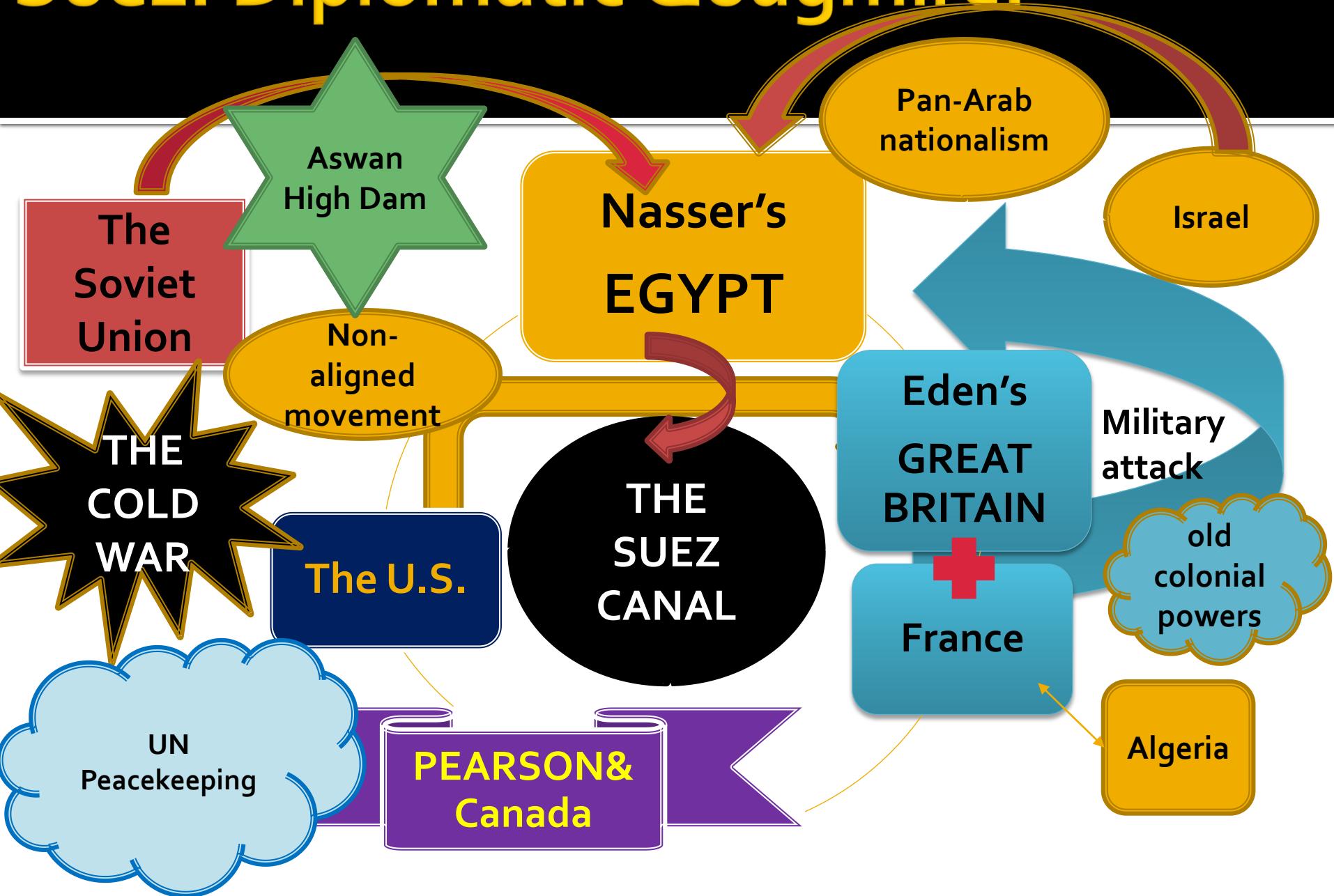
# The Suez Crisis 1956 \*EXAM

- Nasser retaliated by nationalizing the Suez Canal; Egypt would run its own canal, collect tolls, and finance the Aswan Dam
- Eden: went ballistic and called Nasser as the “Hitler of the Nile” & planned an invasion of Egypt to restore British power and prestige
- Eden gave instructions for military attack to reclaim the Suez canal with the Israelis on the frontline (only told the French...didn’t even tell all of his cabinet!)
- Dulles thought Eden was not serious & US doesn’t support British-French military plan
- Dulles: Creation of the Suez Canal Users’ Association (only buys time)
- Military and political confrontation that threatened to divide the United States & Great Britain
- Potentially harming the Western alliance & further destabilization in the Middle East
- WHAT TO DO???



1990

# Suez: Diplomatic Quagmire!



# The Suez Crisis unfolds...

- St. Laurent told the British that it would jeopardize the credibility of the UN, future of the Commonwealth (India was violently opposed to this military action) as well as Anglo-American relations in the Western alliance
- Oct 29<sup>th</sup>: 1956: Israel attacked Egypt
- + British and French stepped in
- Invasion of Egypt coincided with Soviet attack on Hungary
- Oct 30<sup>th</sup>: Egypt brought the issue to the UN, demanding withdrawal from the Canal in 12 hrs
- Brits/French vetoed UN Security Council resolution condemning their imperialistic actions
- issue moved to the UNGA -> India got a resolution passed condemning the British and the French

# LESTER PEARSON AND THE SUEZ CRISIS



- Mike Pearson's Suez solution (**UNEF\***)
- **Speech to the UN General Assembly**
- Pearson formally introduces his proposal for the first UN peacekeeping force
- **Nov 3, 1956**



# Pearson's proposal

\*EXAM

- **Free-standing UN peacekeeping force**, only lightly armed and purely defensive
- **intervene with the permission of both sides** and simply stand in between the two sides to eliminate further conflict
- Pearson had the respect of the international community: Saving Britain's face, working with the Americans & maintain Anglo-American unity
- Maintained the credibility of the UN & ensure the survival of the Commonwealth (India upset)
- Since the Soviet Union was an Egyptian ally, also avoid a larger conflict in the Middle East

# Resolving the Suez Crisis

\*EXAM

- Pearson's proposal is **unanimously passed** for the **Emergency UN Force** to secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities (Nov 4, 1956)
- **A formal ceasefire announced 2 days later**, despite Nasser's protest that Canada's uniform resembled British uniforms
- Canada sent its supply, transport and troops and **contributed to UNEF for the next 11 years!**
- Pearson received a **Nobel Peace Prize** in Oct 1957 for his leadership in the Suez crisis
- **UNEF: the birth of modern peacekeeping!**

# Public reaction in Canada

\*EXAM

- Not all Canadians are happy that Pearson went after the British plan
- St. Laurent in the parliament: “The era when the **supermen of Europe** could govern the whole world has and is **coming pretty close to an end**”  
>> offended Canada’s British-born population and fuelled greater speculation that Canada had sold Britain out to American interests
- St. Laurent was right but **not all Canadians agreed with him and there would be political consequences**

# RECAP of the Suez Crisis

- Ill-fated attempt of the British and the French to re-assert themselves as imperial powers by retaking the Suez Canal.
- The master plan was for the Israelis to attack Egypt; then the British and the French would issue an ultimatum saying that they were going in to separate the combatants.
- No one believed that the new British PM, Anthony Eden, of all people, could have been associated with such a scheme!
- End of empire for Britain & France; Pearson\*\*
- **Canada's new identity & birth of the UNPKO!**

# How important was Pearson?

- Pearson had both public & private appeal
- Understood Brits (Oxford/High Comm office)
- American idea but Pearson's role crucial
- John Holmes described him as a "**quarterback**" in the Suez Crisis because he fully understood the personalities involved.
- Pearson worked towards saving the "mother country" while also balancing relations with the Arabs and Asians @ the UN.
- Crisis averted between the US vs USSR as well

# What was going on with Eden?

- Quite ill by this point, from recurrent fevers and using mood-altering prescription drugs following a series of botched operations.
- Reputation as an opponent of appeasement
- Eden's policy on Suez is considered as a **historic blunder for British foreign policy**, signalling the **end of British predominance in the Middle East**
- After the Suez Crisis, Eden resigned as the Prime Minister on the grounds of ill health.

# The Suez Crisis in retrospect

- Two contrasting perspectives of the Suez Crisis in Canada
  - The reality of what actually happened 56-57
  - Or the memory of the crisis in retrospect
- Canada made a crucial and effective intervention in the Suez Crisis, rescued the British and the French from their own hole, and established peacekeeping as a vocation for Canada and the UN.
- Pearson had the experience, reputation and skills that the diplomats at the UN trusted
  - >> British diplomats did not trust their own government
  - >> Americans agreed with him (it was actually their idea)

*Western alliance would never be the same...*

# The Election of 1957

- Liberals were confident on the election night on June 10<sup>th</sup> 1957
- But they misjudged the degree of anti-Americanism & how they were viewed as sell-outs to the United States (+betrayal of Great Britain at Suez)
- **John G. Diefenbaker** becomes the new PM!

# Enter: “Dief the Chief”



# Exam\* Prep

- Key terms: the British commonwealth, Eden, the Colombo Plan, Pearson, UNEF, Nasser, the Aswan High Dam, the Suez Crisis, peacekeeping, 1952 revolution in Egypt, the Election of 1957 in Canada
- Remember that the **Commonwealth was mostly a psychological phenomenon** – a comforting illusion to help with the British transition
- But Canada continued to believe in the importance of the Commonwealth
- **Q1. To what extent does the Suez Crisis illustrate the changing dynamics of international relations in the 1950s, specifically concerning the GB, the US & Canada?**
- **Q2. How important was Mike Pearson's personal role in resolving the Suez Crisis?**
- **Q3. Do you think that Canada's response to the Suez Crisis reflected our foreign policy traditions & key principles?**
- NB: **TUTORIALS** Next week on Canada's Cold War
- By now, you should be working on the outline for your next term paper (Office hour on **Mon 12-1@ Rotman cafe**)