

Snowden Affair Presents a Suez Canal Moment

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In July 1956, Egyptian forces seized control of the Suez Canal from occupying French and British forces. Egypt froze all assets of the Suez Canal Company, passed a Nationalization Act and announced plans to compensate private shareholders.

Within three days, Britain and France made plans to retake the canal by force. Anticipating equivocal support from U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, Britain, France and Israel agreed on a secret plan in which the Israeli army would invade the Sinai, and French-British forces would react, ostensibly to separate the warring Egyptian and Israeli sides. This would lead to a surprise recapture of the canal.

By November 1956, the French-British coalition had achieved their specific military goals but forfeited their status as global powers. The Eisenhower administration sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution, effectively reversing French-British military achievements on the ground. The U.S. government had used the UN, in effect, to humiliate the French

and British governments. In the Western free world, there was now only one superpower.

On June 23, Edward Snowden was permitted to depart Hong Kong for Moscow via state-owned Aeroflot. His travel was quite likely the result of back-channel discussions between Beijing and Moscow.

On Aug. 1, Snowden received temporary asylum in Russia, his only restriction being President Vladimir Putin's orders to refrain from leaking any more documents detrimental to the U.S. government. Snowden appears to have assumed the role of Archduke Ferdinand's assassin, but not for launching a world war. Instead, the Suez Canal scenario seems more relevant, but the role of Britain and France is now being played by the U.S. Snowden's actions and disclosures have sparked a worldwide debate on the merits of unfettered U.S. government access to almost any electronic communication anywhere.

But long-simmering resentment of U.S. exceptionalism in both the developed world and in emerging markets seems to have reached a boil.

While there may be no UN resolution this time, the actions taken jointly by the Russian and Chinese governments to protect Snowden constitute another Suez Canal moment in history. The United States has been rebuked by two major emerging powers. The balance of power is shifting.

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