Understanding Liberal Aggression: Why Liberal States Are More Aggressive Towards Their Illiberal Counterparts

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John M. Owen argues that liberal ideas prod liberal states into war with illiberal states but does not explain or explore why this is the case. This thesis argues that this ‘why-question’ has thus far remained unanswered altogether and as such takes the first step in bridging this academic gap. The research has been conducted using two main methods: an interview with Owen about his theory and a case study analysis of the 1956 Suez Crisis. The research found that historical analogies and, to a lesser extent, a belief in the moral righteousness of liberalism can cause liberal elites within liberal states to behave more violently towards their perceived illiberal counterparts, thus creating the circumstances for war to break out.

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1. Introduction

The Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) is one of, if not the most famous theory in the field of International Relations (IR). The theory rests on the general assumption that democracies are significantly unlikely to attack one another. It is derived from Immanuel Kant's 1795 Perpetual Peace Theory (PPT) and in the centuries since, the DPT has become a widely debated IR-theory with numerous scholars coming to the same general conclusion, though using different arguments.

John Malloy Owen is one such scholar. He subscribes to the DPT on the basis of shared liberal values and ideas. Interestingly, he also argues that there is a flipside to the DPT, namely that the same liberal ideas that form the basis for peace between liberal democracies, can lead a liberal democracy to war with an illiberal state. It is this argument, to be dubbed the Theory of Liberal Aggression (TLA), around which this thesis will centre.

This thesis argues that a fundamental question that is still to be answered vis-à-vis the TLA is why liberal states behave in the way that the theory argues, and it attempts to take the first step in finding an answer to this question. To accomplish this, I have interviewed Owen about his own theory and on the basis of the interview as well as academic research, formulated two hypotheses along the lines of which research has been done on the 1956 Suez Crisis. The analysis of this conflict has resulted in a general conclusion and suggestions for further research.

The thesis is divided up into three main sections. The first is an introductory section that contains a literature review, an identification of a gap in the literature, the formulation of a corresponding research question, and an outline of how this question will be tackled. The second section starts with the outlining of a theoretical and conceptual framework, in which some of the key parts of the interview with Owen have been incorporated. This is then followed by a chapter dedicated to the remaining relevant answers Owen gave during the interview, a chapter focused on outlining the two hypothesis and a chapter that presents the empirical evidence for Owen's TLA. The second section closes with an elaborate analysis of the Suez Crisis. The third, concluding section ties the evidence found in the analysis to the hypothesis and formulates a general conclusion on the basis of the presented results, followed by suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

The Democratic Peace Theory

The Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) is derived from Kant's Perpetual Peace Theory (PPT). Kant argues that "Besides the purity of its origin, that is, its having sprung from the pure source of the concept of right, the Republican Constitution also offers the prospect for the desired consequence, namely, perpetual peace. The reason for this is as follows: if (as must be the case in such a constitution) the agreement of the citizens is required to decide whether or not one ought to wage war, then nothing is more natural than that they would consider very carefully whether to enter into such a terrible game, since they would have to resolve to bring the hardships of war upon themselves."[1]

In other words, Kant argues that under a Republican Constitution the people's consent is required for the decision to engage in warfare. Given that it is the people who bear the brunt of war, Kant concludes that their consent for it would be hard to come by. Therefore, if all states were to become Constitutional Republics, it would mean the end of (interstate) war.

Although derived from Kant's PPT, the DPT cannot be said to be the same concept, if only for the simple fact that in *Toward Perpetual Peace,* Kant shows clear disdain for the concept of democracy, which he describes as a form of despotism.[2] Nevertheless, his theory has served as a basis for numerous scholars to put forth their own arguments and develop their own variants concerning liberal democracies. Although these arguments and variants differ on many significant issues, they do all agree that liberal democracies, at least to some degree, are more peaceful amongst each other.

Owen's Theory of Liberal Aggression

As previously noted, Owen subscribes to the DPT on the basis of shared liberal values and ideas. Interestingly, Owen uses these same elements to argue for the existence of a flipside to the theory. He discusses this theory in several of his works, most clearly so in his article *How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace.* Here Owen writes: "I argue that liberal ideas cause liberal democracies to tend away from war with one another, and that the same ideas prod these states into war with illiberal states … for my argument to hold, liberals must consider the other state democratic."[3]

The last sentence of the theory emphasises its most crucial part: the importance of perception. Owen further develops this element in his book *Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American Politics and International Security*, where he argues that favouritism is at the basis of liberal democracies' perceptions and subsequent actions. Favouritism, in the context of Owen's TLA, means that liberal states are biased towards states with similar domestic political institutions. They will perceive such states as liberal and thus friendly. Similarly, states lacking the same or preferred domestic political institutions will be regarded as illiberal and thus hostile.[4]

[1] Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace,* 75.
[2] Ibid., 76.
[3] Owen, *How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,* 88-90.
[4] Owen, *Liberal Peace,* 22-25.

Although this thesis accredits Owen for the theory, it is worth noting that he was not the first scholar to put forth the idea that liberal democracies tend to be aggressive towards illiberal states. Back in the 1980s, Michael W. Doyle espoused the same idea but the TLA plays a relatively small role in his texts. In contrast, Owen has devoted multiple academic works to developing and fleshing-out the theory. In doing so, Owen has added elements to the theory that go beyond Doyle's ideas; elements that are of crucial importance in understanding the theory and asking further questions about it.

Despite being a flipside to the DPT, Owen's TLA is not engaged with to the same extent. Nevertheless, there are a number of scholars, theories and schools of thought that agree with its basic tenet. These can be split up into two main groups: a group that is similar to the TLA, i.e. a group of ideas that fundamentally argue different things but with similarities in certain crucial areas, and a group that directly engages with the theory

Theories and Arguments Similar to the TLA

Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder discuss the violent nature of democratising states in their book *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War.* Here they argue that states going through the process of democratisation are likely to devolve into internal struggles and engage in warfare with other states.[5] Mansfield and Snyder's theory interfaces with Owen's when it comes to the violent nature of democratising states. However, whilst Owen largely attributes this violent nature to the attempts of liberal democracies to democratise illiberal states, Mansfield and Snyder are more concerned with the elements within the democratising state itself that lead to violence.[6][7]

A school of thought that shows more direct resemblances to Owen's TLA is Wilsonianism. Originating from the United States of America (U.S.) and named after its 28th President Woodrow Wilson, Wilsonianism is the name given to the belief held by those in the U.S. that (forceful) promotion of democracy around the globe is the best way to bolster the nation's national security. Authors like Walter Russell Mead, Ross A. Kennedy, John A. Thompson and Jonathan Monten have all engaged with Wilsonianism. Of these authors Monten seemingly links Wilsonianism to Owen's theory most clearly. In his article *The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy* he argues that "Democracy promotion is not just another foreign policy instrument or idealist diversion; it is central to U.S. political identity and sense of national purpose."[8] This is in line with Owen's argument that liberal democracies tend to go to war with illiberal states, with the (underlying) intention of liberalising and democratising them; thus turning them into allies.[9]

Despite this striking similarity, there are important distinctions between the TLA and Wilsonianism. Most importantly, Owen's TLA addresses Liberal Democracies in general, whereas Wilsonianism specifically focuses on the U.S. This particular focus makes Wilsonianism fundamentally different from the TLA, which sketches a general behavioural pattern for liberal democracies.

[5] Mansfield & Snyder, *Electing to Fight,* 1-307.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Owen, *The Ideas-Power Nexus,* 16-22.
[8] Monten, *The Roots of the Bush Doctrine,*113.
[9] Owen, *The Ideas-Power Nexus,* 16-22.

Scholars That Directly Engage With the TLA

There are a number of scholars (Doyle, Thomas Risse-Kappen, John MacMillan, Frank Sauer, Niklas Schörnig and Miriam Fendius Elman to name but a few) that write on the TLA. Some of them explicitly refer to Owen in their works; others do not mention him but do talk about the same set of ideas. Doyle, belongs to the latter category. As acknowledged by Owen, Doyle was the first scholar to publicly discuss the idea of liberal democracies going to war with illiberal states.[10] His argument largely follows the same pattern as Owen's but it is not as fleshed-out, nor does it explore why liberal states act in the way Doyle argues.

Risse-Kappen makes a bigger effort in that regard. His argument largely follows the same pattern as Owen's: liberal states tend to be more peaceful towards perceived fellow liberal states and more hostile towards perceived illiberal states. From a social constructivist perspective, Risse-Kappen states that the perception of a state as liberal democratic will cause a liberal democracy to regard that state as friendly due to the perceived and assumed sharing of certain norms such as social diversity, shifting coalitions, the consent of the governed and the publicity of the political process. Similarly, the perception of a state as illiberal or autocratic will cause a liberal democracy to regard that state as hostile, increasing the likelihood of conflict.[11]

MacMillan similarly addresses the idea of liberal values prodding liberal states into war, despite the seeming contradiction between liberal values and the realities of war. Like Doyle however, MacMillan mentions the reality (of the possibility) of liberal aggression but does not necessarily delve into what might cause such behaviour.[12] Furthermore, MacMillan, in several of his works, argues that liberal democracies inherently tend to be more peaceful among one another, because they are peaceful by nature. This more peaceful nature inherently causes liberal states to be generally peaceful towards illiberal states as well. MacMillan does admit that the unguaranteed peaceful nature of the illiberal state is ground for more uncertainty than in a relation between liberal states.[1314]

Sauer and Schörnig's argument follows the same pattern as the aforementioned scholars. The authors acknowledge the increasing aggression towards illiberal states and explore democratic behaviour within International Relations (IR). They argue that modern technology, in the form of drone and robot strikes, has provided democracies with a way of trying to subvert international law, whilst preserving their more peaceful image.[15] Their exploration of democratic behaviour with regard to the TLA, remains limited to the acknowledgement of democratic aggression towards their illiberal counterparts however. And like previously discussed authors, Sauer and Schörnig do not explore why this is the case.[16]

Finally, Elman briefly addresses part of Owen's argument regarding liberal democratic aggression with focus on the economic influences on the DPT and corresponding relations between a liberal democracy and its fellow states. She argues for the importance of

[10] Doyle, *Liberalism and World Politics*, 1157.
[11] Risse-Kappen, *Democratic Peace*, 491-517.
[12] MacMillan, *Liberalism and the Democratic Peace*, 179-200.
[13] Macmillan, *Beyond the Separate Democratic Peace*, 233-243.
[14] Ibid., 241.
[15] Sauer and Schörnig, *Killer Drones*, 363-380.
[16] Ibid., 366.

International Political Economy (IPE) in that process. Elman briefly addresses Owen's claim that liberal democracies tend to be suspicious a priori of illiberal states, by stating that this is different for economic liberalism.[17] Her commentary, though interesting, is too brief to significantly contribute to the 'debate' surrounding the TLA.

The Why-Question

Owen and Risse-Kappen come closest to giving an explanation as to why liberal states behave more aggressively towards illiberal states. Both, albeit in different ways, come to the conclusion that illiberal states are perceived as threatening. The aggression could thus be explained as pre-emptive, an explanation that could go a long way in clarifying liberal states' behaviour towards illiberal states. What still remains unclear however, is what it is about illiberal states that is perceived as threatening. Based on the established research, one question thus keeps coming back: *Why do liberal ideas prod liberal democracies into war with illiberal states?* This question has so-far remained unanswered and as such, this thesis seeks to take the first step.

Why Is Owen's TLA Relevant?

Besides being an interesting corollary of the DPT, Owen's TLA is a potentially helpful tool in better understanding contemporary International Relations. Empirically, wars between liberal democracies historically do indeed seem to be rare, whilst wars between liberal democracies and illiberal states seem to occur on a much more frequent basis, with the liberal state often seen to be the aggressor.

Examples of such wars include the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the Iraq War and the recently ended Western invasion of Afghanistan. None of these wars were started on an entirely unprovoked basis, but all involved a liberal state dealing the first blow. Being the world's hegemon, the U.S. has been at the forefront of most of these conflicts, with support from numerous liberal allies, especially in Western Europe. Understanding the causes of these conflicts has become especially relevant in the wake of the recent developments in Afghanistan, where after a 20-year occupation, President Joe Biden decided to withdraw all U.S. troops from the country, swiftly followed by other Western nations. Given the relatively high number of conflicts over the course of the 20th and 21st century that meet the empirical requirements to Owen's TLA, a better understanding of the theory can lead to a corresponding understanding of such conflicts.

[17] Elman, *The Democratic Peace Debate,* 571-572.

3. Methods & Methodology

Having identified a gap in the literature and formulated a corresponding research question, two main methods have been applied to conduct the research: an interview with Owen and a case study analysis. The interview with Owen served as a way to ask him to reflect and, if possible, expand on his theory as well as address/clarify different interpretations of the theory. The case study that has been analysed is the 1956 Suez Crisis, a conflict with illiberal Egypt, initiated by liberal Britain, France and Israel.

Defining Keywords/Phrases

In the question *Why do liberal ideas prod liberal states into war with illiberal states?* a few keywords must be well-defined for one to get a better grasp of the question. These are respectively: *liberal states* and *aggression*. Owen's working-definition of a liberal state reads as follows: "A liberal state I define as having two domestic institutions: freedom of discussion and regular competitive elections of those empowered to make war."[18] This thesis will work with the same definition of a liberal state. Furthermore, in line with Owen's connotations, the words *liberal state* and *liberal democracy* will be interchangeably used.[19]

With regard to *aggression,* Owen does not provide a similarly clear-cut definition. Nonetheless, because Owen's TLA forms the basis of this thesis and it incorporates *aggression* into war without explicitly mentioning it, I have decided to define *aggression* as the act of going to or starting a war.[20]

The Owen Interview

In the interview, Owen was asked to reflect on his theory in a number of different ways. One example is his usage of the word prod. Owen argues that "Liberal ideas *cause* liberal democracies to tend away from war with one another, and that the same ideas *prod* these states into war with illiberal states".[21] The usage of two different words, for two separate arguments is potentially significant, but gets no further (explicit) attention in either of Owen's works on the TLA.

Furthermore, Owen's argument is hard to define along the lines of one single IR theory. The DPT is mostly associated with liberalism and Owen's argument similarly revolves around liberal states and includes liberal elements. Yet, the emphasis Owen places on the importance of perception, combined with the element of favouritism, gives the TLA constructivist elements as well. Finally, Owen was asked to give his own thoughts on why he believes that liberal democracies behave in the way he argues. Different parts of the interview have been spread out over different chapters, predominantly the hypotheses and the theoretical framework. In addition, a separate chapter highlighting the most important parts of the interview can be found later on in the text.

[18] Owen, *Liberal Peace,* 3.
[19] Ibid., 3-5.
[20] Owen, *How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,* 88.
[21] Ibid.

Analysis of the Suez Crisis

Case studies are generally the best way to evaluate theories such as Owen's TLA because they bridge the gap between the abstractness of the theory and the empirical reality of IR. Case studies can provide a level of analysis that the abstract, theoretical level cannot. Providing a satisfying, well founded answer to the research question requires empirical evidence and as such, case studies are ideal tools. Yet, it is important to recognise this thesis' limitations. Given the limited time and space, the thesis cannot provide a conclusive answer to the research question nor will it seek to do so. It will merely attempt to take the first step, by providing a limited number of hypotheses and evaluating how much evidence the selected case study provides for each of them.

The Suez Crisis has been chosen as a case study for a number of reasons. First, it meets the basic criterium of the TLA: it is a war between liberal and illiberal states, initiated by the former. Furthermore, the Suez Crisis provides a change of pace to the case studies used by Owen: the vast majority of his case studies focus on pre-20th century conflicts directly involving the U.S. Analysing a different and more contemporary conflict provides more representability and credibility of the findings. The Suez Crisis is also both recent enough for meetings and speeches to be recorded and old enough for these recordings to become accessible to the public. Consequently, there is an abundance of both secondary and primary sources available on the conflict.

The Suez Crisis knows three aggressors, Israel, France and the UK. However, providing a qualitative detailed analysis of all three aggressors in this thesis would have been undoable. Therefore, focusing on one of the three aggressors, while providing a clear demarcation for the start of the research, would provide for the most qualitative analysis. Given that the analysis is based on a mixture of primary and secondary sources, the fact that I do not speak or read French or Hebrew, made the UK the obvious choice. The main focus of the research is the (direct) aftermath of Egypt's nationalisation of the Suez Canal, on 26 July 1956. This event serves as a good beacon for multiple reasons, the most important of which being that the consequences it had for the UK, sparked a debate within the country over whether to take up arms against Egypt or not.

The Analysis

The analysis itself consists of four main sections: (i) a general overview of the conflict's prelude (ii) an establishment of the liberal and illiberal statuses of the conflict's main actors (iii) an establishment of the liberal state's (the UK's) perception of Egypt as an illiberal state and (iv) an examination of the reactions and favoured responses to Egypt's nationalisation of the Suez Canal. The first section specifically focuses on the prelude because the research question focuses on what prods liberal states into conflict rather than what they do in the conflict itself. The second and third sections are inspired by the similar approach that Owen took in his research, meant to establish the fulfilment of the basic criteria for the TLA. For consistency's sake, the analysis will use Owen's criteria to determine a state's liberal status. The fourth section has the responses to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal as its main focus because the nationalisation played a key part in the eventual escalation of violence.

Though not its main focus, France and Israel will feature in the analysis, given that providing a general overview of the conflict and its prelude, is impossible without featuring the two

nations. Furthermore, to prevent any critique based on the main actors' liberal status, it is important to show that all aggressors were indeed liberal and that they attacked an illiberal state.

Owen's TLA argues that the political decision makers and liberal elites are the key actors in a potential conflict. Therefore the third section focuses on the British decision makers and elites' perception of Egypt. Given the make-up of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom (House of Commons) in 1956, the analysis will focus on Conservative and Labour politicians.[22] Given that Owen considers the media and public as crucial parts of domestic liberal institutions that can influence decisions of war, the fourth part of the analysis gives them too a pointed examination.

Cherry-picking

In the process of analysing, there is the risk of cherry-picking evidence that seems supportive of this thesis' argument. To prevent any such suspicion, the research has been conducted based on two hypotheses. This thesis does not intend to either prove or disprove Owen's theory, but merely to analyse a specific case, the 1956 Suez Crisis, and derive from this analysis a possible answer to the question why it seems that liberal values prod liberal states into war with illiberal states. Therefore, the analysis highlights the various elements relevant to the posed research question and the thesis derives from this a conclusion as to how much evidence can be found for each of the hypotheses.

[22] BBC News, *1955*.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis is fundamentally based on a number of key elements in Owen's Theory of Liberal Aggression (TLA). These elements can be broadly put into four categories: liberalisation, favouritism, domestic liberal political institutions and liberal political elites. Owen first introduces his argument regarding the TLA in his article *How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,* where he states the following. "I argue that liberal ideas cause liberal democracies to tend away from war with one another, and that the same ideas prod these states into war with illiberal states … for my argument to hold, liberals must consider the other state democratic."[23] The argument then becomes more fleshed out in his book *Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American politics and International Security*. Here Owen argues that a lot of this behaviour is grounded in what he describes as favouritism, claiming that states with similar regime types will naturally be drawn towards each other, especially when they are liberal democracies.

Cause vs. Prod

What is striking about Owen's theory is his usage of the words prod and cause. With regard to the peace part of his theory Owen states that liberal ideas *cause* liberal states to tend away from war with one another. When addressing the aggression part of his theory however, Owen argues that these same ideas *prod* liberal states into war with illiberal states. Though synonymous, the words prod and cause can hold different meanings if used in different contexts.

In the interview Owen was asked to comment on the potential significance of these words. He admitted to purposefully choosing the word prod. "I think that Liberalism is a generative cause. It is not just one condition among many", he said.[24] "Liberalism is a motive towards peace and cooperation in one case and a motive towards confrontation and possibly war in the other. So I don't believe, and I think it is empirically false, that liberal states are constantly going to war with illiberal states", Owen continued, thus acknowledging that his theory is not meant to be read as arguing that liberalism is a direct trigger for war.[25] Rather, his argument is that liberalism is a primary cause for war: it is crucial in creating the circumstances in which wars can break-out without necessarily being the spark that sets things on fire.

Owen also stressed that his theory is meant to be symmetrical. "You're asking … if the language connecting liberalism to war is different from the language connecting liberalism to peace. And I don't mean to do that, I want it to be symmetrical."[26] In other words, the fact that he uses *cause* for the peace side of his argument and *prod* for the war side, is not because he means different things. Yet, the empirical outcomes the two sides of his theory are asymmetrical, given that there are few if any records of wars between liberal states, whereas wars between liberal and illiberal states occur on a much more frequent basis. This raises the question as to why a symmetrical theory can have such asymmetrical outcomes.

[23] Owen, *How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,* 88-90.
[24] Barrie, The Owen Interview.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

Owen explained this by pointing out that his theory merely addresses the behaviour of liberal states. Consequently, the predicted outcome of his theory will have a higher success rate in cases that solely involve liberal states, than in cases that also involve illiberal states. Yet, Owen added, "it's not a 100% outcome. I'm arguing about foreign policy, there are international outcomes that result from the policy, but they're not determinant."[27]

Liberalisation

An important element to Owen's TLA is what is best described as the goal that liberal democracies often have when going to war with illiberal states. Owen describes this goal as the liberalisation or democratisation of the illiberal state.[28] Given that Owen's TLA is the flipside to the DPT, Owen argues that liberal states attempt to liberalise and democratise illiberal states with hopes of creating a new ally; all in the bid to further ensure the security and economic prosperity of the nation. In that sense Owen's argument has a realist element to it, in that the type of war he describes is one based on power/security politics. Yet, it is worth noting that Owen does not argue that liberalisation is at the forefront of these wars. It is more of a secondary goal that can arise once war with an illiberal state has become a serious possibility.

Liberal Favouritism

Owen's argument can be viewed as a mix of a social constructivist and a liberalist one. It is a constructivist argument in that Owen places a lot of emphasis on the importance of favouritism.[29]

With the caveat that it is not the be-all and end-all of his theory, Owen argues that liberal states tend to look for states with an ideology and domestic political institutions similar to theirs. If state A is liberal and perceives state B to have similar domestic political institutions, then A will likely consider B to also be liberal and thus friendly. Similarly, if state A is liberal and perceives state B to lack similar domestic political institutions, then A will likely consider B to be illiberal and thus hostile. The behaviour of A towards B will be in accordance with said perceptions.[30] "You can think of it in terms of a bias: bias in favour of a liberal state and against illiberal states", Owen himself said about this in the interview.[31]

Owen's argument is also liberal in that he explicitly states his belief that liberal norms, values and political institutions possess inherent traits that make it such that the relations between states formed based on liberal favouritism (favouritism based on shared liberal values and ideas) are more durable than those built on favouritism based on other political systems.[32] In the interview, Owen explained this through a sense of moral righteousness. Discussing liberal elites, Owen argued that "they tend to be very sincere about their principals".[33] This is a trait he did not recognise in for example authoritarians. "They tend to be more flexible and less principled. They care about staying in power but do not always have a moral vision for

[27] Barrie, *The Owen Interview.*
[28] Owen, *Liberal Peace,* 4.
[29] Ibid., 22-25.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Barrie, The Owen Interview.
[32] Owen, Liberal Peace, 32-37.
[33] Barrie, The Owen Interview.

authoritarianism, whereas liberals do have quite a moral vision … You'll find principled liberals saying, *even if our national security suffers in the long term, we have to stand with our fellow democracies*."[34]

Relations formed by liberal states on the basis of liberal values, in other words, are not entirely constructed but also possess inherent traits that cause a particular type of behaviour. It makes sense then, that Owen would regard his theory, albeit somewhat reluctantly, as liberal. "Because it really is about what goes on within liberal states, rather than it is about liberal outcomes", he states.[35] These inherent traits, Owen argues, are the liberal (political) institutions present in liberal states.

Liberal Domestic Political Institutions

Liberal Domestic Political Institutions are the institutions that form the fundamental pillars of a liberal state. According to Owen, "Liberal institutions matter because they make it likely that during crises … foreign policy will be liberal."[36] This is because "a state with liberal institutions may elect leaders who are not liberal. Such leaders would have to be domestically constrained to pursue liberal foreign policy." [37] The institutions include the liberal political and governmental system, the liberal political elites, the news media and the general public. In several of his twelve case studies, Owen took note of the responses of the news media to speeches or decisions made by the political elites and the extent of the influence that these responses have had on the decision-making processes. According to Owen, even though the people and news media do not directly influence and are not responsible for the political decisions being made, they do form part of the political institutions that can potentially constrain the actual decision makers, regarding decisions on war and peace.[38]

Liberal Elites

Liberal elites is the term Owen uses for a liberal states' decision makers. He does not give a clear-cut definition as to who these elites are, but when taken within the context of his case studies, it is clear that he is referring to the politicians within a liberal state.[39] Owen argues that liberal elites within a state are likely to be aggressive towards states they do not perceive as liberal according to their own standards. But for war to break-out certain other factors must come into play. These include how unified the elites are in their perception and the level of influence of domestic political institutions, such as the news media and the regular public.

[34] Ibid.
[35] Barrie, *The Owen Interview*.
[36] Owen, *Liberal Peace*, 43.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 67-181.
[39] Ibid.

5. Conceptual Framework

Owen's theory is one of cause and effect. "Liberal ideas cause liberal democracies to tend away from war with one another, and the same ideas prod these states into war with illiberal states … for my argument to hold, liberals must consider the other state democratic."[40] From this argument, a dependent, independent and mediating variable can be derived. The dependent variable is whether or not war breaks out between states. The independent variable is formed by liberal ideas, for they influence whether or not war breaks out between states. Owen finally adds a mediating factor in the form of perception, stating that it is crucial for his argument to hold.

Owen explains that liberal ideas pertain to the ideas, ideology or conviction of liberal elites about how a liberal state should function and what its political/governmental institutions should look like. This concept is based on a number of (nearly) universally accepted key-elements such as free and fair elections, freedom of press and freedom of speech. However, through various historical examples, Owen makes clear that these elements are: (i) often not the only factors taken into consideration when determining a state's liberal status, (ii) not factors whose content is universally agreed upon (e.g. the extent of suffrage), and (iii) factors that do not necessarily have to all be present for a state to be considered liberal by (a number of) liberal elites within another state and vice versa.[41]

Based on the above understanding of Owen's theory, the following conceptual framework can be formed: States that consider themselves liberal will likely tend away from war with a state they perceive as having similar liberal domestic political institutions and will be more likely to engage in warfare with states they perceive as lacking such institutions. The dependent variable within this conceptual framework remains unchanged: the likelihood of war between different states. The independent variable becomes liberal domestic political institutions and the mediating variable becomes a state's perception of another state.

[40] Owen, *How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,* 88.
[41] Ibid., 67-229.

6. Owen's Thoughts on the Why-Question?

In the interview with Owen, he was asked a number of different questions relating to his theory. Answers relating to Owen's choice of words and the IR school of thought best suited to brand his theory have largely been outlined in the theoretical framework. This section focuses on the last crucial part of the interview: Owen's thoughts on why liberal states behave in the way he argues.

During the interview, Owen admitted to struggling to definitively answer this question. He explained that liberals have what he calls "a very robust ideology. It is a teleological view that the human race can and will advance."[42] Owen linked concepts such as peace, rationality and wealth to this advancement, before explaining that the robustness of this ideology causes and justifies liberals' bias against illiberal states. He recognises that this then raises the question as to why this belief is so robust but, as he admits: "I don't have an answer to that but I find that it is empirically quite robust."[43]

Owen also entertained the idea of the Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) being a possible answer to the '*why-question*'. However, he noted that he considers the belief in the DPT to be just one part of the grander, global vision that he argues liberals to have. He argued the U.S. to be a prime example of this. "American elites believe that the whole world someday will become democratic and the U.S. in some way has a role in bringing that about", Owen said.[44] He linked this to the foreign policy of a number of America's more recent presidents, most particularly former President George W. Bush. Owen argued that Bush had a vision about America's role in "ending tyranny in the world and bringing peace."[45]

In the end, Owen's views and thoughts all seem to relate back to the question of morality. As laid out in the theoretical framework, Owen said during the interview that he believes liberals to be relatively distinct in their moral convictions. The global vision that Owen discussed is, in his view, not one born out of greed, self-interest or a hunger for power. Rather, he believes, liberals have this global vision based on a conviction that it is morally right.

This, finally, is where Owen speculates as to why liberal ideas prod liberal states into war with illiberal states. Owen seems to believe that liberals have an 'ends justify the means' type approach, that is rooted in morality. "They say you need police and prison because there are some actors who need to be restrained and maybe rehabilitated. In international life you have bad actors who need to be restrained and taught … we have a flawed world where history is not yet over and so we have to keep using violence carefully and in the right way, so that finally history will be over and we won't need to use it anymore."[46] In other words, for liberals violence for the sake of (bringing about) liberalism can be necessary and therefore justified because liberalism is morally right.

[42] Barrie, *The Owen Interview.*
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

7. The Hypotheses

The research for the case study has been conducted along the lines of two hypotheses (*H1* and *H2*):

H1: *Liberal ideas prod liberal states into war with illiberal states, because historically illiberal states have posed a threat to the security of liberal states. As a result, liberal states develop a suspicion of illiberal states as potentially dangerous, which creates the circumstances for the escalation of violence.*

H1 finds footing in Yuen Foong Khong's theory of historical analogies. Khong argues that "leaders use analogies not merely to justify policies but also to perform specific cognitive and information-processing tasks essential to political decision-making".[47] In other words, not only are historical analogies (the idea of learning from the past) used to publicly justify political decisions, they are also used to interpret information that political decisions are based on. Taken in the context of this thesis and the TLA, Khong's theory can thus easily be applied to decisions of war and peace. Furthermore, the hypothesis of historical analogies is one that Owen too sees as potentially true. "That's not part of my theory, but I do think there is something to historical analogies and learning from the past", he stated in the interview, when asked about the idea of suspicion based in history.[48]

H2: Liberal ideas prod liberal states into war with illiberal states because liberals perceive their own system and values to be morally right and they perceive illiberal states as violating these values and thus morally wrong. Because of this moral dichotomy, liberals believe it justified to combat this wrongness.

H2 rests on a combination of Kant and Owen's writings. In his book, Owen hints at the idea of *H2*, albeit in different words, writing that "Liberals allow and may even support war against a state that coerces its own people. Force may be used against such a state because it may act in ways that are not compatible with the freedom of other states".[49]

Kant devoted multiple works to both issues of politics and morality. In *Toward Perpetual Peace* Kant states that what he calls the Republican Constitution, sprung from "the pure source of the concept of right".[50] In doing so, Kant inherently ties the Republican Constitution to morality, deeming it to be right. In the same piece of literature, Kant furthermore condones what he calls "the type of coercion which first makes possible a just and lasting constitution", thus explicitly linking the use of coercion to the Republican Constitution.[51]

In the interview, Owen argued that liberals subscribing to the DPT have taken Kant's arguments and applied them to liberal democracies and foreign policy. This has to do with the aforementioned global moral vision that liberals have according to Owen and which is rooted in a conviction that liberalism is morally right. Owen argued that (some) liberals use an interpretation of Kant's words on coercion to justify violence against illiberal states. This is shown through the comparison that Owen states these liberals make between domestic law

[47] Khong, *Analogies at War*, 289.
[48] Barrie, *The Owen Interview*.
[49] Owen, *Liberal Peace*, 35.
[50] Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, 75.
[51] Ibid., 98.

enforcement and foreign policy.[52] In other words, if it helps progress history along, for example by liberalising another state, then the use of violence can be justified.

There are some clear interfaces between the two hypotheses, given that both are supposed to be plausible answers to the research question. Both hypotheses revolve around liberal values, but each takes a slightly different approach. *H1* focuses on historical precedent, implying that the suspicion harboured by liberal states is based in history. To an extent it has realist connotation to it, given its focus on security. *H2* is more purely liberal, for it draws on morality and argues that liberal states see a moral wrong in illiberal states. A wrong that they have a right and some would argue even a duty to combat. So where *H1* is more focused on prevention, i.e. preventing illiberal states from developing into significant threats to liberal values, *H2* centres more around retaliation and liberalisation, i.e. punishing illiberal states for their violation of liberal values but also helping them (and the world) by liberalising these states.

[52] Barrie, *The Owen Interview*.

8. Is There Enough Evidence for the TLA?

For research on Owen's Theory of Liberal Aggression (TLA) to be justified, the theory needs evidence that gives it credibility. Owen provides this evidence through twelve different case studies spread out over his aforementioned article and book. The empirical evidence Owen provides in these works is supplemented by more contemporary empirical proof.

Owen's evidence

In his article, Owen demarcates four time periods between the late 18th and late 19th century to discuss historical relations/crises between the U.S. and France (1796-98) and the U.S. and the then British Empire (1803-12, 1861-63 and 1895-96).[53] In his book Owen discusses a total of twelve case studies. Ten of these revolve round the United States, including a more elaborate view of the four crises discussed in the article. The six other case studies Owen analyses are the Anglo-American crises of 1794-96 and 1845-46, the Mexican-American crisis of 1845-46, the Chilean-American crisis of 1891-1892 and the Spanish-American crises of 1873 and 1895-98. The remaining two case studies concern relations between India and Pakistan and South Korea and Japan, both in the later twentieth century. These cases get less elaborate focus than the American centric relations however.[54]

Owen analyses his case studies by asking two key sets of questions for every case: (i) how liberal were states A and B and (ii) how did state A perceive state B and vice versa. Owen further demonstrates that there was not necessarily a consensus within one state on the other state's liberal status. Through explaining the different visions that different political factions in the U.S. (such as the Federalists and Republicans) had for the nation's institutes and system of government, Owen shows that the same country (e.g. France in the late 1790s) can be perceived as liberal by one faction and as illiberal by the other. He then shows that the factions' willingness to violently engage the other nation corresponds with their respective perceptions.[55]

After establishing the different perceptions of different actors in the crises, Owen demonstrates how liberal elites in state A interpreted state B's actions as more or less hostile, based on the different groups of liberal elites' perception of state B. I.e. he demonstrates how liberal elites in for example the U.S. interpreted France, Britain or Spain's actions as either hostile or not based on their perception of those nations as either liberal or illiberal.[56]

Weaknesses in Owen's evidence

The one apparent weakness to Owen's evidence for his theory is that the bulk of his case studies revolve around the U.S. The two case studies that do not (India-Pakistan and Japan-South Korea), are limited in size. Yet, Owen does clearly demonstrate the most important element of his theory in both cases. For both India-Pakistan and Japan-South Korea the perception of the other's (Pakistan and South Korea) liberal status by the respective liberal state (India and Japan) corresponds to the perception of the other as either friendly or

[53] Owen, *How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,* 104.
[54] Owen, *Liberal Peace,* 67-229.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

hostile.[57] Furthermore, all of Owen's cases revolving around the U.S. also involve other states, some of which Owen considers to be liberal. Owen always includes the other state's perception of the U.S. and demonstrates how this perception corresponds to the actions taken and the willingness to engage in violence.[58]

The best example of this is Owen's analysis of the British perception of the American Civil war. Owen demonstrates how, for the first few years of the war's duration, the UK was unsure as to which warring faction to support, as its liberal elites were unsure of the liberal status of the Union and Confederation relative to each other. It was not until the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 that the UK firmly threw its support behind the Union. The proclamation had made the Civil War unambiguously about the abolition of slavery and as a liberal state that had already abolished slavery over half a century prior, the UK could not ignore the significance of this gesture. Accordingly, it could no longer be in doubt over which warring faction was more liberal and so it firmly started to support the Union.[59]

Contemporary Evidence

Owen's cases are mostly historical but even in the contemporary world, examples can be found of liberal states engaging in warfare with illiberal states. Some of the most obvious ones, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s, again relate back to the U.S. The Bush-administration justified the wars in numerous ways and liberal values undeniably played a key role in that justification.[6061] Furthermore, the U.S. helmed both invasions but was far from alone in its pursuit thereof. In Afghanistan it had support from for example the UK, Canada and Australia, and the UK also proved an ally in the American invasion of Iraq.

Finally, the United Nations' acceptance of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in 2005, showcases the outspoken commitment of all of its member states to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, accepting the use of military coercion if necessary.[62] The idea of R2P as well as those of the existence of war crimes and crimes against humanity all find their roots in liberal ideology. Although the veto rights of competing powers Russia, China and the U.S. in the United Nations Security Council, make the practical implementation of R2P complicated to say the least, the drafting and acceptance of a commitment that includes the option of military intervention in case of a violation by a government against its own people, is an indication of liberal states' willingness to take up arms against a state that, albeit it the most extreme way, is illiberal.

[57] Owen, *Liberal Peace,* 217-229.
[58] Ibid., 67-229.
[59] Ibid., 124-138.
[60] Bush Archives, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush,* 66-68.
[61] Ibid., 168.
[62] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *What is R2P?*

9. Case Study: The 1956 Suez Crisis

Conflict prelude: Egyptian nationalisation of the Suez Canal

The 1956 Suez Crisis encompasses the nine days of warfare between Israel, France and the United Kingdom (UK) as aggressors and Egypt as the 'victim'. The conflict was preceded by a mixture of historic grievances. These include colonialism in relation to the European nations – Egypt is a former French and later British colony – and the general tension between the Zionist Jews and the (surrounding) Arab nations, Egypt included, in relation to Israel. The latter two nations in particular had had a troubled relationship in the build up to the Suez Crisis, with both repeatedly antagonising each other and believing that, despite the best peace-making efforts of foreign nations, war at some point was inevitable.[63]

The direct trigger that led to the serious possibility of war was the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by Egypt's leader Gamal Abdel Nasser on 26 July, 1956. During a speech, Nasser gave a coded order to the Egyptian military to move in and take control of the canal. This move had implications for various nations across the world, the most significant of which were the closing of the canal to Israeli shipping and the threats posed to the military and economic interests of, in particular, the French and the British.[64]

Aftermath and Conspiracy

In the days that followed the nationalisation, outrage spread and the British and the French started seriously considering military action. A debate in the House of Commons showed an appreciation of the seriousness of Nasser's move but also caution to respond with military force.

On 14 October, 1956, nearly three months after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, French Deputy Chief of Staff, General Maurice Challe, met with British Prime Minister Anthony Eden to lay out what Mordechai Bar-On calls the "Challe-scenario", which would serve as a precursor to the conflict that would be dubbed the Suez Crisis.[65] It involved a plan that would start with an initial attack against Egypt by Israel, to then allow France and the UK to eventually move in, recapture the Suez Canal and remove Nasser from power. Eden, who had previously made known his support for a potential military intervention, was reportedly happy to accept the French proposal. [66]

As stated, tensions between Israel and Egypt were high in the years leading up to the confrontation: both Nasser and Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion had engaged in repeated antagonizations and provocations.[67] Nevertheless, Ben Gurion was at first very dismissive of the French-British plan, believing it to be a British ploy to pursue their interests in the Middle East, much to Israel's perceived disadvantage. Consequently, efforts were made to bring delegates of the three nations together, to hopefully come to a consensus.[68] They gathered in Sèvres, France, where over the course of three days (24–26 October, 1956) they

[63] Caplan, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 258.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Bar-On, *Three Days in Sèvres*, 173.
[66] Caplan, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 258.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Bar-On, *Three Days in Sèvres*, 173.

devised a plan. An account of the meeting is given by Bar-On, who served as the personal assistant to General Moshe Dayan, the Israel Defence Forces' (IDF) Chief of Staff at the time.[69]

Under the plan, Israel would launch an attack near the Suez Canal that was large and threatening enough to look war-like and as such provoke an Egyptian response. The British and French would then usher an appeal to both Israel and Egypt to bring an end to the conflict, though the appeal to Israel would contain different language than the one to Egypt, so as to not suggest that Israel was the aggressor. Egypt would be demanded to "cease hostile acts against Israel" and assuming that Egypt would not comply with these demands, Britain and France would then land their own troops in Egypt under the guise of restoring the peace.[70] Given that Egypt, rather than Israel, would be labelled the aggressor, French and British intervention would mainly focus on the Arab forces.[71]

The conflict largely proceeded as planned, with Israel invading Egyptian territory on 29 October, 1956. The British and French sent out their ultimatums the following day, and on 1 November airstrikes on Egypt began. On 5 November the European nations landed paratroopers along the Suez Canal. Two days later on 7 November, after the United Nations (U.N.) had adopted resolutions calling for a ceasefire, and the newly formed United Nations Emergency Force had moved into Egypt to ensure the ceasefire, the violence ended.[72]

How liberal were the aggressors?

The United Kingdom and France

As of 1956, the United Kingdom (UK) lacked a formalised (written) constitution, but it did work under the Bill of Rights, which at the time already guaranteed various basic human rights, including the freedom of speech as well as free elections. By 1956 these elections had become free enough and the right to vote in them widespread enough for them to be considered regular and competitive.[73] Going by Owen's criteria, the UK can therefore be considered a liberal state in 1956.

Fundamentally, the same can be said of France. As of 1956, the country had gotten rid of the monarchy and transformed into a full-fledged republic, complete with a constitution protecting free speech as well as suffrage during regularly held competitive elections.[74] Like the UK, France in 1956 can thus be considered a liberal state.

Israel

As of 1956, Israel was still a very young state; it had only come into existence eight years prior, in 1948, making it harder to say anything conclusive regarding the regularity of Israel's elections. In its relatively short lifespan however, Israel had already organised three

[69] Bar-On, *Three Days in Sèvres*, 172-186.
[70] Ibid., 174.
[71] Ibid., 181.
[72] United Nations, *First United Nations Emergency Force.*
[73] UK Parliament, *Bill of Rights 1689.*
[74] Constitutional Council, *Preamble to the Constitution of October 27th 1946.*

parliamentary elections, in 1949, 1951 and 1955.[75] This causes the country to meet the election criterium.

Free speech in Israel in 1956 is also a more complicated matter than in the UK or in France. Like the UK, Israel did not have a written constitution, as of 1956. It instead had 'regular' laws in place to protect rights such as the freedom of speech.[76] Furthermore, Israel has a controversial approach regarding press freedom. This has everything to do with the argued grip that the IDF have on Israeli mainstream media, and the censorship that it results in. Given that press freedom is an inherent part of freedom of speech, this observation makes, to some extent, Israel's freedom of speech in 1956 questionable. Yet, it is worth noting that the Israeli censorship pertained mainly to the press and that individual citizens were still quite free to express their opinions. This, in combination with the relatively high number of competitive elections the young nation had already hosted, gives enough reason to declare 1956 Israel a liberal state, in line with Owen's criteria.[77]

How liberal was Egypt?

Having established that all three states on the aggressors' side were indeed liberal at the time of the war, the question then arises as to what the liberal status of Egypt was. Once again applying Owen's criteria, one will find that Egypt, in 1956, did adopt a constitution but that that constitution did not guarantee human rights such as the freedom of speech. Furthermore, Egypt did not have regular and competitive elections. Between 1922 and 1953, Egypt was a monarchy and hosted ten different (to some extent competitive) elections. The revolution of 1952 meant the end of the monarchy however, and with it, the end of this more liberal era.[78]

This also marked the beginning of Nasser's reign and thus the beginning of an era of Egypt as an authoritarian state. Nasser undertook various actions that signified this change, including the abandoning of both parliamentary elections and parliament itself, to change the political system to a one-party system. In 1956 Egypt did have two formal elections in the form of referendums. The first referendum was held to formalise Nasser as Egypt's head of state, turning him from Egypt's Prime Minister into its President. The second referendum was on the 1956 Egyptian constitution that was to be implemented alongside Nasser's presidency. Nasser overwhelmingly won both referendums, that would furthermore prove to be the only formal elections under his reign.[79] Elections in Nasser's Egypt were thus neither regular nor competitive.

The constitution that was adopted in 1956 did, at face value, seem to guarantee a number of freedoms, including the freedom of speech.[80] However, a closer look at the exact wording of these freedoms in the constitution finds that they are not so absolute as they seem. The words "within the limits of law" conclude both articles that directly relate to free speech, as can be seen in Kayla Sivak-Reid's translation of the document.[81] This small addition makes it such that the rights outlined in the constitution are effectively trumped by the laws, over which

[75] The Knesset, *Elections for the Knesset.*
[76] Lahav, *American Influence on Israel's Jurisprudence of Free Speech*, 65-69.
[77] Peri, *Intractable Conflict and the Media*, 80.
[78] Sayyid-Marsot, *A History of Egypt*, 98-126.
[79] Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt,* 67.
[80] Sivak-Reid, *Tracing a State and its Language from Province to Republic*, 50.
[81] Ibid.

Nasser and his regime had unchallenged control. This essentially provided them with a loophole to curb the freedom of speech.[82] Failing to meet both of Owen's cornerstone criteria, Egypt in 1956 thus qualifies as an illiberal state.

How did the UK perceive Egypt?

By the time of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and the subsequent Suez Crisis, Nasser had thus effectively grabbed absolute power in Egypt. Yet, as Owen demonstrates, being illiberal does not necessarily mean that others will perceive a state as such.[83] Given the importance of perception to the TLA, this section is dedicated to the British perception of Egypt. The fact of Nasser's absolute power means that he and the state had effectively become one and the same. Consequently, the British perception of Egypt, in essence, boils down to the British perception of Nasser.

On 2 August 1956, exactly one week after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, the House of Commons debated both the issue and how the UK ought to respond. The speeches given by the various MPs show the different party lines and give a clear indication of how Britain's liberal elites perceived Nasser. The analysis will first present perceptions of arguably the two most relevant politicians in the UK at the time, Prime Minister and Conservative Leader Anthony Eden and Opposition and Labour Leader Hugh Gaitskell. The analysis will then provide a more general overview of the views of the rest of the elites spread out over the two major parties.

Prime Minister Anthony Eden

Although Nasser had only been in power since 1953, and Eden only since 1955, relations between the two leaders by 1956 were already notoriously tense. According to Mark Garnett et. al, over the course of his dealings with Nasser, Eden developed an obsession for the colonel and started to consider him a dictator akin to those Europe had seen two decades prior, such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini.[84] This leaves little to the imagination. Just having Eden label Nasser a dictator might have been enough to conclude that he saw the Egyptian leader as illiberal. The direct comparisons between Nasser and the likes of Hitler and Mussolini, only add fuel to the fire. Eden clearly considered Nasser and thus Egypt to be highly illiberal.

Opposition Leader Hugh Gaitskell

Gaitskell's position on Nasser is less easily pinpointed than Eden's because the Opposition Leader took noticeable care with his words addressing the colonel. He made sure to always speak on the content of the issue at hand rather than the man behind it. Even when he addressed Nasser, Gaitskell took care to speak of the colonel's actions, rather than his character.

When speaking of such actions however, Gaitskell's words were unambiguously harsh and on par with Eden's invocation of the notorious dictators of the then recent past. "The French Prime Minister … quoted a speech of Colonel Nasser's and rightly said that it could remind us

[82] Sivak-Reid, *Tracing a State and its Language from Province to Republic*, 50.
[83] Owen, *Liberal Peace*, 81-88.
[84] Garnet et. al, *British Foreign Policy Since 1945*, 128-153.

only of one thing—of the speeches of Hitler before the war."[85] Of Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal, Gaitskell made a similar comparison. "It is all very familiar. It is exactly the same that we encountered from Mussolini and Hitler in those years before the war".[86]

Gaitskell thus compared Nasser's actions, rather than his character, to Hitler and Mussolini but even so, the comparison should not be taken lightly, given the extreme illiberalness that Hitler embodies. Furthermore, Gaitskell compares Nasser's rhetoric with that of Hitler and this can be argued to be an attack on the man's character. Therefore, it can be reasonably concluded that Gaitskell, despite not using as direct language as Eden, did similarly perceive Nasser's Egypt as illiberal.

Liberal Elites

The perceptions of the other politicians in the House of Commons were in line with that of their respective Party Leaders. Conservative MP Charles Waterhouse stated that Nasser, in the past tense, had posed a threat to the liberty of foreign subjects and his partyman Julian Amery gave Nasser the appurtenant label dictator.[87] On the other side of the isle, various Labour politicians such as William Warbey and Stanley Evans used similar terminology. [8889]

Evidently, the rhetoric on Nasser from all sides was tough. No matter one's political ideology, party or affiliations, all who spoke seemed to agree on one thing: Nasser was a dictator whose nationalisation of the Suez Canal was, at the very least, condemnable. The consensus on this issue is underscored by Labour MP Denis Healy who noted at the top of his speech that "There has been an extraordinary degree of agreement between the main speakers on both sides of the House".[90] Later in the debate Healy's partyman Tomney similarly remarked: "Nasser … has done something which has been done before in history by people who have assumed the role of dictator. He has succeeded in uniting the House of Commons."[91]

What response did the UK's Liberal Elites favour?

Despite the seemingly unanimous condemnation of Nasser's actions and character, similar consensus on the need for (immediate) military action against him was lacking. Generally, Labour seemed opposed to such action, whilst the Conservatives were more hawkish in their rhetoric.

Prime Minister Anthony Eden

Prior to the debate in the House of Commons Eden had already made a few minor military moves. In both his speech during the debate, as well as in later moments, such as the meeting in Sèvres, Eden seemed strongly in favour of military action against Nasser, fuelled by his

[85] Gaitskell, *Suez Canal.*
[86] Ibid.
[87] Amery, *Suez Canal.*
[88] Warbey, *Suez Canal.*
[89] Evans, *Suez Canal.*
[90] Healy, *Suez Canal.*
[91] Tomney, *Suez Canal.*

perception of the colonel as a reincarnation of Hitler and a determination not to make the same mistake as in the 1930s.[9293]

Opposition Leader Hugh Gaitskell

Gaitskell's position on intervention was simultaneously clear and ambiguous. The Labour Leader was with Eden when the news of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal first reached the UK. At the time, Gaitskell is alleged to have shared Eden's opinion that the move warranted a military response.[94] A week later, during the debate in the House of Commons, Gaitskell directly compared Nasser's move to Hitler and Mussolini's conquests in Europe in the 1930s. However, as consistent as this conviction seems with the alleged support for military intervention, Gaitskell used the same speech to outline his arguments against such a move.

The Opposition Leader made clear that he generally did not favour a military response but he acknowledged that certain circumstances could arise in which intervention became unavoidable. Yet, he was quite adamant about not becoming the aggressor. Gaitskell, above all else, viewed the Suez issue as an international issue and thus favoured a corresponding approach, preferably through the United Nations (U.N.). "It is important that what we do should be done in the fullest possible co-operation with the other nations affected. We should try to settle this matter peacefully on the lines of an international commission … While force cannot be excluded, we must be sure that the circumstances justify it and that it is, if used consistent with … the Charter of the United Nations and not in conflict with them."[95]

Besides an ideological case, Gaitskell also made a legal case against the use of force against Nasser. "Indeed, if there were anything which he had done which would justify force at the moment, it is … the one thing on which we have never used force, namely, the stopping of the Israeli ships … it would, I think, be difficult to find … in anything else he has done any legal justification for the use of force."[96]

Gaitskell followed this speech up with two letters, sent on August 3 and 10, in both of which he doubled down on his arguments against a (rushed) military intervention. In the second of the two letters, Gaitskell repeated his argument that Nasser had not (yet) done anything to justify a military response. He also once more pleaded for consultation of the U.N., stating that if they judged Egypt as "aggressors", he would see enough justification for a military response.[97] So far however, Gaitskell argued in his letter, "what Nasser has done amounts to a threat, a grave threat to us and to others, which certainly cannot be ignored; but it is only a threat, not in my opinion justifying retaliation by war".[98]

The Labour Party

The rest of the Labour Party was generally in line with Gaitskell's take on the matter. Healy, for example, painted a picture of the confusing British policy towards Egypt, arguing that

[92] Bar-On, *Three Days in Sèvres,* 174-178.
[93] Eden, *Suez Canal.*
[94] Turner, *Suez 1956,* 181.
[95] Gaitskell, *Suez Canal.*
[96] Ibid.
[97] Turner, *Suez 1956,* 232.
[98] Ibid.

"Colonel Nasser and, indeed, the Arab world as a whole have some justification for being totally perplexed about what the real attitude of this country is towards them and their aspirations, because our policy has somersaulted at least twice a year and in the last year four times."[99] Healy's argument was not that Nasser's actions are justified, but that the British response should take into account the role they themselves had played in enabling the nationalisation.

Healy seemed even more opposed to British military intervention than his party leader. In his speech to the effect, he made no comparison to any of the dictators of the 1930s. In fact there was even a hint of understanding for the Egyptian perception and a lot of blame was laid at the feet of the UK. Healy later did adopt some of the same rhetoric as Gaitskell, in that he argued that the nationalisation of the Suez Canal did not only affect the UK, but other nations as well. A response in the form of policy, especially a military one, should therefore be one of the same kind.[100] This line of argumentation was adopted by most, if not all of the MPs opposed to military action.

Interestingly, Labour MP John Jones went against the grain. Jones presented himself as a general opponent of war, yet with regard to Egypt, he seemed to see no other option but to intervene militarily. He argued that the UK had a choice: "whether we shall lean over backwards to a dictator, or say that democracy, as we understand it, and our constitutional way of life, are worth defending and proceed to its defence, cost what it may."[101] Jones' argument rested on the conviction that as a democracy, the UK had a moral obligation to defend democracy when it is under threat elsewhere. Convinced that Nasser posed such a threat, Jones expressed his hope for a diplomatic solution but acknowledged the probable reality that a forceful defence of democracy would be needed.[102]

Everyone present at the debate seemed to agree that what Nasser did was wrong. The dispute around whether to take military action or not thus seemed not to revolve around a judgement of Nasser's character or actions, but rather around the necessity and the justification for (individual British) military action. The most important arguments against such action were twofold: a lack of conviction that Nasser posed a significant enough potential threat and an unwillingness to bypass allies and recently established institutions such as the U.N., given that its Security Council was meant for, amongst other things, handling such crises.

The first of these two arguments disagrees with the Nasser-Hitler comparison, at least to such an extent that it frames Nasser as a lesser threat than Hitler. It has a (neo-)realist element to it, evaluating whether British national security is under enough threat to risk an armed conflict. I.e. do the (potential) benefits of a military intervention outweigh its (potential) costs? The second argument is not so much focused on Nasser as it is on the UK, its allies and the liberal institutions in place for dealing with international crises. It is more liberal in nature, for the argument seeks for the UK to go through international laws and institutions, rather than acting alone.

[99] Healy, *Suez Canal.*
[100] Ibid.
[101] Jones, *Suez Canal.*
[102] Ibid.

The Conservative Party

The Conservatives were more hawkish in their approach to Nasser. Without explicitly demanding war, it was clear that most of the Tories did favour a tougher response by the UK. Amery, for example, opened his speech with a clear threat to Nasser. "There is a long gallery of tyrants, emperors and dictators who have paid with their lives for waking up and uniting the boldness of France and the determination of England. Colonel Nasser may find himself in that boat before long."[103] Further on in his speech Amery advocated a number of actions, including establishing a renewed presence of British and French troops in the Suez region, accepting the risk that this might usher a response from the Egyptians and thus escalate into a conflict.[104]

Partyman John Harvey, like many others, made the Hitler-analogy. He took it a step further however, and said that what many others left out. "We remember that our failure to act in the defence of, and in honour of, international agreements at that time led Hitler to imagine himself invincible and led eventually to world war. Many of us feel that Colonel Nasser's policies today are shaping much the same way."[105] In naming the failure to act against Hitler and explicitly warning that Nasser's policies are shaping the same way, Harvey made clear his perception of the threat Nasser posed if left unchecked. He therefore argued that the UK had to make clear to Nasser that it "cannot accept another Rhineland situation", and thus that the colonel had a choice between being reasonable or facing the consequences.[106]

This rhetoric from Harvey and Amery was exemplary of the Conservative Party line. Still, it is important to note that the Conservative position was not to ignore other affected countries or the U.N. altogether. The arguments simply fixated on the perceived urgency of the matter, based on the Hitler-analogy: rather than wait for international approval, the UK ought to take the initiative and act first. Any international support was welcome but not required. The Conservative argument was thus also a more (neo-)realist one; they judged Nasser to be a greater threat than Labour did and thus were more intent on taking precautionary measures beyond 'mere' economic sanctions. The argument can also be viewed from a liberal perspective: Nasser's actions proved him to be so illiberal and thus immoral that they required the same forceful response that the likes of Hitler and Mussolini had eventually been given.

Another common pattern in the Tory rhetoric on Nasser was that they had seemingly run out of patience with him. Removing Nasser from power was also something the Conservative government officials hoped to achieve with their invasion plan. In fact, the disdain for Nasser and the desire to be rid of him was one of the few initial unifying factors during the negotiations between Israel, France and the UK in Sèvres.[107] This ties into the regime change argument made by Owen, that liberal states often go to war with illiberal states with the (additional) goal of liberalising them. The liberal nations saw in Nasser's Egypt a new enemy of liberalism and consequently made plans to remove him from power.[108]

[103] Amery, *Suez Canal.*
[104] Ibid.
[105] Harvey, *Suez Canal.*
[106] Ibid.
[107] Bar-On, *Three Days in Sèvres,* 178-180.
[108] Owen, *Liberal Peace,* 4.

How did the British media respond to the Suez Crisis?

Early responses to the nationalisation

Like the British liberal elites, the British media in late July 1956 were adamant in their condemnation of Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal. The rhetoric against the colonel in the first days and weeks after his move was generally harsh. The Times labelled the nationalisation a "*coup d'etat* against the … Suez Canal Company".[109] The newspaper was also quick to understand that the situation was severe enough for there to be serious talk of war. Despite this realisation, the Times did not make a direct case for war. Instead it praised Prime Minister Eden's initial reaction, saying that the UK would need to use firmness and care in its response.[110]

Less measured were the responses by outlets such as The Observer and The Daily Herald. Like many of the liberal elites, these outlets were unafraid to compare Nasser and his actions to the notorious dictators of the 1930s. The Observer made reference to Nasser's seizure of the Suez Canal as "Hitlerian tactics".[111] The Daily Herald took it a step further, publishing an article on its front page titled *WHAT WE THINK: No more Adolf Hitlers*. The lead sentence of the story, is about as blunt and explicit as it gets: "Colonel Nasser is acting like Hitler in the Middle East."[112] This was followed by a clear appeal to the British government and its allies to take (military) action. "Hitler did this – and got away with it. Britain and the other Powers must swiftly show Nasser that they are going to tolerate no more Hitlers."[113]

According to Guillaume Parmentier, only three newspapers of note (Tribune, The Economist and The New Statesman and Nation) explicitly opposed intervention, albeit for different reasons. The Economist had a relatively realist argument for their hesitance; the newspaper failed to see the benefit of military intervention, fearing it would prove insufficient for the West to teach Nasser a lesson. Tribune and The New Statesman and Nation were more idealistic in their rejection of military intervention, arguing that Nasser's nationalisation was lawful and that the UK, or any other nation for that matter, had no right to respond in such an aggressive manner.[114]

Attitudes by the time of the intervention

Interestingly, by the time the UK started taking actual military action, Parmentier argues that the press had shifted its position to oppose such action. Yet, his breakdown of the different media responses paints a different picture. In the immediate aftermath of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, Parmentier's research shows media reconciliation with regard to condemning Nasser and looking to the government for a firm response. Yet, the number of newspapers directly calling for war at the time was relatively small. Just about as small in fact, as those explicitly opposing it.[115]

[109] The Times, *Anglo-French Unity Urged,* 6.
[110] The Times, *Time for Decision,* 7.
[111] The Observer, *Comment,* 6.
[112] The Daily Herald, *What We Think,* 1.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Parmentier, *The British Press in the Suez Crisis,* 438.
[115] Ibid., 435-438.

By the time of the Suez Crisis three months later, Parmentier's research shows that the shift the press had made was not so much about support for military action as it was a critique of Eden and his government's alleged inconsistent leadership throughout the crisis. Parmentier shows that the press had generally shaped back up along party lines, meaning that what he calls "the Labour press" largely espoused the Labour Party's rhetoric, and the same goes for "the Conservative press".[116] This does not mean that Nasser was now no longer considered a condemnable figure; the shift refers more to a shift in focus (from Nasser onto Eden) than a shift in opinion, as Parmentier demonstrates, but strangely does not argue.

How did the British people respond to the Suez Crisis?

It is difficult to determine the British public's exact response to the nationalisation of the Suez Crisis. No polls on that question seem to be available from that time period to give an indication of British public opinion. The British Institute of Public Opinion did conduct opinion polls during and after the Suez Crisis, on 1-2 November, 10-11 November and 1-2 December. The results of these polls are outlined below, in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Agree with Eden's handling of Middle East situation.[117]

Voting Intention	**Nov 1-2, 1956**	**Nov 10-11, 1956**	**Dec 1-2 1956**
All	40%	53%	51%
Conservative	76%	89%	85%
Labour	16%	20%	19%
Liberal	25%	46%	46%
Don't Know	27%	50%	39%

Table 2: Right to take military action in Egypt.[118]

Voting Intention	**Nov 1-2, 1956**	**Nov 10-11, 1956**	**Dec 1-2 1956**
All	37%	49%	48%
Conservative	68%	81%	79%
Labour	16%	22%	30%
Liberal	24%	39%	40%
Don't Know	23%	43%	33%

The results show a pattern similar to the one displayed by both the Liberal Elites and the British press. There was strong support for intervention from Conservatives and strong opposition from Labour voters. The interesting pattern that is consistent across all voter groups is the increase in support from 1-2 November to the 10th and 11th of that month. This is consistent with the view of then Labour MP James Callaghan, who, as quoted by Russel Braddon, said "we had public opinion on our side, but as soon as we actually went to war, I could *feel* the change".[119]

[116] Parmentier, *The British Press in the Suez Crisis*, 444-445.
[117] Mahmood, *British Public Opinion and Suez*, 218.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Braddon, *Suez*, 113.

Division Along Party Lines

What stands out from every analysed layer of society is that the British perspective on military action against Egypt in 1956 seems to have been heavily divided along party lines. Conservatives seemed generally in favour of intervention based on a combination of liberal arguments – categorising Nasser as a Hitler-like dictator and thus the worst possible evil – as well as realist arguments – fearing that said categorisation implied the significance of Nasser's threat and refusing to make the appeasement-mistake again. Those affiliated with the Labour Party were more cautious and, in more extreme cases, even outright opposed to military intervention. They similarly used a combination of realist and liberal arguments. The hardliners, who were outright opposed to military action, downplayed the threat Nasser posed and in some cases even sided with him on the Suez Canal issue. The more moderate wing of the party did not rule out military action but also did not wish to bypass liberal international institutions in their pursuit of their and other affected nations' interests. The British discussion whether or not to take military action against Nasser's Egypt thus seemed to revolve around three main themes; two of them liberal, the evilness of Nasser's illiberal regime and the importance of liberal international institutions, and one of them realist, the level of threat that Nasser actually posed.

10. Conclusion and Discussion

Research for this thesis found strong evidence for *H1* and a reasonable amount of evidence for *H2*.

H1

Most of the evidence for *H1* comes in the form of Hitler-analogies. Just eleven years after the end of World War II (WWII), a lot of the British liberal elites, in particular Prime Minister Eden, saw strong similarities between Nasser and Hitler. In particular the former's nationalisation of the Suez Canal was compared to the latter's conquest of central Europe in the late 1930s. This comparison, made repeatedly by British politicians and the British media alike, largely fuelled the pro-military action rhetoric.

Drawing on the recent experience with a non-interventionist, conflict-avoiding approach, a recurring theme in the discussion about what to do about Nasser was the warning to avoid making the same mistakes as in the lead up to WWII. Consequently, the Conservatives favoured a more direct and forceful approach and, despite clearly indicating that they did not favour war, various Labour politicians, like leader Gaitskell, did acknowledge that the situation was grave enough for violence to become a serious possibility.

This epitomises *H1:* Nazi Germany, the embodiment of illiberalism, had posed a significant threat to the UK in the recent past and illiberal Egypt was now perceived to show signs of similar behaviour. Consequently, the UK's liberal elites, developed a suspicion of Egypt as potential threat, as a result of which a coercive approach became favoured by the Conservatives and seriously considered by Labour.

H2

Jones' speech is the epitome of *H2.* His words portray a clear image of moral wrongness to be found with the perceived threat that Nasser and his regime posed to democracy. It is this moral wrongness that Jones brought up as his sole, though crucial justification for military action. Furthermore, this idea of moral wrongness is another thing that the constant Hitler-analogies fuelled. In these analogies, morality plays a role to such an extent that Hitler, as the embodiment of illiberalism, was also the embodiment of immorality or evilness. Any comparison to Hitler can thus reasonably be assumed to also contain a moral judgement.

Yet, as previously argued, the Hitler-analogies were mostly used as a threat indicator. A lot of the rhetoric centred around avoiding the mistakes made in the lead up to WWII, implying a fear that, if left unchecked, Egypt would pursue similar policy to Germany in the 1930s. This would, obviously, be detrimental to the UK's security. The issue of morality was implied but not as explicitly present as the threat perception. So although there is definitely evidence for *H2*, it does not present itself in as overwhelming a way as the evidence for *H1*. The analysis shows that *H2*, in this case, is possible but not necessarily plausible.

11. Future Research

This paper never intended to draw hard conclusions, but rather set out to provide possible hypotheses for future research. Based on the research done and evidence laid out, it seems that any such research would have the best chance of proving *H1,* the idea that liberal ideas prod liberal states into war with illiberal states because illiberal states have historically posed a threat to liberal states.

At the same time *H2* should not be discounted, if only for the fact that Owen, the man accredited for the TLA, has speculated about this himself. Furthermore, this research focused on and analysed the more explicit rhetoric by liberal elites and media outlets alike. A research that is designed to focus on identifying the more implicit indicators of morality could find stronger evidence for *H2*. *H2* is therefore definitely worth doing more research on.

The results of this research also come with a new set of questions, the most pertinent of which relates to time sensitivity. The evidence put forth in this thesis is drawn from a conflict taking place in an era shortly after WWII. The memories of Hitler were still fresh and the trauma and destruction that he caused could still be felt. This could be of influence on the way in which actions by perceived illiberal states were interpreted, as well as the favoured response to these actions. Future research could show whether time plays a role in this respect.

Finally, a lot of the rhetoric against war revolved around not being seen as the aggressor, while many who were pro-intervention also seemed to consider Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal as an act of war, making Egypt the aggressor. This raises the question as to how big a role perceiving themselves as the aggressors and being perceived as aggressors by the international community are in liberal elites' willingness to go to war.

As has been stated throughout this thesis, it was never the intention to definitively close a gap that various scholars over multiple decades have not. Significantly more research will need to be done in order to get to a stage where either one (or both) of the hypotheses put forth in this thesis can reasonably be said to be true for other cases as well. And even then, the theory will only have developed to the extent where it will be subjected to questions of human nature and how applicable that is to the world of IR.

Since I am a big football fan, I will close the thesis by saying this. Goals are often only scored after a series of many passes by many players. I can only hope that this thesis can, in some way, shape or form, serve as the first.

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