Eden’s Government 1955-7

- Foreign Secretary for 10 years under Churchill.
- Eden was irritated by criticism in the Tory press, so was determined to silence criticism by achieving success in foreign affairs since he felt he had special expertise; Led to the Suez affair.

Suez affair 1956: Overview

- Colonel Nasser = president of Egypt since 1952 and had first been on good terms with the West.
- Had been promised US and British loans for the construction of the Aswan Dam (Would modernise Egypt by providing a huge supply of hydroelectric power).
- When the USA learned that Nasser had also approaches Soviet bloc countries for aid, it withdrew its original offer.
- July 1956 Nasser, in desperation, announced nationalisation of the Suez Canal in order to raise necessary finances.
- Foreign ships would have to pay to pass through what was now an Egyptian waterway.

- Eden said such a man as Nasser could not be allowed ‘to leave his thumb on Britain’s windpipe’.
- Referencing the threat to the essential oil supplies that came to Britain from the Middle East through the Canal.
- Eden began to plan ways to bring Nasser down.

- Britain eventually withdrew from Suez.
- Eden had a deep distaste for Nasser, whom he saw in the mould of the dictators of the 1930s and dealt with these as Foreign Secretary between 1935 and 1938. For example Hitler and Benito Mussolini (Italian leader 1922-43).
- Eden did not help his cause by the manner and style in which he acted; tetchy and short-tempered.
- He did not try to hide his distaste for those who disagreed with him, especially when dealing with the USA with his undisguised annoyance with Eisenhower.
- It is said that Eden’s chronic poor health, which deteriorated further during the crisis, weakened his judgement.

- Within weeks of the crisis Eden stepped down as PM.
- The official reason was ill health but the Suez disaster had shattered his standing at home and abroad.

Significance of the Suez affair for Britain

- Britain was not defeated militarily in Egypt.
- Britain’s withdrawal was of political will.
- Fearing the consequences of being internationally isolated.
- Eden’s nerve broke and he accepted that Britain could no longer continue with a policy that the world disapproved of.