

**Forum:** Historical Security Council

**Issue:** The Suez Crisis or the Second Arab-Israeli War

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## **Introduction**

On October 29th, 1956, approximately 10 Israeli brigades entered Egyptian territory, along with British and French troops to regain control of the Suez Canal and to overthrow Egyptian President, Gamal Abdel Nasser. This conflict drew wide international reactions, and according to many analysts marked “the decline of colonial empire powers”. This conflict unfolded against the settings of the Cold War, with the United States and the Soviet Union eager to gain political influence in the Middle East, and spread their ideologies. The nationalization of the canal by the Egyptian government angered the British and French, one of the reasons that prompted the war. In the end, the war ended with the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Nations applying political pressure on the nations involved, and with the withdrawal of Israeli, British, and French troops. Around 4,000 soldiers were killed in the conflict, with hundreds more wounded.

The Suez Canal is a man-made waterway, built in 1896 in Egypt under British and French supervision. This 120-mile waterway connects the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. The canal is one of the backbones of the global economy and trade, allowing easy access to the Red and Mediterranean seas.

After the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1936, tensions escalated almost 20 years later between Egypt, Britain, and France, with the Soviet Union supplying Egypt with arms and money, in an attempt to bring the nation under its direct sphere of influence. President Nasser was then extremely frustrated with the United States for

failing to honor its agreement on providing money for the construction of the Aswan Dam on the River Nile. This then resulted in Nasser seizing complete control of the Suez, and demanding that any ships passing through must pay a toll, which would help fund the construction of the Aswan Dam. This upset the British, French, and Israel, who sent 255,000 troops into Egypt to fight to regain control of the canal. The conflict upset the Soviets and the Americans, as well as other nations all around the globe who condemned the invasion and demanded the withdrawal of the tripartite aggressors. The conflict ruined British and French influence in the Middle East.

The Soviet Union heavily protested against the invasion and threatened to rain nuclear weapons on British and French soil, if they did not immediately withdraw. President Eisenhower then warned the Soviets that America would directly intervene if nuclear weapons were used. The United States then threatened to use economic sanctions on Britain, France, and Israel if they continued the conflict. The United Nations also called for an Emergency Special Session, which resulted in the deployment of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), which are military and peacekeeping troops who were deployed to the Suez. By December, the British and French had withdrawn their troops, with Israel withdrawing later. The war ended with President Nasser remaining in power and made him a symbol of victory among the Egyptian and Arab people. The war also inspired more Arab Nationalist independence movements around the Middle East and the Arab world.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936**

The Anglo-Egyptian treaty ended the 54-year British occupation of Egypt and stated that Britain would withdraw all its forces from Egyptian territory, except those needed to defend or protect the Suez Canal, the British were allowed to have a force of 10,000 troops in Egypt.

### Arab Nationalist independence movements

After the withdrawal of the Tripartite troops, the war was seen as a victory for Egypt, as President Nasser remained in power, and inspired many nations to break free from the colonial powers. The Arab Nationalist movement was a political movement, with goals to achieve self-determination, independence, and unity amongst the Arab people.

### Arms exports

The supply of military weapons and equipment to other countries. During the Suez Crisis, the Soviet Union was a major supplier of arms to Egypt, to help the Egyptian military put up a fight against the invading armies.

### Aswan Dam

The Aswan Dam is a significant dam, that was to be situated near the River Nile. The Dam would be used for irrigation, water management, and even to generate hydroelectric power. The United States promised to fund Egypt to construct this dam but broke its assurance later on. This then forced President Nasser to collect tolls from the Suez for the funding of the construction of the dam.

### Cold War

The Cold War was a period of geopolitical tension and ideological rivalry between the United States of America and the Soviet Union, throughout the latter half of the 20th century. The Cold War caused significant impacts on global politics and security, without a direct conflict between the Soviets and the Americans

### Colonialism

Colonialism is a movement, in which a more powerful nation gains control over another region or population, for resources, and economic and political control. Many great powers such as Britain, France, and Spain had colonial territories across the globe.

## **Nationalization**

Nationalization is the process by which privately owned enterprises, and industries owned by the private sector, are then transferred to the ownership of the government or the state. President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, placing the canal under the complete control of the Egyptian government, and demanded tolls from any passing ships willing to use the canal.

## **Self-Determination**

It is a process by which a certain group of ethnic people, form their state and vote on their government.

## **Tripartite aggression**

The Tripartite aggression refers to the use of military force by the nations of Britain, France, and Israel against Egypt.

## **United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF)**

The UNEF was a proposed solution by the United Nations, for peacekeeping. Troops from different nations were sent to the Suez Canal, to monitor the withdrawal of foreign troops from Egyptian territory, and to maintain peace and stability in the region.

## **United Nations Emergency Special Session**

The UN Emergency Special Session refers to a meeting convened by the United Nations to discuss and convey critical or urgent issues. An Emergency Special Session takes place only when a situation that requires immediate action to be taken place has occurred.

## **Key Issues**

### **Nationalization of the Suez Canal**

Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser made the key decision to bring the entire Suez Canal under the control of the Egyptian state. This placed a vital waterway, that is pivotal to the global economy, and trade under the hands of Egyptian authority.

President Nasser then demanded tolls from any ships or vessels wishing to move through the canal, for revenue to fund the building of the Aswan Dam. One of the main reasons for this was the United States and Britain refusing to send aid to fund the Aswal Dam construction. Many experts cite this as one of the main reasons for the conflict. The decision made by President Nasser directly threatened the British and French stock holdings in the regions. This move also threatened to cut down Europe's oil supply, as the Suez was an important route for transporting oil from the Middle East and Africa to many European nations.

### **Soviet and Communist Intervention**

Another key issue that Britain and the United States were not pleased with, was the constant Soviet intervention in the Middle East and Africa. The United States and Britain both broke their assurance to Egypt for aid to construct the Aswan Dam, after President Nasser supposedly made moves that were 'friendly to the communist block'. One of these moves was the Egyptian-Czechoslovak arms deal, in which the Soviets were to supply \$83 million worth of modern Soviet weaponry and machinery to Egypt via Czechoslovakia. This was done to spread the Soviet sphere of influence across the Arab World.

In addition to the Soviets supplying military assistance to Egypt, the United States dejected the move by the Egyptians to recognize the People's Republic of China. On October 29th, 1956, the Soviet Union and the United States both demanded an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of all foreign military from Egypt.

Tensions reached a boiling point between the Soviets and the West, when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, immensely escalated tensions by threatening to drop nuclear

missiles on the Western Block and Israel, the tripartite forces did not withdraw. President Eisenhower of the United States then warned the Soviets that the United States would retaliate, and take countermeasures against direct Soviet intervention in this conflict.

### **Expulsion of citizens from Egypt**

During the beginning of the conflict in 1956, President Nasser began the expulsion of many foreign minorities from Egyptian territory. Many British, French, Greeks, and Jews were expelled or left the country. Many owners were deprived of their property, incomes, and businesses. By December 1956, around 1,500 British and French civilians had been expelled and deported out of the country.

Jews were the most targeted minority within Egypt during the Suez Crisis. President Nasser began mounting mass arrests, and removal of civil rights, as well as citizenship for Jewish civilians in Egypt. Around 500 Jewish businesses were seized by the government, and local authorities arrested 1,000 Jews. Hundreds of Jewish bank accounts were seized, and many more were expelled from their jobs.

By 1957, around 6,000 Jewish civilians were safely escorted out of Egypt via ship, with the aid of the International Red Cross. Estimates then range that approximately 25,000 out of 42,500 Jews in Egypt had left, and sought refuge mainly in Israel and Western Europe. Other humanitarian groups such as the Central British Fund the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Jewish Agency helped many refugees settle down in Western Europe and Israel. The UN High Commission on Refugees also donated around \$30,000 to Jewish refugees from Egypt.

### **Economic and Energy Security**

The Suez Canal was a vital transportation hub for Middle Eastern and African oil to Western Europe and other parts of the globe. When the canal was closed, this was a huge energy security threat to many other Western European countries. The countries that suffered the most during this crisis were Britain and France, who lost complete access to

Middle Eastern oil, as other nations refused to trade with both nations, vying for support for Egypt. The Suez Crisis illustrated how regional conflicts could have such a geopolitical influence and impact on oil supply and trade.

The Suez Crisis was seen as a ‘wake-up call’ for many nations to find alternative suppliers of oil and supply routes. This led to the discovery and construction of more oil pipelines, to reduce the overdependence on the Suez Canal for oil supply. Throughout the crisis, the costs of shipping goods had greatly increased, and many nations had to take extended shipping routes to trade. The Suez Crisis evoked many Western European nations to re-evaluate their policy and encouraged nations to discuss the matter of energy conservation and diversification. The Suez Energy Crisis proved to be a pivotal lesson to a large number of countries.

The Suez Energy Crisis also prompted responses from the Soviet Union and the United States of America, both of which wanted to spread their influence around the region throughout the conflict. The United States was a mediator between the 2 sides during the conflict. This highlighted the United States’ commitment to its oil supply in the Middle East, and its goal of preventing any disruptions in the global oil supply. The Soviets took advantage of the situation to spread its sphere of influence across the regions and strike important oil-supply deals and agreements with Egypt.

### **Decolonization and Arab-Nationalist Independence movements**

The Suez Crisis occurred amidst the mist of the Arab-Nationalist independence movements. Many regions and populations demanded ‘freedom’ from the colonial powers, and demanded that the principle of self-determination be applied.

President Nasser’s decision to nationalize the Suez was seen as a direct message to assert its sovereignty and jurisdiction over its land and resources. Nasser’s actions during the Suez Crisis, including his actions for anti-colonialism and his support for newly independent nations, were seen as heroic and inspired more independence movements across the region, and the entire globe.

As for Britain and France, their invasions raised questions about the right and legality of former colonial powers to interfere in occurrences in former colonies. The Suez Crisis was also seen as humiliating for Britain and France, as both nations struggled to maintain their colonial influence in the post-WW2 era, this was a significant moment in history, as it marked the decline of British and French colonial powers. Lastly, it signaled a move from a colonial-world order to a post-colonial one.

### **National Interests against International Law**

National interests are usually aims set by a government of a nation that they wish to accomplish. These aims can be military, cultural, economic, etc. In the case of the Suez Crisis, British and French national interests were to maintain their grip on the Suez Canal, following Nasser's nationalization of the waterway.

Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter calls for member nations to prohibit the use of military aggression or force, and asks nations to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of independent states. The UN Charter prohibits the use of military power against any nation, except in the use of self-defense, or with permission from the United Nations Security Council. Britain, France, and Israel intervening in Egypt was seen as a violation of international law and raised questions about these nations prioritizing their national interests, without regard to international law. The UN then held a special emergency session and demanded the immediate withdrawal of all foreign powers from Egyptian territory.

During this crisis, the United States and the Soviet Union both framed their stances in terms of international legal frameworks. President Eisenhower of the United States was against the invasion and was disappointed in Britain and France. The US acted as a mediator in promoting peaceful dialogue between the nations involved to end the conflict diplomatically. Moreover, Premier Khrushchev of the USSR saw the crisis also to present the Soviets as a defender of international law.



## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### **The Arab Republic of Egypt**

Egypt was the nation that was invaded by the tripartite aggression. President Nasser's actions to nationalize the Suez, and place it under direct control of the Egyptian state, was seen as a direct challenge to Britain and France. This was also seen as a move to assert its sovereignty over the colonial power of Britain, and its support of Arab-nationalist or Pan-arab movements, which was to decrease the Western influence and intervention across the Arab World. In addition to this, Egypt was also ramping up its military, by aligning with the USSR and receiving vital modern Soviet military equipment and weapons.

Egypt was also widely involved in UN discussions and negotiations, supporting Resolution 118 of the United Nations, which called for the sovereignty of Egypt. The Egyptians also expressed their desire for a ceasefire, and their immediate end of the conflict diplomatically and peacefully. At the end of the conflict, President Nasser's popularity sky-rocketed in the Arab world, and it earned him vital support from many other Arab nations, placing Egypt as a pivotal voice in Arab politics.

### **The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

Egypt was a British colony, since 1882. British forces have occupied the country since the Anglo-Egyptian conflict. In 1936, both nations signed the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, which limited the presence of British troops in Egypt, and declared Egypt's independence. The United Kingdom saw the Suez as an important waterway, to gain easy access to its colonies elsewhere in Asia and Africa. Nasser's nationalization of the canal was seen as a threat and a direct challenge to London over control of the canal.

Britain then conducted a joint invasion of Egypt, alongside Israel, and Egypt in an operation known as “Operation Musketeer”. The British involvement left major doubts on the international stage, of Britain violating international law, by intervening in the affairs of its former colonies. The United States, a major ally of the UK, went against the tripartite aggression and demanded the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Egypt. The conflict also had a toll on the British economy, as its oil supply routes in Africa and the Middle East had been disrupted and severed. This conflict marked the downfall of Britain’s colonial influence around the globe, as many colonies soon demanded independence after seeing the British struggle against Egypt. After immense political pressure from the United Nations, and the USA threatening to apply economic sanctions, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden finally decided to withdraw his troops from Egypt and solve the conflict in diplomatic dialogue.

### **French Republic**

France, similarly to Britain saw the Suez Canal as an important transportation hub, for access to its colonies in the Far East and elsewhere. The French were also concerned about the nationalization of the canal, as it threatened French trade routes and its oil supply from the Middle East. France then joined Israel and Britain in the invasion of Egypt, to protect its interests in the region. However, unlike Great Britain, Paris was less reliant on the United States than Britain and was more willing to use military force. The French economy also took a toll similar to Britain, as the crisis disrupted vital trade routes and limited the oil supply from the Middle East. It also made it more difficult for France to access its colonies around the globe. On 22nd December 1956, Prime Minister Guy Mollet finally decided that France would be withdrawing its troops from the region, after immense political pressure internationally.

## State of Israel

Israel's primary reason for participating in the Suez Canal was the mere existence of President Nasser's regime. The Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was not pleased with Egypt's support of Palestinian Fedayeen, and his continuous support for Palestine. Israel also had similar interests in protecting the Suez Canal, in response to President Nasser's nationalization of the canal. Israel then secretly collaborated and communicated with Britain and France, in planning the use of military force against Egypt.

The Israeli forces then launched Operation Kadash, with the main goal of capturing and seizing control of the Sinai Peninsula, this would also allow for easier landings for British and French troops. From a military perspective, the campaign was a military success for Israel and showcased Israel's military might on the global stage. However, Israel was under immense pressure from the United States, who demanded the withdrawal of all Israeli troops, to de-escalate the conflict. Israel also faced political pressure from the United Nations. Finally, on March 19, 1957, Israeli forces withdrew from the Suez Canal, after months of political pressure from other nations. Israel's already sour relations with other Arab nations in the region had grown even worse and led to more political tension in the region.

## The United States of America

One of the catalysts for the Suez Crisis was the United States' refusal to help Egypt construct the Aswan Dam, which then forced President Nasser to nationalize the canal to collect tolls for the construction of the dam. Under the leadership of President Dwight Eisenhower, the US hoped to achieve a solution to the Suez Crisis diplomatically and peacefully. The USA strongly opposed and went against the use of military force by the tripartite aggressors. This severed relations between Britain and the US, as the US saw Britain prioritizing its national interests above international law. President Eisenhower saw the use of military intervention as going against UN law and principles.

The United States played a crucial role in mediating the conflict, by actively engaging in the UN discussions and supporting resolutions that demanded the withdrawal of foreign troops. The United States applied immense political pressure on the tripartite aggressors and threatened to place economic sanctions if they did not withdraw. The US was also concerned with protecting Middle East security, as the region was a major supplier of oil globally. President Eisenhower also helped de-escalate the conflict, when the Soviets threatened to intervene with nuclear warheads, Eisenhower warned the Russians that intervening would only make the conflict even more bloody and would result in a larger amount of casualties and loss of life.

### **The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics**

Amidst the Suez Crisis, the USSR was an important ally for the Egyptians. The Soviets struck an arms deal to supply modern Soviet machinery and weapons worth \$83 Million, this deal was struck with the Czechoslovaks, within Soviet supervision. The USSR also gave diplomatic and economic support to Egypt during the crisis. The USSR strongly opposed and went against the tripartite aggression, demanding that all foreign powers withdraw immediately. The Soviets played a crucial role in diplomatically ending the conflict, by actively engaging in UN discussions.

However, the crisis also escalated tensions between the USA and the USSR. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev threatened to ‘rain nuclear weapons over Western Europe’ if the tripartite troops did not withdraw from Egypt. This could’ve escalated the conflict into a global nuclear war. President Eisenhower then warned the Soviets not to escalate the crisis, and that America would intervene if nuclear weapons were to be used. Both Moscow and Washington were eager to spread their ‘spheres of influence’ and ideologies around the Middle East region. However, at the ‘Suez Summit’ in London in 1957, the Soviets participated in the conference, in hopes of finding a diplomatic solution.

## The United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF)

On the day of the Suez Crisis, the United Nations General Assembly met to discuss the conflict. A majority of nations then voted for Britain, France, and Israel to withdraw their troops completely from Egyptian territory. Thus, as per UN General Assembly resolution 1001, The United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) to stabilize the region. The UNEF consisted of forces from all around the globe from nations such as Canada, India, and other neutral states. The main goal of the UNEF was to ensure stability in the region, supervise the ceasefire, and provide humanitarian assistance to civilians. The UNEF also monitored the withdrawal of all foreign troops.

### Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
1947	Independence of the State of Israel	The United Nations officially recognizes the State of Israel and approves the partition of Palestine.
1952	Nasser seized power in Egypt	A military general General Abdel Nasser organized a coup d'etat of the Egyptian government. He is a leader who supports the Arab Nationalist revolts and goes against the

		policy of Western nations.
<b>1954</b>	US Economic aid	The United States keeps its assurance in supporting Egypt for the construction of the Aswan Dam. The Dam was built to improve the water facilities of the Nile River and supply more water to the region
<b>1955</b>	Egyptian- Soviet cooperation	Egypt signed an arms deal with Czechoslovakia, in which the Egyptians would receive \$83 Million worth of the highest-quality modern Soviet military equipment. This move is greatly opposed by Western Leaders, who consider this move unfriendly.
<b>July 1956</b>	Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and the tripartite	President Nasser seized control of the Suez

	aggressors secretly planned the invasion of Egypt.	Canal and demanded tolls for any ships that wished to pass through. British and French companies lost access to the canal, and Europe's oil supply route is now at risk as well. The crisis then escalated as Britain, France, and Israel secretly planned an invasion of Egypt.
<b>October 29, 1956</b>	<b>The start of the war</b>	Israel launched Operation Kadesh, and moved troops into the Sinai Peninsula, with the main goal of seizing the peninsula. Soon, British and French troops also landed troops at Port Said and Port Fuad.
<b>November 6th, 1956</b>	United Nations Emergency Session	The UN General Assembly held an emergency meeting to discuss the conflict. Most nations demanded an immediate ceasefire

		and the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Egypt.
<b>November 2nd to 21st, 1956</b>	American and Soviet responses and reactions	Both Moscow and Washington actively participated in UN sessions and demanded a diplomatic and peaceful solution to the conflict. The Soviets supported Egypt and provided military support to Cairo. The United States remained neutral but was unhappy with Britain and France (both key US allies) for using military aggression. Soviet Premier Khrushchev then threatened to intervene with Soviet nukes, which prompted America to intervene, stating that they would retaliate in the case of Soviet intervention. The US then placed immense



		political pressure and threatened to apply economic sanctions to any foreign power with troops in Egypt.
<b>November 21st, 1956</b>	Withdrawal of troops	Britain and France both agreed to withdraw their troops from Egypt after immense political pressure was applied on them internationally.
<b>November 22, 1956,</b>	United Nations Emergency Forces	The United Nations agreed on a resolution to deploy peacekeeping forces to Egypt, to help maintain stability, help civilians, and monitor the withdrawal of foreign troops.
<b>December 1956</b>	British and French troops withdraw	The last British and French troops withdrew from the Suez Canal, under UNEF supervision.
<b>March 1957</b>	Israeli troops withdrew	Israel decided to keep its troops in the Sinai

		Peninsula and Egypt until they decided to finally withdraw in March after immense political pressure.
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### Previous attempts to solve the issue:

#### The Canal Users Association

The United States and Britain formed the Suez Canal Users Association at a conference in London, shortly before the start of the conflict. This association was aimed to ensure the international operation and usage of the canal. This attempt was a failure, as Nasser's policy of nationalization on the canal remained intact. One of the causes of the Canal Users Association's demise was a lack of international support. The CUA primarily only focused on the national interests of Britain, France, Israel, and the United States. Without much dialogue from other nations, the CUA's goals and objectives became harder to accomplish, and its position was weakened.

#### Peace conferences

Many international and peace conferences were held to solve the issue diplomatically. The United States and Britain hosted the London conference in 1956, with US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles aiming to search for a peaceful resolution to the crisis. However, the efforts and negotiations made at the London conference were unsuccessful and a failure. A primary reason for this failure, was Egypt's absence from this conference, as the conference's capacity to reach a comprehensive settlement was hampered. Moreover, the national interests of other nations collided. The London conference brought together the nations of Britain, France, and the USA. The primary goal for Britain and France was to regain complete control of the Suez Canal, while the

Americans opted for a more diplomatic approach, and opposed the use of military intervention. This also led to a lack of trust between the parties.

## **Possible Solutions**

### **Internationalization of the Suez Canal**

The nationalization of the Suez Canal was viewed as the catalyst or the cause of the Suez Crisis. This move threatened a major international waterway, that is a vital backbone to the global economy and trade. Thus a probable solution, is the internationalization of the canal, by placing it under the control of the United Nations. This would allow all nations to use the canal for commercial uses, and would not threaten the route of any supplies.

### **Development Assistance**

Western powers can start providing aid and funds for Egypt once again for the improvement of its infrastructure and development. Most importantly, the allies must come to the negotiating table, where the allies support Egypt in its construction of the Aswan Dam, while in exchange, Cairo loosens its grip on the Suez Canal and allows ships to pass through without paying tolls.

### **Shared Stakeholder Control**

Before the nationalization of the Suez Canal, the countries with primary stakeholders in the region were Egypt, France, and Britain. It is more probable for the governments of these countries to come to the negotiation table to split the ownership of the canal. This way, all the parties involved would still be able to collect their share of profits in the canal, while also being equally involved in the decision-making of the canal.

## International Financial Support

Due to the nationalization of the Suez Canal by the Egyptian President, there can be the creation of an international compensation fund. This fund can be established by contributions of other nations willing to support this fund, or through other international financial institutions under the supervision of the United Nations. Its purpose would be to square accounts with Britain and France for their losses due to the loss of stakeholders in the Suez.

Financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank can provide loans or further assistance, to lighten the losses of France and Britain in the region. Lastly, to ensure future stability in the region, various guarantees and treaties can be put into play to safeguard the international use of the Suez, and to prevent disruptions of the canal in the future. This could involve legal agreements and financial assurances.

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