



Historical Security Council

The Suez Crisis 1956
Meeting on November 6th, 1956





Forum:

Historical Security Council

Issue:

The Suez Crisis of 1956

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Position:

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Introduction

The Suez Canal is vital to world trade, enabling traders wishing to transport goods from Europe to Asia by over 8,800 km, via a much safer route compared to its alternative round the West African coast. With 30% of world trade going through the canal on a yearly basis, there is great financial and geopolitical incentive to control the route. Since its completion in 1869, its control has been contentiously switched between Egyptian, British, and minority French control, with each staking historical, financial, and security claims to its control. This finally erupted in the Suez Crisis of 1956, where British, French, and Israeli forces coordinated together to seize back control of the canal from Egypt who had recently seized control through the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company.

When Israel invaded the Sinai peninsula in the first stages of the mission, the UK and France quickly ordered a joint ultimatum for both sides to retreat and create a 10 mile buffer zone around the canal. As Israel was still 40 miles away from the canal, the move quickly exposed France and the UK to be in cahoots with Israel. Thus making the crisis much more intricate. As **this council meets on the 6th November, 1956** it will have to balance the historical and financial claims of the British and French to the canal, the grievances of Israel from being blocked from its use, and primarily the sovereignty of protection of the Egyptian state.

The Suez Crisis (1956) Map and chronologic overview



(Fanack)



Definition of Key Terms

Suez Canal Company

Established in 1858, by the Canal founder, the company has legal ownership and control over the canal, it dictated the flow of goods, collected tolls, and distributed profits to its shareholders. Initially control of the canal was split between the French investors (French businesses and government institutions), who owned 52% and the Egyptian government who owned 48%. However by the time of the company's nationalisation its largest shareholder was the British government who had bought out Egypt's shares, and had 44% ownership, followed by French investors / government institutions, and other European investors with minority stakes.

Ottoman Empire

An empire that consisted of modern-day Turkey, and its surrounding neighbours, that controlled swathes of the Middle East, European Balkans, and Africa from 1299 till its dissolution post WW1 in 1922. However by the turn of the 19th century its influence was already significantly declining, it was commonly nicknamed the "Sickman of Europe".

Protectorate

Is a semi-independent state who may have degrees of control over internal affairs, yet it is still placed under the military protection of a more powerful nation. This is done through a legally ratified treaty. Protectorates lack full statehood and are dependent on their "Protector nation", however this relationship is not always malicious, modern examples include Puerto Rico, and the US, or the Falkland Islands the UK.

Arab Nationalism

A political belief and movement that the Arab people should constitute a single nation, and that its current leaders should work not in the sole interests of their own nation instead align their policies to benefit all Arabian people. Arab Nationalism in this context does not explicitly mean it supports wish for a single Arab nation, just rather believe in geopolitically aligning with other Arab nations.

Nationalisation

Nationalisation is the process whereby a nation's government takes control of a privately held company. Depending on the degree of liberty in the government, some may need to buyout the company by compensating its shareholders, other nations may take hold of them through sheer force. Examples of nationalisation include, bringing private train lines, bus companies, electricity services, or healthcare providers under government provision.



The Central Banks of nations will often hold other countries' currencies as a form of insurance, so that in case of a national default or recession they can sell these currencies, as they are immune from the host nation's financial trouble. These can also be used as a geopolitical tool, the mass selling of your foreign reserve can crash the value of another nation's currency, causing economic harm.

General Overview

Nationalisation of the Suez Canal

On July 26, 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian President announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company, a British-French-owned enterprise that had operated the Suez Canal since its construction in 1889. The announcement came after numerous months of political tension between Egypt, Britain, and France - the British and French governments were outraged with the nationalisation, as they already suspected Nasser's opposition to their political influence in the area.

On September 9, 1956, the United States suggested the creation of a Suez Canal Users' Association (SCUA), "an international consortium of 18 of the world's leading maritime nations," (*Office of the Historian*), to operate the canal. Though this would give Britain, France, and Egypt equal stake in the canal, this and other solutions proposed by the USA didn't gain the full support of any of the parties involved.

UK and France partnership with Israel

Britain and France saw the nationalisation of the Suez Canal as a threat to their national interests, accordingly, they decided to follow through with a solution that involved Israel. They contacted the Israeli government and proposed a joint military operation where they would "invade the Sinai and march toward the Suez Canal zone after which Britain and France would issue a warning to both Egypt and Israel to stay away from the Canal. Britain and France would then land paratroopers in the Canal Zone on the pretence of protecting it." (*U.S. Department of State*)

Israel invasion

On October 29, 1956, Israeli forces defeated the Egyptian army in the Sinai and captured Sharm el-Sheikh; they then started moving towards the Suez Canal. Britain and France therefore issued an ultimatum, for all parties to remove themselves to 10 miles from the canal. However, when the ultimatum was emitted Israel was still 40 miles from the region which exposed their collaboration with Britain and France.



As expected Nassar rejected the ultimatum. Then on the 5th of November British and French paratroopers landed to secure a ten mile buffer zone around the canal. The French and British forces quickly eliminated the majority of Egyptian forces and now have control of the Canal region.

Major Parties Involved

The Arab Republic of Egypt (Egypt)

Egypt is involved in the crisis for a multitude of reasons. The government's nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company is one of the primary causes of the crisis, while as the host country of the canal, its consent will be vital to any possible solution. Furthermore Egypt's long history of colonial occupation, and its position as the nation under invasion makes its sovereignty central to the question of this council. Although Egypt's military power pales in comparison to that of the UK, France, or Israel it holds significant geopolitical weight in this specific situation. Egypt's non-alignment to the American dominated West or Soviet dominated East, instead pursuing a policy of *Arab Nationalism*, meant they have the ability to sway both bloc's foreign policies in the region. With no current alignment, both the US and USSR sought Egypt's backing due to their influence over Arab states, and the Suez canal. Control of which would be pivotal in the race for dominance between the two superpowers.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK)

As one of the invading nations its agreement and involvement will be essential to any possible solution. However, their involvement goes beyond that. The British have strong historical ties to the Egyptian nation, its position as a protectorate means it was host to British government officials for nearly a century. Furthermore the government of the United Kingdom has vested financial interests, and near majority shares in the Anglo - French Suez Canal Company, with this in mind the British government has a legitimate claim for financial compensation following the unpaid nationalisation of the company. Meaning despite being one of the aggressors in the conflict, its grievances from lost economic assets may also need to be addressed in solutions proposed by this committee.

French Republic (France)

Similar to the UK, France as one of the invading parties, its agreement and involvement in any possible solution is essential. While the loss by French citizens following unpaid nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company had a significant effect on a number of French institutions, firms and citizens who essentially lost billions of dollars. This innately includes France in the conflict, as they have reparative claims. However the bigger aspect of their involvement as one of the belligerent parties that coordinated an unprovoked attack on Egypt is what should be primarily addressed. Yet



delegates should be reminded that the French citizens and firms who lost out from the nationalisation had no influence on French foreign policy, thus any fair and just solution should address this nuanced dilemma.

Israel

As the other aggressor party, their invasion of the Sinai peninsula was the initial cause of the conflict. As it has invaded a sovereign foreign nation, a decision about their military is essential to any proposed resolution.

The Arab-Israeli war is one that highlights the complicated relationship between Egypt and Israel. After Israel declared their independence on May 14, 1948, Egypt and four other Arab nations invaded the country. This led to Israel gaining more territory than originally planned by the UN, and the displacement of around 750,000 Palestinians.

The relationship between France and Israel was described as warm, the French recognized the Jews as “comrades-in-arms,” and assisted them throughout history. In contrast their relationship with Britain was more hostile, during the Arab-Israeli war it nearly led to a direct military confrontation. Britain maintained a pro-Arab stance, however the rising tension between all three nations and the Egyptian president at the time led to secret discussions between them.

The United States of America (US)

As the predominant world power, and their influence over the British and French governments, through geopolitical institutions such as NATO, or through economic tools such as their large reserves of Great British Pounds and French Francs the United States has the means to direct the outcome of the conflict significantly. Furthermore their lack of involvement in the Sèvres conference, angered their government, hurt the relationship between them and the British and French governments making them more supportive of the Egyptian cause.

Timeline of Key Events

Start of the Suez Canal

1858	French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps proposes the creation of a canal between the Red sea and the Mediterranean. He created the Suez Canal Company to construct and operate the canal.
1859 - 1869	Lesseps with financial backing from the French and Egyptian governments along with national businesses constructs the Suez canal
1869	The Suez Canal officially opens, connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea.
1875	Egypt's faltering economy leads them to sell their 44% stake in the Suez Canal Company to pay off debts.



1876	Egypt defaults on debts leading to dual control by the UK and France over Egypt's finances.
1881-1882	Rising discontent from the faltering economy led to the Urabi Revolt, an uprising led by Colonel Ahmed Urabi, protesting foreign control, and the Pasha dynasty's mismanagement of the nation.
1882	Britain concerned over its investments in the nation, including the canal intervened militarily, defeating Urabi's forces, and establishing Egypt as a British protectorate. Although Egypt remained technically under the Ottoman Empire.
1914	The Ottoman Empire's allegiance to the Central Powers in WW1 leads the UK to declare Egypt independent from the Ottomans.
1922	The UK grants Egypt nominal independence, but the UK maintains control of foreign policy, defence, and the canal.
1936	The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty removes British troops from Egypt except for those guarding the canal.
July 1952	Egyptian military officers led by Gamal Abdel Nasser overthrow the monarchy, and establish a new regime.
1954	President Nasser negotiated with Britain for the withdrawal of British troops from the canal zone by 1956.

Start of the Suez Canal Crisis

1956	President Nasser's lack of hostility to the USSR led the US and the UK to withdraw previously promised financial assistance.
Early July 1956	Nasser declares his intention to nationalise Suez operations, using its tolls to fund national infrastructure projects.
26th of July 1956	Nasser nationalises the Suez Canal Company, arresting it from British and French control by mooting their shares. While also banning all Israeli shipments going through the canal.
22-24 October, 1956	French, British, and Israeli representatives meet to plan a coordinated military operation to seize back control of the Canal at a secret meeting in Sèvres, France.
29th of October, 1956	Israel invades the Sinai Peninsula.
30th of October, 1956	The UK and France issue an ultimatum for both Egypt and Israel to withdraw 10 miles away from the Suez Canal on either side (<i>the Suez splits the Sinai Peninsula and mainland Egypt</i>).
5th of November 1956	British and French Paratroopers land in Egypt and occupy parts of the canal zone.
6th of November	The UN Security Council convenes.



UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- UN Security Council Resolution 118, October 13, 1956 (Resolution 118)
- UN Security Council Resolution 119, October 31, 1956 (Resolution 119)
- UN General Assembly Resolution 997, November 2, 1956 (Resolution 997)
- UN General Assembly Resolution 998, November 4, 1956 (Resolution 998)
- UN General Assembly Resolution 999, November 4, 1956 (Resolution 999)
- UN General Assembly Resolution 1000, November 5, 1956 (Resolution 1000)

Possible Solutions

There are a variety of measures available that can be taken by the UN, or by the coordination of nations, in order to resolve the crisis and improve the issue.

The primary solution is the removal of French, British, and Israeli forces from the Sinai peninsula, Canal zone, and all other Egyptian territory. However, without any military force in the region powerful enough to enforce this decision, or the unlikelihood of either of the world's dominant military alliances to intervene due to pre-existing relationships or risk of escalation, other methods of enforcement may be used. As British and French national defence is reliant upon their membership of NATO, this council could suggest that alliance threaten their expulsion. Another form of enforcement would be the selling of foreign reserves of the Great British Pound and French Franc. Nations with large foreign reserves of these currencies such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the US, India, Australia, South Africa, etc. have the potential to inflict the greatest economic consequence.

There are also other solutions that can be combined with the first solutions, such as the reestablishment of the Suez Canal Company, or allowing Israel to trade through the canal. The conflict was primarily caused by the French and British's anger over the loss of control of the canal, and the sanctions placed on Israel. By appealing to the three invading nations, it could lead to a more amicable withdrawal of their forces, without imposing economic or geopolitically destabilising measures. Furthermore the formation of a new ownership structure of the Suez Canal Company could appease the financial losses by the British government and French citizens and firms from nationalisation.

Another solution that could be implemented in order to appease Israel, France, and the UK rather than threaten them, while also ensuring future security for the region would be for the UN to administer the canal. As a vital global trade route, the future disruption of the canal could have harsh economic consequences, by placing permanent UN peacekeepers, and essentially establishing



the region as a UN autonomous zone, it would be apolitical and immune from any national conquests.

Other less aggressive approaches could include the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces to mediate the conflict and prevent further escalation, or establishing a temporary ceasefire. This combined with a multinational conference between the UK, Egypt, Israel, and France, aimed at the creation of a treaty would place the decision into the hands of the four involved nations, and ensure mutual agreement.

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