

Forum: Crisis Committee

Issue: The Suez Crisis

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Introduction

The Suez Crisis, also known as the Second Arab-Israeli War or the Tripartite Aggression, was a diplomatic and military conflict that took place in late 1956 between Egypt and a broad Anglo-Franco-Israeli alliance.

Definition of Key Terms

Suez Canal

The canal connects Egypt to the Mediterranean and the Red Sea across the Isthmus of Suez. It is the shortest sea route between Europe and the Indian and western Pacific oceans and is one of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes (Fisher and Smith).

Nationalization

Governments taking control or ownership of private property.

Tripartite Aggression

Britain, France, and Israel's alliance to perform a military attack on the Suez. This "Tripartite Aggression" was to control this waterway.

Cold War

It was when geopolitical tensions were high between the United States and the Soviet Union and their allies. The Cold War effectively split the world into two, with the West and East. It was named the Cold War because there wasn't an actual shot fired directly between the United States and the Soviet Union; however, there were close encounters and proxy wars, i.e., the

Berlin Airlift, Cuban Missile Crisis, Vietnam War, etc. During this period, there would have been many nuclear stalemates, which only heightened tensions.

Eisenhower Doctrine

Motivated by the Suez Crisis, the Eisenhower Administration issued the doctrine, which stated that countries “could request American economic assistance and aid from U.S. Military forces if it was threatened by armed aggression from another state.”

(Office of the Historian). This would have been done to prevent the influence of the Soviets in Egypt and Syria towards the end of the Suez Crisis.

Sèvres Protocol

This was named after the private villa in Sèvres, where representatives of Britain, France, and Israel met to discuss and sign the Protocol of Sèvres secretly. The Sèvres Protocol detailed the plan for the attack on Egypt for the control of the Suez Canal (Shlaim).

Background

Nationalization of the Canal

Following World War II, the world entered the Cold War era, characterized by intense rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. This period also saw the rise of nationalist movements and decolonization efforts across Asia and Africa. Former colonial powers like Britain and France were struggling to maintain their influence in their former colonies. Egypt, which had gained nominal independence from Britain in 1922, was keen to assert its sovereignty and control over its key national assets, including the Suez Canal.

Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the canal on July 26, 1956 (state.gov). Previously operated by British and French interests and operated by the Suez Canal Company (SCC), the Canal was of immense strategic importance for oil shipments from the Middle East to cross to Europe. According to the modern Suez Canal Authority, it was and is the “shortest route between East and West as compared with the Cape of Good Hope” (SCA). Nasser’s decision was driven by the need to secure funds for the construction of the Aswan High Dam after the United States and Britain withdrew their financial support (ADST).

Protocol of Sèvres

In response to the Suez Canal's nationalization, on 24 October 1956, representatives of the British, French, and Israeli governments met at a villa in the French countryside area of Sèvres and signed an eponymous document. The document detailed the three governments' plan to attack Egypt. The plan put simply: Israel would invade the Sinai Peninsula, advancing towards the canal. Britain and France would then issue an ultimatum to both sides to cease hostilities, anticipating Egypt's refusal and thus justifying their intervention under the guise of protecting the canal and separating the warring parties (Shlaim).

Operation Musketeer

“Operation Musketeer” was the code-name for the Anglo-French plan to invade the Suez Canal zone (Deac). The operation had initially been code-named Operation Hamilcar, but this was quickly abandoned when it was found that the British were painting an air recognition letter H on their vehicles, while the French, who spelled Hamilcar differently, were painting an A.

Reactions

There was massive negative backlash against Operation Musketeer. The U.S. condemned the plan at the UN, breaking the U.S. and UK's usually harmonious diplomatic relationship. Only Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand supported the operation out of all those in the Commonwealth, with Canada strongly opposing it.

The operation had been completely successful from a military standpoint, but diplomatic pressure (as well as an American threat to devalue British currency) caused the British and French governments to accept UN ceasefire terms.

Operation Kadesh

The Israeli campaign on Sinai was code-named “Operation Kadesh”, after a Biblical town in central Sinai. It was scheduled to begin on 29th October as per the Sèvres Protocol, and lasted only 8 days in total. Israeli total losses in the campaign were 171 dead, several hundred

wounded, and four taken prisoner. Egyptian losses are estimated at several thousand dead and wounded, with 6000 taken prisoner.

Opening Phase: October 29-30

A paratrooper battalion was air-dropped into the west central area of the Sinai peninsula with the goal of cutting telephone lines and disrupting Egyptian communications and the chain of command on the 29th. The morning of October 30, al-Quseima was captured by the Israelis, giving them an additional route into Sinai and exposing the southern flank of the Egyptian defense.

Middle Phase: October 30 – November 1

Israeli reconnaissance confirmed that the Dayqa Pass was free of enemy forces, allowing central Egyptian forces to seize key road junctions and block escape routes of the Egyptian brigade. During the night of November 1-2, Egyptian troops withdrew, leaving heavy equipment. These soldiers wandered the area until rounded up and taken prisoner. The ex-British hunt-class Egyptian destroyer *Ibrahim al-Awwal* was captured off Haifa on the 1st of November.

End Phase: November 2-5

In compliance with the Anglo-French ultimatum, Israeli heavy forces halted 10 miles from the canal on the 2nd. The Gaza Strip was cut off, and from the 2nd to 3rd, Israeli forces continued to occupy townships and eliminate fortified positions.

Aftermath

After a prolonged political disagreement, in which both the U.S. and USSR opposed Israel, Israeli forces evacuated the Sinai peninsula and the Gaza Strip. UN emergency forces were posted, guaranteeing free passage of Israeli shipping, with Israel implying that any deviation from the agreed upon arrangement would be seen as a provocation (Encyclopaedia Judaica).

Timeline

Date	Event
1955-56	Nasser rejects U.S. offer of finance in exchange for siding with the West in the Cold War.
26 July 1956	Nasser nationalizes Suez Canal; Egyptian forces seize control and shareholders are paid back their exchange price.
29 July 1956	French Cabinet decides upon military action against Egypt in alliance with Israel.
8 August 1956	Labour Party issues a statement expressing that forcing Nasser to reprivatize the canal would violate the UN Charter.
16-23 August 1956	24 countries, including the largest users of the canals, meet with representatives to discuss the issue with Egypt sending an observer. 15 supported the American-British-French position of internationalization, and 3 supported a competing proposal from India suggesting international supervision.
23 August 1956	USSR announces that it will send troops if Egypt is attacked.
24 October 1956	The Protocol of Sèvres is signed.
30 October 1956	Britain and France send ultimatums to Egypt and Israel.
29 October – 5 November 1956	Operation Kadesh.
5-11 November 1956	Operation Musketeer.

Major Parties Involved

Egypt

The Egyptian Government had nationalized the Suez Canal, clearly highlighting its stance on this issue. The Egyptian Government had been pushing for the ending of the British

colonial-era military presence in the canal zone during the aftermath of World War II. Egyptians at this time had gained support from the Soviets through arms and money; this cooperation would change the entire dynamics of this issue.

France

Historically, France was involved in the creation of the Suez Canal, as Ferdinand de Lesseps, a French diplomat, supervised the creation of the British and French collaboration. The French had been speculating about Egypt's support towards rebels in Algeria, a French Colony. This led to its standing with the British, entering into a coalition with them and streamlining their stances. The French also had been outraged by the nationalization of the Suez region, which enraged them with their background in colonialism.

Israel

The Israeli government had been thoroughly convinced that the Egyptian's new president, Nasser, would threaten its security and would hence want to take action against this as soon as possible. Israel would then take every opportunity to collaborate with other nations that took a similar stance to get rid of Nasser. Israel had also occupied the Egyptian-occupied Gaza Strip for four months. Israel, at this point, is still a new country that has had support from the US for its rise.

United Kingdom

Historically, The British denied offers of the shares of the Suez Canal, giving Egypt 44% of the shares that the British had dismissed due to their suspicion of the French's increased influence. The Suez gave the British a shorter sea route to her empire and the oilfields of the Persian Gulf. During both World Wars, the British had defended the Suez one way or another. The British would have then disarmed the Egyptian paramilitary police force orchestrating violence in Cairo. This, in turn, would have put Anglo-Egyptian relationships on a knife edge, exacerbated by the British threats to occupy Cairo. She was leading the British to worry about their interests in the Suez Canal.

Potential Solutions

When dealing with dynamic issues, they must be quickly implemented, and they would prevent the changes in the situation from damaging the landscape even more. These factors must be considered when creating solutions. When creating these solutions, the needs of each party must also be considered.

One potential solution could be to create an international administrative group for the Suez Canal. This would be done by creating a temporary international committee consisting of all members of this issue, as well as those who are neutral and could potentially be involved in acting as mediators and ensuring the freedom of navigation across the Suez. However, when doing so, the Egyptians must have a platform and a heavy say to protect their sovereignty.

Another potential solution would be to provide economic aid during decolonization. This will most likely increase the rate of colonialism, which will help lower the sense of the increased need for nationalism within a nation. This will decrease the anger of the Egyptians, making negotiations easier to reach than common grounds regarding the long-term stability of the Suez.

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