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The Suez Crisis: Country Breakdown

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Introduction

After the events of the Holocaust and other actions taken by Germany, the importance of the United Nations and the lawful justification of military combat were at the forefront of the international community's collective mind. International law placed restrictions on acceptable uses of force. Due to the increasing importance of international law, the Suez Crisis shocked the global community. On July 26, 1956, President Gamul Abdul Nasser of Egypt announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Only a few months later, after only a week of fighting, on November 7, 1956, Britain, France, Israel, and Egypt agreed to the ceasefire mandated by the United Nations Security Council. These events were brought on by years of tension amongst multiple state actors, in a changing post-World War II environment and the beginnings of the Cold War. In order to end the hostilities, the first United Nations Emergency Force was created and called into action in order to resolve the chaos.

President Nasser's decision to nationalize the Canal ignited the tensions between Egypt and the Western world due to the increasing importance of the Canal in a growing global economy. The transportation of goods through the Canal made any change in how it was run very worrisome. As Nasser knew, "the Canal had become the vital artery for the flow of exports, imports, and shipping of many nations, and especially for Europe's access to the Middle East oil essential for its economy. Canal traffic, which had grown steadily, was expected to increase even faster in the future to meet Europe's rapidly expanding oil needs" (Bowie 2). Thus, the continued efficiency of the Canal was of the utmost importance to multiple

maritime countries. Whether or not Nasser was legally justified in his decision to nationalize the Canal, many other nations had a direct and indirect interest in the Canal. The Suez Canal was an essential aspect of international trade. Many states relied on the Canal for economic purposes, and had a vital interest in ensuring its success.

While still in the beginning stages of its development, the United Nations played a vital role in ending the conflict. Both the General Assembly and the Security Council were called into action. At the same time, the youth of the organization and lacking of experience with utilizing its potential also made world leaders hesitant to test it out. Multiple factor were considered in how best to solve the Crisis, including “the validity of nationalization in international law, the status of the Canal Company, the ability of the Egyptians to run the Canal, the propriety of unilateral intervention, the role of the United Nations, and the coherence of the Western Alliance” (Bowie 25). Issues of legality and justification were at the center of the Crisis. Questions of Nasser’s legality in his decree were questioned, as well as his violation of international law by not allowing Israeli ships through the Canal. As the new beacon for international law, the United Nations was created in order to solve international conflicts such as the Suez Crisis.

Background

The years and months leading up to the Crisis were filled with tension and conflicts of interest. With Egypt’s newfound independence as a post-colonial state,

political relationships with other countries were changing. Political agendas towards Egypt were altered greatly in the months before the nationalization. This was evident, for example, “in the period from March to July, the United States and Britain had managed to work together to a large extent on an immediate policy toward Nasser. Yet the divergence in their assessment of Nasser, and their aims in dealing with him, still remained, and would influence their handling of the Suez Crisis” (Louis 196). Prime Minister Anthony Eden and President Dwight Eisenhower had different views on the threat level posed by Nasser as a leader; however neither was personally fond of him. Both leaders were concerned with the influence of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, particularly Egypt, which was striving to be a regional power.

Two personalities stand out over all others within the Crisis: they are Anthony Eden and Gamul Nasser. Nasser was a young politician with many political aspirations and desire for ever-increasing power. He received widespread support from Egyptian citizens, craving to find their place in a post-colonial world. As the country’s independence grew, “Egypt under Nasser entered the mainstream of international politics as a factor to be dealt with” (Louis 32). His popularity and political support within his nation and among other Arab nations continued to give him strength in his role. On another continent, the British Empire was shrinking without its colonial holdings, causing fear to take root in Prime Minister Eden. While he accepted losing land holdings, he greatly emphasized the importance of influence as part of continued British power. The Prime Minister’s mental condition at the time has come into question, “it is Eden’s state of mind – and the medicines

that may have affected his judgment in the lead-up to Suez – which are critical” (Turner 161). Due to medications he was taking, his personality was erratic, causing not only tensions with his advisors, but also a lack of popularity with the British people. He was nowhere near as popular with his citizens as Nasser was with his own, evident in the population’s reaction to the Crisis. Not only was there a colonial past between these two leaders, Egypt had a tense relationship with its neighbor, Israel.

Since the creation of Israel as a state, the Arab world was slow in accepting its existence, to the point of military action. Before the announcement of nationalization, Israel and Egypt’s relationship was tense, with very little discussion between the two states. As was the case with other states within the region, “Egypt’s relations with Israel had of course been unfriendly since the hostilities and armistice following Israel’s creation in 1948. Like other Arab states, Egypt denied Israel’s legitimacy and demanded its surrender of considerable territory and restitution for the Palestinian refugees” (Bowie 9). Due to their perceived state of war, Egypt had refused to allow Israeli ships to pass through the Canal. This exception would be continued once Nasser nationalized the Canal.

The Suez Canal Company ensured the smooth running of the Canal. Investments in the Company were open internationally, with Britain owning the majority of the shares. Within the agreement the “Company concession was to expire in twelve years” at the time of the Crisis (Louis 202). This meant that in twelve years, unless another agreement was erected, the Company’s ownership would transfer to Egypt. Nasser’s actions in 1956 were a fast forward to what was

an expected nationalization of the Canal; however, many questioned whether he had the legal right to not wait the final twelve years. Based on a presumed illegal decision, Britain and France acted upon “the unstated premise of the mission...that the Egyptians were unreliable and unable to operate the Suez Canal without international supervision, it was doomed to failure” (Kingseed 71). No matter their ulterior motives, both Britain and France had a deep interest in ensuring the continued success of the Canal. This included other considerations in how best to achieve their goals.

Before military retaliation were multiple attempts at a diplomatic solution. Two major discussions occurred to attempt to create an agreement agreeable to all parties. The first “conference convened in London from August 16-23” (Kingseed 66) and “the Second Suez Canal Conference met in London from September 19 to 21” (Kingseed 75). Both France and Britain were involved in these conversations despite their eventual actions. The eventual result of Nasser’s nationalization only became known months later that “the British and the French had conspired with Israel, deliberately misinformed the United States, and initiated hostilities at a time when they felt Eisenhower would be powerless to act due to the presidential election” (Kingseed 102). How Great Britain, France, and Israel reached the point of military action, going against the wishes of the United States, concerning land and a Canal, has many complexities and ulterior motives. Each of the countries involved had their own reasons for policy choices, which all ultimately came to a head at the United Nations in order to bring the Crisis to a quick and final end.

Country Positions

Egypt

As the colonial past was left behind, Egypt gained power within the Arab world. Part of the rise to power was Gamul Nasser's own climb up the ladder to become Egypt's second president. As a true politician, Nasser knew the feelings of the Egyptian people and "had effectively made Arabism a protest movement against Western dominance in the region" (Louis 37). Egypt and Nasser strove to become the central Arab power. In order to ensure their independence, Egypt negotiated with Great Britain, a withdrawal of British troops. In 1954 Britain agreed to begin withdrawing from Egypt as a colonial power. Great Britain extracted a guarantee that "if Turkey or an Arab state were attacked, Britain would have the right to activate the base" (Louis, 66). It only took two years for the country to completely withdraw its presence. Tensions with the Western world were not the only concerns for the Egyptian government, however.

Despite an armistice, the presence of Israel was not accepted by Egypt. Instead of recognizing the Israeli statehood, "Egypt considered itself to be in a state of war with Israel, abided by the rules of the Arab boycott on any diplomatic contacts with Israel" (Louis 73). Part of this tension was refusing to allow Israeli ships to pass through the Suez Canal. The Canal was under the control of the Canal Company; however, Egyptian military and police forces enforced the Egyptian position. Any communication with Israel was made through third parties and other

countries. As Egypt emerged as an Arab power, the vestiges of colonialism were still a sore point for her citizens.

The Egyptian people were very conscious of their colonial past and wanted to move beyond being controlled by a Western power. Influence and power within not only the Western world but also the entire international community was part of their new agenda. This was also part of Nasser's personal agenda. It became clear that "Nasser was by no means a passive man: he aspired to become the leader of a vast federation of Arab countries embracing the Maghrib, and to erase Israel from the map" (Louis 135). Military power was important in achieving these goals in light of Israeli military strength and the military tensions of the Cold War. In order to counter the perceived threat of Israel, Egypt desired a strong military arsenal. To achieve this, "Nasser appealed to the United States for a shipment of arms to counter Israel's growing military power and apparent willingness to see its army as an instrument of policy" (Kingseed 32). Due to a previous agreement, the U.S. refused to arm Egypt, in order to control the Cold War atmosphere. However, the Soviet Union chose to supply Egypt. It became clear "that weaponry, plus the Soviet political backing that went with it, had given Egypt formidable military might and her president...a tremendous feeling of confidence" (Dayan 183). Military power was not the only objective for Nasser and Egypt; financial power was also part of the plan for the country's rise. As with military supplies, Egypt called on Western powers to support its endeavor.

Nasser dreamed of building the Aswan High Dam and using the revenues to increase the financial power of Egypt. Despite desiring a speedy withdrawal, Egypt

made “an appeal to Britain to help push ahead Nasser’s ambition to revolutionize Egypt’s economy and to release the country from its poverty trap. The means for achieving this was to trap the flood waters of the Nile behind the Aswan High Dam” (Turner 150). The Aswan High Dam was Egypt’s next great project in order to increase its importance within the international community. Funding from the United States as well as loans from the World Bank were also necessary to fund this large endeavor. Before plans and the funding were finalized, negotiations concerning how the revenues would be split went back and forth. Due to paranoia concerning their perceived revenue from the Suez Canal, “negotiations dragged on for months, with Nasser objecting strenuously to the fiscal safeguards requested” (Bowie 11). Egyptians did not want to lose out on money that was rightfully theirs due to greedy Westerners. This back and forth could not go on forever. Due to their post-colonial psyche, debate over the conditions of the loans was very tense.

Nasser’s eventual agreement to the terms came at too late of a date. The Egyptian President’s proud character made negotiations difficult. The financing countries no longer had the popular support, nor the desire to fund the project. This became clear, and “by the end of June, Nasser had given up on Western promises...if money was not forthcoming...he was prepared to risk confrontation with America, Britain and France to achieve his ends” (Turner 176). For a few months, Nasser had been considering a contingency plan. In order to fund the Dam, the Suez Canal would be nationalized, giving Egypt all of the revenues.

Nationalization of the Canal was a last resort, but had been thought out by Nasser. Despite the possible international retaliation “this act would procure for

him both the revenge for his wounded prestige, which meant so much to him, and the financial assets needed for the great Aswan project” (Lacouture and Hofstadter 166). Losing Western funding was a blow to Nasser’s ego, which he needed to counteract by some act to show the world that Egypt could be independent. This was not only a concern for Nasser, but also the Egyptian people who as a whole still remembered colonialism. Nasser knew that “its nationalization conformed to the national aspirations of the Egyptian people” (Louis 165). The act also saved the pride of the newly independent Egyptians, not just their leader. In order to guarantee the support of his citizens, Nasser crafted an impassioned speech to bring out all of these emotions.

Nasser played on multiple insecurities during his announcement of the nationalization of the Canal, ensuring the backing of the Egyptian people in his endeavor. During the “three-hour speech that delighted the crowd, the Egyptian president proclaimed the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. Even as he was speaking, Egyptian forces occupied the various company installations”, immediately taking action (Kingseed 41). In the speech, Nasser spoke of the unfair share in profits that the Western world had forced upon Egypt when they were a Colonial power, depriving and taking advantage of the country and its people. The timing of the speech was not a coincidence either, as it “mark[ed] the fourth anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution” (Bowie 1). All of these factors almost guaranteed the support that was necessary for Nasser to defend his actions to the international community. Legality was not an issue for the Egyptians, Nasser was

only speeding up the process, and in only a few more years the Canal would have belonged to Egypt.

Understood as part of the nationalization, was the requirement that Egypt must run the Canal as smoothly as it had been run prior, and continue to allow all states to travel through it. However, Egypt continued to refuse Israel access to the waterway. This surprised no one within the international community. While he expected some blowback from the Western powers, "Nasser's strategy was to escape from any direct confrontation and thereby preserve the nationalization without war" (Louis 166). Direct military action was to be avoided if possible. This was considered in the evaluation of nationalizing the Canal. After the announcement, "an ever watchful Nasser calculated that the risk of war fell with every week that passed" (Turner 197). As each week went by, Nasser felt that Egypt and the Canal were safer than the last. By continuing to run the Canal as well as it had been before the nationalization, Nasser believed he was continuing to decrease the chances of military retaliation from the West. Egypt was successful in its endeavor to continue the smooth running of the Canal and "there was no indication that Nasser was about to interrupt the flow of oil" (Turner 237). Receiving oil transported through the Canal was very important for Great Britain and other Western countries. Despite these efforts, Nasser was unsuccessful in stopping the Western world from protesting the nationalization of the Canal.

Efforts made by the United States and Great Britain to set up a conference for all countries concerned with the Canal in order to come up with a solution acceptable to all resulted in two conferences held in London. Egypt was invited to

this meeting, however “Nasser issued a lengthy statement in which he rejected the invitation to the London conference on the grounds that the body was attempting to interfere in Egypt’s domestic affairs” (Kingseed 56). Having an international body be in charge of the Canal was not acceptable to Nasser. He refused all requests and suggestions made, as they would all transfer authority from Egypt to an international body. The Egyptian government was unaware of Great Britain, France, and Israel’s discussions behind the scenes for a military confrontation.

Only until a few days before did Nasser understand how far Britain and France would go to place the Canal under international control. After seeing the movement of troops, “Nasser took the threat of an Anglo-French invasion seriously, and then only after forcing himself to accept what seemed a ludicrous proposition, that France and Britain...were ready to sacrifice their remaining Arab friends for the sake of a strip of water” (Turner 323). However, Israel’s attack was much less surprising as Egypt considered itself still in a state of war with the newly founded state. Once Israel invaded, Nasser “ordered a complete withdrawal of all troops east of the Canal to prevent their encirclement by the Israelis from the east and the British and the French from the rear” (Louis 168). Despite the Soviet weaponry, Egyptian training was sub par in understanding how to utilize it for military success. In order to protect his citizens, Nasser pulled out of the Canal, but not before sinking two ships in order to stop traffic. For pulling out of the funding and coming to their aid once the colonial countries attacked the Canal, Egypt ultimately blamed the United States for the Crisis.

The Egyptian people did not blame their leader for the Crisis that was being fought within their borders. Instead, “the people rallied round Nasser’s leadership and established a united front against the invaders” (Louis 170). As he quickly realized that the United States would not become involved militarily, Nasser reached out to the United Nations to end the Crisis.

Israel

Since its creation as a state, Israel had to fight for its legitimacy with other Arab states. Instead of diplomatic means, the Israeli government cultivated military strength in order to fight the opposition. Both the government and the people “held to the doctrine that attack is the best form of defense, a policy that in relation to Egypt found increasing favor with Israeli politicians of all parties” (Turner 157). Force was emphasized over diplomatic solutions with other governments within the Arab world. Due to their proximity to each other, and Egypt’s history of refusing Israeli ships passage through the Canal, tensions between Egypt and Israel were at a constant high. For Israel, the issue was that the Israeli’s believed that historically they owned the Sinai Peninsula, rather than a true contention with the nationalization of the Canal. However, this gave Israel an opportunity to partner with Western countries in order to reach their end goal. Nor was removing Nasser from power a top priority. As Moshe Dayan, the military leader at the time, stated, “in capturing Sinai, we would gain our objectives even if Nasser remained in power” (Dayan 201). As per usual policy, Israel was ready and willing to take military action against Egypt. The first country to agree with Israel was France.

Due to their interests in Algeria, France was prepared to join with Israel in taking military action against Egypt. While Britain was interested in considering the option, they were initially hesitant to definitively become part of the plan to invade Egypt. The relationship between Israel and France began with “the large-scale deliveries of arms from France had started to arrive in Israel shortly before the

nationalization of the Suez Canal, which would redress the balance of power between Israel and Egypt” (Louis 150). These deliveries violated the tripartite agreement between France, Britain, and the U.S., which had caused the U.S. to refuse Egypt’s request for weaponry. In beginning discussions of a possible military action, “France was the driving force behind the policy of action. Britain’s Prime Minister Eden also favored military measures, but he faced serious opposition inside his own country” (Dayan 184). Discussions with France were mainly without British involvement, in case Britain did not end up taking part in the military action. However, Israel was aware of the United States’ refusal to address the nationalization militarily, and wanted to continue their relationship without upsetting the Americans. In order “to allay the opposition of the United States, Ben-Gurion was ready to forgo many strategic advantages which a preventive strike might give, and allow the Egyptians to take the initiative” (Louis 147). This connection with the United States did not stop Israel from military talks with France, however.

Israel was aware of what was holding France back from a full commitment. Instead of offering a commitment, “it was clear that France could not finalize her plans for a Suez campaign until she had Britain’s decision: (Dayan 196). Israel and France decided to make plans in the case that Britain would not take part, but it was clear that the French would rather have the British involved in any kind of military attack. During the talks with Britain and France, tensions between Israel and Egypt continued to escalate as they played a back-and-forth game. In particular, “the Israeli raid on Gaza further aggravated matters” (Louis 79). Israel also attempted to

pass goods and ships through the Canal, to see how far they could go. Tensions continued to escalate between the two states as Israel waited for Britain and France to decide on military action.

As plans began to be finalized among the three states, it became clear that Israel would be asked to begin fighting alone. The Israeli government was “concerned over the eventuality of full-scale fighting going on for two days, in which case Israel would be condemned and might run the risk of confrontation with volunteers from the Soviet block” (Bar-Zohar 239). As the plan emerged, it became clear that Britain and France wanted to appear as heroes, ameliorating the situation between Israel and Egypt. This arrangement for Israel to act first and alone required a “price for Israel’s participation: England and France were to recognize Israel’s right to hold on to certain sections of Sinai after the fighting in order to ensure freedom of navigation” (Bar-Zohar 241). Israel was willing only if the state could be guaranteed its end goals. However, this action placed their relationship with the United States at risk.

For the gamble to be worthwhile, the Israelis needed to be prepared. While the weapons were not as advanced as those in Egypt’s possession, the Israeli military had the training to understand how to handle and utilize what the government was given. As the international conferences failed to come up with a solution, the three parties decided upon a final military plan. The main elements of the plan were “an Israeli invasion of Sinai, reaching the Suez Canal within two days, whereupon an Anglo-French ultimatum would be presented to both sides to pull back from the canal. If the Egyptians refused, France and Britain would invade,

occupying the Canal Zone and overthrowing Nasser" (Bar-Zohar 238). All three parties knew that Egypt would refuse the ultimatum, guaranteeing the need for France and Britain to invade. This increased Israel's willingness to invade first.

Once finalized Israel was only waiting for the agreed upon date to begin its military assault. As planned "the attack began with the Israeli invasion of Sinai on 29 October 1956, and on 5 November as prearranged, Britain and France intervened" (Louis 38). However, once Israel began its attack emergency sessions at the United Nations were convened. Despite the Anglo-French-Israeli plan, the UN became involved, making Britain and France's actions unnecessary to the international community.

Great Britain

After the destruction of World War II, Great Britain had a lot of rebuilding to accomplish at home, taking time and money away from the vast British empire of colonial holdings. As the country began ending its rule as a colonial power, it still wanted to retain power and influence in these areas, including Egypt. The British government wholeheartedly agreed and desired to pull out of Egypt, but did not want to lose their influence within the country and the over all Middle East area. Prime Minister Eden “rejected out of hand the possibility of a continued British occupation” (Louis 53). Britain would be allowed to reenter in a military capacity if any British allies were being attacked. However, the government knew that “great care would have to be taken to avoid the impression of a ‘complete surrender’ to the Egyptians” (Louis 67). One of the ways Britain was to remain involved was the funding of the Aswan High Dam. However, “with the withdrawal of American financial support, Great Britain quickly followed suit” (Kingseed 40). The British government as well was growing tired of the back-and-forth of negotiations with Nasser. Eden was all too willing to end negotiations due to his dislike of Egypt’s leader.

President Nasser’s proud personality found him few friends in the Western world. However, few seemed to dislike him to the degree that Prime Minister Eden did. As time went on and Great Britain pulled out of Egypt, Eden began to see the benefits of removing Nasser from power. The government was not fond of the

Egyptian president and “concluded that Nasser was now a virtual Soviet tool, seeking to dominate the region and its vital oil, and to undermine all Western influence and alliances” (Louis 191). Eden had personal tensions with Nasser, search for any cause to unseat Nasser’s government, without considering the consequences. The nationalization of the Suez Canal became an opportunity for Eden to achieve his goal.

The British government did not see Egypt’s action as legal, stating that the country was taking control of an international waterway. Re-colonizing Egypt Britain’s intention, instead an international body was desired in order to run the Canal so that no one country would be able to manipulate the area for their own interests. Eden made it clear that “the official British position was that no arrangements for the future of the Suez Canal could be acceptable to Great Britain that would leave it in the unfettered control of a single power that could exploit it purely for purposes of national policy” (Kingseed 65). This was the overall Western policy, however the United States emphasized diplomatic means to solve the tension.

Despite American reluctance to military intervention, Britain, and more specifically Eden, saw this as an opportunity to not only have the Canal be placed under international control, but also as a chance to remove Nasser and set up a government more favorable to Western objectives. Before a military plan was decided upon, Britain hosted the London Conferences in order to find a diplomatic solution. However, “the Cabinet [was] unanimous that if economic and political pressure did not lead to the desired result we must be prepared to use force” (Lloyd

84). As time went on, it became clear that Egypt was not bending to economic or political pressure. Britain was caught between the policy of its two major allies, “on one hand, the Americans’ refusal to participate in any intervention; on the other, the French determination to intervene” (Louis 140). Aligning with the French ultimately won due to their alignment with removing Nasser from power. In Eden’s eyes, diplomacy had failed, thus military action was the next viable step

The majority of the members of the British government felt the legality of any military action must be considered; however, Eden was not as concerned. In order to ensure that all parties were happy and that “illegality [was] to be avoided, President Nasser must contribute to his own ruin” (Louis 114). In terms of the military plan, this meant that Israel would be the first to take action, in order to allow Britain and France to be justified in their own military action, when Egypt refused to back away from the Canal. However, in preparing for a military attack it became clear “the troops were in a poor state of readiness, [and] the military hardware was in an even sorrier condition” (Turner 212). Thus, military intervention was not possible immediately; it would take time to prepare. Due to the amount of time it took to prepare and agree to an invasion, many within the government began to have doubts.

The British population was originally as enraged about the nationalization of the Canal as the government was. However, against Eden’s own desires, “public and parliamentary support for his Suez policy began to deteriorate by mid-August” (Kingseed 65). However, this did not end Eden’s communications with Israel and France. Military plans were being finalized in order to begin at the end of October.

Eden believed that the United States would come to their aid as the Americans did in both World Wars. While it was clear that in the “United States public opinion was not prepared for the idea of using force”, Eden believed that they would later support helping the British (Lloyd 88). Neither public opinion, nor American objections was going to stop Eden from his desire to remove Nasser from office.

The relationship with America was not only political, but also personal. Eden and Eisenhower were in direct contact by letter for many years. Despite this personal relationship, “as soon as Eden formally approved collusion with France and Israel, open communication across the Atlantic ceased” (Kingseed 82).

Eisenhower was kept in the dark concerning Britain’s actions. Due to the Soviet Union’s veto, protecting Egypt, Eden saw UN refusal in a different light. With the knowledge that Egypt had the power of the Soviet’s vote, “the condition of United Nations approval for the use of force by Britain and France was equivalent to denying its use” (Eden 445). Thus, if the Security Council passed the resolution it was approval, and if it was not passed Eden believed that all members, except the Soviet Union, were in support, thus giving legitimacy to future British actions. Eden also received support at home when “on 25 October the intervention plan was approved by the British Cabinet, seemingly without major objection” (Bowie 59). Britain was moving forward with its plans along with France and Israel, with what appeared to be international and national support.

Due to swift and decisive military action, few civilians were harmed during the Crisis. Despite issues of legality, “the British aim of minimizing civilian casualties was commendable and largely effective” (Turner 324). Safety aims were

successful, but the British and French both failed in their goals of taking control of the Canal, removing Nasser from power, and having the international community agree with their actions. Instead, "London witnessed numerous demonstrations calling on the prime minister to cease the aggression" (Kingseed 103). Eden did not receive the support at home or internationally that he had originally hoped for and had originally been offered. After the initial push for action against nationalization, support from the public and the British government began to reverse. It had become clear who drove the military policy when "criticism was directed primarily against Prime Minister Eden. There was no doubt that the general public and even the majority of his Cabinet did not support his Suez action" (Dayan 244). The backlash was almost immediate for Britain's military action. Instead of coming to its ally's aid, the U.S. instead went to the United Nations.

When Israel invaded, emergency meetings were convened at the United Nations to discuss how best to handle the situation. With a clear agreed upon policy "it was impossible for Eden to maintain credibly that an Anglo-French force in the Canal Zone was necessary to prevent the continuance of hostilities between Israel and Egypt when both states had already accepted a ceasefire" (Bowie 75). The U.N. was seen as the legal and logical instrument to end the military actions between Israel and Egypt,

Before and during the Crisis, Britain looked to the United States for support and leadership. Eden felt that "the course of the Suez Canal crisis was decided by the American attitude to it" (Eden 458). Due to the American emphasis on negotiations and diplomacy, the British did not feel that the Americans took a

leadership role. Britain blamed the United States somewhat for lack of American leadership and action during the Crisis. Instead of aligning with the Americans, the United Kingdom aligned with France.

France

Unlike Great Britain, France did not have a presence in Egypt, having very little influence within the country. French interests primarily lay within Europe and Algeria. Due to Algeria's proximity to Egypt and the Canal, France began to take notice of Nasser and the consequences of nationalization. The nationalization of the Canal was seen as another "offence against France... - the hijacking of a French enterprise and his support for the Algerian rebels who threatened the integrity of the Fourth Republic" (Turner 254). France's interests in Algeria made the government desire to overthrow Nasser for his support, rather than his takeover of a company that was headquartered in Paris. Similar to the British, Nasser's move to nationalize the Canal gave France an opportunity to overthrow Nasser. In Algeria "for the army, Nasser was perfectly cast as the scapegoat for the failure to restore peace. Egypt's role in Algeria matched that of China in the war in Vietnam" (Turner 193). To France, the removal of Nasser would not only solve the issue of the Canal, but also solve the difficulties they were having in Algeria. Military force could be used to "turn the nationalization weapon against Egypt and kill two birds with one stone: eliminate the budding dictator and settle the Algerian affair" (Louis 137). Out of the three states that would ultimately invade Egypt, France was the surest of its actions from the beginning.

Unlike the British government, the French government was united in its disdain for Nasser and its willingness to remove his government from power. Not too long after the nationalization was announced, "an idea took hold in the French

Ministry of Defence for a joint French-Israeli action against Egypt” (Turner 262).

The international community knew of the continued tension between Egypt and Israel, and the continued refusal to allow Israel to pass through the Canal. France had previously supplied weapons to Israel, creating a military relationship between the two states before the nationalization. It had been kept quiet that “the French had for some time had been supplying the Israelis with far more military equipment than the United States had been aware, in clear violation of the Tripartite Declaration” (Kingseed 104). Thus, France was aware of the military strength of the Israelis. Longtime ally, Great Britain, was also contacted in order to be part of the military action against Nasser.

The French took part in both London Conferences, however the government was in agreement concerning the necessity of military action. Among the three tripartite countries “the French government emerges as anxious for close collaboration among the three allies; but the more the crisis evolved, the more France evinced the will to take action, in contrast with American prudence and British procrastination” (Louis 138). The government’s certainty was in part due to skepticism regarding the United Nations process. With fewer countries involved, action would be swifter and could proceed with less debate. In contrast “any other action, such as debate by the United Nations or the International Court of Justice, would be too slow and detrimental to the immediate solution to the problem” (Kingseed 44). This does not mean that the French did not believe in the international process; however, their impatience to capitalize on the opportunity presented to them made them desirous to take quick action to achieve their ends.

France desired not only the involvement of Israel, but also the involvement of Britain. They both had the same goals once the nationalization was announced. With Nasser's decision, "France and Great Britain were aghast at the seizure of the waterway" (Kingseed 43). Interest in the Canal was not all that the allies shared. Another connection was "the fact that the character of the Suez Canal Company was French, with its headquarters in Paris, while the British government was the principal shareholder, made for an Anglo-French alignment" (Louis 112). Both country felt Egypt's decision was illegal. But also felt that one country should not have control over the clearly international waterway, as well as the internationally held Company that ran it. Removing Nasser from power would be an added bonus; ultimately "Britain and France wanted a Canal Authority capable of imposing its will on a recalcitrant Nasser" (Turner 238). A Nasser moldable and willing to follow Western policy was the true desire. With each passing day it became clear that Nasser was the leader of a pro-Arab, anti-Western movement, and was unwilling to give back the control of the Canal.

Military action became the clear answer to reach French goals, and connect with their interests in Algeria. Due to Britain's hesitance, it was not until "mid-October, if not sooner, [that] Mollet and Eden had reached firm agreement that Britain and France would act jointly in concert with Israel against Egypt" (Bowie 52). Israel attacked first; then, as agreed upon, Britain and France offered both Israel and Egypt an ultimatum, which Egypt refused. As planned, both Britain and France became involved in the fighting, however "on the night of 6 November, the Anglo-French Suez Expeditionary Force halted about 20 miles south of Port Said".

The cease-fire agreed upon by the UN also required Britain and France to halt their actions. France was unsuccessful with its endeavor to effect change within Egypt, and, therefore, the desired impact on Algeria also was not forthcoming. Instead, the UN, led by the United States, became involved to ultimately not only halt Israel and Egypt, but Britain and France as well.

The United States of America

After World War II, the international community changed dramatically, as did the United States' role within it. Despite the alliances made with Europe during the World Wars, historically the United States was against colonialism and supported the disbandment of colonial holdings, including Britain's hold on Egypt. Also, unlike their Western allies, "the American statesmen had a certain sense of commitment to the state of Israel, which was hardly prevalent among their British colleagues" (Louis 93). Despite their differences and conflicting colonial attitudes, America and President Eisenhower had growing tensions with Nasser and his policies. This apprehension began to play out in discussions concerning the funding of the Aswan High Dam.

In order to build the Dam, great amounts of money were required from the United States. Americans were willing to help pay, but quickly grew tired of Nasser's continued refusal to the terms presented by the Western powers and the World Bank. After months of negotiations, "when Nasser countered with proposals that were unacceptable to the United States, Great Britain, and the World Bank, Eisenhower considered the matter dead for all practical purposes" (Kingseed 37). The American Congress as well as the American people were no longer willing to fund the great expense of the Dam. After difficult negotiations Eisenhower was unwilling to push the issue.

This was not the only cause for a difficult relationship between the United States and Egypt, "the Czech arms deal, coupled with Nasser's continued vociferous verbal attacks on the Baghdad Pact, convinced Eisenhower that Nasser was

untrustworthy and unpredictable” (Kingseed 33). Unlike Britain and France however, this did not cause Eisenhower to desire Nasser’s complete removal from government. Rather, Cold War tensions were the larger issues, with the United States attempting to limit the influence and power of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Also, due to the upcoming presidential election, Eisenhower and his administration were under greater scrutiny for their actions to the American people.

Not only Eisenhower, but also the international community knew of the upcoming election. Britain, France, and Israel believed that the election would tie Eisenhower’s political hands from retaliating against their planned military attack. However, as Eisenhower stated “Ben Gurion should not make any grave mistakes based upon his belief that winning a domestic election is as important to us as preserving and protecting the interests of the United Nations and other nations of the free world in that region” (Eisenhower 332). Despite his desire to be re-elected, Eisenhower was concentrated on his presidency and his duty to the international community. This does not mean that the election did not add additional stress to Eisenhower; it clearly was a consideration. However, despite the closeness between the Crisis and the election, Eisenhower ultimately chose international security, returning to Washington from the campaign trail as events began to quickly escalate (Kingseed 98). The election did place pressure on the administration to uphold its desire to solve the nationalization tensions through peaceful means. This was felt throughout the entire administration, “with a presidential election barely two months away, Dulles was under more than usual pressure to come up with an idea that would at least keep in prospect a peaceful solution” (Turner 250). A diplomatic

solution was not only to stop a war from occurring and stopping the flow of oil, but also the greater imperative was to ensure that the Soviet Union would not join in on the fighting and insert their influence into the Middle East. However, finding a peaceful solution was not the leadership role that the rest of the world was expecting from the United States.

In a partnership with Great Britain, two London Conferences were set up along with the maritime powers to discuss a solution that all parties could agree to. While Egypt did not send direct counsel, Egypt's interests were still represented by other parties that did attend. After discussions during both conferences and ultimately deciding upon a Canal User's Association to control the Canal, the agreement was brought to Egypt. However once brought to his attention, "Nasser had said that he would regard the payment by ship owners of the dues to SCUA as a hostile act" (Lloyd 180). Despite the agreement between all other maritime powers, Egypt was unwilling to give up control of the Canal to an international body. This did not end Eisenhower's hopes for a peaceful solution.

Eden was clear with Eisenhower from the beginning about his willingness to consider a military option, despite America's protests. This placed the United States in a tight political space between its relationship with Great Britain, and its policy of a diplomatic solution. In full knowledge of this conflict, "the President insisted that, however unhappy about helping Egypt, the United States must fulfill its pledged under the Tripartite Declaration to aid the victim of aggression" (Louis 208). Once Great Britain, France and Israel committed to military retaliation, Eisenhower was kept in the dark. Britain's connection was not supposed to be known by the

international community, in particular the United States. Despite the overseas silence, Eisenhower still believed that “the Anglo-American special relationship would soon be back on track was shattered when reports started coming through of a build-up in Israel, along with rumours that somehow Britain and France were involved” (Turner 301). Eden and Eisenhower’s personal relationship also led to the U.S.’s misperception of how far Great Britain was willing to push the issue of international control. Until he had knowledge of his allies’ betrayal, “Eisenhower remained convinced that he had done all in his power to prevent armed hostilities in the Suez region” (Kingseed 80). He would continue to feel confident until intelligence came in of the military mobilization in the Middle East, making clear attack was imminent. With this knowledge Eisenhower needed to take action.

With only Israeli forces invading Egypt, Britain and France’s role in the planning was still unknown to the Americans. Knowing that he needed to take immediate action and “after hearing the recommendations of his civilian and military advisers, Eisenhower made the decisions to bring the matter to the United Nations” (Kingseed 89). Since Britain’s involvement was still unknown to the U.S., Eisenhower invited its historical ally to go before the Security Council in order to end the hostilities (Kingseed 90). Eisenhower did not consider gathering American forces to end the hostilities, or joining in when France and Britain invaded, once their ultimatum was rejected by the Egyptians. However, “the entry of America’s most trusted allies into the conflict seemed to make a mockery of the president’s efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution of the crisis” (Kingseed 102). Despite the embarrassment, Eisenhower continued to pursue a ceasefire through international

means, instead of coming to Britain and France's aid as in the World Wars, they had previously predicted he would. In contrast to America's previous fears of the conflict, the Soviet Union was in agreement to ending the hostilities.

Once military actions were taken, America was clear in its disapproval. However, it was not until hostilities had occurred that the United Nations was truly an actor within the Crisis. Eisenhower and his administration "did not want to see the U.N. dragged into the crisis prematurely and be unable to resolve it (Bowie 33). The organization was still young; any amount of failure might result in lessening the legitimacy of the organization and its ability to work effectively. With the invasion of Israel, and no end in sight, the time had come for the U.N. to act as it was designed to. Despite their betrayal, "Eisenhower carefully managed the UN resolutions to avoid formal sanctions against Britain, France, and Israel" (Louis 212). The U.S. was authorizing its allies a way to get out quickly and without long-term economic harm to their people. While clearly deceived, Eisenhower was able to honor his policy of not becoming militarily involved in the fighting and was reelected. He was able to utilize the United Nations successfully, and quickly bring an end to the fighting without lasting harm.

The United Nations

In the Post-World War II world, an international organization was created in order to ensure lasting peace and stop wrongful aggression. With the creation of the United Nations, an arena for country disputes, the world would no longer be threatened by aggression. As international law became defined, “the grounds for using force had been drastically narrowed to self-defence, forcible denial of rights, and protection of nationals” (Louis 114). This limited each country’s ability to declare war against another. Legal and justified reasons for military aggression made diplomacy necessary before any action to be taken, allowing the UN to be the stage for these talks. The youth and inexperience of the organization made even the countries that were fully supportive of the UN hesitant to utilize it. If the UN were to fail in its early stages, not only hope for peace, but also the organization itself would no longer be seen as viable. Despite these fears, the UN was necessary in order to end the Suez Crisis.

President Nasser’s decision to nationalize the Canal earlier than the agreement called for raising questions regarding the legality of his actions. Before the announcement “it did not pass notice that Egypt was in violation of a 1951 UN resolution which called for the freedom of navigation for Israeli vessels” (Turner 259). The Canal under national control continued this violation. However, there was no action within the UN to allow Israel to travel through the Canal as it legally was allowed to. Regional tensions concerning Israel’s existence, however, explain

other states hesitance to pursue the matter and create a larger issue. These legal issues offered a justification for some for Israel's eventual actions.

The two major bodies of the United Nations were both called upon in order to end the conflict. The Security Council, the only binding body at the UN, was the main site for resolution of the conflict. Unfortunately, more than half the countries awarded veto power were directly involved in the Crisis. The other body was the General Assembly Plenary. While its decisions are non-binding, each country receives an equal vote and is able to speak their opinion, creating an international consensus on the issue at hand. The first attempt to solve the Crisis was vetoed by the Soviet Union, taking Egypt's side. Once military aggression began the discussion again took place "at the UN, where there was already talk of a three-power collusion to bring about Nasser's downfall, an America-led Security Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire was vetoed by Britain and France" (Turner 314). This allowed Britain and France to honor their ultimatum and invade, without being in violation of a Security Council resolution. With this second use of a veto it became clear that little would be completed in the Security Council.

Other options within the organization were then considered in order to still find a resolution within the United Nations. The Soviet Union, France, and Britain's actions made it clear that "the next move...was to refer the whole issue to an emergency session of the General Assembly, where the veto could not be exercised" (Turner 314). Action needed to be taken, and a roundabout route was necessary in order to prove success in utilizing the United Nations. The situation within the organization was tedious as well. At the time, "the U.N.'s inability to halt Soviet

intervention in Hungary was already damaging its standing. An added failure to cope with the Suez attack in violation of the Charter could discredit it utterly” (Bowie 62). Agreement within the General Assembly was a requirement for a resolution to be found, and for continued trust in the UN. Any failure and the Crisis could last for an unforeseen amount of time, and no other international conflicts would be brought before the UN for a solution to be found.

Despite the problems within the Security Council, the decision to bring the matter to the General Assembly was successful. Consensus surrounded “the US resolution, adopted by the General Assembly on 2 November” (Louis 211). While having an agreement among the international community was a great improvement over the standstill caused by the veto, the General Assembly resolution was non-binding, meaning that there was no enforcement mechanism. However, despite the non-binding nature, the resolution was triumphant in ending the Crisis. By November 6th all parties involved agreed to the resolution, which “urged an immediate cease-fire, the withdrawal of all forces behind the armistice lines, a ban on all military aid to the belligerents, and action to reopen the Suez Canal, which the Egyptians had blocked at the beginning of the war” (Kingseed 110). For a non-binding resolution to have such international consensus behind it that a cease-fire was declared without a Security Council resolution was a major success for the United Nations.

The cease-fire was not the only agreement within the resolution. During the discussions within the General Assembly, it was decided upon that a force would be necessary to ensure the removal of the Israelis, and to ensure peace within the

region. The other purpose of the resolution was to create this force, thus “before any British and French paratroops were dropped along the Canal, the Assembly had approved Resolution 1000, establishing U.N.E.F. and its executive framework and affirming...not to include in it any contingents from permanent members of the Security Council” (Bowie 73). This included the British and French forces about to invade Egypt. While the resolution did not stop their military actions, a cease-fire was agreed upon in days. The British and French no longer appeared as heroes; with the creation of the United Nations Emergency Force, their presence was unnecessary and unjustified.

The Suez Crisis created a precedent for future uses of the UNEF. Although there were difficulties within the Security Council, the overall system was successful in ending the Crisis. By quickly solving the aggression, confidence continued to be built for the UN process. While American efforts stopped any true long-term effects for the aggressors, the stigma of violating the UN charter followed Israel, Britain, and France for years. Western fears concerning the potential of the UN were well founded, but the timing was successful whether or not they truly needed to wait to bring it to the organization’s attention.

Conclusion

The inflexible position of the multiple actors during the Suez Crisis made military aggression all the more precarious within a post-Hitler world. Britain and France attempted to make multiple connections between Nasser and Hitler in order to engage the United States in their endeavor. Instead Eisenhower searched for a diplomatic solution in order to ensure the Soviet Union would not be allowed to infiltrate the Middle East. No matter the efforts of the countries involved, the final solution was only found within the United Nations. Issues of sovereignty collided with international law erupting in a military attack that was ultimately unsuccessful in serving the goals of the aggressors.

Nasser's decision to nationalize the Canal, while thought out, was clearly a controversial act. He was looking for this attention to ensure to repair his ego from the loss of Western support for the Aswan High Dam. The act also brought attention to Egypt on the international stage, and would show Egypt's power in successfully running the Canal as it had been before Nasser's announcement. Ultimately, the Crisis made Egypt appear as a victim against Britain and France's unnecessary aggression. Due to Egypt's continued violation of international, while military aggression was not seen as necessary, the Israeli government's actions were considered somewhat justified.

Despite their disagreement over control of the Canal, both Eden and Nasser had a commonality during the Crisis. Both blamed the United States for not being the leaders the world had come to expect the superpower to be. Eden had hoped that Eisenhower would react as the government had done historically during both

World Wars. While Eden and Nasser overestimated America's willingness to address the Crisis militarily, Eisenhower overestimated his personal relationship with Eden. Eisenhower did not believe until it became painfully obvious that Eden would resort to aggression despite his friend and ally's refusal. The conflict between the strong personalities during the Crisis halted vital communication making diplomacy an almost impossible solution.

Veto power also allowed these powers to stop a binding resolution from ending the Crisis before Britain and France entered the aggression. However, the rest of the international community reached a consensus through the General Assembly in order for the invading parties to agree to a cease-fire and creating the United Nations Emergency Force. Despite obstacles the international organization was able to halt the Crisis quickly and create a force to enforce the removal of troops. The organization was successful despite the strong personalities and utilization of the veto, showing its strength and ability to achieve the goals of its creation.

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