

THE PREMIER VIRGINIA TECH MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE

# Suez Showdown: The Suez Crisis of 1956

FEBRUARY 2ND, 2023 - FEBRUARY 4TH, 2023  
SPECIALIZED COMMITTEE | BLACKSBURG, VA





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## Dear Delegates of VTMUNC I,

We appreciate your participation and dedication to the premier Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference's efforts to promote productive and civil discourse and conversation. Nevertheless, please be warned that some presentations, discussions, and or information found in the background guides may contain delicate or triggering material. At Virginia Tech, we prioritize fostering a safe and inclusive environment, so we want to ensure that you are prepared for the nature of the discussions to occur.

That being said, the following content areas may contain sensitive material:

1. **Conflict Zones & Human Rights Violations:** Some conversations may involve sensitive global problems including human rights violations, armed conflicts, and or other difficult themes.
2. **Sensitive Cultural or Religious Topics:** Some topics may raise sensitive cultural or religious issues for individuals.
3. **Violence and Trauma:** In their speeches or resolutions, delegates may reference incidents of violence, trauma, or abuse in real-world scenarios that may potentially be a sensitive topic to delegates in committee.
4. **Discussions about Discrimination and Marginalization:** Emotionally intense discussions concerning discrimination, marginalization, or inequity may arise during committee.

As you prepare for the conference, we encourage all of our delegates to approach these discussions with both respect and empathy for differing perspectives. If the content of these committees is something that you are uncomfortable with, we recommend that you take the appropriate steps to prioritize your well-being, such as seeking support from conference staff or Secretariat of VTMUNC I.

Bound by the motto *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve), we serve to ensure that we will promote constructive and respectful dialogue during committee sessions. As you prepare and participate in the conference, we promise that VTMUNC I will stay committed to creating a space where all your voices are heard and are welcome.

Thank you for your compassion and cooperation to our goal of respectful and intellectual discourse for all. We hope that as you progress with our conference, you continue to bloom.

Sincerely,

Aaryan Menon, Secretary General of VTMUNC I

Shriya Chemudupati, Under-Secretary General of General Assemblies of VTMUNC I

Madeline Pedersen, Under-Secretary General of Specialized Agencies of VTMUNC I

Juan Camilo Bonilla, Under-Secretary General of Crisis Committees of VTMUNC I



## CONFERENCE GUIDELINES

The first iteration of the Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference, otherwise known as VTMUNC I, is committed to providing a safe and pleasurable experience for all delegates, advisors, and individuals involved with VTMUNC I. Although participating in Model UN is being involved in competitive activity, its fundamental purpose is to uphold and put into practice both the principles of diplomacy, collaboration, and cooperation. Any individual that violates the policies and procedures of VTMUNC I and the ideals of an open and inclusive environment will be subject to disciplinary action from the staff of VTMUNC I; disciplinary action may include a warning or being disqualified from receiving awards. Promoting an environment that is open to all by being safe, equitable, and exhilarating is our utmost priority. In order to ensure this, the following are **prohibited**:

1. Any pre-writing or working on committee content outside of VTMUNC I committee sessions (as described by the Schedule of Program).
2. Any speeches, directives, crisis arcs, or actions in committee that intend to create violence or promote a violent environment to a specific group of people, including mentions of sexual violence, graphic violence, and other behavior that is beyond committee guidelines.
3. Any hate speech, written documents, or behavior that uses language that is discriminatory and disrespectful, including but not limited to any language that is racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic, antisemitic, Islamophobic, or language harmful to any specific group.
4. Any actions that are deliberate, both knowingly and intentionally, to bully, harass, or otherwise harmful behavior that may or has hurt other delegates' physical and or mental health.



Dear Delegates,

Thank you for choosing to participate in the 1956 Suez Crisis Specialized Committee, and for attending Virginia Tech's inaugural conference, VTMUNC II! I am honored and excited to serve as your chair as we tackle international conflict, geopolitical strategy, the threat of nuclear war, and more.

About myself, I am a Virginia Tech junior from West Bloomfield, Michigan. I am studying Aerospace Engineering and pursuing a minor in Political Science. Outside of class, I am involved with a number of organizations including as a travel member and secretary of Virginia Tech Model UN. I am also the secretary of Virginia Tech's chapter of the American Institute for Aeronautics and Astronautics and heavily involved in a number of research projects focused on making aviation more sustainable. I find studying the world around us fascinating and I believe by better understanding past events including the Cold War, we can better understand and analyze the geopolitics of our modern world.

This background guide is meant to provide a general overview of the flow of committee, delegate expectations, and a brief history of the topic. While all necessary information is located here, I highly encourage you to engage in further research to better understand the material and prepare for committee. If you have any questions or concerns regarding committee or VTMUNC, please feel free to reach out via email at [noahc25@vt.edu](mailto:noahc25@vt.edu).

Once again, thank you for choosing to attend VTMUNC. I look forward to seeing you all in committee!

Best regards,  
Noah Charness  
[noahc25@vt.edu](mailto:noahc25@vt.edu)



Dear Delegates,

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Virginia Tech's inaugural Model UN conference. I cannot thank you enough for your interest in this momentous event. I look forward to how you all will deal with the serious issues that will need to be contended with to solve one of the most important events of the last century.

To provide a little information about myself, I am a fourth-year student at Virginia Tech, studying paleontology and political science, and am from Stafford, Virginia. I have done a number of things during my time at VT, but some highlights include my time as a training chair for the Model UN club at VT and my ongoing paleontological research on unidentified fossils from the early Cambrian period. I have fostered a life-long love of learning and of sharing what I know with others because I believe that knowledge and critical thinking are the cornerstones of a successful life. I hope you all will use these skills to find creative and effective solutions to all too serious issues of the past and shine light on things we can do to better our world today.

I wish you all the best of luck in your research. I look forward to seeing you all at the start of the conference!

Sincerely,

Trevor Niles

ntrevor20@vt.edu

(P.S. I can name a dinosaur for every letter of the alphabet)



Committee Procedural Rules:

**Delegate Expectations:** As a specialized committee, this committee will not follow the standard flow of a general assembly committee nor the standard flow of a crisis committee. This committee is meant to simulate the emergency session of the United Nations General Assembly called together during the 1956 Suez Crisis. As a result, delegates will act as the ambassadors of the country they are representing, but they will also have the associated powers of the nation they are representing.

**Voting Logistics:** Due to this committee simulating the UN General Assembly, there will be no veto power administered to any delegate. As a result, unless otherwise stated, a simple majority of delegates voting in favor of a resolution will lead to its adoption by the committee.

**Delegate Powers:** In addition to the standard ability to vote on substantive issues, delegates may also employ additional powers and resources to change the flow of committee and the trajectory of the ongoing

crisis. These powers will be dictated as follows:

**Crisis Pads:** Delegates will **not** have access to individual crisis pads. Instead, delegates are expected to influence the committee through public means in the form of voting on substantive issues and through covert means in the form of Joint Private Directives. Delegates therefore must work with other committee members to take private actions beyond the purview of the committee.

**Joint Private Directives (JPDs):** As stated above, delegates can only impact the committee through covert action using Joint Private Directives. To draft a successful JPD, delegates must first ensure their actions are within their nation's power and motivation. Additionally, **delegates are only allowed to sponsor (or be involved in) two JPDs per session of debate. Furthermore, each JPD will require a minimum of three sponsors** to ensure delegates are both working collaboratively and carefully considering which members of the committee they hope to

partner with in the use of covert actions and powers.

**Available Powers and Allowed Actions:** While this committee is meant to diverge from our world's history, major actions must still have some basis in our world's reality. Due to the specialized nature of this committee, and specifically its intent to replicate the United Nations General Assembly, delegates are expected to work to create realistic, collaborative, and peaceful solutions to problems.

1. Delegates should refrain from partaking in speeches or actions a real UN delegate would not do
2. Delegates should not attempt to enact entirely ahistorical actions such as establishing a new religion, creating a cult to amass power, or doing things that directly go against a country's previous and established expectations (ie: North and South Korea should not collaborate on the development of nuclear weapons, the United States and USSR should not suddenly

endorse each other or sign a defensive pact, etc.)

3. Delegates may, and are encouraged to, use JPDs to partake in covert and potentially disruptive actions if such action would be a conceivable action the country said delegate represents would partake in (ie: The US, UK, and Israel working together to fund rebel groups in Egypt, India negotiating an arms deal with Egypt and the USSR in exchange for supporting them in the UN, etc.)
4. Delegates will have the power of their resolutions and JPDs limited to the existing power of any involved countries (ie: non-nuclear powers cannot threaten the use of nuclear weapons, new weapons or technologies cannot be created during committee, if a country does not possess an intelligence agency it cannot partake in exceptionally disruptive covert actions such as supporting coups or spying on other countries, etc.)



5. While the overarching topic of the committee is the Suez Crisis, and the potential of a much larger and more international war looms over the committee, delegates should work to find a peaceful resolution. Delegates should not be calling for total war or an expansion of hostilities without a valid motive or direct prior escalation

#### Sensitivity Statement

This committee will cover a recent and violent period in history. While the goal of this committee is to simulate an alternative outcome to the Suez Crisis, we also must make our expectations regarding content and delegate behavior clear. This committee, and VTMUNC as a whole, both have a strict policy against bigotry and hate in any capacity. Delegates are to refrain from promoting, endorsing, or engaging in racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-semitism, islamophobia, xenophobia, ableism, or any other intentionally harmful and disrespectful behavior. Additionally, delegates may not invoke the use or endorsement of egregious and unnecessary violence or hate within

committee such as an attempt to engage in genocide or war crimes through the use of a Joint Private Directive.

While this committee intends to replicate the United Nations and therefore delegates may be faced with addressing very sensitive issues that arise in times of war and conflict, all representatives should work towards finding a peaceful and diplomatic solution to any humanitarian crises that arise. Delegates are still allowed and encouraged to have a productive debate on the best course of action to solve major world issues, but no committee member should take a stance of endorsing the harm of innocent civilians.

## Useful Maps:



Map of the Middle East with modern borders.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United States National Imagery And Mapping Agency, “Middle East Graphic.”



Map of the Sinai Peninsula and the Suez Canal Zone<sup>2</sup>



Map of the Israeli Offensive into the Sinai Peninsula<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "Sinai Peninsula."

<sup>3</sup> Szapiro, *Map of the Israeli Campaign in the Sinai Peninsula*

### History of the Conflict:

#### The Establishment of Israel and the 1948 Arab-Israeli War

Following the conclusion of World War II in 1945, much of Europe was left devastated by the global conflict. Specifically, both the British and French empires faced significant economic hardship following the end of the war. The costs of the total mobilization of the homeland, defending core territories from invasion, and maintaining an overseas empire quickly bled the coffers of the United Kingdom and France dry. Additionally, the war had weakened the control these powers were able to maintain over their controlled territories. Growing nationalist movements in controlled territories, compounded by the absence of economic and military support from the empires, led to calls for self-governance and independence in several colonies throughout the world.<sup>4</sup>

One of the territories the United Kingdom withdrew from was the British

Mandate of Palestine. The land, taken by the British after the collapse of the Ottoman empire following World War I, had seen increased Jewish immigration as a growing Zionist movement gained support internationally. Throughout the interwar period, violence between the Arab residents of Palestine and Jewish settlers increased dramatically, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Jews and Arabs and an increased presence of British occupation forces.

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<sup>4</sup> "Condominium Agreement (1899) | Encyclopedia.Com."



In 1937, the Peel Commission proposed splitting the Mandate of Palestine into two independent Jewish and Arab states. Arab leaders rejected this proposal outright while Zionist leaders, hoping to use the proposal as a basis for further negotiation,

convinced the Zionist Congress to generally accept the terms of the proposal. Following the Peel Commission, the British instituted the White Paper policy in 1939, limiting Jewish immigration and land ownership within the Mandate of Palestine. This prompted Zionist organizations to establish methods of illegal immigration to smuggle Jews out of Europe into Palestine.<sup>5</sup>

Following the end of World War II and in the backdrop of increasing violence between Jewish and Arab groups, the British Empire handed the issue over to the recently established United Nations. Drawing up a two-state partition plan, the UN proposed Resolution 181 to divide the Mandate of Palestine between the Jews and Arabs of the region.<sup>6</sup>

The plan was accepted by a majority of the Jewish population, but largely rejected by the local Arab groups, citing previous agreements with the British government promising the creation of an independent

<sup>5</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "United Nations Resolution 181 | Map & Summary."

<sup>6</sup> Sicherman and Ochsenwald, "Israel | Facts, History, & Map."

Arab state in return for an uprising against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. In contrast, the British also made promises to early Zionist groups to support the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, creating a pair of conflicting promises. Despite numerous objections raised by Arab groups and leaders, the UN General Assembly adopted the partition plan on November 29, 1947, with the following votes:

On the Adoption of Resolution 181<sup>7</sup>

**In Favor (33):**

Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Byelorussian SSR, Canada, Costa Rica, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Guatemala, Haiti, Iceland, Liberia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Sweden, Ukrainian SSR, Union of South Africa, United States, Soviet Union, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

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<sup>7</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "1947: The International Community Says YES to the Establishment of the State of Israel."

**Against (13)**

Afghanistan, Cuba, Egypt, Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen.

**Abstained (10)**

Argentina, Chile, China, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Mexico, United Kingdom, and Yugoslavia.

Following the adoption of Resolution 181, a civil war erupted in British Palestine between Jewish and Arab residents. Fighting raged on within the territory until May 15, 1948, when Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, and expeditionary forces from Iraq all entered Palestine in response to the Israeli Declaration of Independence the day prior. This marked the official start of the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948.

This conflict would last for 10 months with fighting mainly taking place in Palestine, the Sinai Peninsula, and Southern Lebanon. While two cease-fires brokered by the United Nations were instituted

throughout the conflict, fighting only concluded with the adoption of separate armistice agreements between Israel and the neighboring states of Egypt, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Syria. As a result of the conflict, Israel gained control of all of its initially granted land in Resolution 181, as well as approximately 60% of the land designated for Arabs in the plan. Egypt would take control of the Gaza Strip while Transjordan would take control of East Jerusalem and what is now known as the West Bank.<sup>8</sup>

### Tensions Leading to the Crisis

Even before the First Arab-Israeli War, Anglo-Egyptian relations had already been tarnished following the conclusion of the Second World War. Following the provisions of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, Egypt gained broader autonomy within the British Empire, yet was still under the Crown's control. This treaty did, however, limit the number of British troops within

Egypt to 10,000 and only permitted their stationing within the Suez Canal Zone during peacetime. Additionally, Britain would maintain its garrison in Sudan, yet would work with Egypt to jointly manage the territory. Intended to last for a period of 20 years through 1956, the end of World War II and subsequent political changes within Egypt would see an increasing movement to void the terms of the treaty and cause a worsening of relations with the United Kingdom.

Following the end of the Second World War, Egypt called for the British to completely withdraw from Sudan and cede its territory to Egypt. This was denied by the British and led to months of negotiations between the two countries before ultimately stalling. Before and during the war, Egypt became more committed to the Arab cause in Palestine, but its unexpected and crushing defeat in the first Arab-Israeli war contributed to disillusionment and political instability within the nation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Office of The Historian, "The Arab-Israeli War of 1948."

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<sup>9</sup> Office of The Historian.

In 1950, the Wafd Party was able to form a government in Egypt with Muṣṭafā al-Naḥḥās as the head of state. After failing again to reach an agreement with the British, in October of 1951 al-Naḥḥās unilaterally declared both the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 and the Condominium Agreement of 1899, which outlined the joint administration of Sudan between Egypt and Britain, as void. The Egyptian government further announced it would expel British forces out of the Canal Zone and seize control of Sudan. This escalation prompted the Royal Navy to send warships to Port Said at the North end of the canal with more troops en route.

Despite continued negotiations between the United Kingdom and Egypt to reach an agreement regarding control of Sudan and the Suez Canal, anti-British violence increased dramatically as troops garrisoned in the Canal Zone were subject to guerilla warfare. In response, British troops killed approximately 50 auxiliary Egyptian policemen in the city of Ismaīlia. The subsequent riots within Cairo lead to mass

looting and arson, eventually becoming known as Black Saturday or the Cairo Fire.

The tensions stemming from discontent with the current government boiled over into the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. Driven by a coalition of nationalist military officers known as the Free Officers Movement, the revolution aimed to eradicate British influence and address perceived corruption within the ruling monarchy, eventually culminating in the end of the monarchy and the establishment of the Arab Republic of Egypt. On July 23, 1952, a successful coup led by General Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser resulted in the abdication of King Farouk I, signaling the beginning of a new political era.

Under the leadership of Naguib and later Nasser, the revolutionary government implemented significant changes to the Egyptian political landscape. The monarchy was abolished, and the country declared itself a republic. Nasser, who eventually assumed the presidency, pursued a nationalist and socialist agenda. Land reforms were introduced to address issues of land



inequality, and key industries were nationalized to reduce foreign influence. These policies aimed at fostering economic and social equity, with an emphasis on empowering the working class and rural population. The revolution also set the stage for Nasser's dominance in Egyptian politics, shaping the country's trajectory for years to come and influencing broader Arab nationalist movements in the region.

The revolution also had a profound impact on Egypt's stance toward the Palestinian cause, becoming a cornerstone of the country's foreign policy. Under the leadership of President Nasser, Egypt assumed a more assertive role in championing the rights of the Palestinian people. Nasser's commitment to Arab nationalism and solidarity translated into active support for Palestine against Israeli expansionism. Egypt became a vocal advocate for the Palestinian cause, providing both diplomatic and material assistance to Palestinian nationalist movements and subsequently worsening its

relationship with Israel, which it had not formally recognized as a legitimate state.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond his focus on supporting the Palestinian cause, Nasser's main foreign policy woes were the ongoing British occupation of the Suez Canal Zone and control over Sudan. An agreement signed in February 1953 established a transitional period of self-government for the territory of Sudan, which became an independent republic in January 1956. Prolonged negotiations led to the 1954 Anglo-Egyptian Agreement, under which British troops were to be evacuated gradually from the canal zone. Some Egyptians criticized the treaty from a nationalist perspective, fearing that external events could permit the British to reoccupy the canal bases.

In October of 1954, an assassination attempt was made on Nasser's life by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. After surviving the attack, Nasser used this event as a provocation to crush the organization, imprison its leaders, and execute numerous

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<sup>10</sup> Britannica, "Egypt - The Revolution and the Republic."

members. Following the attempt on his life, Nasser began to cement his control over Egypt, in stark contrast to the previous four years of instability and regular changes of power and leadership.

In early 1955, Nasser requested the purchase of approximately \$27 million worth of arms from the United States. Knowing Egypt did not have the payment ready, the Eisenhower administration stated it would only sell the weapons to Nasser if he was able to pay in cash. Additionally, the United States also added that weapons sold to Egypt could only be used in a defensive capacity and Egypt would have to allow American troops in for supervision and training. Nasser then threatened to instead purchase weapons from the Soviet Union to which the United States gave no response. In August of 1955, an arms sale worth \$80-150 million was finalized between the USSR and Egypt. This only increased tensions in the Middle East as fighting between Palestinian and Israeli forces continued and outsiders worried about rising instability in the region.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Schorreck, "The Suez Crisis."

After a previous agreement signed on December 3 of 1955 between Britain and Egypt, Sudan gained independence the following January 1. The following June, Britain ended its occupation of the Suez Canal after 72 years of control. While this is seen as a major victory for Nasser, on July 19, 1956, the United States withdrew financial support for the construction of Aswan Dam, a massive public works project meant to provide power generation and irrigation control by harnessing the flow of the Nile River. The stated reason for the United States backing out of helping fund the construction was due to Egypt's growing ties with the Soviet Union, however, the US State Department was also unhappy with Nasser's diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China.<sup>12</sup>

### The Suez Crisis

On July 26, 1956, President Nasser announced, with the broad support of the Egyptian people, the nationalization of the

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<sup>12</sup> Postgraduate Certificate in Education, M. S., and B. S., "Do You Know What Events Led up to the Suez Crisis?"

Suez Canal. Nasser also announced that all stockholders of the canal would be reimbursed for their shares and that any future revenue generated by the canal would be used to pay back stockholders and to fund the construction of the Aswan Dam. Later that day, Egypt closed the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping and blockaded the Gulf of Aqaba by closing the Straits of Tiran, further restricting Israel's sea access.

Egypt's unexpected nationalization of the Suez Canal took Britain and the Commonwealth by surprise as the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London, held in late June and early July, did not address the issue. Despite the lack of international consensus, Egypt's action posed a threat to British economic and military interests in the region. Prime Minister Eden faced domestic pressure, drawing parallels between the events of 1956 and the Munich Agreement in 1938. With the absence of U.S. support, the British government opted for military intervention to prevent a collapse of British prestige in the region.

Prime Minister Eden received counsel from King Feisal II of Iraq and his Prime Minister, Nuri es-Said, advising a swift and forceful response against Egyptian President Nasser. The initial support from both Conservative MPs and the British public waned as Leader of the Opposition Hugh Gaitskell grew more cautious. Gaitskell, initially leaning towards military action, warned against violating the United Nations Charter and expressed reservations about acting without international approval. Despite initial parliamentary support, Gaitskell's stance evolved, and Labour declined to respond to Eden's ministerial broadcast on the nationalization calling for support in a military operation against Egypt.

The French Prime Minister, Guy Mollet, shared the outrage over Nasser's move and sought to form a military alliance with France, Israel, and Britain to regain control of the Suez Canal. Mollet's strong stance was supported by the French public, although some critics on the right doubted his willingness to go to war. The British government, facing the risk of damaging

relations with the U.S. and angering Washington, entered into a secret military pact with France and Israel.<sup>13</sup>

Among the Commonwealth nations with historical ties to Britain, Canada initially displayed a cautious stance, having previously declined British requests for peacetime military aid in the Middle East. Canada's limited ties to the Suez Canal and its focus on the Panama Canal over Suez contributed to its restrained reaction in the immediate aftermath of the nationalization.

Australia and New Zealand, both deeply connected to Britain through their contributions to two world wars, exhibited initial support for Britain's position. Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies, emphasizing the canal's historical significance and the potential threat posed by Nasser's actions, stood by Britain in the early weeks following the seizure. Meanwhile, New Zealand's Prime Minister Sidney Holland hinted at the possibility of sending troops to assist Britain, gaining support from the opposition party.

South Africa, led by Johannes Strijdom, took a pragmatic approach, recognizing Nasser as an adversary while acknowledging potential economic and geopolitical benefits from a closed canal. Although cautious, South Africa's government refrained from opposing a nation's right to govern its internal affairs, maintaining a nuanced stance.

In contrast, the responses from more anti-British members of the Commonwealth reflected a more sympathetic view towards Nasser's actions, perceiving them as expressions of anti-imperialism and Arab nationalism. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, despite being with Nasser when the U.S. withdrew aid for the Aswan Dam, adopted a neutral position, warning against the use of force or threats. The Dominion of Ceylon, deeply affected by the canal's economic importance, adopted a more measured approach as it renegotiated defense treaties with Britain.

Pakistan, though cautious due to its rivalry with Egypt as a leading Islamic nation, acknowledged Nasser's right to

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<sup>13</sup> Postgraduate Certificate in Education, M. S., and B. S.

nationalize the canal. The responses from the Commonwealth governments highlighted the intricate balance they had to maintain, considering historical ties, economic interests, and geopolitical considerations in navigating the complexities of the Suez Crisis.

The Western diplomatic response involved a tripartite meeting between British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, US Ambassador Robert D. Murphy, and French Foreign Affairs Minister Christian Pineau. Despite initial proposals for international management of the canal, negotiations failed, leading to the three nations supporting various positions. The United States proposed an association of canal users, while Britain and France prepared for military intervention. Britain believed the United States, worried at Nasser's support for Palestine, Egypt's ties to the USSR, and his attempt to destabilize pro-western regimes in the Arab world, would not intervene in the upcoming joint operation and instructed Israel to prepare for war.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory in American Foreign Policy*.

Both Britain and France were deeply concerned at the prospect of losing access to the Suez Canal due to its strategic location and the high volume of oil, a valuable resource for the two developed economies, that passed through the canal daily. Additionally, France was worried about Egypt's growing influence in North Africa, specifically in colonial Algeria where the French forces were working to fight an ongoing uprising. Britain and France both agreed on a goal of retaking the canal and working together to oust Nasser.

Israel sought to reopen the Straits of Tiran and regain its shipping access. Additionally, Israel hoped to strengthen its defenses along its Southern border which it saw as a critical weak point in the country's tactical planning. Finally, Israel was deeply concerned about the growing stockpile of weapons the Egyptians possessed and hoped to destroy Egypt's new Soviet technology before they could be used against Israel.

As meetings between Western powers played out, tensions were raised as Britain froze Egyptian assets, instituted an arms

embargo on Egypt, and informed Egypt it could not take total control of the canal. In response, Egypt stated they were willing to negotiate ownership of the canal in exchange for a total British withdrawal from the Middle East. The United Kingdom, worried about protecting its supply of oil and its waning influence in a critical region of the world, rejected these terms.

On August 23, the USSR announced it would send troops and additional military aid to Egypt in the event the nation was attacked. This significantly raised tensions around the planned military operation between Britain, France, and Israel as it risked the involvement of a global superpower. Seeking to de-escalate the brewing conflict, the United States, and later the United Kingdom and France, called for the creation of a Suez Canal Users Association (SCUA). On October 1, a 15-nation Suez Canal Users Association was officially created and outlined four key principles and requirements of the canal including free passage and oversight of the canal by the

SCUA. These plans were rejected by the Egyptian government.

At the same time as the SCUA conference was held, Britain and France brought the issue of the canal to the UN Security Council. The Security Council returned a unanimous statement regarding the governance of the canal and stated any settlement concerning the canal should meet the following criteria:

1. There should be free and open transit through the Canal without discrimination, overt or covert—this covers both political and technical aspects
2. The sovereignty of Egypt should be respected
3. The operation of the Canal should be insulated from the politics of any country
4. The manner of fixing tolls and charges should be decided by agreement between Egypt and the Users
5. A fair proportion of the dues should be allotted to development

6. In case of disputes, unresolved affairs between the Suez Canal Company and the Egyptian Government should be settled by arbitration with suitable terms of reference and suitable provisions for the payment of sums found to be due.

Despite efforts from the United States, the United Nations, and the international community, efforts to resolve the conflict failed as Britain, France, and Israel prepared for war.<sup>15</sup>

#### The Conflict and Current State of Affairs

At 3:00 PM on October 29, 1956, Israeli Air Force P-51 Mustangs launched numerous attacks across the Sinai Peninsula, marking the start of the Suez War. Israel also simultaneously deployed military forces near the West Bank and their border with Jordan, fearing their entrance to the war. Due to the

increased military presence, many Palestinians were hurt or killed by IDF forces despite not being combatants or even in the area of combat.

The invasion of the Sinai began shortly after as multiple Israeli paratrooper battalions were dropped on and around the strategically critical Mitla Pass. Concurrently, Israeli fighters used their propellers and gunfire to destroy Egyptian telephone lines and communication channels, greatly limiting the success of Egyptian command and control in the early days of the conflict.

While the early hours of the invasion were very successful for Israeli forces, they did face some resistance, specifically on October 30th at the Battle of Jebel Heitan which slowed ground progress. Despite these setbacks on the ground, Israeli air power demonstrated superior technology and skill over the Egyptian Air Force. After the initial assault used to disrupt Egyptian communication lines, on October 31st Israel employed waves of aircraft to continuously attack Egypt's 1st Armored Brigade. Despite counterattacks from Egyptian fighters and

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<sup>15</sup> Postgraduate Certificate in Education, M. S., and B. S., "Do You Know What Events Led up to the Suez Crisis?"

anti-air installations, Israeli Air Force pilots were able to inflict a massive amount of damage to the brigade, leaving dozens of vehicles destroyed and burning.<sup>16</sup>

As the fighting raged on the ground and in the air throughout the initial days of the attack, naval skirmishes also took place in the early days of the conflict. On October 30th, Egypt sent the destroyer Ibrahim el Awal to the Israeli city of Haifa with orders to shell the city. A nearby French destroyer was able to return fire and force the Egyptian vessel to abandon its mission and retreat where it was then chased down by Israeli forces. At the southern end of the Suez Canal, a British light cruiser challenged and sank an Egyptian destroyer, sustaining very limited damage in the process.

Throughout the initial days of the conflict, heavy fighting also took place in the Gaza Strip. In a strategic move, Israel sought to control the city of Rafah to sever the Gaza Strip from the Sinai and gain access to key centers in the northern Sinai, namely al-Arish and al-Qantarrah. The forces stationed outside

Rafah, comprising a mix of Egyptian and Palestinian troops, were part of the 5th Infantry Brigade. Simultaneously, the 87th Palestinian Infantry Brigade was stationed within the city. Israeli forces, led by infantry and armored units, were assigned to capture Rafah. The assault involved clearing paths through minefields surrounding Rafah, with support from French warships. The IDF successfully seized strategic points, cutting off Rafah and controlling northern and eastern access roads.

On October 30th, an emergency session of the United Nations Security Council was called. The United States proposed a resolution calling on Israel to withdraw from Egypt behind the 1940 armistice lines, however this was vetoed by both the United Kingdom and France. By October 31st, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 119, admitting the Security Council's failure to maintain peace between member states and invoking the 1950 "Uniting for Peace" resolution to call an emergency session of the United Nations General Assembly. This emergency session,

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<sup>16</sup> *The Suez War.*



beginning November 1, 1956, marks the start of our committee.<sup>17</sup>

### Questions to Consider

1. Should a waterway as important as the Suez Canal be under the control of just one country?
2. Should Israel, France, the United Kingdom, or any other countries be held responsible for the conflict? If so, how should they be punished?
3. How does this conflict impact the broader geopolitical landscape of 1956 and the Cold War?
4. What is the role of the United Nations, if it has one at all, within this conflict?
5. How can the United Nations exert its influence to achieve peace without violating international law?
6. What does my country have to offer and have to gain from this conflict?

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<sup>17</sup> Resolution 119 (1956), “Resolution 119 (1956) / [Adopted by the Security Council at Its 751st Meeting], of 31 October 1956.”

Member States in Committee

Afghanistan	Algeria	Australia
Belgium	Brazil	Canada
Cuba	Egypt	Finland
France	Greece	Iceland
India	Indonesia	Iran
Iraq	Israel	Italy
Jordan	Lebanon	Libya
Mexico	Netherlands	Norway
Pakistan	Philippines	Portugal
Saudi Arabia	Soviet Union	Sudan
Syria	Tunisia	Turkey
United Kingdom	United States	Yugoslavia

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