

The Suez Canal Crisis

Historical Committee MUNHIGH24

These briefing pointers are written from a historical perspective; delegates should consider that the crisis has just happened.

Since the second millennium BCE, the stretch- now known as Suez- has been intrinsic in the transferal of goods between Asia and the Mediterranean basin. In 1864, the capacity for wealth creation was recognised and a 164 km long canal was built; leading to a dramatic acceleration in global trade. However, in 1956 Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser, ordered the seizure and nationalisation of the Suez Canal so that tolls could be taken and the proceeds used for infrastructural development. This has since escalated and become a contentious issue.

To understand why this occurred, it is pertinent that we acknowledge Egypt's desire to remain impartial during the current conflict between the West and the USSR, to protect the independence of the Arab world from domineering imperial Western powers. The lack of hostility Egypt demonstrated towards the East led the USA to withdraw financial support. This has since been cited as one of the main reasons why the Egyptians initially took control of the canal. As the canal was previously held by the Suez Canal company it has strong links to both France and Britain, both of whom are allies of the USA. Thus western European nations began to feel somewhat betrayed by Egypt, so much so that in July 1956 Britain and France allied with Israel.

The plan was for Israel to capture the Sinai peninsula and then for Britain and France to capture the canal under the false pretence that it was to restore order. On November 5th British and French invaded Egypt, gaining control over the canal as the people of Egypt were ill-equipped to tackle the Western army. The military action was swift and effective, yet the political fallout has been substantial. Since then Khrushchev, the leader of the USSR, has been openly hostile to 'British Imperialism' and has threatened to decimate London with rockets. However, the antipathy towards the two nations has been mirrored in Western sentiment. There have been calls for the UK and France to withdraw from NATO and President Eisenhower has called for the International Monetary Fund to deny Britain Financial aid, as the two nations invaded without the support of the USA. What is more, only Australia has supported Britain in its attacks and commonwealth nations, such as Pakistan, have threatened to leave the newly formed union. Furthermore, several media outlets have exclaimed that the British attacks drew attention away from the USSR's brutality; such as the suppression of the Hungarians.

The actions of France and Britain have left many questions up in the air. It is uncertain how dominant the USSR will become now that the West has essentially antagonised itself. Western unity has been called into question and it is also unsettled how trade should continue in the region.

Points to consider:

- How can the UN support those who will be affected by the crisis? Both in terms of the impact in trade and those directly affected by the invasion.
- Who is culpable for the crisis and what repercussions should they face?
- Who should control the canal?
- Should a possible USSR and Egyptian alliance be trusted?