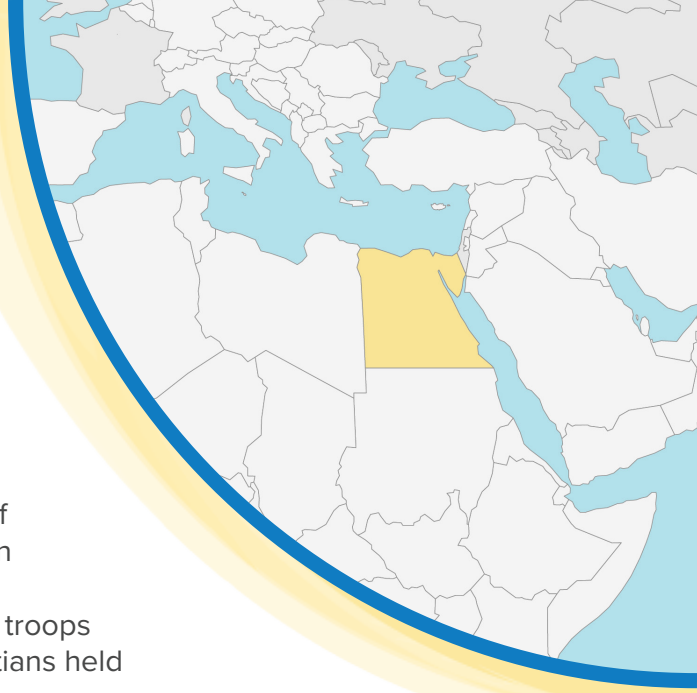


Egypt

Egypt has long been an important part of the Arab world, with long historical connections to its African, Mediterranean, and Red Sea neighbors. From 1517 to 1882 Egypt was ruled by the Ottoman Empire, before becoming a central part in the British Empire. In 1922, Egypt became independent. However, Great Britain maintained a great deal of influence. This included the use of the Suez Canal. Great Britain used Egypt as a base for Allied operations during World War II, keeping the canal closed to German shipping. Although British troops were withdrawn from the Suez Canal Zone in 1947, many Egyptians held anti-British feelings.

In 1952, a group led by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser removed the King of Egypt from power. President Nasser became a popular leader in Egypt and a prominent leader throughout the Arab world. Nasser spoke out against imperialism. He also believed Egypt should be independent and deal with both major world powers—the United States and the Soviet Union. This policy was part of a larger movement called the “Non-aligned Movement” made up of countries that did not want to take sides in the Cold War. He also supported national independence movements in other European colonies such as Algeria’s war for independence against France. President Nasser also went against U.S. policy and engaged with Communist countries, when he agreed to an arms deal with Czechoslovakia in 1955. Nasser officially recognized the People’s Republic of China in 1956. The United States and Great Britain responded to these actions by cancelling funding for President Nasser’s most important project, the Aswan Dam.

President Nasser responded to the actions of the United States and Great Britain with a bold step. He nationalized the Suez Canal Company. This put the Suez Canal entirely under the control of Egypt’s government. He believed that by controlling the company, Egypt could use the fees paid by ships going through the canal to help pay for the construction of the Aswan Dam. Most importantly, President Nasser also saw nationalization and control of the canal as the ultimate statement of Egyptian independence. In 1956, Egypt also blockaded the Straits of Tiran, threatening the Israeli Port of Eilat.

Nasser’s action angered Great Britain and France. Nasser argued that the nationalization of the canal was perfectly legal. From his point of view, the Egyptian government had originally granted the right for the Suez Canal Company to manage the canal and the agreement had expired. President Nasser also assured U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower that Egypt would allow free navigation of the canal. Nasser asserted that Egypt only sought to manage the canal.

Opening Position:

- Maintain control of the Suez Canal.
- Maintain political support from the United States.
- Maintain military support from the Soviet Union.

- Seek funds for the Aswan Dam.
- Ensure President Nasser remains the president.

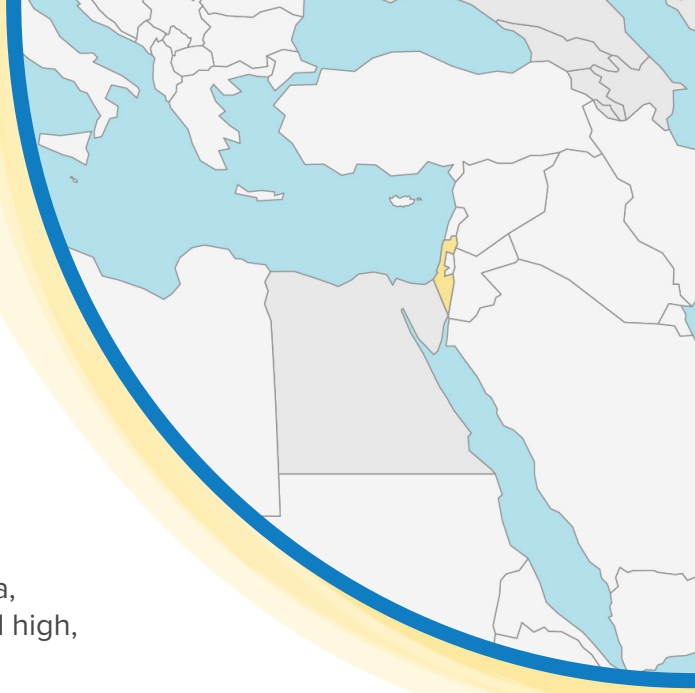
Questions to Consider:

- What were President Nasser's goals in nationalizing the canal?
- Was Egypt mirroring the communist model of nationalization of private industry and resources?
- Did Egypt expect to be attacked for the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company?

What can Egypt negotiate with?

Remember that you don't have to offer these right away in a negotiation.

- Assure the United States, France, and Great Britain that ships carrying oil from the Middle East will be allowed to pass through the canal.
- Allow Israeli ships access to the canal.
- Make it clear that Egypt does not intend to align with either the U.S. or the Soviet Union.
- Reduce or increase arms purchases from Soviet-aligned countries.
- End the blockade of the Straits of Tiran.



The State of Israel

The declaration in 1948 that established Israel as a Jewish state in the Middle East was greeted with invasion by its Arab neighbors. While many Middle Eastern countries were gaining their independence from European powers, the state of Israel maintained close ties to the United States and the West. Israel fought wars with neighboring countries to establish its independence from 1947 to 1949. Treaties signed in 1949 between Israel and Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan ended the fighting but tensions remained high, especially with Egypt.

A series of events continuously escalated tensions between the two countries. In 1950, Egypt closed the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping. Later in 1956, Egypt blockaded the Straits of Tiran. This act prevented ships from reaching the Israeli Port of Eilat, the only Israeli port on the Red Sea. Further, Egypt signed an arms deal with Czechoslovakia in 1955. Israel worried this action indicated that Egypt planned to start another war, and Israel began to increase its own arms supply in response. France agreed to sell Israel weapons, which led to a closer relationship between the two countries.

When Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal Company in 1956, Israel was not directly involved nor considered a major player in the situation, but it saw the action as a threat to its ability to trade and increase its advantage over a key rival.

Questions to Consider:

- What does Israel stand to gain in a conflict between Egypt and Great Britain or France?
- How can Israel strengthen its claim to independence?
- How does Israel benefit from an open Suez Canal?

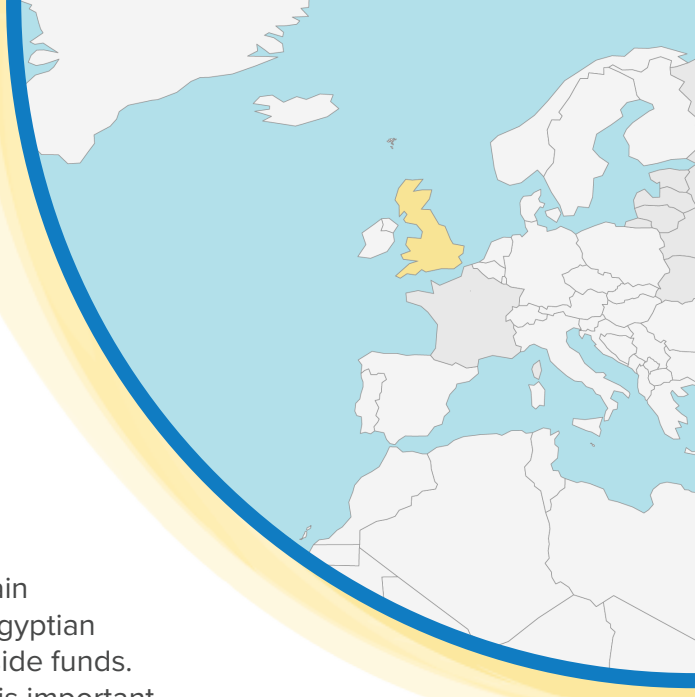
Israel's Position:

- Maintain your allegiance with Britain and France.
- Prevent Egypt from growing stronger.
- Ensure Egypt does not get arms via the Soviet Union.
- Seek access to the canal for trade purposes.

What can Israel negotiate with?

Remember that you don't have to offer these right away in a negotiation.

- Promise no military action will be taken against Egypt.



Great Britain

In the late 1500s and early 1600s Great Britain established numerous colonies throughout the world. This empire grew to span the globe and included land in North America, South America, Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Middle East. The empire provided Great Britain with raw materials, trade opportunities, and international power.

In the 1870s under Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, Great Britain purchased a 44% share in the Suez Canal Company from the Egyptian government. At the time, Egypt agreed because it needed outside funds. The purchase gave Great Britain a great deal of control over this important water link between East and West. In 1882, Great Britain began its occupation of Egypt and used the canal as a central connection for its commercial ships and navy. During World War I, Great Britain used its control of the canal to deny access to enemy ships. After the war, the Ottoman Empire was dissolved and British power grew in the Middle East. The League of Nations gave permission for Great Britain to administer two Middle East territories: Palestine (present-day Israel and Jordan) and Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq).

In 1922, Egypt became independent, however, Great Britain maintained a great deal of influence in the country. During World War II the British used Egypt as a base for Allied operations. Britain closed the canal to enemy ships. However, the war also weakened Great Britain's ability to control its empire. In the postwar years, many colonies pushed for independence. This accelerated the breakup of the empire, and Great Britain slowly granted independence to its colonies. Iraq and Jordan became independent in 1932 and 1946 respectively, and Israel was declared a state in 1948.

Even though by 1956 Great Britain no longer had a vast empire to defend, the Suez Canal was still important. The canal was the main route to ship oil from the Middle East to Europe. Because of the tense global atmosphere felt during the Cold War, the canal maintained its military value. Great Britain was a member of multiple regional defense alliances including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Southeast Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). All these alliances opposed the spread of the Soviet Union. Great Britain viewed controlling access to the canal as vital to its own and its allies' interests.

When President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and placed it under the control of the Egyptian government, Great Britain truly felt their national interests and security were at stake and reacted accordingly. The possibility of Europe's access to Middle Eastern oil being cut off was a nightmare scenario. Great Britain's leadership believed they needed to restore their control of the canal so as not to lose any more status and power in the region.

Questions to Consider:

- How important was the Suez Canal to Great Britain?
- How was Great Britain's security threatened?

- How could Great Britain maintain its control of the canal? Could it use its military to reverse President Nasser's actions?
- What are some alternatives to a military conflict with President Nasser?
- Why was Middle Eastern oil important to the British?

Great Britain's Position:

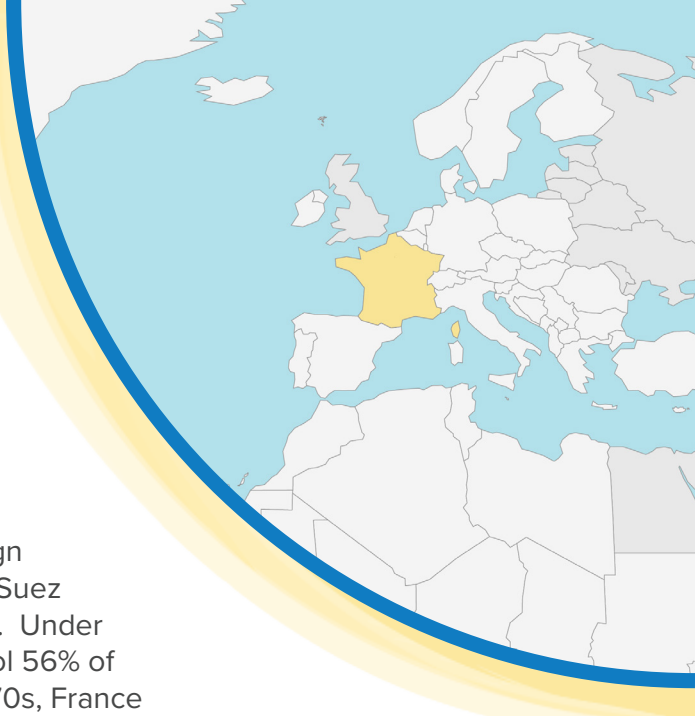
- Ensure national interests and securities are not at stake with the nationalization of the canal.
- Maintain access to oil in the Middle East.
- Restore control of the canal and preserve influence in the region.
- Support entering into an alliance with France and Israel.
- Explore the option of military intervention (Note: no military action can be part of this simulation).
- Maintain alliance with the United States against the Soviet Union.

What can Great Britain negotiate with?

Remember that you don't have to offer these right away in a negotiation.

- Promise no military action will be taken against Egypt.
- Help Egypt pay for the Aswan Dam.
- Allow Egypt to nationalize the canal as long as British ships still have access.

France



France began its colonial empire in the 1600s. At various points the French controlled territory in the Americas, Asia, and Africa. France also had deep-rooted connections to the Suez Canal, beginning with Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt and Syria (1798-1801). During this time the idea of a canal linking the Mediterranean with the Red Sea became popular. A half-century later, a workable design was drawn up by French engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps. The Suez Canal Company was formed to pay for the canal's construction. Under an agreement between France and Egypt, France would control 56% of shares in the company and Egypt would control 44%. In the 1870s, France tried to purchase full control of the canal, but Egypt sold these shares to Great Britain instead.

After World War II, many of France's colonies pushed for independence. France responded by trying to retain control over its colonies. One French colony, Vietnam in Southeast Asia, won its independence in 1954. That same year Algeria in North Africa began its war for independence. Egypt's leader, President Nasser, supported the Algerian fight for independence.

By 1956, France had lost one colony (Vietnam) and was fighting a war to try to retain control of another (Algeria). France's power and status seemed to be declining along with their influence in the Middle East. When the Suez Canal was nationalized by Egypt and placed under control of the Egyptian government, it completely undercut France's position. Not only was the action a threat to economic and political interests, it was a further assault on France's prestige and influence in the region. By entering into an alliance with Britain and Israel, France hoped to regain its status as a major player in the region. France believed that removing President Gamal Abdel Nasser from power would resolve the Suez Crisis and make victory in Algeria more likely.

Questions to Consider:

- How important was the Suez Canal to France?
- Did France truly feel their security was threatened, or was this more of an issue of national pride?
- Was President Nasser really behind France's problems in Algeria?
- Why did France get Israel involved?

France's Position:

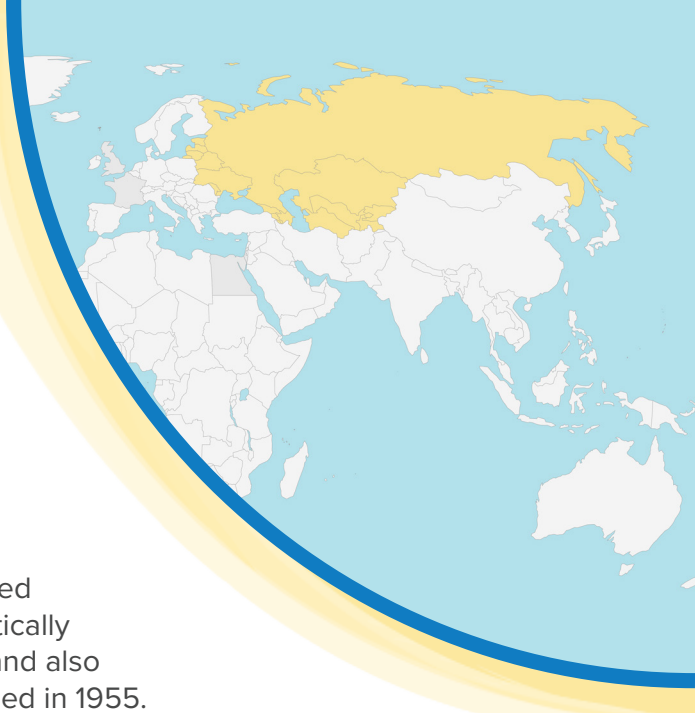
- Nationalizing the canal is a threat to your long standing prestige and influence in the region.
- Ensure continued access to the canal for French ships.
- Support the idea of a military intervention.

- Encourage an alliance with Britain and Israel to regain status as a major player in the region and oust President Nasser.
- Maintain alliance with the United States against the Soviet Union.

What can France negotiate with?

Remember that you don't have to offer these right away in a negotiation.

- Promise no military action will be taken against Egypt.
- Help Egypt pay for the Aswan Dam.
- Allow Egypt to nationalize the canal as long as French ships still have access.



The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union was founded following the victory of the Bolsheviks over their rivals the Mensheviks in 1922. This victory resulted in a union between the communist republics of Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, and the Transcaucuses. Initially, the Soviet Union was isolated from the rest of the world and developed its own resources and industries. During World War II, it allied with Great Britain and the United States against Nazi Germany. After the war ended in 1945, the Soviet Union emerged economically weak but politically and militarily powerful. It grew to 15 Soviet Socialist Republics and also controlled most of Eastern Europe under the Warsaw Pact formed in 1955.

Two superpowers emerged from the war: the Soviet Union and the United States. For their part, the Soviet Union sought to encourage the spread of communism against the capitalist system of the West. A Cold War developed between the Soviet Union and the United States as each attempted to spread its philosophy and ideology around the world.

Compared to the United States, Great Britain, and France, the Soviet Union had very little influence in the Middle East. As a result, the leadership of the Soviet Union sought to increase their influence and the Suez Crisis provided that opportunity. When Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal and placed the canal under the control of the Egyptian government, the Soviet Union was caught off guard. Several days passed before the Soviet Union issued a statement in support of Egypt's action. The statement criticized Great Britain and France for threatening world peace and asserted President Gamal Abdel Nasser actions were legal and justified.

Questions to Consider:

- What influence did the Soviet Union have in Egypt before the Suez Crisis?
- Why was it important for the Soviets to gain influence in the Middle East?
- How could the Soviet Union benefit from conflicts between Israel and neighboring countries in the Middle East?
- How concerned was the Soviet Union about a possible confrontation with the United States?

Soviet Union's Positions:

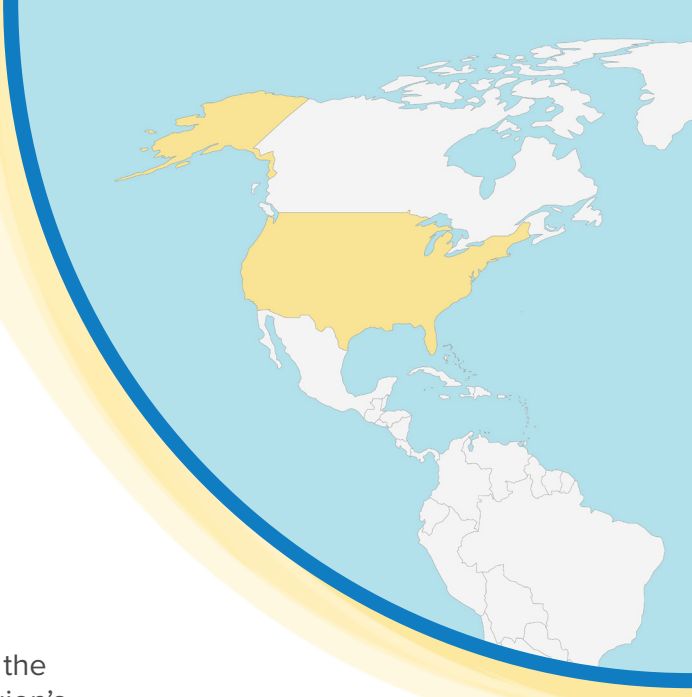
- Support Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal.
- Maintain political strength against the U.S., Great Britain, and France.
- Use the crisis as a chance to become a major player in the Middle East.

What can the Soviet Union negotiate with?

Remember that you don't have to offer these right away in a negotiation.

- Decrease military aid to Egypt.
- Agree to not support Egypt in a military conflict.
- Help Egypt pay for the Aswan Dam.

The United States of America



Two superpowers emerged from after World War II: the Soviet Union and the United States. For their part, the Soviet Union sought to encourage the spread of communism against the capitalist system of the West. A Cold War developed between the Soviet Union and the United States as each attempted to spread its ideology around the world.

Prior to World War II, the United States had a very low profile in the Middle East, with a few trade agreements. After the war, the region's strategic, political, and economic importance rose rapidly, in large part because of its oil resources. As the Cold War simmered, oil was vital to domestic economies and it was important to maintain strong militaries. Not only was access to Middle Eastern oil a necessity, the Arab countries provided many strategic locations for military bases that could be used in a future conflict with the Soviet Union.

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower came into office in 1953, he and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles pursued a neutral policy–"friendly impartiality"–towards Israel and its Arab neighbors should conflict arise. By not appearing to take sides, the U.S. hoped to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining influence in the Arab world based on anti-Israel sentiment. The United States also supported the formation of a NATO-like defense body in the Middle East to counter the Soviet Union. This agreement between Great Britain, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Iraq was known as the Baghdad Pact, which was formed in 1955. Egypt was offered admission, but President Gamal Abdel Nasser refused to join and was very critical of the pact.

When President Nasser came to power in the early 1950s, the United States was open to working with him. For example, the United States offered financial assistance to build the Aswan Dam, a project very important to President Nasser. However, Nasser's 1955 agreement with communist Czechoslovakia to purchase weapons and his recognition of Communist China caused the United States to rethink its relationship. The United States feared Egypt would turn toward the Soviet Union and this would allow communist influence in the region to spread. In July 1956, the United States and Great Britain withdrew funding that they had promised Egypt for the Aswan Dam.

When President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, by placing it under the government's control, the United States was caught off guard. It was critical of the Egyptian action but opposed any type of military action by France and Britain to resolve the crisis. The United States worried that attacking Egypt could open the door for a greater Soviet role in the region. The United States sought a diplomatic solution via a three-party conference with itself, France, and Great Britain, followed by two multi-nation conferences in London but no resolution emerged.

Questions to Consider:

- Why is it important for the United States to limit the influence of the Soviet Union in the Middle East?

- How did Egypt fit into the rest of United States policy in the Middle East?
- How will the United States balance avoiding a war with advancing its interests in the region?

U.S. Department of States' Position:

- Ensure the Soviet Union does not have any influence in this crisis.
- Maintain alliances with Britain and France; question the reasons and purpose for a military intervention as a solution.
- Keep access to Middle East oil.
- Maintain the alliance with Israel.

What can the U.S. Department of State negotiate with?

Remember that you don't have to offer these right away in a negotiation.

- Help Egypt pay for the Aswan Dam.
- Allow Egypt to nationalize the canal as long as U.S. ships still have access.
- Pressure France, Great Britain, and Israel to support a U.S. position in exchange for continued U.S. military and political support.