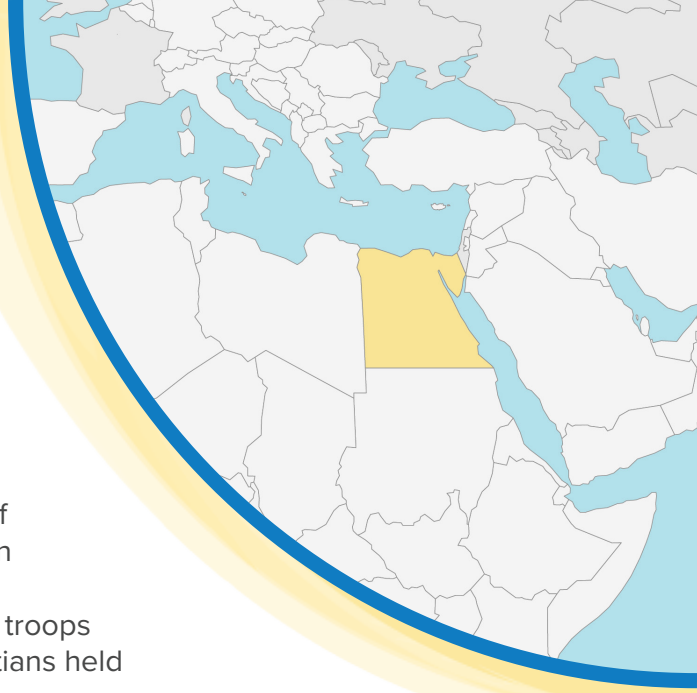

Egypt

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 Although British troops were withdrawn from the Suez Canal Zone in 1947, many Egyptians held anti-British feelings.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.