

PART 3: SOURCES ANALYSIS

1956 Suez Crisis

The Suez Crisis was a dispute about the control of the Suez Canal, which provided vital international access by cutting through Egypt and connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. The Suez Canal was initially financed and consequently owned by Egypt and France, but Egypt had to sell its share to Britain to pay off debts.

In 1956 tensions arose between various countries over financing a dam on the River Nile and Egypt's supposed support of communist governments in China and Russia. Eventually tensions boiled over and Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt, without the support of the United States. The United Nations intervened and negotiated a truce between the countries at war before the problem became a wider crisis involving the United States and Russia.

SOURCE 1 — A historian's description of the background to the Suez Crisis

In December 1955 the United States and Great Britain agreed in principle to help finance the Aswan Dam, an enormous Egyptian hydroelectricity project. In February 1956 Nasser¹ reached an agreement with the President of the World Bank for funds from America, Britain and the Bank. He then formally requested \$100 million in aid from the United States. He heard nothing for the next five months.

In the meantime, Dulles² attitude towards Nasser had changed after ... Egyptian recognition of Communist China in May 1956. Dulles reasoned that he could teach Nasser a lesson if he withdrew American support for the Aswan Dam. The President of the World Bank warned that 'all hell might break loose' if Dulles reneged on

his promise. On 19 July Dulles bluntly announced that America was withdrawing its support for the dam.

One week later Nasser struck back by nationalising the British-owned Universal Suez Canal Company, an act which restored his lost prestige at a stroke and gave him the \$25 million annual profit from the canal operation. The British and French were furious. Nearly all of Europe's oil came through the canal and the Europeans feared that an intense nationalist such as Nasser might interrupt this flow. At the end of July the British Foreign Secretary let Dulles know that the Europeans would move militarily against Egypt if the crisis were not resolved quickly.

¹ Gamal Nasser was the President of Egypt

² John Foster Dulles was the American Secretary of State

J. Fitzgerald, *Soviet–American Relations in the Nuclear Age*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1988, p. 77

SOURCE 2 — Another historian's account of reasons for the Suez Crisis

Nasser's dream was to provide a better life for all Egyptians. His dream materialised into the concept of a high dam across the Upper Nile at Aswan. It would allow the irrigation of additional land and provide electricity for industrial development. Egypt was to raise itself by its own 'sandalstraps'. In 1955 Britain and the United States consented to provide a huge loan to enable the project to commence. Nasser's non-aligned policy¹, however, placed the loan situation in jeopardy. American Secretary of State Dulles was strongly opposed to communism and highly angered by ... Egypt's recognition of Red China in May 1956.

In July 1956 Dulles cancelled the American assistance to Egypt.

To Nasser and the Egyptians the Aswan dam project had become a symbol of Egypt's regeneration. The American decision was taken as a national affront and on July 26 Nasser announced that he would nationalise the Suez canal and use the revenues collected to finance the dam. The powder keg had been set alight.

Attempts were made to mediate the dispute ... but in October 1956 representatives of Israel, France and Britain met secretly in Paris. It was decided that Israel should launch an attack across the Sinai desert and the resulting conflict would provide Britain and France with the pretext of invading Egypt to protect shipping in the Suez Canal.

¹ Non-aligned = not influenced by a major power such as the United States or Russia

N. Paccagnella, *In the Balance*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1989, pp. 112–13

Refer to the sources on this sheet when answering Question 45.

SOURCE 3 — The announcement of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by President Nasser on 26 July 1956

The income of the Suez Canal in 1955 amounted to £35,000,000. In return for the 120,000 Egyptians who perished digging it and for the money spent on building it, we get £1,000,000.

The Suez Canal Company sitting in Paris is a usurping company. It usurped our concessions ... We shall build the High Dam and we shall gain our usurped rights. We shall build the High Dam as we desire. We are determined. The Canal Company annually takes £35,000,000. Why shouldn't we take it ourselves? ...

As I told you a little while ago, it is no shame to be poor and to strive and build my country. What is shameful, however, is to suck blood. They sucked our blood, and extorted and stole

our rights. Today as we retrieve these rights, I declare on behalf of the Egyptian people that we shall preserve these rights and cherish them. We shall protect these rights because thereby we shall be making up for the past. Today, O citizens, the Suez Canal has been nationalised ... Today, O citizens, we declare that our property has been returned to us. The rights about which we were silent have been restored to us. Today, citizens, with the annual income of the Suez Canal amounting to £35,000,000 ... we shall not look for ... American aid ... Your Egyptian brethren ... have started to take over the Canal Company and its property and to control shipping through the Canal — the Canal which is owned by Egypt.

P. Shuter & T. Lewis, *Skills in History: Book 3, The Twentieth Century*, Heinemann, Oxford, 1988, p. 98

SOURCE 4 — Map of British, French, and Israeli manoeuvres against Egypt

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G. Warner, 'The Suez Crisis', *History of the 20th Century*, A.J.P. Taylor & J.M. Roberts (eds), Powell, London, 1969, p. 2262

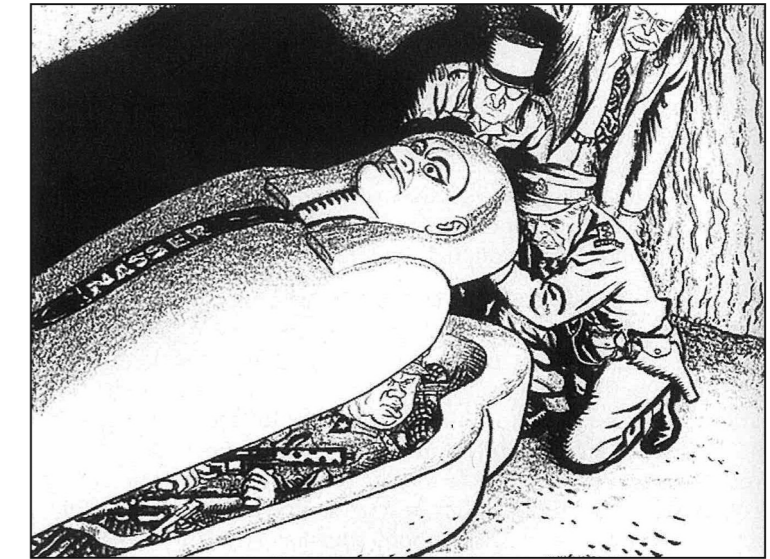
SOURCE 5 — Part of a confidential letter sent by the British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden, to President Eisenhower of the United States on 6 September 1956

In the 1930s Hitler established his position by ... acts of aggression ... His actions were tolerated and excused by the majority of the population of Western Europe. It was argued ... that Hitler ... was entitled to do what he liked in his own territory ...

Similarly, the seizure of the Suez Canal is, we are convinced, the opening gambit ... by Nasser to expel all Western influences and interests from Arab countries. He believes that if he can get away with this ... he will be able to mount revolutions ... in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Iraq ... These new governments will in effect be Egyptian satellites, if not Russian ones. They will have to place their united oil resources under the control of ... Egypt and under Russian influence. When that moment comes Nasser can deny oil to Western Europe and we ... shall all be at his mercy.

B. O'Callaghan, *A History of the Twentieth Century*, Longman Group UK Limited, UK, 1987, p. 238

SOURCE 6 — A cartoon by British cartoonist Leslie Illingworth, published in the British newspaper the *Daily Mail*, 12 November 1956



The US President Eisenhower, the British Prime Minister Eden and French Prime Minister Mollet uncover a sarcophagus labelled Nasser and discover the Russian premier Khrushchev within.

M. Cannon, *et al.*, *20th Century World History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 112

SOURCE 7 — Part of an article published in the British newspaper the *Daily Mirror*, 25 November 1956

U.N. TELLS BRITAIN QUIT SUEZ

THE United Nations last night demanded the immediate withdrawal of British, French and Israeli forces from Egypt.

The demand came in a resolution put before the General Assembly by the 17-nation Asian-Africa Group — WITH THE SUPPORT OF AMERICA.

The vote in favour was 65 to 1.

Earlier, in the Commons, Sir Anthony Eden told M.P.s that British troops would not leave Egypt until a United Nations force took over.

A United Nations resolution calling for the setting up of such a force was passed last night by sixty-five votes to nil.

B. O'Callaghan, *A History of the Twentieth Century*, Longman Group UK Limited, UK, 1987, p. 239

SACE Board of South Australia

Sources to accompany the 2013 Modern History paper

Wednesday 13 November: 9 a.m.