

WATERLOO CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

MODEL UNITED NATIONS



HISTORICAL COMMITTEE

THE SUEZ CANAL CRISIS

MAY 12-14, 2026

Key Issue: Following the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company by President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt on July 26, 1956, the countries of France and England engaged in a number of actions of retribution, including the bombing of Egypt starting on October 31, 1956. These actions led to immediate global reactions, including a stark threat from the USSR that they would be prepared to use nuclear weapons to defend the interests of Egypt.

How should the General Assembly of the United Nations respond to the immediate threat posed by the bombing of Egypt by France and England?

Background : Until the creation of the Suez Canal, the trade of goods from European nations like England and France with the countries of India and China could only occur in one of three ways:

- a. Overland route from India through Egypt
- b. A naval route that followed the path through the southern tip of South Africa to India
- c. A naval route crossing the Atlantic Ocean from England/France through the Panama Canal in central America, then crossing the Pacific Ocean to China and India.

All of these options, including the most used option which was route around South Africa, were time consuming and expensive.

However, by the 1840s the construction of a canal connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea through the Isthmus of Suez began to take shape. The French, through the Compagnie de Suez, with the consent of the government of Egypt, began construction in 1859. When it was opened on November 17, 1869, the canal provided a quicker and cheaper option to transport goods than was previously possible. However, the canal also divided Asia from Africa and specifically divided the Eastern part of Egypt from its western portion (the Sinai Peninsula). The Egyptian government officially owned the canal but the concessionary company that took tolls for passage was jointly owned by the French government with an ownership stake of 56% and the Egyptian government with an ownership stake of 44%. However with Egypt facing a financial crisis, it sold its 44% share in the concessionary company to England in 1875. From that point forward, the Suez Canal was effectively controlled by England and France. As oil began to become a vital commodity following World War I and with the English holding control of much of the oil produced in the Middle East, the Suez Canal became even more lucrative to the governments of England and France. England, in particular, served to benefit quite heavily from their stake in the canal. As English economic interests in the region began to expand, they increased their presence in Egypt, including the establishment of military bases during World War II.

Following World War II, England looked to keep its influence in the region, including maintaining military bases in Egypt. Increasingly, Egypt began to resent the English presence as a colonial presence in the country and Egyptian leaders began to actively encourage the sabotage of English facilities in the country. In 1952, Gamal Abdel Nasser led a revolution in Egypt as the old monarchy was thrown out. As the new leader of Egypt, he began to assert greater Egyptian control over their own

territorial sovereignty and that included a growing call for the nationalization of the Suez Canal. At the same time, France's presence in Africa, particularly in Algeria was coming under intense scrutiny and resentment. As a result the Egyptian government began to look more and more to the Soviet Union for military support in the form of the purchasing of weapons. The close relationship between England and Israel, a traditional enemy of Egypt, did not help soothe growing tensions in the region.

A result of this was a growing competition between the USSR, England, France and the United States to maintain economic and political influence in the region. A major project of immense economic promise for the Egyptians was the building of the Aswan dam. As all major players offered to invest in the building of the dam, but growing English frustration at Egypt's involvement with the Soviet Union ultimately led to the withdrawal of English and ultimately French support for the project on July 19, 1956. The United States withdrew their promise of investment as well. In response, an increasingly hostile Egyptian government decided to nationalize the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956. Any attempts at seeking a resolution to possible partnerships in the Canal were rejected by Egypt in September of 1956. The nationalization of the canal was seen as a direct "assault" on the English and French economic interests in the region and in response, they threatened military action. In coordination with the Israelis, the English and French began the bombing of Egypt on October 31, 1956. The United States government, traditionally an ally of France and England for fear that such actions could lead to a broader conflict. And on November 5, 1956 the Soviet Union reacted by threatening to use military force, including the possible use of nuclear weapons in response to the joint English/French actions.

Key Points for Consideration for Delegates:

This is not a typical Model UN committee. The historical committee will act more like a Crisis Committee and as a result, the following should be considered:

- a. The injection point into the conflict is November 5 as the tensions escalate with the Soviet threat.
- b. Delegates can only use historical references up to and including November 5, 1956.
- c. Delegates may "predict" possible outcomes and solutions but they may not use them as fact.
- d. Delegates must understand the motivations of the country assigned to them including any historic relations/allegiances between themselves and other countries. An understanding of post WWII conflict is recommended.

Committee work will operate in two phases:

Phase 1 – Dealing with the immediate crisis.

1. Initial statements: delegates will focus on the actions of the English/French governments in the bombing of Egypt and the subsequent Soviet threat.

2. Continued debate: delegates should continue to debate both immediate consequences of the actions and any potential consequences. Delegates will continue to sign up for the opportunity to speak, however, delegates will have the right to respond directly by posing questions to the initial speaker
3. Produced statement: delegates will work to producing a statement that hopes to immediately resolve the conflict posed by the actions of both the English/French and the Soviets. This is not meant to act as a long term solution but as a solution to the immediate crisis. The committee will ultimately vote on the statement to be issued by the committee. The statement, as well, does not take the form of a traditional resolution.
4. The traditional use of an unmoderated caucus can be used to help formulate the statement.

Phase 2 – Proposing long term solution to the crisis.

1. Debating long-term solution: delegates will work toward seeking a permanent solution to the ongoing conflict over the issue of the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the continued threat of military action. A new speakers list will be created to deal with the long term solution.
2. Committee work: students will begin to propose possible solutions with the goal of creating a resolution or series of resolutions seeking to end the conflict. Students can use “predictive” solutions to end the conflict.
3. The traditional use of moderated and unmoderated caucuses will apply.

Delegate countries:

The UN committee, for purposes of encouraging debate will be comprised of the following:

1. NATO countries (based on membership between 1956-1962)
2. Warsaw Pact countries (based on membership between 1956-1962)
3. Selected countries which were part of the Security Council in the years of 1956 and 1962
4. Countries directly affected by the crisis
5. Randomly selected countries representing a global perspective.

RESOURCES:

Why Was the Suez Crisis So Important. Imperial War Museum.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/cold-war/suez-crisis>

Lester Pearson and the Suez Crisis

<https://www.suezcrisis.ca/summary.html>

The Suez Crisis, 1956. Office of the Historian

<https://www.suezcrisis.ca/summary.html>

Suez Crisis. Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suez_Crisis