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***Suez Crisis- 1956***

Pre-Suez War conditions

* **Round Two of the Arab-Israeli Conflict**
  + First Arab Israeli War had no clear peace agreement
    - Israel unsatisfied
      * No recognition of the state of Israel & international legitimacy
      * Not able to fully secure borders
        + Establish more defensible border
        + Expand its territory
      * Israel was being infiltrated by Palestinians and *fedayeen* from Gaza, Syria, and Jordan
    - Arabs unsatisfied
      * Regional insecurity
      * Domestic challenges
      * Aimed to redeem Palestinians and defeat Israel
    - Unresolved issue of Palestinian Refugees
    - Emerging Cold War in Middle East (pressure).
* **July 1952**- Free officer coup ousted the king
  + Mohammed Naguib took presidency
    - Socio-economic reforms
  + Egypt propelled into position of leadership in the Middle East
* **October 1954- Nasser** became President of Egypt
  + Regarded **favorably** by Israel and the USA in the beginning
    - USA- searching for pro-Western leaders; provided Egypt with American aid, training.
    - Israel- opportunity for settlement since Nasser expressed “desire to resolve the conflict” in 1949.
* Previously, there were 80,000 British Troops in the Suez Canal Area
* When he took power, Nasser persuaded the British to withdraw their troops from the Suez Canal
  + Britain and USA wanted to continue their good relations with Nasser
    - Both wanted Arab support in the Middle East against USSR **(COLD WAR)**
      * Egypt was the strongest and most developed Arab nation, and the Suez Canal was in its territory
  + Israel was feverously against
    - Removal of troops would be a removal of buffer zone between Egypt and Israel
    - Also, Egypt could be eligible for US military aid
  + Nasser wanted a neutral Egypt
    - However, he needed to strengthen his army- needed equipment- since in Feb. 1955 Israeli government attacked Egypt in Gaza for encouraging Palestinian raids into Israel. This resulted in 38 Egyptian soldiers’ death
      * Egyptian population wanted revenge

Nasser’s First Move

* **September 1955-** Nasser buys Russian arms from Czechoslovakia and announces the closure of the Straits of Tiran
* **July 1956-** In response, Britain and USA refused to lend Egypt money for the construction of the Aswan High Dam, thinking that they still had control over Nasser.
  + The dam was to be built in the Nile river and would be crucial for power

Nasser shocks the West

* On **July 26, 1956,** Nasser nationalized the canal
  + They would use the profits to build the Aswan Dam
* Britain and France were furious
  + Tried to remove the guiding pilots from the canal, but to no avail

Secret Meetings

* The British and French met with Ben Gurion on **October 24, 1956 –** had a common objective- **overthrow Nasser**
* **Israeli Involvement-**
  + Wanted to end border raids from Gaza
  + Force Egypt to recognize the state of Israel
  + Break Egyptian blockade of the Tiran Straits
  + Worried with increasing Egyptian military power
    - Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian armies had been placed under the same command
  + Ben Gurion- believed strongly in the use of force, pre-emptive attacks
    - Israel’s security took precedence
    - Aimed at keeping Arabs off-balance and retarding their efforts to modernize their military
  + Willing to do the “dirty work” if Britain protects them by air and if Britain and France actually take over the canal
    - World opinion would not approve of Israel taking it over
* **French Involvement-**
  + Not alone in its opposition
  + Egypt had been sending aid to Algerians to fight French rule
    - Only way to control revolution was to overthrow Nasser
* **British Involvement-**
  + British influence in the Middle East has significantly declined
  + Canal was the symbol of the Empire
  + After UK lost control over their share in the oil production, their focal point became the Suez Canal
    - This nationalization deprived UK of its profits
    - Also was a political and military challenge
      * Most of British shipping had to pass through canal
  + Also, the Egyptian refusal to join the Baghdad Pact and the Czech arms deal showed the increasing Soviet influence

The Trio Devise a Plan

* Israel’s pre-emptive strike to seize the Suez Canal
* France & Britain would then come in and ask Egypt and Israel to withdraw from the canal
  + They assumed that Egypt would refuse, “forcing” the Anglo-French troops to invade to protect the canal
* Israel asked their collaborators to wait until the US elections passed (Nov. 6) to secure American backing
  + However, the invasion started on **October 29, 1956**, as the Israeli troops invaded Egypt
    - They advanced across Sinai peninsula towards canal, keeping their agreement of just reaching the canal, but not taking it over
  + On **October 30**, France and Britain ordered Egypt and Israel to cease fighting and withdraw ten miles from Canal
    - As expected, Egypt refused to withdraw
* As a response, on **October 31**, British and French planes bombed the Egyptian airfields and destroyed most of their air force
  + They also bombed Port Said (city at the northern end of canal).
    - On **November 5,** the Anglo-French troops landed at the city and advanced along the canal
      * To deter the troops, the Egyptians proceeded to sink ships along the canal, obstructing their advance

UN Intervention

* Because of the Anglo-French action, the Arab states appealed at the United Nations
  + They announced the halt in the oil supplies to the West
* The United States also condemned the actions
  + They did not wait for Eisenhower’s election to be concluded
    - Eisenhower felt deceived
      * He needed the support of the Jewish lobby in the elections, and felt that Ben Gurion purposely staged the attack before to assure US support of their cause (so Eisenhower could gain the Jewish support)
        + Condemned Israel for aggression
  + Also, the threat of Soviet involvement drove the US actions
    - Canal was a crucial link for oil supplies to NATO
      * Soviet restriction would weaken Western European resistance to communism (COLD WAR)
    - US had just condemned Soviet intervention in Hungary
      * This made it difficult to support intervention in Egypt
        + Would also draw the attention towards this US action and away from the Soviet action
* On **November 2, 1956** the UN General Assembly approved US-sponsored resolution for *immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of all forces from Egyptian territory*
  + Under US pressure, Israel was forced to accept
  + Financial pressure drove Eden (UK) to also accept
    - USA threatened to cut off financial aid to Britain
  + USSR threatened to use military force if resolution was not accepted
  + French also accepted
* **November 6, 1956-** UN declares ceasefire
  + UN sent **UNEF** forces to Egypt
  + Britain and France forced to withdraw

Results of the War

* **Egypt-**
  + Overall, it was a resounding military defeat for Egypt
  + However, Nasser was regarded as victorious
    - He dismissed the Sinai Campaign as non-existent
      * Was hailed as only Arab leader able to challenge West and expel Anglo French imperialist forces
    - Was able to expand his influence and establish Egypt’s leadership over the Arab World
    - Able to hold on to the Suez Canal
    - During the war, he was also able to nationalize the remaining French and British holdings
    - Provided Funds for the Aswan Dam and modernization of Egypt
    - Acquired UNEF army to protect Egypt from Israeli retaliatory policy
* **Israel-**
  + Also gained from the war
    - UNEF army guaranteed Israeli freedom of shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba, providing Israel with a Red Sea port
      * Also provided limited control over *fedayeen* infiltrations
    - Israel’s military reputation was furthered enhanced
      * Became a *regional superpower* because of the speed in which they took over the Sinai
* **France & Britain-**
  + Generally considered the “losers” of the war
    - Egypt still remained in total control of canal
      * The view that Nasser had prevailed over the former colonial powers decreased the British and French influence in the Middle East as well as in Africa and South East Asia
* **USA & USSR**
  + Emerged as the two foreign powers in the Middle East, replacing France and Britain
  + Arab-Israeli conflict was now “arena for the Cold War”

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