



LIPA MUN 2025

Forum: United Nations Historical Security Council

Issue: The Suez Canal Crisis (October 28, 1956)

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Committee Introduction

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of six United Nations (UN) organs. As established by the 1945 UN Charter, the UNSC's mission is to maintain international peace and security. The council first met on January 17, 1946, in London, and may meet whenever peace is threatened. The UNSC today consists of 15 members: five permanent members (China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United States) known as the P5, and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly (GA).

As opposed to other UN organs which simply make recommendations, the UNSC has the power to make decisions, using acting clauses, which each Member State has the obligation to follow under the UN Charter. All UN Member States therefore agree to carry out the actions demanded by the UNSC.

As stated in Article 27 of the UN Charter, UNSC amendments and resolutions require 9 out of 15 votes to pass, including the affirmative votes of the P5, provided they do not abstain. The Permanent Member States also have the right to veto, which means that if any one of them casts a negative vote, the amendment/resolution fails.

The United Nations Historical Security Council (UNHSC) at LIPAMUN is a reenactment of the UNSC at the time of a crisis. This means that delegates relive and

can influence the outcome of critical historical events. Delegates cannot use knowledge of the development of the crisis in debate and are to be fully immersed in the context of the time, as of the specific date of October 28, 1956, in this year's UNHSC.

In 1956, the UNSC members were Australia, Belgium, China, Cuba, France, Iran, Peru, the USSR, the UK, the USA, and Yugoslavia. Decisions were passed with 7 out of 11 affirmative votes. Voting procedures may be adapted at the LIPAMUN 2025 UNHSC.

Background Information

The Suez Canal

Completed in 1869, the Suez Canal is the shortest maritime route between Europe and Asia. Extending over 193 km, it connects the Mediterranean to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, by cutting through the Isthmus of Suez in Egypt. It was built to offer a considerably cheaper alternative to going around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. Since its completion, it has remained one of the world's most used shipping lanes.

In 1854, French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps received an act of concession from the newly appointed Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, Sa'īd Pasha, to construct a canal. In 1856, another act gave the canal's operating rights, for 99 years after completion, to the Suez Canal Company, an Egyptian joint-stock company headquartered in Paris. At the time of construction, France held 52% of the shares and Egypt 44%. However, by 1875, the new viceroy Ismā'īl Pasha was forced to sell Egypt's shares to the United Kingdom due to a financial crisis.

Initially allocated 15% of net profits, Egypt gave up that percentage and lost its representation on the Suez Canal Company's board of directors after the sale of its shares to the United Kingdom. In 1949, it was reinstated on the board of directors and given 7% of gross profits. It was also decided that 90% of new clerical jobs and 80% of new technical jobs would be given to Egyptians and that the Suez Canal Company would provide schools, hospitals, and other amenities. By July 1956, the company employed over 5,100 workers in Egypt. Egyptians represented a majority in the laborer group, while they took up 42% of administrative and technical positions.

In 1955, traffic through the Suez Canal accounted for 13% of world sea trade volume. The main goods transported through the canal were oil, raw materials, and

foodstuffs. Petroleum exports from the Middle East represented 60.4% of total transport volume.

International Use

In 1888, the Convention of Constantinople was signed by all major sea powers, except Britain who only signed in 1904, and stated that the Suez Canal would remain open to ships of all countries, in times of peace and war alike. It also forbade acts of hostility on the canal's waters.

However, the international use of the canal during wartime was marked by numerous inconsistencies. Spanish war vessels were denied passage during the Spanish-American War of 1898, while Russian ships were let through during the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, just as Italian ships were during the 1935-36 invasion of Ethiopia. During the First and Second World Wars, Allied superiority denied Germany and its allies an effective use of the canal.

After the Armistice Agreements of 1949 between Israel and its Arab neighbors, Egypt restricted access to the canal for both Israeli ships and those trading with Israel.

Rising Tensions

In the 1950s, four conflicts simultaneously unfolded in the Middle East:

- the Cold War, a battle for influence between the US and the USSR
- the Arab Cold War, a race between different Arab states to establish their leadership in the Arab world
- the anti-colonial struggle, a fight from Arab nationalists against the remaining colonial powers of France and the United Kingdom
- the Arab-Israeli conflict

In 1955, the United States and the United Kingdom agreed to finance the construction of the Aswan High Dam, which would control Nile flooding to provide water and electricity to the Egyptian population. The West believed that the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser would be a strong pro-capitalist leader in the Middle East, and could help resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

However, Nasser soon made multiple moves to get closer to the communist bloc, by making an arms deal with the USSR through communist Czechoslovakia in September 1955, and by recognizing the People's Republic of China. These were seen

as acts of defiance towards the US and UK, who pulled their funding for the dam project.

In addition, Egyptian–Israeli relations deteriorated. After Israeli forces attacked an Egyptian base in the Gaza Strip, Egypt started supporting Palestinian raids into Israel, which were met with retaliatory attacks. This added to previously tense relationships, as Egypt already blocked Israel from sailing the Suez Canal and the Tiran Straits.

The Crisis

Nationalization of the Suez Canal

On July 26, 1956, Nasser nationalized the canal and gave its control to the Suez Canal Authority, precipitating the Suez Canal Crisis. Having lost funding for the Aswan High Dam, Nasser had decided to pay for the project with the Suez Canal's toll revenue. Nasser did, however, offer compensation to Suez Canal Company investors, by pledging to pay them the last market price for their shares over the next few years.

From the Egyptian point of view, this was a reaction to an unfairly broken promise of funds, as well as resistance against a colonial force occupying Egypt.

Reactions

The French and the British saw Nasser's actions as dangerous on a number of levels. As they previously owned the Suez Canal Company, losing it was a harsh blow to their political influence in the region. Their role as superpowers was being threatened, and they felt that they had to give a strong response. In addition, they were afraid that Nasser might close the canal to oil shipments from the Persian Gulf to Western Europe, greatly threatening their petroleum supplies.

With that in mind, the UK and France allied themselves with Israel, who had the goal of reopening Egyptian shipping lanes to their ships. The three countries started secretly planning an armed invasion of Egypt to regain control of the canal. This was, however, not public information at the time, therefore Egypt and other countries would have no knowledge of it.

On the other hand, the United States sought diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis. They had a strong fear of Soviet involvement in favor of Egypt and opposed any armed intervention. Egyptian government assets were, nonetheless, blocked in France, the UK, and the US.

Starting from the Bandung Conference of 1955, China maintained strong relationships with Egypt, recognizing its struggle against colonial powers and desire for independence. It therefore supported Egypt in the crisis.

UN Efforts

On October 13, 1956, the UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 118, clarifying the requirements for the resolution of the crisis. The resolution reaffirmed Egypt's sovereignty while stating the canal should be open to all without discrimination, and calling for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Nonetheless, tensions continued to rise, through October 28, 1956.

Possible Solutions

All countries involved in this conflict had drastically different aims in mind, making it difficult to reach the common ground necessary to draft a UNSC resolution.

There are a number of possible solutions that different parties would argue for, including but not limited to:

- Diplomatic solutions
 - mediation
 - negotiations
 - multinational agreements
- Economic and political measures
 - creation of economic funds
 - military and economic sanctions
- Military action
 - use of force with a particular aim in mind

Definition of Key Terms

Isthmus

“a narrow piece of land with water on each side that joins two larger areas of land” (Cambridge Dictionary)

Joint-stock company

“a company that is owned and controlled by shareholders, with shares that are traded on a stock market” (Cambridge Dictionary)

Viceroy

“one who rules a country or province as the representative of his sovereign or king” (Britannica)

Clerical *adjective*

“relating to work done in an office” (Cambridge Dictionary)

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