

Mini Model UN
Day 131 – The Suez Crisis
Position Papers

United States Position

Paper Primary Sources Source One: President Dwight Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Radio-Television Report, Aug. 3, 1956 Eisenhower: Good evening, citizens. All of us, of course, appreciate the tremendous importance of the Suez Canal. Its continuous and effective operation is vital to the economies of our country, indeed, to the economies of almost all of the countries of the world. So all of us were vastly disturbed when Colonel Nasser a few days ago declared that Egypt intended to nationalize the Suez Canal Company. . . . Dulles: Now, why did President Nasser suddenly decide to take over this operation of the Suez Canal? Now, he has told us about that in a long speech that he made. And in that speech he didn't for a moment suggest that Egypt would be able to operate the canal better than it was being operated so as to assure better the rights that were granted in the 1888 treaty. The basic reason he gave was that if he took over this canal it would enhance the prestige of Egypt. He said that Egypt was determined "to score one triumph after another" in order to enhance what he called the "grandeur" of Egypt. And he coupled his action with statements about his ambition to extend his influence from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf. And also he said that by seizing the Suez Canal he would strike a blow at what he called "Western imperialism." And he thought also that he could exploit the canal so as to produce bigger revenues for Egypt and so retaliate for the failure of the United States and Britain to give Egypt the money to enable it to get started on this \$1 billion-plus Aswan dam. Now President Nasser's speech made it absolutely clear that his seizure of the canal company was an angry act of retaliation against fancied grievances [I]t is inadmissible that a waterway internationalized by treaty which is required for the livelihood of a score or more of nations, should be exploited by one country for purely selfish purposes. . . . We decided to call together in conference of the nations most directly involved with a view to seeing whether agreement could not be reached upon an adequate and dependable international administration of the canal on terms which would respect, and generously respect, all of the legitimate rights of Egypt.

Source Two: Dulles, "Statement at 22-Power London Conference, Aug. 16, 1956."

About one-sixth of all the world's sea-borne commerce now passes through the Suez Canal. The canal plays a special role in the close relationship between the economy of Europe and the petroleum products of the Middle East. Europe received through the canal in 1955 67 million tons of oil, and from this oil the producing countries received a large part of their national incomes. The economies of each of these areas are thus largely dependent upon, and serve the economies of, the others, and the resulting advantages to all largely depend upon the permanent international system called for by the 1888 Treaty. . . . One thing is certain, whatever may be the present intentions of the Egyptian Government, the trading nations of the world know that President Nasser's action means that their use of the canal is now at Egypt's sufferance. Egypt can in many subtle ways slow down, burden and make unprofitable the passage through the canal of the ships and cargoes of those against whom Egypt might desire for national, political reasons to discriminate. Thus Egypt seizes hold a sword with which it could cut into the economic vitals of many nations. . . .

Source Three: Eisenhower warned the British Prime Minister Anthony Eden that if the Western nations intervened in Egypt,

"the peoples of the Near East and of North Africa and, to some extent, all of Asia and all of Africa, would be consolidated against the West to a degree which, I fear, could not be overcome in a generation and, perhaps, not even in a century, particularly having in mind the capacity of the Russians to make mischief." Secondary Source: Background Information Although Eisenhower and Dulles were concerned about Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company and valued Great Britain, France and Israel as allies, Eisenhower was extremely angry when he heard that his three allies had invaded Egypt and taken over the Suez Canal by force. Eisenhower condemned the British, French and Israeli invasion and called for their immediate withdrawal. He appealed to the United Nations to stop the invasion, and he used all the power he had to pressure his three allies into taking their troops out of Egypt. To Eisenhower, the use of armed force by Britain, France and Israel was an act of imperialism that the US would not tolerate.

Soviet Union Position

Paper Primary Source Soviet Foreign Minister Dmitri Shepilov,

“Statement at 22-Power London Conference, Aug. 17, 1956.” True to its policy of peace, the Soviet Union is a consistent exponent of having all disputes settled by peaceful negotiation. The Soviet Union is convinced that it is possible to settle also the Suez problem by respecting the sovereign rights of nations, and by developing international co-operation on a basis of equality and non-interference in internal affairs, in keeping with the spirit of the times. . . . There are two aspects of the Suez Canal problem; that of the nationalization of the company and that of free navigation through the canal. The first aspect falls exclusively within the internal competence of the sovereign Egyptian state.... I would like to point out that position of some governments on the Suez Canal is intrinsically contradictory. On the one hand they recognize the sovereign rights of Egypt; on the other hand they contest the possibility of Egypt exercising these rights, and thus they are trying to justify interference in the internal affairs of the country. . . . What is the meaning of this reservation to the effect that international interest allegedly limits the right to nationalization? It can mean only one thing; the desire to preserve an inferior status for Egypt by artificially combining the question of the nationalization of a private company with the question of navigation through the Canal. It should be pointed out that the Suez Canal Co., founded on the basis of a one hundred year old concession, has a very pronounced colonial character. . . . The whole of Asia, the whole Near and Middle East are in the midst of a great patriotic upheaval of nations which are now at present members of the United Nations If we are all to accept the high principles of the United Nations, and if we speak about welcoming the changes which have taken place in relation to countries which had once been in a state of colonial dependence, then we cannot, and should not, hinder the exercising by these countries of their sovereign rights. Egypt, like many other countries who have recently attained their independence, is naturally still desiring to overcome the grave consequences of her colonial status. The nationalization of the Suez Canal Co. is in itself a legitimate step on the way to freeing Egypt from the survivals of the past and a help in the upsurge [improvement] of her national economy which is lagging behind owing to a long period of domination under colonial rule. For eighty odd years the Suez Canal, built by Egyptian hands and situated on Egyptian territory, was in fact alienated [kept away] from Egypt . . . [I]t is not for nothing that one of Egypt’s political leaders of the last century told a French engineer: “Like you, I am fully in favour of the idea of the canal, but I want the canal to be for Egypt, and not have Egypt be for the canal.” The handsome profits which the Suez Canal Co. extracted from the canal did not remain in Egypt but went elsewhere, although they rightly belonged to the Egyptian people. The Suez Canal Co., although registered as an Egyptian enterprise, to be run on the profits of Egyptian soil . . . constituted one of the most important instruments of foreign colonial domination in Egypt. . . . Representatives of Arab countries are justified in pointing out that plans for the international operation of the Suez Canal constitute an attempt to create a stronghold of colonialism, to revive outdated practices in the Arab East. It is no secret that certain quarters in Britain and France resort to the threat of the use of force in regard to Egypt. Apparently they would like to impose on Egypt by means of force a plan of international operation of the Canal in case Egypt should not voluntarily agree to such a plan. For that reason military preparations of which the whole world knows are taking place in Britain and France. . . .

Secondary Source: Background Information

In October, 1956, when the British, French and Israelis invaded Egypt (as Shepilov had predicted in August) the Soviet Union strongly opposed the invasion. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev proposed that the United Nations should send a joint US-Soviet peacekeeping force to Egypt, and threatened to send Soviet troops to the Middle East if the US wasn’t willing to join in. The Soviets were the major suppliers of weapons to Egypt during and after the Suez Crisis.

Great Britain (United Kingdom) Position Paper

Primary Sources Source One: MP [Member of Parliament] Anthony Eden, Speech to the House of Commons, December 23, 19295

If the Suez Canal is our back door to the East, it is the front door to Europe of Australia, New Zealand and India. ... [I]t is, in fact, the swing-door of the British Empire, which has got to keep continually revolving if our communications are to be what they should.

Source Two: Emanuel Shinwell, Minister of Defense, address to Chiefs of Staff on May 23, 19516

[Referring to the decision of Prime Minister Mossadeq of Iran (Persia) to nationalize the AngloIranian Oil Company] If Persia is allowed to get away with it, Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries will be encouraged to think that they can try things on; the next thing may be an attempt to nationalize the Suez Canal.

Source Three: British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, "Statement at the 22-Power London Conference, August 18, 19567

. . . [A]nyone. . . knows . . . that the Canal Company was an international company and, whatever the Egyptian government could do with the assets of that company in Egypt. . . the fact is that the matter was handled in such a way as to disregard the rule of law between nations. . . [T]he manner of Colonel Nasser's act was certainly immoderate. The result has been, which I think we all regret, to damage confidence in Egypt and to affect the flow of funds for investment in under-developed countries. . . . It has been inferred. . . that any international participation in the control or operation of the Suez Canal would be an infringement of Egyptian sovereignty. Well, I just do not accept that proposition. . . . Sovereignty does not mean the right to do exactly what you please within your own territory. . . . [T]he doctrine of sovereignty gives no right to use the national territory or to do things within the national territory which are of an internationally harmful character. . . [O]ur basic position, the basic position of our Government, is that this international waterway cannot be subject to the political control of one government. . . and it was that aspect of Colonel Nasser's statement, when announcing his Government's decision, that profoundly shocked the people of this country. . . . If one Government is going to control transit through the canal according to political considerations, it is impossible to see where the line will be drawn. . . . And the only safe answer is that the operation of this canal should somehow or other be under international control.

Source Four: British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, Speech to the House of Commons on the Suez Crisis, October 31, 1956

[after Britain, France and Israel had invaded Egypt] We have no desire whatever, nor have the French Government, that the military action that we shall have to take should be more than temporary in its duration, but it is our intention that our action to protect the Canal and separate the combatants should result in a settlement which will prevent such a situation arising in the future. If we can do that we shall have performed a service not only to this country, but to the users of the Canal. It is really not tolerable that the greatest sea highway in the world, one on which our Western life so largely depends, should be subject to the dangers of an explosive situation in the Middle East which, it must be admitted, has been largely created by the Egyptian Government along familiar lines. I would remind the House [of Commons] that we have witnessed, all of us, the growth of a specific Egyptian threat to the peace of the Middle East. Everybody knows that to be true. In the actions we have now taken we are not concerned to stop Egypt, but to stop war. None the less, it is a fact that there is no Middle Eastern problem at present which could not have been settled or bettered but for the hostile and irresponsible policies of Egypt in recent years, and there is no hope of a general settlement of the many outstanding problems in that area so long as Egyptian propaganda and policy continues its present line of violence.

France Position Paper

Primary Source: French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau, "Statement at the 22-Power London Conference, Aug. 17, 1956

" You will not be astonished that France should attach a particular interest to the problem of the Suez Canal. As a sea power, and a commercial power, its economy is linked to the life of the canal, and its oil supply -12 million tons in 1955 through the canal – constitutes a vital factor. However, I should also like to recall that it is France who conceived and carried through the canal against all expression of skepticism, and that the French people have brought a decisive contribution to the financing of that great work. Finally, my country for 87 years now has played the main role in the management of the canal. . . . Our thesis is therefore that a country is perfectly entitled to nationalize the goods and equipment situated on its own territory, but that when international interests are involved, right and courtesy demand that previous consultations should enable one to settle in the best possible manner the interests of foreigners; that thesis, in our view, is very much more valid, when, as in the case of the Suez Canal, what is involved is an international public service. . . . Many countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, have for a certain number of years now been the advocates of anti-colonialism and even anti-capitalism. Far be it from me to defend here the obvious abuses of which people have been guilty; but we must see that on the part of certain countries the protest of anti-colonialism might become too easy a means of repudiating undertakings which one does not feel inclined to observe. . . . Please be good enough to remember that a large part of the staff of the canal is of French nationality. . . . We do not conceal the fears which were raised as regards the security of our nationals through the anti-foreign campaign so [in]cautiously started by Colonel Nasser. . . . For some weeks Colonel Nasser's tone has changed and almost every day we get the promise of the Egyptian dictator that he will ensure, without any discrimination, at normal rates the free circulation of all ships on the Canal. In the present circumstances and in the present framework of nationalization law, can we trust such a promise? . . . Egypt, being recognized as proprietor of the Canal and its installations, can entrust to a treaty, and to an international authority, the management of the Canal. . . .The powers of that international authority would be as follows:-the laying down of rates, operation of the canal, the fixing of national investments and indemnities to the universal [Suez Canal] company, and dues paid to Egypt. . . . For the Asiatic or Arab powers the problem is not to take some revenge on the west. It is in their turn to reach the standard of life in the west, and we on our side are ready to do everything we can to that end, but no one will convince me that in accepting violations of international right and international ethics, international morality, and in submitting us to the possibilities of the use of force or of arbitrary ends, we would reach our goal in the most certain and most rapid manner possible. . . .

Indonesia Position paper

Primary Sources Source One: President Sukarno, Speech at the Asian-African Conference at Bandung, April 18, 1955 [The audience included leaders of Third World nations.] All of us, I am certain, are united by more important things than those which superficially divide us. We are united, for instance, by a common detestation of colonialism in whatever form it appears. We are united by a common detestation of racialism. And we are united by a common determination to preserve and stabilize peace in the world. . . . Relatively speaking, all of us gathered here today are neighbours. Almost all of us have ties of common experience, the experience of colonialism Many of us, the so-called “underdeveloped” nations, have more or less similar economic problems, so that each can profit from the others’ experience and help. And I think I may say that we all hold dear the ideals of national independence and freedom. Source Two: Foreign Minister Ruslan Abdulgani, “Statements at 22-Power London Conference, Aug. 16 and 18, 1956”¹⁰ . . . I understand fully Sir Anthony Eden’s remarks this morning about respect for the sanctity of international law. However, Mr. Chairman, I should add one comment upon this, and that is that most of the international treaties which are a reflection of international law do not respect the sanctity of men as equal human beings irrespective of their race, or their creed or locality. Most of the existing laws between Asian and African countries and the old-established western world are more or less outmoded and should be regarded as a burden on modern life. They should be revised and be made more adaptable to modern national relations and the emancipation of parts of mankind. . . . If you look at the statistics, Mr. Chairman, the standard of living in western countries has been improved by leaps and bounds, whereas the productivity of the ex-colonial countries though steadily increasing can hardly match the relentless growth of the population, with the result that the standard of its living there is rising only very slowly. Compared with your life full of material comfort, Mr. Chairman, our daily existence might resemble the way to death. It is in this context, Mr. Chairman, that we are surprised if we are accused of cutting the lifeline of western nations, as if we have no right to existence at all. You regard the Suez Canal as a very important waterway on which depends your life or death. We on the other side of the Suez Canal are not less concerned with the international importance of the Suez Canal, because that waterway is also the Achilles heel of our national economy, not only of ours, but of many Asian countries, and still why do we not react so violently against the nationalization statement of the Egyptian Government? It is not because we are less concerned with the Suez Canal issue than you but it is that we understand the right and the duty of the Egyptian people to find the ways and means to serve the interest of their people with due respect for international obligations based upon equality and mutual benefit. [A]ccording to Indonesia, it is in the interest of Egypt itself that the Suez Canal should be operated efficiently and that free passage should be secured for every nation without discrimination. I know that some countries have some doubt that Egypt would keep the guarantee, but there would be no difficulty in finding other countries to affirm this guarantee. . . . [N]o national government of Egypt would accept the imposition of any kind of internationalization. It might voluntarily share some of its rights with the international users because it is to the benefit of Egypt, and promotes an international co-operation. That, Mr. Chairman, is not a matter of speculation. What Egypt will or will not do will be merely calculated upon whether any solution will serve her basic national interest. Let us put full confidence in the need for realistic thinking in Egypt, because after all, Mr. Chairman, without full confidence in the Egyptian Government and people no international arrangement is workable in the long run, since all the physical forces are under Egyptian control. . . . It is for this reason . . . that Indonesia supports the Indian proposal . . . [that] though clear in its indication that Egypt should give consideration to the association of international users’ interests without prejudice to Egyptian ownership and operation, [the Indian proposal] does not make public references which in any way could be interpreted as a curtailment of Egyptian sovereign power.

Secondary Source: Background Information

Ruslan Abdulgani was a diplomat for Indonesia which was ruled by Sukarno. Indonesia had been a Dutch colony, taken over by the Japanese in World War II. At the end of the war, Sukarno, one of the leaders of the Indonesian nationalist movement, proclaimed his country’s independence, even though the Netherlands tried to re-impose its control. Along with Nehru of India, Sukarno was one of the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement. He sponsored the April 1955 Asian-African conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, which was the largest and most important meeting of Third World leaders during the early Cold War.

Pakistan Position Paper

Primary Source: Foreign Minister Hamidul Huq Choudhury, Statement at the 22-Power London Conference, Aug. 18, 1956

Before proceeding any further I should like to impress our Government's view that the act of nationalization of the Suez Canal Company on the part of Egypt was an exercise of her sovereignty. It is the considered view of my Government that, irrespective of other issues involved, the sovereign right of Egypt in her dealing with a commercial concern within her own territory cannot be challenged or contested. . . . A careful examination of the issue at stake will reveal the absence of any real conflict of interest. To the users of the canal the freedom of navigation without discrimination is understandably of the utmost and paramount importance. The Suez Canal is the shortest, the easiest and generally the cheapest route of communications between the vast East and the West. If freedom of navigation to ships of all countries without discrimination is fully ensured and necessary improvements to meet the requirements of the ever-increasing traffic are effected, the Suez Canal will remain important and progressively profitable for Egypt herself. I am firmly convinced, therefore, that a real basis for fruitful and effective co-operation exists between the users of the canal and Egypt, the owners of the territory over which the canal passes. . . . The fact remains though that the nationalization of the Universal Suez Canal Company at the time and under the circumstances has shaken to a great extent the confidence of a large number of interested countries in the future security of their vital line of communication through the Suez Canal. . . . It is up to all of us to ensure the sense of security is restored and maintained. . . . The interest of my country in seeking an early, equitable and effective solution of this problem facing us embraces every aspect of our national life and international thinking. Even a temporary interruption in the steady passage or a dislocation of the handling of shipping in the Suez cannot fail to have the most serious consequences on our national economy, for by far the bulk of our trade and commerce passes through this canal. Moreover, a setback in effective co-operation and mutual assistance between the industrially advanced countries and the vast area of undeveloped countries of the Middle East and Asia would have the most serious repercussions on our long-term plans of industrialization and development. The vital question of the interest of the users and the dependence of their economy on the continuous, free and unfettered use of the canal has been ably emphasized by the heads of delegations who have spoken before me, whether it was the utterances of my friend from Indonesia or our friends from the U.S.S.R. As for Egypt, she has everything to gain from continuous and extensive use of the canal. It is therefore not a problem of reconciling conflicting interests, because the interests involved are common to both the users and the owners of the canal. It is essentially a matter of confidence among nations, which has suffered a temporary eclipse. The restoration of that lost confidence is bound to be the primary objective of our deliberations here. . . . My delegation therefore, on these premises, proposes for the consideration of this conference: That the nationalization of the Universal Suez Canal Company by Egypt be accepted as a *fait accompli* [a done deal] whether we like it or not: financial settlement and questions of compensation can be considered separately between the parties and hereafter. (2) An effective machinery be set up in active collaboration with Egypt to ensure the efficient, unfettered and continuous freedom of navigation, without discrimination and within the capacities of the trade of all nations, while at the same time the legitimate interests of Egypt should be fully protected. . . . In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to emphasise that Pakistan is bound by close ties of common faith, religion and culture to the countries of the Middle East, and Egypt particularly, and as such it cannot remain indifferent to a situation which may adversely affect the welfare and progress of these countries or jeopardise their legitimate interests and aspirations.

Egypt Position Paper

Background on Gamal Abdel Nasser: Nasser fought in the 1948 war against the newly formed Israel. During this war, Nasser held his first 'proper' meeting with those officers who were willing to support his ideas for Egypt. The defeat of the Arab nations in the 1948 war, gave an added impetus to their anger especially as the Egyptian Army had to fight with faulty weapons which was linked to a supply scandal that implicated some members of the Royal Family. Nasser was clear in his own mind - the Royal family had to go and Egypt needed a new form of government. He believed that the army had to take a lead in this.

The defeat in 1948 strongly affected Nasser. On top of the humiliation of losing the war, Nasser was angered by the apparent corruption within certain sections of the Royal Family which it was thought hindered any chance of victory. Nasser decided to basically plot against the king for the sake of Egypt's future.

"This led Nasser to believe that it was inevitable that the army should itself take up the national assignment of salvaging the country from corruption." (Bistoni)

On July 23rd 1952, Nasser helped to organise a revolt against the Royal Family and King Farouk was overthrown after a few days of bloodless rebellion. The actual figure head for the rebellion was General Neguib. Farouk fled to Italy and Neguib took over control of the nation.

Despite his status within the army, Neguib lacked any political skill and he lost the support of the younger army officers – those who were so pro-rebellion. In November 1954, Neguib resigned and retired from public life.

As deputy to Neguib, Nasser was the obvious choice to succeed him. This he did on November 17th 1954.

Nasser had a very clear vision for modernising Egypt. He identified five targets that he wanted to address: Poverty in Egypt Ignorance in Egypt "National oblivion" Neglect of Egypt's infrastructure No sense of national identity or pride in Egypt. He was also keen to see Egypt free of any overtones of colonialism – a belief that was to bring him into direct conflict with Britain and France in 1956. To support his beliefs, Nasser did what he could to restore national pride to all Arab nations – not just Egypt.

The most obvious source of a foreign power being dominant in Egypt was the British/French control of the Suez Canal. Completed in 1869, the canal was designed by Ferdinand de Lesseps. However the vast bulk of the physical labour required to build this engineering marvel was done by Egyptian nationals. Britain had a 40% holding in the company that ran the canal. However, despite the fact that the canal was on Egyptian 'soil', the benefits it brought the people of Egypt were minimal. In 1956, Nasser nationalised the canal – provoking an attack on Egypt by the French and British. This attack was condemned at an international level and the British and French had to withdraw their forces when it became clear that America did not support what they had done. In fact, the American president, Eisenhower, was openly critical of Britain and France.

Nasser's stand against two major European powers brought him huge popularity not just in Egypt but also in all Arab nations. After this success, Nasser set about the 'Egyptianisation' of his country.

One of the most pressing problems Egypt faced on an annual basis was the flooding of the River Nile which could decimate fertile farming land. Nasser's plan was to build a dam to hold back the mighty waters of the Nile which would also provide Egypt with hydro-electric power.

Neither Britain nor France could have been asked to assist in the project. Asking America – who openly supported Israel – was politically impossible for Nasser. Hence he turned to America's Cold War enemy – the Soviet Union. The USSR provided the capital and the engineers for the huge project. Egypt and the USSR were curious bed-fellows. One was a Muslim nation while the other, a communist nation, had banned all forms of religion and had shut down all places of religious worship. However, for Nasser, the Russians provided Egypt with what they needed after the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development had withdrawn its financial support for the project after 1956. For Russia, there was the opportunity to gain a foothold in the Mediterranean Sea – the Black Sea Fleet was 'trapped' in the Black Sea and its movements were easily made known to the Americans. Egypt offered a way around this problem.

Nasser also made gains in other areas of domestic policy. Under Neguib, civilian titles as associated with the Royal Family, were banned. Privileges associated with the 'old way' were also banned. Laws were brought in that limited the amount of land someone could own and they also widened the opportunities for land ownership. In 1961, Nasser nationalised a number of corporations so that the wealth that they generated could be used to improve the lifestyle of the Egyptian people. One year later, a decision was announced that Egypt would be run on Arab socialist lines. During Nasser's time in office, the Aswan High Dam was completed. This was a project that generated world-wide attention. However, iron and steel mills, aluminum plants, car and food factories were also built. In total, over 2000 new factories were built in Egypt in Nasser's time.

