Cold War and Decolonization

Case Study: Suez Canal Crisis 1956
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Suez Canal Crisis, Egypt 1956:

- crisis thought to ‘push the world to the brink of nuclear catastrophe’ and ‘threaten World War III’

- critical intersection of:
  - local Decolonisation - and its ‘needs/demands’
  - International Decolonisation – “End of Empire” (British)
  - Middle East relations (following from violent creation of Israel 1948)
  - Cold War politics
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

“An outspoken, youthful Middle Eastern leader takes on powerful Western adversaries seeking to isolate him. Grasping the mantle of national and regional power, his gamble is stunningly successful, but brief. Strategic calculation leads Western powers and their ally Israel to use military power in response. The result: shambles, recrimination, political downfall, imperial eclipse, and an entirely altered regional complexion.”

[“Suez Ripples Half Century after Crisis” (2006), Add’l Rdg]
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

**Egypt: British Protectorate**
*[see earlier lecture ‘Inter-War World: creation Palestine’]*

- WWI: Egypt placed under Emergency Law, turned into large military base to protect Suez Canal

- Saad Zaghou: moderate nationalist

- worked with British until WWI conditions turned him to populist agitation
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Nationalist Saad Zaghouli:
- founder Wafd Party, [flag below]
- elected Prime Minister in 1924
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

- led Egyptian Delegation to Paris Peace Conference: demanded independence for Egypt

- refusal to back down from political agitation led to his exile*

- this, in turn, generated Revolution 1919

(*only permitted to return in 1924)
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Thousands took to Streets to Demand Independence, 1919
Women Protesting in 1919 Revolution:

- first time women participated in public demonstrations; middle, Upper class women
  Generally secluded
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

- 1922: made ‘nominally independent’ at same time as British mandate in Palestine formalized

- ‘compromise’ left British in control of Canal zone, surrounding bases

- British continued to exercise political influence over King and government
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Independent Egypt, 1922
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Nationalism and Resistance:

- took two forms:
  - earliest Muslim Brotherhood (Islamic): grew in interwar years, increasingly radical; fought for influence against...
  - opposing, growing Western educated elite
  - as in other ‘colonies’ -- many in army

1952: *King overthrown by Free Officers Group*
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“Free Officers Group”, 1952 (Nasser, frt. row left)
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General Naguib:

- led coup d'état

- ousted King Farouq in name of true independence from British

- Not taken seriously At the time....
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1954: Control Seized by Abdel Jamal Nasser

- Colonel in Free Officer’s Group

- ambitious, well-educated

- secular: quickly clamped down on Muslim militants
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Burning of Muslim Brotherhood Headquarters, 1954
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Nasser: socialist-leaning but not communist -- goal was leadership in Arab World

- Opposed ‘Baghdad Pact’ (1955)

-agreement between Britain, Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan to:
  - strengthen regional defense,
  - prevent infiltration of Soviet Union into Middle East

- sought support of Jordan, Syria to complete ‘arc’
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Opposed Baghdad Pact of 1955: used to generate support

- Nasser carried out anti-British radio campaign ("Voice of the Arabs") from Cairo: was successful

- neither Syria nor pro-British Jordan joined

- Provoked widespread popular riots against Pact specifically – and British in general
Nasser initiated own attempt at ‘Arab Unity’: 1958

- merged with Syria: ‘United Arab Republic’

- goal to include Yemen and Iraq: failed

- effort reported internationally with fanfare: Nasser was claiming his role among Arabs

- short-lived: Syria left union in 1961

[see short video in ‘UAR 1958’ Wikipedia article, “Resources”]
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Creation of United Arab Republic (1958-61)
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Abdel Jamal Nasser and British:

- Like other nationalists of his generation (e.g. Nkrumah): grew to resent British presence as remnant of Imperial past

*Suez Canal became focal point: Nasser wanted British out*
NASSER: THE CANAL STAYS BLOCKED

‘As long as a single foreign soldier is on our soil’

‘WE WON’T BE TAKEN BY SURPRISE AGAIN’

CAIRO, Friday.—President Nasser of Egypt declared today that “Egypt will not allow the clearing and repair of the Suez Canal as long as there is a single foreign soldier

British protest to Moscow

Hotels ablaze in new Budapest battle

VIENNA, Friday.—Bitter street fighting with heavy fire from the rebels broke out in Budapest today. Two of the city’s best hotels, the Royal and the Continental, are in flames, said Budapest Radio. Firemen could not ret
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

British resistant:
- two-thirds of oil Western Europe (especially Britain) depending on for post-war recovery passed through Suez Canal

- *But Nasser’s ‘blackmail’ successful: British were out 20 months later*
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Agreement Signed 1954: British permitted to return ‘if canal was threatened’
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

**Other issues: Israeli Growth, Development Needs**

- creation of State Israel ensured ongoing instability in region

- thousands of Palestinian refugees, drawing military support from other Arab states in region remained problem . . . Leading to Israeli responses

- Egypt drawn into escalating political situation
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

1955 “Gaza Raid” provocation:

- Israeli army attacked military outposts in Gaza: 39 killed

- until then Nasser chosen to concentrate resources on Development, rather than military build-up
  [see ‘Development’, below]

- raid generated shift of priorities

* Nasser went in search of weapons! *
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Nasser’s Search for Support: rebuffed by West

- French demanded Egypt cease aid to Algeria’s Nationalists who were fighting for Independence
[another Decolonization ‘demand’, like Vietnam, refused by the French]

- US saw Nasser’s ‘non-alignment’ position as equal to ‘Communism’ : refused to consider support

- British warned Nasser against accepting any Soviet weapons – none would come from Britain in that case, but nothing offered either
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

1955: First Soviet Bloc Military –Aid Agreement with Developing Country $250 million
- Nasser pushed to sign agreement with Czechoslovakia in September 1955: massive importation of arms to vitally strategic region could not go unnoticed

- gave Soviet Union foot-hold in what West considered its ‘sphere of influence’ in the Middle East

- Churchill’s right-wing successor, Prime Minister Anthony Eden, *saw Nasser as embodiment of Communism, Fascism (Hitler) rolled into one!*
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

- With backing of M16 reports, Eden set up plans to assassinate Nasser

- several attempts made before and during Suez Crisis: none successful

[see ‘The Suez Canal Crisis- Pt I’, Add’l Rdgs; also ‘British Plots to Assassinate Nasser’, Resources]
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Second Post-War Issue: Development:

-Nasser (like Nkrumah) needed both electricity and water to modernize and in this case, develop potential of Nile River agriculture

-Aswan Dam (like Volta River Dam) seen as answer to all needs

-Problem: it required massive foreign investment
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Location Aswan Dam, Upper Nile River
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

December 1955: Secretary Dulles announced $70 million aid joint between US and Britain

- Dulles against but others argued aid would keep Nasser from further engagement with Soviet Union and . . .

- thereby, protect region from growing Soviet influence
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

JULY 1956: Dulles announced American offer withdrawn

-excuses given about administrative difficulties between US and Egypt

-Real reasons: Nasser’s attacks on Western colonialism, imperialism and . .

- continued involvement with Soviet Union
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Soviet Union:

- Rushed to fill financial gap

-dam completed in 1964

Whole affair critical in turning Nasser away from US – and towards the Soviet Union
Monument to Friendship with Soviet Union
Commemorating Completion Aswan Dam
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

In Response to Western Withdrawal Funding for Aswan Dam: Nasser Nationalized the Suez Canal!

-July 26 1956 – with no notice, Nasser announced that Egyptians would now be managing the Canal

-from Egyptian perspective: an amazing, audacious move

- from British (and French, who shared interest in protecting rights to canal for ‘West’) perspective: *humiliating, provocative*
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Video:
The Suez Canal Crisis (Pts. I, II)

[shown in class Pt.I 9:15-14:55; Pt.II 0:08-10:25]
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt
Nasser Raising Egyptian Flag over Port Said
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Egyptian Troops Take Back Suez Canal (Port Said)
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

“Operation Musketeer”: ‘secret plan’ hatched between British, French and Israel

- Israel undertook land invasion Sinai Peninsula: easily overran it in 7 days

- British and French air-bombed canal zone (Port Said): Egyptians had no comparable arms, civilian losses high

- UN appeared to step in to ‘end hostilities’ between regional enemies Egypt and Israel
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt
Meanwhile: Soviet Union also engaged

-Egypt clearly an ‘ally’ to be protected

- Khrushchev openly threatened European capitals within range of its nuclear weapons – specifically Paris and London

- reported that Khrushchev had ‘encouraged’ Nasser: not the case: he had no more knowledge of Nasser’s nationalization plan than anyone else – and he would have discouraged it
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Issues Important to Middle East but Equally Important Internationally:

- was US President Eisenhower who insisted on UN’s role in a cease fire

- ‘stakes’ were far too high:
  - destabilizing of strategically vital region,
  - strengthening of Soviet links with liberation movements around the world
  - raising global tensions in age dominated by nuclear arms race
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

And This was the Intention of Operation Musketeer!

- US had never been consulted (any more than Soviet Union) about Nasser’s nationalization plan

- British and French, with agreement of new Middle Eastern ally, Israel, counted on fear their little ‘war’ would raise . . .
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

And This was the Intention of Operation Musketeer!

-goal was to get canal back (Israel had been denied right to use it since independence by Egypt)

-and defeat Nasser

-plan manipulated Cold War and super-power competition for their own aims
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

**Operation Musketeer:**

- militarily: worked as it should have

- politically: complete disaster

- US (Eisenhower) furious at having been duped (or at least, in not having been consulted)

- denounced Anglo-French-Israeli invasion publically – articulating ‘superior power’ influence/voice
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Operation Musketeer:

- British, French leaders forced out of office

-Nasser: emerged as ‘target’ of Western powers

- became hero of Pan-Arabism and even today, of Egypt – his ultimate goal
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Consequences:

- realization Britain, France that ‘age of Imperialism and Colonialism’ over: former colonies had both power and ambitions independent of former colonial masters

- Cold War had created conditions for ‘hot wars’ to break out wherever super-power competition took root: to the point of threatening Nuclear War [would be repeated – Case Study: Cuba]
Suez Canal Crisis - Egypt

Consequences:

- example of how ‘Development’ and ‘Decolonization’ issues intersected to provide opportunities to new powers (US, Soviet Union) to establish ‘neo-colonial’ relations with former colonies [another example in Case Study: Ghana]

- Important new voice being heard: Arab Nationalists led by Nasser – the ‘Arab World’ acknowledged as emergent post-war political player

*Suez Canal Crisis marked powerful first step on ‘world stage’*