

WE SHALL DEFEND IT WITH OUR BLOOD AND STRENGTH, AND WE SHALL MEET AGGRESSION WITH AGGRESSION AND EVIL WITH EVIL

THE SUEZ CRISIS (1956)



IN CONTEXT

FOCUS

Modern Middle East

BEFORE

1945 Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, northern Yemen, and Transjordan form the Arab League.

1948 Israel is established in former Palestine, dividing Arabs and Jews.

1952 A military coup removes Egypt's King Farouk from power. Colonel Gamal Nasser seizes control two years later.

AFTER

1964 The Palestine Liberation Organization calls for an end to the Jewish state.

1993 The Oslo Accords provide for mutual recognition between the PLO and Israel.

2011 Protestors across Arab states demand reforms in a series of popular uprisings.

On July 26, 1956, Egyptian leader, Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, addressed a crowd in the city of Alexandria, declaring the nationalization of the Suez Canal, the waterway through which most oil bound for Western Europe had to pass. For Egyptians, the nationalization symbolized the liberation of their country from the British imperialist dominance it had been under since the 1880s. In response to Nasser's bold move, a secret plan was hatched by Britain, France, and Israel. France was eager for Nasser's downfall because of his support for Algerian insurgents against French colonial rule in Algeria. Israel had many reasons for

See also: The construction of the Suez Canal 230–35 ■ The Young Turk Revolution 260–61 ■ The Treaty of Versailles 280 ■ The establishment of Israel 302–03 ■ The 9/11 attacks 327 ■ The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan 341 ■ The Iranian Revolution 341 ■ The USA and Britain invade Iraq 341



President Nasser of Egypt announces the nationalization of the Suez Canal to a quarter-million-strong gathering in Alexandria celebrating four years since the revolution.

toppling Nasser, including Egypt's denial of passage through the canal to any Israeli-flagged ships. The three conspired that Israel would attack Egypt, and Britain and France would intervene a few days later posing as peacemakers, taking control of the canal. On October 29, 1956, the Israelis began their assault. British and French troops invaded on October 31, but faced immediate diplomatic pressure to call a ceasefire. The United States, which was trying to cultivate good relations with Arab states, was appalled by the Anglo-French invasion, believing it threatened the stability of the whole region. President Dwight Eisenhower forced through a United Nations resolution imposing a ceasefire, and British and French troops had to conduct a humiliating withdrawal.

Splitting the land

The strong anti-Western sentiment in the Middle East dates back hundreds of years, fueled by the West's increased involvement in

the region. Colonialism in the 1800s and the division of the Ottoman Empire after World War I were bitter humiliations for peoples who felt their religion, Islam, was the highest form of divine revelation. In 1948, the partition of Palestine to form Israel spilt the land into two states, one Arab and one Jewish, and was rejected vehemently by Israeli Arabs and enraged the other Arab nations. The regular armies of the Arab states—including Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt—attacked Israel in the first Arab–Israeli War in May and June 1948. The war ended in defeat for the Arabs and disaster for the Palestinians: more than half of the country's Arabs were uprooted as refugees, and they lost any possibility of a state of their own.

Ambitious plans

Egypt continued its stance of belligerence toward Israel by closing the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping. When Nasser ousted the regime of King Farouk in 1954 and sent him into exile, he imported arms from the Soviet Union to build his arsenal for future confrontations with Israel. Britain had agreed to withdraw its troops from the Suez area by June 1856, but as the last troops left Egypt, Nasser relied on funds from Britain and the US to fund ambitious plans to develop Egypt. This included the Aswan Dam project on the Nile. Nasser was angered when Britain and the United States withdrew its offer of loans to help him pay for the dam. The US and Britain backed out »

