
TDC 6th Sem (M) Paper : 618 by **Dr Biman Hazarika**

The Suez Canal was built in **Egypt** under the supervision of French diplomat **Ferdinand de Lesseps**. This 120 miles man-made waterway opened in 1869 which separates most of Egypt from the Sinai Peninsula. The canal connects the **Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean** by way of the **Red Sea**.



- The canal was operated by the Universal Company of the **Suez Maritime Canal**, the area surrounding the canal remained sovereign Egyptian territory and the only land-bridge between Africa and Asia.

- The canal instantly became strategically important, as it provided the shortest ocean link between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The canal eased commerce for trading nations and particularly helped European colonial powers to gain and govern their colonies.
- On **Oct 29, 1956**, Israeli brigades invaded Egypt and advanced toward the canal, routing **Egyptian forces**. **Britain and France**, following their plan, demanded that Israeli and Egyptian troops withdraw from the canal, and they announced that they would intervene to enforce a cease-fire ordered by the **United Nations**. On **November 5 and 6**, British and French forces landed.

In 1875, as a result of debt and financial crisis, Egypt was forced to sell its shares in the canal operating company to the British government of Benjamin Disraeli. The 1888 Convention of Constantinople declared the canal a neutral zone under British protection.

- In ratifying it, the Ottoman Empire agreed to permit international shipping to pass freely through the canal, in time of war and peace. The Convention came into force in 1904, the same year as the *Entente cordiale* between Britain and France.



- The Suez Crisis was provoked by an **American and British** decision not to finance Egypt's construction of the **Aswan High Dam**, as they had promised, in response to Egypt's growing ties with communist **Czechoslovakia** and the **Soviet Union**. President **Gamal Nasser** reacted to the American and British decision by declaring martial law in the canal zone and seizing control of the Suez Canal Company. Britain and France feared that **Nasser** might close the canal and cut off shipments of petroleum flowing from the **Persian Gulf to western Europe**.
- When diplomatic efforts to settle the crisis failed, **Britain and France** secretly prepared military action to regain control of the canal and, if possible, to depose Nasser. They found a ready ally in **Israel**, whose hostility toward **Egypt** had been exacerbated by Nasser's blockage of the Straits of Tīrān and the numerous raids by Egyptian-supported commandos into Israel during **1955–56**.

After 1945

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Britain was reassessing its role in the region in light of the severe economic constraints and its colonial history.

The economic potential of the Middle East, with its vast oil reserves, as well as the Suez Canal's geo-strategic importance against the background of the Cold War, prompted Britain to consolidate and strengthen its position there. The kingdoms of Egypt and Iraq were seen as vital to maintaining strong British influence in the region.

Fuad started occupying the canal zone the move was soon met by growing opposition at home and by U.S.-sponsored resolutions in the UN. It quickly put a stop to the Anglo-French action. **On Dec 22, a UN evacuated British and French troops, and Israel was withdrawn in 1957**

Nasser emerged from the Suez Crisis a victor and a hero for the cause of Arab and Egyptian nationalism. Israel did not win freedom to use the canal, but it did regain shipping rights in the Straits of Tīrān. Britain and France, less fortunate, lost most of their influence in the Middle East as a result of the episode.

THANKS

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