

The Suez Conflict of 1956 at the United Nations Organization: On the 60th Anniversary of the War

Abstract

Sixty years have passed since the Suez crisis of 1956. This article deals with the major events and issues surrounding the crisis, leading to war and to a major international crisis involving the two superpowers and their allies. Battles were fought in the air, on the ground and on the diplomatic fronts of the United Nations Organization. However, the United States – opposed to the action of its allies – played the major role in terminating the military actions of Israel, Great Britain and France against Egypt, in avoiding direct Soviet intervention and establishing a UN-sponsored solution.

Introduction

Towards the end of World War II we observe political life in Egypt coalescing around two major objectives: namely, the end of the British occupation and the introduction of socio-political reforms. With the country's political forces divided the initiative of overthrowing the corrupt monarchy, which had become largely subject to British interests, was taken up by the army and – more precisely – by junior officers, organized under the banner of the Free Officers headed by Colonel Jamal Abdel Nasser.¹ The negatively-assessed experience of the Palestinian war, in which they had participated, led to the intensification of the internal crisis and accelerated the activity of the Free Officers, whose assumption of power (on 23 July 1952) was largely due to the skillful utilization of favorable military and political circumstances. After the abdication of King Farouk on 26 July 1952, Egyptians began to give their strong backing to the new order, which came to be known as the July Revolution.

The shape of the new political authorities and institutions in Egypt was crystallizing during a period of internal disputes and confrontations during the years 1952–1954. Among the achievements of this period were the Agrarian Reform Law and the agreement with Britain concerning Sudan. This was followed by the British-Egyptian agreement on the evacuation of British troops from Egypt, which was completed a little more than a month before the outbreak of the Suez conflict. By June 1956, the organizational and legal foundations of the new political system had also been determined.

The end of 1954 and the beginning of 1955 had witnessed an apparent thaw in Egypt's relations with the West, which to a certain extent was connected with British-American rivalry for the attainment of influence and ultimately domination in the Middle East. In the post-World War II

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¹ On Nasser, Egypt and the Arab world during his times, see Gamal A. Nasser, *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of Revolution*, Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1955; Harry Hopkins, *Egypt, the Crucible: The Unfinished Revolution in the Arab World*, London: Houghton Mifflin, 1969; Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958–1970*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1971; Jean Lacouture, *Nasser*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1973; Peter Mansfield, *Nasser's Egypt*, London: Penguin, 1969; Anthony Nutting, *Nasser*, London: Constable, 1973; B.K. Narayan, *Anwar el-Sadat: Man with a Mission*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1977; Jerzy Zdanowski, *Historia Bliskiego Wschodu w XX wieku* [History of the Middle East in the 20th Century], Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2010; Jerzy Zdanowski, *Bracia Muzułmanie i inni* [The Muslim Brothers and Others], Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Glob, 1986.

period, the British role in the region was steadily weakening, while the United States started to take over British positions. In essence, the Middle East began to offer a different role for Great Britain (a defensive one – imperial routes, oil supplies) than for the United States (offensive – as an element of global strategy). The conclusion of the Baghdad Pact at the beginning of 1955 under the auspices of Great Britain revealed British desire to assume leadership in the region.²

Egypt treated the improvement in its relations with Britain as the beginning of an era of cooperation based on equal rights and benefits for both sides. This cooperation might involve also other Arab countries, naturally after their independence. The conclusion of the Baghdad Pact Treaty created a deep breach in relations between Egypt and Arabs on the one hand and Britain leading the West on the other. Striving to exert indisputable hegemony in the Middle East, the British planned to expand the Treaty to other than Iraq Arab states. The main obstacle to these plans was Egypt. Other sources of tension between Egypt and the West were: the strong support rendered by the West to Israel and the instrumental use of Israel as an element of pressure exerted in due course upon Arabs, the refusal to supply Egypt with arms indispensable to stop Israeli expansion, the intentional drop in Western (and especially British) orders for Egyptian cotton – the main export commodity of Egypt's mono-cultural type of agriculture.

The British (and the West in effect) wanted to win Egypt over for their policy or, at least, to neutralize it. When they failed in their efforts, they became convinced that the only source of their misfortune in the Middle East was Nasser. Consequently, he had to be removed through the use of force. Quite a similar stance was adopted by the French government, which made Nasser responsible for the success of the Algerian uprising (initiated in 1954). The United States on the other hand preferred to assume the role of a seemingly neutral arbitrator, while in fact attempting to use the region for its geopolitical ends. This concept of participating in the fight against the Soviet Union and socialist countries was alien to Egypt and Arabs. They not only had no interest in such a fight, but were objectively involved in a struggle with the West for their independence. Hence, the Egyptian rapprochement with socialist countries was met with public acceptance, a move that also involved practical considerations and significance.

Meanwhile, Egypt strove to implement its programme of economic development, attainment of favourable terms for trade exchange and first of all the delivery to its army of armaments necessary for defense against Israeli expansionism. The major Western powers refused to supply these weapons to Egypt. Explicit preference was given to Israel. In this situation, Egypt decided to purchase weapons from socialist countries without any political conditions in exchange for cotton.

Still in mid-1955, the West tried to pull Egypt over to its side. Several proposals concerning the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict were presented, however without any serious involvement. The main element in the attempts made by Western powers to win Egypt's support for their policy was the issue of financial assistance for the construction of the Aswan Dam – an undertaking of fundamental significance for the socio-economic policy pursued by the Egyptian political authorities. By participating in the financing of the dam, the West hoped to win over Egypt's support for its policies for many years to come. When the hopes cherished by Western politicians were not realized (further rapprochement of Egypt towards the Soviet Union, diplomatic recognition of the Chi-

² On the Baghdad Pact, see *Zbiór Dokumentów PISM* [Collected Documents of the Polish Institute of International Affairs], No. 10, 1955. pp. 2144–2151; *A Select Chronology and Background Documents relating to the Middle East: Committee on Foreign Relations. United States Senate*, June 6, 1967, Washington: U.S. Government Publications, 1967.

nese People's Republic, strengthening of relations with India and Yugoslavia, further opposition to the Baghdad Pact Treaty), the United States and Western institutions 'punished' Egypt by withdrawing their Aswan offer.³ In response, on 26 July 1956 Egypt decided upon the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company.⁴

Prior to the Outbreak of the Suez War

The source of the sharp reaction from the West – particularly on the part of Great Britain, France and the United States – to the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company should be sought, on the one hand, in the fact that this act intensified the anticolonial struggle in Africa and Asia, in addition to representing a threat for the position held by Western powers in the vast – as well as economically, politically and strategically important – lands of the Middle East. On the other hand, the intensive agitation in the West was a reflection of tactics adopted by specific circle of advocates of traditional colonialism, which – taking the Egyptian action as a pretext – wanted to frighten former and existing colonial and semi-colonial nations and force them to retreat. At this stage, the views of radical conservatives had consolidated their position in British ruling circles. They did not appreciate the significance of intensified national liberation movements and did not recognize the new rising and steadily prevailing trend in the post-war world. Most specifically they could not accept the fact that British world influence was shrinking.⁵ Already, the British Prime Minister expressed his readiness to use armed force against Egypt as early as during his visit to the United States at the beginning of 1956, and during the visit of Soviet statesmen to England in April 1956.

Thus, the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company was grasped as a unique opportunity to return by force to Egypt and overthrow the rule of President Nasser.⁶ Being aware that it would be very difficult to enforce its claims through legal procedures, the British government decided to use its armed forces against Egypt jointly with France, which at this time (with the intensification of the Algerian uprising) was treating Nasser as enemy number one and was ready to take part in the planned war.

Faced with the lack of sufficient air and navy forces in this region of the world to carry out an immediate offensive, while making their preparations for the invasion, the governments of Great Britain and France agreed to embark upon diplomatic action initiated by the USA, which – although taking a hostile stance when the Suez Canal Company was nationalized – had no interest in the rivals' return and settling in the Middle East, and furthermore by means of an armed conflict alienating the Arabs and newly-independent nations of Asia and Africa from the West.

³ Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945*, Chapel Hill – London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004, pp. 157–192.

⁴ On the international crisis brought about by the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, see Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East*, London – New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003; Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years*, Vols. 1–2, London: Heinemann, 1963–1966; Erskine B. Childers, *The Road to Suez*, London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1962; Hugh Thomas, *The Suez Affair*, London: Littlehampton Book Services, 1967; Hassan Jamsheer, *Konflikt sueski w stosunkach międzynarodowych [The Suez Conflict in International Relations 1956–1957]*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1987; Walter Laqueur, *The Struggle for the Middle East*, Washington: The Macmillan Company, 1969.

⁵ Kyle, *Suez...*, pp. 40, 42–43, 122, 165, 284.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 148–152; ("The psychological impact of a swift diplomatic and military line-up against Egypt might in itself be enough to depose of Nasser". See *ibid.*, p. 148).

Thereby, as a result of technical considerations (protracted preparations for the military operation) Britain and France were forced for some time to undertake the diplomatic path.⁷ Along this path were two London conferences, the mission to Cairo of The Five (state leaders) headed by the Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies, the establishment of the Association of Suez Canal Users, as well as diplomatic activities within the United Nations Organization. However, these moves were never aimed at initiating a dialogue with Egypt; no serious efforts were made to reach to agreement with the Egyptian government. The proposals were of an ultimatum nature and were assumed to be rejected – a consideration, which at an ‘appropriate’ moment – would give the required pretext to launch a military operation against Egypt.

For its part, the Egyptian government acted extremely cautiously, giving no pretext for the use of armed forces against its country and simultaneously displaying a readiness to conduct negotiations, but rejected being subjected to a dictate. In this respect, the Egyptian government had the support of Arab, non-aligned and socialist countries. An expression of this support was the failure of Great Britain and France in their effort to interrupt navigation along the Suez Canal by withdrawing Western pilots, with the intention of granting a pretext to both countries to use armed force against Egypt. The above mentioned Egyptian allies delegated to Egypt the number of pilots needed for the normal functioning of the Canal. Deprived of legal arguments and formal pretexts to launch a war against Egypt, Britain and France opposed by the anti-war stance of large sections of their own societies and world opinion decided to utilize the invasion of the Sinai Peninsula by Israel as a moment of launching their own operation, under the guise of separating the fighting Israeli and Egyptian forces in addition to protecting the Suez Canal navigation.

Israel in turn treated the emergence of Nasser, as a popular Arab leader, as a potential threat for its expansionist policy. Israel had already been preparing to capture the Sinai Peninsula (the occupation of al-Auja zone),⁸ but it was not until the Suez Canal Company was nationalized that the Israelis could seriously think about participating in a military action against Egypt. Initially, the anti-Egyptian action was synchronized by the French, but in mid-October the British authorities too gave their support to the French-conceived tripartite secret plan of action.⁹

After the Outbreak of Hostilities

Launching its military attack against Egypt on 29 October 1956, Israel had facilitated the task. Faced with the concentration of British and French troops in Cyprus after the nationalization decree, Egyptian authorities withdrew half of the Egyptian troops stationed in the Sinai Peninsula in normal conditions. Moreover, the Israeli army was during the operation receiving arms and ammunitions from French aircraft transport taking off from Cyprus. Despite such favourable conditions the Israeli troops could not make a breakthrough until the bombardment of Egyptian centers started days later by Franco-British air forces, and the Egyptian government order to withdraw soldiers from Sinai.¹⁰

⁷ Keyle, *Suez...*, p. 136.

⁸ *The Yearbook of the United Nations 1955*, New York: UNO, 1956, p. 31.

⁹ Kyle, *Suez...*, pp. 327–331; ‘Collusion: The Sevres Protocol’, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue No. 1321, 24 November 2016.

¹⁰ On the Suez War, see Moshe Dayan, *Diary of the Sinai Campaign*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966; Andre Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956*, London: Faber and Faber 1969; Anthony Eden, *The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden: Full Circle*, London: Cassell, 1960; Mohammad H. Heikal, *The Cairo Documents: The Inside Story of Nasser*

The military intervention of the three states can be qualified as an act of aggression. Article 1 of the UN Charter in its point 1 stipulates maintaining international peace and security, and to that end taking effective measures for the prevention and avoidance of threats to peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law. Article 2, point 3, in turn, states that all UNO members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace, security and justice are not endangered. Moreover, the United Nations Charter does not acknowledge any cases of “legal war”, unlike the League of Nations’ Covenant, which allowed the settlement of international disputes through war once specific measures of peaceful procedure had been exhausted. The UNO Member States passed the main responsibility for the maintenance of peace to the Security Council.

The British-French invasion lasted only two days, starting from the landing operation at Port Said early in the morning on 5 November. Neither power expected such a strong reaction to the move on the international stage. It was thought that the United States would be preoccupied with the presidential campaign, while the Soviet Union with the suppression of the Hungarian uprising. The invasion was however terminated without the attainment of its intended or declared objectives. A decisive role was played here by Great Britain’s stance as holding the central position in the Suez conflict. The major factors here were: the opposition of the Labour Party and substantial sections of the British public, divergence of opinions within the ruling Conservative Party, the negative attitude of the United States, the interruption of petroleum supplies, the rejection of the aggression by Arab and Commonwealth states, and the negative stance of the Security Council and General Assembly of the United Nations. However, a key role should be granted to the armed and non-armed resistance of Egyptians to the invasion (against the Western assumption that the new leaders were unpopular). Specialists also refer to the decisive impact of the Soviet ultimatum-note to the governments of Great Britain, France and Israel and the parallel activity of the USSR at the UN Security Council, as well as the Soviet proposal directed to the United States of a joint US-Soviet intervention to stop the hostilities.

Altogether, it seems, these factors led to the end of the tripartite aggression upon Egypt, the armed conflict stopped, and within a few weeks British-French troops had to withdraw from Egypt, while Israeli troops had left by 8 March 1957. The main battle to evacuate the invading troops from Egypt was fought however at the United Nations: the Security Council (30–31 October)¹¹, First Special Extraordinary Session of the General Assembly (1–10 November)¹², 11th Session of the General Assembly (12 November 1956 – 8 March 1957).¹³

Deprived of legal arguments and formal pretexts to launch a war against Egypt, Britain and France, opposed by the anti-war stance of large sections of their own societies and world opinion, decided to utilize the invasion of the Sinai Peninsula by Israel as a moment to launch their own op-

and His Relationship with World Leaders, Rebels, and Statesmen, New York: Doubleday, 1973; idem, *Abdel-Nasser wal-'alem* [Abdel Nasser and the World], Beirut 1972; Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson: The Story of Suez*, London: Constable, 1967.

¹¹ *United Nations Security Council Official Records. Year 11, Meeting 748*, New York: UNO, 1956.

¹² *Official Records of the General Assembly: First Emergency Special Session, 1–10 November 1956, Plenary Meetings*, New York (n/d); Substantial materials of the Extraordinary Session, in *Zbiór Dokumentów PISM* [Collected Documents of the Polish Institute of International Affairs], 1956, pp. 2021–2115.

¹³ *Documents Officiels de l'Assemblée Générale, Onzième session, Annexes, 12 novembre – 8 mars, 1956–1957*, Vols. 2–3, New York (n/d); *General Assembly of the United Nations, 11th Session, Plenary Meeting 1956–1957, Verbatim Records of Meeting*, New York: UNO (n/d).

eration, under the guise of separating the fighting Israeli and Egyptian forces in addition to protecting the Suez Canal navigation.

Hence, on 29 October Israel launched its military operation against Egypt through the landing of an airborne unit in the vicinity of the Mitla pass – i.e., 200 km from the armistice line or 65 km from the Suez canal. Additional units were prepared to pass the line in the direction of the Canal. The Israeli action was a violation of the armistice agreement of 1949 convened under the auspices of the UNO. To that end, the United Nations had established the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) with Gen. E. Burns as its commander. Soon after the Israeli incursion Gen. Burns intervened in order to bring about a ceasefire without any positive response.¹⁴

The initiative to call the UN Security Council came from the USA. On the same evening of 29 October, the decision was taken at a White House meeting in the presence of president D.D. Eisenhower and secretary of state J.F. Dulles. The latter explained the situation in the light of the blockade of information on the part of U.S. allies, Great Britain and France, in addition to the substantial increase in the number of coded messages between Paris and Tel Aviv as followed by the CIA – signaling the existence of a synchronized action involving Israel. In the light of such information, the U.S. president decided upon directing the matter to the UN Security Council early next morning, in a move to deprive the USSR of taking the initiative.¹⁵

The United States was convinced that the use of force against Egypt in connection with the Suez Canal would be disadvantageous for the West, antagonizing the newly independent countries and strengthening the Soviet bloc. Also the lack of loyalty on the part of allies was negatively assessed by American politicians. For their part, Britain and France intended to force upon the USA the acceptance of accomplished facts during the presidential elections. Likewise, Israel disappointed the American administration by ignoring the personal intervention of the president. It was reminded that the USA had signed the Tripartite Declaration together with Britain and France (25 May 1950) to guarantee the territory of Israel.¹⁶

In the note to the Security Council (S/3706) the USA informed the body that Israeli armed forces had penetrated deep into Egyptian territory, in violation of the Israeli-Egyptian armistice agreement. An immediately convening of the Council was demanded to consider the proposed matter: The Palestine question: steps for the immediate cessation of Israel's military action in Egypt.¹⁷ The emphasis on Palestine was intended to accommodate Arab nationalists.

In 1956, the Security Council members (11 in all) were apart from the five permanent members: Australia, Belgium, Cuba, Iran, Yugoslavia and Peru. The Council president in October was the French representative Bernard Cornut-Gentile. The Council was addressing the U.S. request of 29 October, and later the Egyptian note of 30 October (informing on being the object of Israeli aggression) at four meetings on 30–31 October, with Egypt and Israel participating in the debate. Opening the morning meeting of 30 October, the U.S. representative, Henry C. Lodge, avoiding condemnation of Israel, called upon the Council to acknowledge the violation of peace and demanded the immediate termination of hostilities and also the withdrawal of Israeli forces behind the

¹⁴ *United Nations Security Council Official Records...*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Eisenhower, *The White House Years...*, Vol. 2, pp. 72–73.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

¹⁷ *Yearbook of the United Nations 1956*, New York: UNO, 1957, p. 25.

armistice lines. Having in mind Britain and France, the American delegate called upon other countries to refrain from the utilization of the situation for their “selfish interests”.¹⁸

At an earlier stage, the UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, who sought to treat his own post “as an independent political authority, independent of the will of member states”, worked upon finding a compromise solution for the dispute about the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. To a certain extent he managed to work out the six principles adopted by the Council on 13 October. The UN Security Council, alarmed by events, convened on 9–12 October at a number of informal secret discussions. Britain and France introduced to the UN Security Council a project for a resolution, which was accepted unanimously at a formal session on 13 October. It declared six principles:

- 1) the maintenance of the freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal;
- 2) the acknowledgement of Egyptian rights;
- 3) the non-political nature of the functioning of the Canal;
- 4) fixing of fees and other payments through agreement;
- 5) the allocation of parts of collected revenues for the maintenance and enlargement of the Canal;
- 6) the solution of disputes by means of arbitration.¹⁹

Actually that was the first part of a British-French resolution. However the two countries went further by introducing a second resolution, regarded as the second part of the former. It accused Egypt of not presenting its own acceptable proposals, and until the Association of Suez Canal Users should assume control of the Canal and collect fees. That was vetoed by the USSR and rejected also by Yugoslavia. So it was rejected in line with the intentions of the initiators of the project.²⁰ Hence, mid-October was decisive for the decision of the two countries to go to war over the above mentioned involvement of Israel.

At the 30 October meeting, the UN Secretary General presented the information received from the UNTSO commander Gen. Burns. Next, representatives of Cuba and Peru opted for the cessation of hostilities. The arguments of the Iranian and Yugoslavian delegates were also moving in this direction, with overt or covert condemnation of Israel, while the USSR representative was more outright in supporting Egypt, condemning Israel and pointed to those states (without mentioning Great Britain and France) that had prepared to send their troops into the area of conflict. He then was the first to inform the Council about the 12-hour British-French ultimatum to Egypt (and formally to Israel) to withdraw from the Suez Canal area.²¹

The British-French ultimatum was based on the fictitious assumption that the fighting between Israeli and Egyptian troops was taking place in the vicinity of the Suez Canal. In reality, the ultimatum was tantamount to inviting Israel to march towards the Suez Canal. In this way, one day after the Israeli attack, the world learnt about the collaboration of the three states in the preparation of the war against Egypt. Moreover, the ultimatum was a violation of many agreements signed by

¹⁸ *United Nations Security Council Official Records...*, pp. 2–3; *Yearbook of the United Nations 1956...*, p. 25.

¹⁹ Text of resolution: *Yearbook of the United Nations 1956...*, p. 25.

²⁰ Eden, *The Memoirs ...*, p. 504.

²¹ *United Nations Security Council Official Records...*, pp. 5–6.

both powers (the Constantinople Convention of 1888, the U.S.-British-French Declaration of 1950,²² British-Egyptian Treaty of 1954 and the UN Charter).

Debates at the Security Council were dominated by condemnation of – first – the Israeli military action and – next – the British-French ultimatum and bombardment of Egyptian territory by the air forces of Britain and France. The arguments of both powers about keeping the fighting sides apart and protection of the Suez Canal proved totally unconvincing. It was only through applying their right of veto at the Security Council that the British and French delegates managed to stop the adoption of resolutions unfavorable for both states. However, Great Britain and France could not prevent the adoption of a procedural resolution (Uniting for Peace) convening the Extraordinary Session of the General Assembly.

At the Extraordinary Session the governments of Britain and France treated their intervention as “a police action”. They made the suspension of war operations conditional, among other things, on the agreement of Egypt and Israel on the installation of UN troops. This postulate was in a sense a tactical move dictated to appease the strong internal and international opposition. The intention of both powers was simply to attain recognition by the United Nations of British and French troops, which were to land soon in the vicinity of the Suez Canal, as peacekeeping forces of the UN. The analogy of the Korean war is quite striking here. In their original form, British-French conditions could not be accepted either by the General Assembly or by Egypt. Wishing to help Britain and France, Canada presented a draft resolution to the effect of the establishment of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in the Middle East.²³

Conclusion

Elaborating upon the diplomatic background of events, the initiation of war operations by Israel placed the United States in a delicate position. The refusal on the part of Great Britain and France to cooperate with the USA within the framework of the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 in an action to stop Israeli aggression convinced the Americans that the three states had conspired together. In such conditions, silence on the part of the United States would be interpreted as implicit support for the action of the three states against Egypt. The United States could not, on the one hand, tolerate the establishment of a serious precedent for fait accompli in relation to an issue that could have grave consequences for world peace. On the other hand, seizing the initiative at the Security Council and during the early stage of the First Extraordinary Session of the UN General Assembly, the United States aimed at preventing the USSR from undertaking such an initiative and condemning the three invading states as aggressors. The negative stance of the United States sprang also from the fact that during that time the attention of the American administration was directed heavily towards Hungary and Poland. Many U.S. politicians thought that the long-awaited moment of the liberation of Central and East European nations had come. In the expected military action, a leading role should have been played by the armed forces of France and Britain. Meanwhile, both countries were engaged and entangled in the Suez operation.

²² The Declaration, called the Tripartite Declaration, dealt with the issues of preserving the balance of armaments delivery to Israel and Arab countries, as well as the securing of the armistice lines between them.

²³ Jerzy Zdanowski, *Stosunki międzynarodowe na Bliskim Wschodzie w XX wieku* [The International Relations in the Middle East in the 20th Century], Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM, 2012, pp. 258–259.

From the very beginning of the Special Extraordinary Session of the General Assembly, two trends in relation to the tripartite intervention can be identified. The first, combining Arab, socialist and the emerging Afro-Asian group of states, called for the unconditional end of British-French intervention and the withdrawal of Israeli troops beyond the truce lines. The implementation of such a resolution was to be charged to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and the Secretary General. The other trend, grouping the supporters of the Canadian postulate, strove to appease the aggressors in order to preserve their prestige. Attempt to find a compromise formula, legalizing invasion and occupation, had to be found at the cost of the victim, i.e. Egypt.

The USSR and other socialist countries considered the establishment of UNEF to be a violation of the UN Charter, since only the Security Council had the right to employ armed forces. However, due to the lack of objection on the part of the Egyptian government to the establishment of the Emergency Force, the afore mentioned states upheld the opinion that the resolution regarding UNEF was an expression of the will of the states establishing this Force. Moreover, the costs of this Force, in addition to compensation of damages incurred upon Egypt in the course of war operations, as well as the costs of clearing the Suez Canal should be covered by the aggressor states. It was also pointed out that there were attempts to impose upon Egypt concessions in return for the withdrawal of occupation troops.

On 10 November the General Assembly adopted a resolution to the effect of transferring the question of the Suez Canal conflict to the ordinary Session of the General Assembly (which was held between 8 November 1956 and 8 March 1957). The evacuation of the Franco-British forces was dealt with in the first stage, then of Israeli forces, which was carried out by further stages. All this took place under immense international pressure and the passage of numerous UN resolutions on the details and technicalities of the withdrawal.

Israeli troops, as already mentioned, remained for a longer time on Egyptian territory (until 8 March 1957). Utilizing its occupation as a bargaining element, Israel won a concession that the UN Emergency Force was installed only on the Egyptian side of the truce line (Gaza Strip) and in Sharm al-Sheik on the Gulf of Aqaba, thereby additionally ensuring for itself the freedom of navigation through the Strait of Tiran. The presence of UNEF in the Gaza Strip and Sharm al-Sheik without any time limit, although dependent on the assent of the Egyptian government, restricted Egypt's sovereignty upon its own territory.

Israel inflicted many material damages and losses upon Egypt. Particularly heavy damages were inflicted by Israeli troops before their withdrawal from each part of the occupied areas and localities – roads, mines and buildings were destroyed, and robberies were committed. All this was done with impunity and under the guise of implementing resolutions of the UN Security Council and General Assembly about the evacuation of its armed forces. In essence, the main aim of Israel was to delay the economic and military development of Egypt in accordance with its peculiar interpretation of the “right of self-defense”.

In as much as Israel was able to register a few ‘successes’, Great Britain and France suffered only defeats: loss of all footholds in Egypt, nullifying of the British-Egyptian agreement of 1954, loss of the Suez military base and many other positions in the Middle East, undermining of both powers’ prestige in the Middle East and the world, the downfall of the British and French governments. Simultaneously, the anti-colonial national liberation movements gained momentum, while the Soviet Union gained authority and sympathy among Arabs.

In order to curb the process of retreating Western influence in the Middle East, the United States Congress, on the initiative of the president, adopted the Eisenhower Doctrine on the day of the final withdrawal of Israel from Egypt (8 March 1957), voicing the necessity of taking over by the Americans of the 'vacuum' created by the political and moral defeat of Great Britain and France in the Middle East.