

The Suez Crisis: “Disregarding the UN, War Continues” (November 6, 1956)

Abstract

The Suez Crisis of 1956 began in July of 1956, when Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser announced that Egypt had nationalized the Suez Canal Company, which was jointly owned and operated by the British and French. Though Nasser offered to compensate the British and French for the Company, the British and French were livid, and refused; Nasser, in turn, was incensed by what he saw as an attempt to continue European colonial domination. The Eisenhower administration attempted to broker a diplomatic solution to the crisis but was unsuccessful. Behind the scenes, the British and French governments plotted a military invasion with Israel, with the goal of unseating Nasser. On October 29, Israeli forces attacked the Sinai Peninsula; on the 5th of November, the British and French governments sent forces of their own. The Eisenhower administration was deeply concerned about the optics of the Suez Crisis; they wanted to distance themselves from European colonialism (especially as they had just criticized Soviet intervention in the Hungarian revolution) and were concerned that the Soviet Union might intervene on the Egyptian side. They also believed that if the U.S. were seen as agreeing with the attack, the backlash in the Arab world would lead Arabs to align with the Soviet Union. They pressured the British and French to agree to a UN ceasefire on November 6, 1956. Though the mission was militarily successful, it was a diplomatic and political disaster, leading to international criticism and diplomatic pressure for the British and the French, souring the relationship between the U.S. and the UK for months, and forcing Anthony Eden, the British Prime Minister who had overseen the attack, to resign.

Source

Cairo

Disregarding the UN Charter and General Secretary Hammarskjöld’s call to stop the invasion immediately, British and French forces began their landing in Egypt on Monday. In a communiqué issued at noon on Monday, British-French headquarters on Cyprus announced that British paratroopers had captured the airfield at Port Said. South of Port Said, French paratroopers had occupied two bridges over the Suez Canal. At 11:30, a government spokesman in Cairo had still alarmed the world with the news that Port Said was under continuous bombardment by British and French airplanes and the casualties among the civilian population had been extraordinarily high.

At the same time, the British-French invading fleet went into action off the Egyptian coast. This is the largest fleet to operate in the Mediterranean since the Allied landing in Sicily during the Second World War. The commander-in-chief of the invading forces, General Keightley, announced in Nicosia that additional paratroops would be flown to Egypt.

Immediately following the landing of the British and French, units of the Egyptian Army and the National Guard took up positions in the Egyptian cities to resist the landing operations along a broad front. Long lines of Egyptians are still standing outside recruitment offices to report for military service.

Meanwhile, British and French ground troops are continuing their terror against the civilian population. AP quoted eyewitnesses who counted 13 assaults on Cairo and the region north of the capital on Monday between six and nine am Central European Time. According to an Egyptian report, more than 90 British, French and Israeli aircraft have been shot down since hostilities began.

Source of original German text: “Unter Mißachtung der UNO Krieg fortgesetzt,” *Berliner Zeitung*, vol. 12, no. 260, November 6, 1956.

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