



National Museum  
of American Diplomacy

# THE SUEZ CANAL CRISIS

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National Sovereignty versus International Access to Waterways



The **National Museum of American Diplomacy** (NMAD) offers educators immersive programs that explore the goals and practice of diplomacy, teach diplomatic skills, build global competence, and illustrate how the critical work of American diplomats impacts people's everyday lives. Lesson plans emphasize 21st century skills: creativity and innovation; critical thinking and problem solving; and communication and collaboration. These skills are keys to success for the next generation of global citizens.

The **Diplomacy Simulation Program** is the museum's premier educational program. In a collaborative learning environment, students step into the shoes of real-life diplomats. The diplomacy simulations are designed for 15-30 participants, plus a teacher/moderator. Students receive a scenario related to a global issue, which could be real-world or hypothetical, current, or historic. Within each simulation, there are five to six stakeholder groups (e.g., foreign ministries, NGOs, and international organizations), each with different perspectives and priorities. Students role-play these stakeholders in small teams of three to five. Under set time constraints, the groups are challenged to negotiate a peaceful solution to the crisis in the scenario. Students use the information provided in the simulation packet to develop their group's policy positions and defend or modify their choices in real time.

The diplomacy simulations help audiences to understand that many of the opportunities and challenges before us as a nation are global in source, scope, and solution. In these efforts, NMAD has created the **Historical Diplomacy Simulation Program** to provide educators with the opportunity to bring diplomacy and the work of U.S. diplomats into the classroom.

The goal of NMAD's Historical Diplomacy Simulation Program is to engage participants in the art and practice of diplomacy, while introducing them to the contributions of the State Department and U.S. diplomats in the context of an historical event addressed in the teaching of U.S. history. Funded by the Uma Chapman Cox Foundation, and developed along with partners National History Day and George Mason University's Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, the Historical Diplomacy Simulation Program offers three simulations:

- **The Barbary Pirates Hostage Crisis: Negotiating Tribute and Trade**
- **The Spanish and American Conflict of 1898: Treaties and Self-Determination**
- **The Suez Canal Crisis: National Sovereignty versus International Access to Waterways**

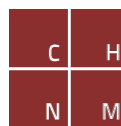
To access the complete Diplomacy Simulation Program, including training and subject matter expert videos, please visit [diplomacy.state.gov](http://diplomacy.state.gov).



National Museum  
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History AND  
New Media

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**“Peaceful settlement must be the only answer in these days of nuclear weapons.”**

**Jim Hagerty**, White House Press Secretary

*Memo, Hagerty to Eisenhower, October 8, 1956, “Dulles, F Oct 56 (2)”*

In 1869, France and Egypt entered into an agreement to build the Suez Canal through Egyptian territory. To manage the canal, the Suez Canal Company was created with French investors controlling 56% of the shares and the Egyptian government controlling 44%. The canal was a huge commercial success for Europe as it allowed large ships to sail directly from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean. This greatly reduced the cost of shipping raw materials to Europe from colonies in South Asia and East Asia. Before the canal, these shipping routes had to go around the continent of Africa.

The canal was supposed to benefit Egypt as well as European countries. Each ship that passed through the canal paid a fee and part of that money went to the Egyptian government. Over time, however, European countries, especially France and Great Britain, claimed more and more of the benefits. Egypt lost control of the canal entirely in the 1870s when the Egyptian government in need of funds sold their shares in the canal to Great Britain.

In 1882, Great Britain invaded and occupied Egypt. The canal became a central connection for British commercial and naval ships. Great Britain used its control of the canal in both World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) to deny access to enemy ships. The canal remained important after World War II as the main route to ship oil from the Middle East to Europe.

After World War II ended, two main powers emerged: the Soviet Union and the United States. The rivalry between these two powers was termed the Cold War. Each side sought to increase their influence in every region across the globe. Both nations developed the powerful hydrogen bomb by 1953 so any direct conflict between the two could have devastating consequences for millions of people. The Suez Canal had significant military value at this time. Further complicating the situation in the Middle East, the state of Israel was created in 1948 out of the British colony of Palestine. For Arab nations like Egypt, the creation of a Jewish state felt like an invasion of Arab land by outside powers. War between Israel on one side and Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan on the other over territorial claims lasted until 1949.

The United States supported the formation of an alliance of Middle Eastern nations to counter the Soviet Union. This agreement between Great Britain, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Iraq was known as the Baghdad Pact, which was formed in 1955. Not all Middle Eastern countries approved of the Baghdad Pact. Egypt’s president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, criticized the pact and refused the offer for Egypt to join.

During the Cold War, Egyptian President Nasser’s primary goal was for Egypt to be as independent as possible. In 1954, Egypt pushed for complete independence from Great Britain and expelled all British

military personnel. Nasser did not want Egypt to align itself with either the U.S. or the Soviet Union. Egypt tried to maintain equal relations with both sides. Egypt sought the United States's and Great Britain's help to pay for the construction of the Aswan Dam. The dam was designed to help control the Nile River's flood waters. It also provided electricity and water for irrigation and personal use. President Nasser also built Egypt's relationships with Communist nations. He acquired military weapons and materials from Communist Czechoslovakia and officially recognized Communist China. The United States viewed these actions as supporting the goals of the Soviet Union. The United States and Great Britain responded by refusing to help pay for the Aswan Dam.

On July 26, 1956, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company. This meant that the Suez Canal would be controlled by the government of Egypt. The action led to a global conflict as several countries announced their support for Egypt on one side or France and Great Britain on the other. The conflict strained relations between the United States and two primary Cold War allies, Great Britain and France, and threatened to escalate into a larger conflict with the Soviet Union.

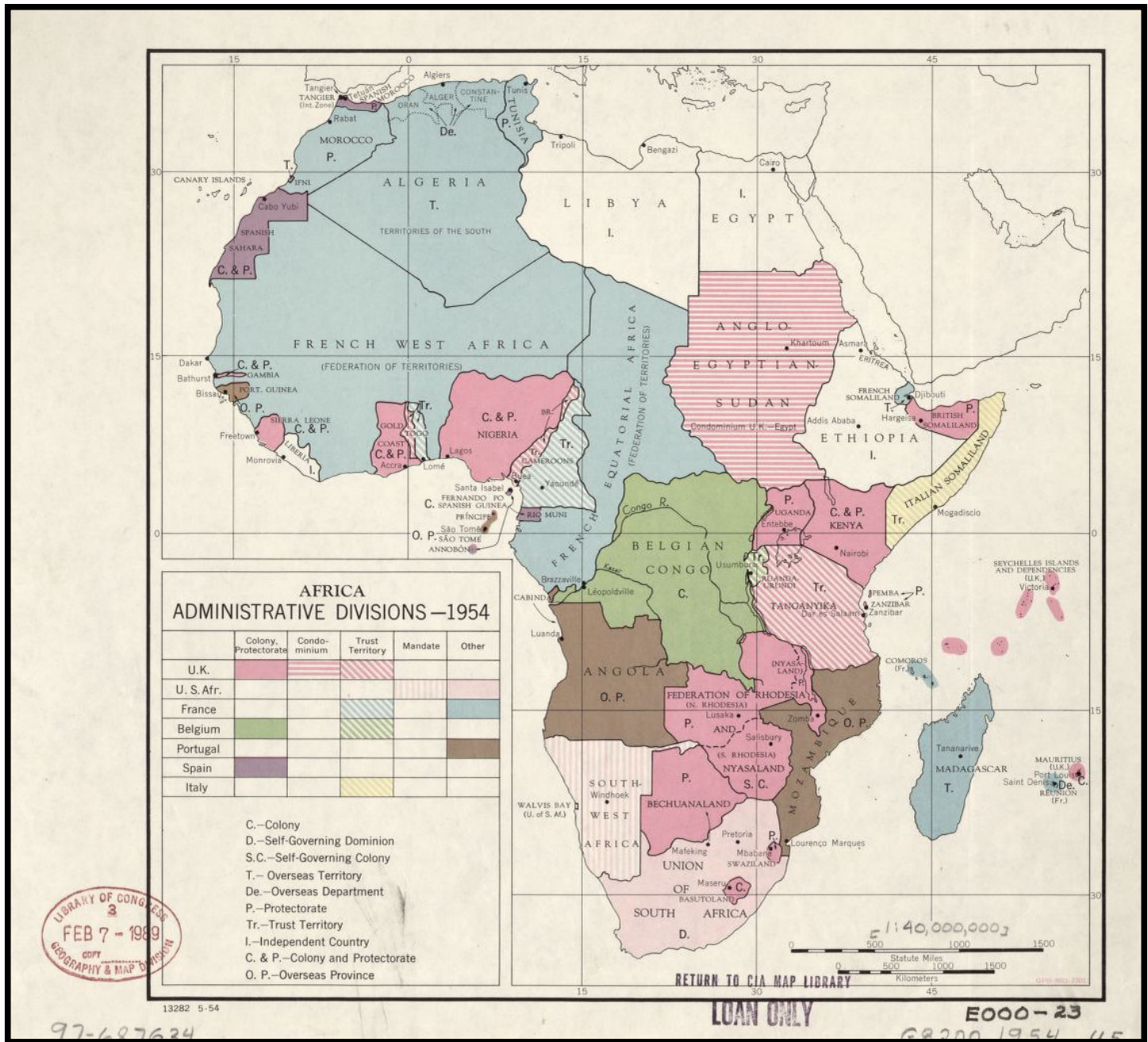
The global community feared the outbreak of hostilities would only serve to destabilize a region of great economic and strategic value. There was also the fear that the conflict would expand to involve the two Cold War superpowers with Great Britain, France, and Israel on one side supported by the U.S. and Egypt on the other supported by the Soviet Union.

How can this crisis be solved? Nasser has just nationalized the canal and a meeting has been called. You will be assigned to a country group to try to work out a solution and avoid a war. Work with your group and negotiate with other country groups to achieve your country's goals.

### **Priorities to be considered by all country groups:**

- Decide to cede complete control of the Suez Canal to Egypt.
- Create a partnership with France, Great Britain, Israel and Egypt that offers all an equal stake and control of the canal.
- Grant Egypt managing authority of the canal, and give all other stakeholders the opportunity to use the canal for the commercial purposes of their nation and their nation's businesses only.
- Pursue a joint partnership of the United States, Great Britain, and France with Egypt to control the canal, provided that the three Western nations agree to fund the construction of Egypt's Aswan Dam.





## Political Map of Africa

United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Africa, Administrative Divisions, 1954*, 1:40,000,000 scale, 24 x 24 cm, Library of Congress, Map Collections, <https://www.loc.gov/item/97687634/>.



## Sinai Peninsula

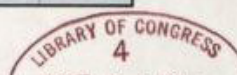
United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Egypt, Sinai Peninsula*, 1988, 20 x 16 cm, Library of Congress, Map Collections, <https://www.loc.gov/item/91681412/>.

## Strait of Tiran



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## Strait of Tiran

United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Strait of Tiran*, 1983, 21 x 17 cm, Library of Congress, Map Collections, <https://locn.loc.gov/84692836>.





# STAKEHOLDERS



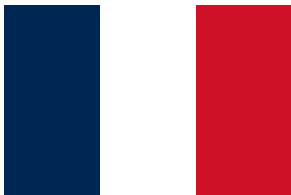
Egypt



Israel



Great Britain



France



Soviet Union



United States

## Forming Your Strategy

This worksheet will guide you in developing your country's position and strategy. Use it to list your priorities, goals, allies, and negotiation strategies.

### Goals

*What do you want to accomplish in the negotiations? Who has similar goals to you?*

### Interests

*What are your country's interests moving into negotiations?*

### Obstacles

*Who or what might be standing in the way of your country's goals?*

### Resources

*Who can help you get what you want? What can you offer to motivate others? What negotiation strategies can you use to sway others in your direction?*

## OPENING STATEMENT

## Drafting Your Opening Statement

Your country stakeholder group will deliver a minute-long opening statement at the start of the negotiation. The statement should introduce your team to the others, outline your goals, and offer a sense of what you would like to accomplish in the negotiation.

You do not have to share everything you want, or how you would like to achieve it. It is fine to hold information back, and to keep secrets within your team.

Write the points you would like to make in your opening statement:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Mid-Negotiation Strategy Worksheet

**1** What new information did you learn in the first round of negotiations?

**2** How does this new information change your group's interests and priorities?

**3** What are your re-established or new priorities?

**4** What do you need to accomplish in the next round to advance your interests?



1. What did you learn?
2. What skills did you use?
3. What did you learn about diplomacy?
4. What did you learn about the work of diplomats?
5. What was challenging about the negotiation?
6. What was challenging about working within your team?
7. Did the simulation end as you thought it would?
8. Once you learned about how the crisis ultimately resolved, how did that compare to how the group played the simulation?
9. What insights did this experience give you about how diplomacy has shaped history?
10. Would you consider becoming a diplomat after this experience?

Located at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C., the National Museum of American Diplomacy is a public-private partnership between the State Department and the Diplomacy Center Foundation. NMAD's education program connects high school and college students with the world of American diplomacy, increasing their understanding of the skills, practices, and language of diplomats. Through simulations, online resources, and the museum's annual Educator's Workshop, NMAD inspires involvement in foreign affairs and citizen diplomacy.





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The cover photograph is owned by AP Images and was edited for use in this publication. Image shows the sunken Egyptian dredger, *Pollux*, which was used as a blockship in the Port of Said. This publication was designed by Tiina Ojala.

Diplomacy Simulations are developed and presented by NMAD as an integral component of the museum's education offerings. This document and all associated materials are intended exclusively for educational use.