

The suez crisis essay sample



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The Suez Crisis was certainly one of the more major turning points in Britain's relationship with her Empire as it led her to realise just how isolated she was, and that although she had her Empire, she did not have any actual allies. It also effectively led to the eventual decolonisation of all her African colonies.

Just before the First World War, Britain's temporary protectorate over Egypt was still in place, even though it should have been removed many years before. The Suez Canal was still of considerable importance to Britain, as trade in that area remained to prosper. When World War 1 started, Britain established a martial law in Egypt, which was not at all popular with the Egyptians, who felt that Egypt had now become the "barracks of the British Empire". This was especially due to the curfews they had placed upon them and the huge amount of forces in Masupertania in particular. So, Britain's relationship with her Empire in Africa was slowly deteriorating from this point onwards.

After WW1, in 1922, Britain had to grant Egypt quasi independence, but in return, the Egyptians agreed that Britain could still controlled their foreign policy and the Suez Canal area. During this inter-war period, Britain's relationship with India was suffering, and trade from that area was decreasing rapidly. Since the Suez Canal was the main trade route from India to Britain, it was no longer so important economically, but retained its military and strategic importance, especially in the lead up to World War 2.

During WW2, the Suez Canal Zone became hugely important, as it became the base of all operations in the Middle East. This provoked some Arab

resentment, and for an Arab league to form to establish a stronger position for themselves. The fact that the British were using African resources and people in the war for their own benefit with little in return also caused some hostility. After the war, in 1954, Nasser, a great nationalist who was hugely popular in Egypt, became the leader of Egypt. Having a nationalist leader obviously fuelled Arab nationalism. This nationalism grew after, in 1954, Nasser signed a treaty with the British in which the British promised to remove their troops from the Canal Zone within the next 2 years, but would still come back and protect it if it ever came under threat. Nasser presented this agreement to the Egyptians as a great victory, as Britain had had to make a concession according to Nasser's terms.

Nasser decided to militarise Egypt, and bought weapons from Czechoslovakia, which the British (and America) saw as trading with the Communist bloc. Then, in 1955, Egypt formally recognised communist China. The following year, the Americans withdrew their funding for the Aswan Dam, which they had agreed to on the condition that Nasser behaved himself. This caused Nasser to announce in the summer of that year that he was planning to nationalise the Suez Canal. This provoked chaos, and Britain, France and Israel decided to sign the Treaty of Sevres, in which they all agreed that Israel would stage an attack on the Suez Canal, and that Britain and France would come in and 'protect' it, as they were allowed to in the previous agreement with Nasser. This was disastrous for Britain as the United States withdrew all financial agreements with Britain, and publicly showed their disapproval of Britain's way of dealing with the crisis.

The Suez Crisis was a turning point in that essentially, it told Britain something she should have realised in 1945, following WW2 – that she was no longer a big power any more and that from now on, she had to seek America's approval if she wanted to do anything. The crisis left Britain feeling very isolated, and wanting to make more alliances in the world. The crisis also made Nasser out to be a 'king of Arab nationalism', but it also provoked more instability in the Middle East. The crisis didn't affect West Africa, but undoubtedly changed attitudes towards Empire within the Empire itself, and encouraged much nationalism in other African colonies. The British people now were no longer hugely interested in Empire after this, as they realised that they needed to concentrate more on their own country than other far off colonies. The crisis also contributed to the UN resolution of 1960 which stated that countries should give up their colonies sooner rather than later, which pushed the French and Belgians to withdraw from their colonies, and this too put pressure on the British to leave.