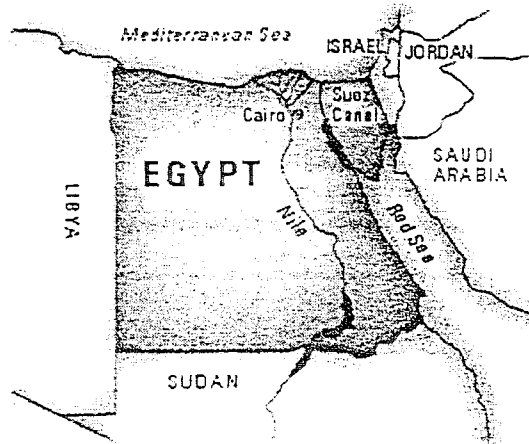


# CANADA AS A PEACE KEEPER

The Politician

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## The Suez Crisis

On July 26, 1956, the Egyptian President, Gamal Abder Nasser, nationalised the Suez Canal which, at the time, was owned by the Franco-British Suez Canal Company. The nationalisation of

this seaway between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea was ill-received by certain western countries, and most particularly by France and Great Britain, who considered it to be a direct blow to their international trade.

Aware of the strategic and economic importance of the canal, France, Great Britain and Israel came to a secret agreement under the terms of which Israel would attack Egypt, and the other two countries would then intervene on the pretext that they were safeguarding the canal.

According to plan, the attack took place on October 29, 1956. Israeli paratroopers were dropped 40 km away from the canal, and the next day the Franco-British coalition sent an ultimatum to both Egypt and Israel, calling for a cease-fire and demanding that they withdraw to a distance of 16 km from the canal. When Egypt refused to comply, France and Great Britain took direct action: on October 31, they bombarded Egyptian airfields. The Middle East was set to explode and there seemed to be a serious threat of a Third World War.



Lester B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, Addressing the UN General Assembly  
National Archives of Canada, C-14706



Canadian Members of the UN Peace Force Arriving in Egypt  
Reference: Parks Canada

Privately, St. Laurent was extremely upset by this military intervention which, amongst other things,

seemed likely to break up the Commonwealth. He had no hesitation in condemning the steps taken by the belligerents. The Canadian government's response, though moderate and conciliatory, given the circumstances, surprised Great Britain, which had hoped for Canadian backing at this point.

St. Laurent then asked his Secretary of State for External Affairs, Lester B. Pearson, to solve the crisis. Behind the scenes, a great number of strings began to be pulled. On November 4, Pearson, assisted by his UN colleagues, suggested sending an international force to supervise the cessation of fighting. This force, which would include Canada, would be under Canadian command. The General Assembly of the United Nations accepted this proposal, as did the belligerents, who were coming under pressure from the international community, especially from the United States and the USSR.

Around mid-November, the emergency task troops arrived in the Suez Canal Zone. A few days later, the occupying troops began to move out, and negotiations started with a view to ending the crisis.

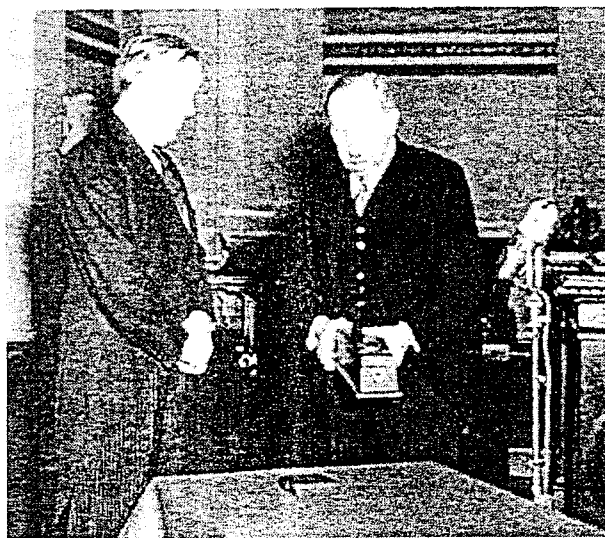
Although Pearson was congratulated on his action by representatives from other countries, and in particular by the United Kingdom, a pro-British segment of the English-Canadian electorate was highly indignant. They believed that Canada should have shown more support for Great Britain, arguing that

Britain's actions had been taken to preserve its honour and position in the world economy. This "reasonable act" was probably one reason for the defeat of the Liberals in the general elections of 1957.

As for Pearson, he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957, for his action during the crisis.

## Lester B. Pearson & The United Nations As Peacekeepers Planting Seeds For World Peace

From Cyprus or the Congo in the 1960s to Yugoslavia or Somalia or Rwanda in the 1990s, Canadians have shared widely in the peacekeeping work of the United Nations. In fact, UN peacekeeping forces are very much the product of a Canadian initiative taken by Lester B. Pearson, then Canada's Minister for External Affairs, during the Suez Canal crisis of 1956. Pearson had been president, in 1952, of the United Nations General Assembly and later became Canada's Prime Minister (1963-1968).



This historic view portrays Lester B. Pearson, Canada's Minister of External Affairs (and future Prime Minister, 1963-68), receiving the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize, in Norway, from Gunnar Jahn, Chairman, Nobel Committee (1942-66) [NAC/PA 114544]

In October 1956, Israeli troops backed by Britain and France attacked the key Suez Canal area, which Egypt had earlier seized. Faced with a situation that threatened to disrupt the alliance of Western powers — or even lead to world war — Pearson proposed a United Nations Emergency Force to stabilize the danger zone and offered Canadian troops to serve in such a collective force. Working through its secretary-general, Dag Hammarskjold, he succeeded in getting the UN to adopt his bold proposal. The UNEF thus quickly came into being under the command of Canadian General Eedson L.M. Burns; a Canadian contingent was a permanent inclusion. Despite difficulties, this UN Force succeeded in restoring order. Pearson, for his efforts, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957. Above all, a major instrument had been added to the UN's global operations, one for which Canada, today, deserves a large portion of the credit.

Still, the Canadian idea for peacekeeping grew quite naturally out of Canada's own role in the United Nations established in 1945. This was a world body with which Pearson, as a top Canadian diplomat, had close links from the beginning. Neither great nor a small power — it was small in population but large in size and production — Canada behaved as a responsible, influential middle power by actively supporting the UN in promoting collective security around the globe. Thus from the start Canada entered into joint efforts to calm world trouble spots. For example, it sent officers as part of military observer groups to supervise ceasefire lines in 1948 in both Kashmir and India, and from 1953 on, along the Arab-Israeli borders. But these were small observer groups, not substantial forces able to maintain order. Thus the real development of UN peacekeeping came after the sizable commitment made at Suez.

Canadian units, from 1964 on, would spend close to three decades in keeping the peace between Turkish and Greek Cypriots on a bitterly divided island. More recently they have faced bombardment and bloodshed in Bosnia or Somalia or Rwanda — and the widespread list goes on. Nonetheless, Canada can be proud of the idea put forward by Lester ("Mike") Pearson that has so clearly expressed Canada's commitment to the cause of peace.

#### Questions

1. What did Nassar do to upset the western world?
2. Why were Britain and France particularly angry?
3. What 4 countries were fighting?
4. What was St. Laurent's reaction to the crisis? How was this decision not typically Canadian? How did this decision cost him in the long run?
5. Which two powerful countries were making the situation worse through political pressure? Why is this important?
6. What was Pearson's Solution to the problem? What did he receive?
7. Name 6 places where Canadian Peacekeepers have served?
8. What is a middle power? Why is Canada considered a middle power?

Canada as a Peace Keeper - Questions

a. What is the Suez Canal? Why is it important?


b. What did Nassar do to upset the Western world?


c. Why were Britain and France particularly angry?


d. What four countries were fighting?

Country #1: \_\_\_\_\_ Country #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Country #3: \_\_\_\_\_ Country #4: \_\_\_\_\_

e. How did Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent privately feel about the crisis?


f. Who did St. Laurent ask to solve the Suez Canal crisis?

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g. What did Pearson do on November 4, 1956?


h. Why were St. Laurent's actions considered "treasonable" by some Canadians?


i. What award did Pearson win for his actions during the Suez Canal Crisis?

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