

Hinkley (Jan)

42



THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

PRIME MINISTER

SPOTLIGHT ON

...ute of yesterday's date
...ion in connection with the

2. While your assurance that, if the necessity should arise, the Cabinet as a whole will be asked to take "the final decision", I do hope that we shall be consulted as soon as possible about the broad lines of the military plan which is

Prime Minister's Office: Suez Crisis

...reasons, knowledge the operational plan must be kept in a small circle. On the otherhand, the territorial objective of the operation, the manner of initiating it, and, above all, the grounds on which we should justify it to the world, are obviously matters of major political importance.

4. The choice of the right moment to consult the Cabinet is naturally a matter for your decision; but I hope that you will take us into your confidence before it is too late for any views we may have to be taken into account.

D.S.

Key Stages 3-5 | Postwar 1945-present

Video resource

... 1956.

PREM: Suez Crisis correspondence, 1956

We hope you enjoyed watching our Education Service video with Contemporary Records Specialist Mark Dunton looking at twentieth century records from the Prime Minister's Office relating to the start of the Suez Crisis in 1956.

Egyptian President Nasser announced the nationalisation, or taking into public control, of the Suez Canal Company on July 26, 1956. The Suez Canal had been built and operated by the British and French since 1869. It connected the Mediterranean and Red Sea. Europe depended on the canal for shipping oil from the Middle East and Britain as a route to their former empire in the East. The nationalisation was Egypt's response to the USA's decision to withdraw funding for the new Aswan Dam across the Nile. However, Arab nationalism was an important factor in the decision – control of the canal would reduce western influence and benefit Egypt's economy. Find out more about the context and events that followed.

[Watch video](#)¹

[Read video transcript](#)²

¹ <https://youtu.be/Lncuj3zAOEk>

² <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/students/videos/spotlight-on/spotlight-on-suez-crisis/spotlight-on-suez-crisis-video-transcript/>

Suitable for:

KS 3-5

Time period:

Postwar 1945-present

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Tasks

Watch the video then try and answer the following questions:

- What is the role of the Prime Minister's Office?
- When was it formed?
- What type of sources can we find in the PREM collections?
- How do these collections compare to the Cabinet office records?
- What do the PREM records reveal about the role of the Prime Minister?
- What makes PREM collections valuable for historians?
- What does the file in this video reveal about the British government's reaction to the Suez crisis?

Source 1: Extract from a draft minute from Prime Minister Anthony Eden (written by Cabinet Secretary, Norman Brooke) to Duncan Sandys, Minister of Housing and Local Government, 1956.

Catalogue ref: PREM 11/1125

Sandys had commented on the lack of information made to the wider Cabinet on the question of using military force in reaction to President Nasser's decision to nationalise the canal.

It is our understanding that the comments written in red were written by an official, presumably dictated by the Prime Minister. The word 'omit?' in blue was written by Cabinet Secretary, Norman Brooke.

Tasks

Source 2: Letter from Duncan Sandys to Prime Minister Anthony Eden, 1956.

Catalogue ref: PREM 11/1125

Letter from Duncan Sandys to Prime Minister Anthony Eden in reply to the Prime Minister's minute about possible military action after Nasser's decision to nationalise the Suez Canal.

Duncan Sandys (pronounced Sands) was first elected to the House of Commons in 1935. He returned to the House of Commons when the Conservatives regained power in 1950 and became Minister of Supply in 1951 then later Minister of Housing and Local Government from 1954.

- Why do you think the letter is labelled 'Personal' and 'Top Secret'?
- Why has Sandys written to the Prime Minister?
- What hope does he express in the final paragraph of the letter?
- What is the significance of this letter?
- What does this source reveal about the value of the PREM collection to historians of these events?
- What other sources could you explore relating to the Suez Crisis?

Tasks

Extension activity

Take a look at three other original sources available in the 1950s Britain themed collection of documents. What do these sources reveal about the Suez crisis?

- Article and illustration entitled: 'The Government are prepared to embark on a policy of abject appeasement: Sir Anthony Eden concluding his historic statement of policy on Suez' from The Illustrated London News, 22 September 1956, Catalogue ref: ZPER 34/208.
- An article and photograph from the News Chronicle dated 5 November 1956, Catalogue ref: FO 371/118922. The News Chronicle was a British daily newspaper which ceased publication in October 1960 being absorbed into the Daily Mail. This article forms part of a collection of material described by the Foreign Office as 'samples of propaganda being put out by the Egyptians.'
- Extract from a report dated 11 October 1957 by General Charles Keightley on Suez operations in the Eastern Mediterranean, November-December 1956 Catalogue ref: AIR 8/1940

Source 1: Extract from a draft minute from Prime Minister Anthony Eden to Duncan Sandys, 1956. Catalogue Ref: PREM 11/1125

E.R. 46

Top Secret

DRAFT

MINISTER OF HOUSING *In view of the point you raised I feel I should explain to you*

I should like you to be clear, before the next meeting of the Cabinet, about the limits within which the Cabinet can discuss the possibility of a military operation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Up to now the Cabinet have considered this only as a hypothetical question, viz., should we be prepared to take this course in the last resort if all attempts to achieve a satisfactory settlement by other means had failed. If that situation should arise, the Cabinet as a whole will of course be asked to take, in the light of all the circumstances at the time, the final decision whether we should seek to impose a settlement by force. *me*

meant for the Cabinet to meet from time to time, since Parliament rose, so that my colleagues might be kept informed of the progress of the international conference.

It would not, however, be possible for the Cabinet as a whole to discuss the plans for any military operations that might have to be undertaken. Knowledge of these details must, for obvious reasons of security, be confined within the narrowest possible circle. [I could not widen that circle, even if I wished to do so, without breach of the security plan which we have agreed with the French Government.] Such political guidance as the military authorities may need in the preparation of their plans must continue to be given by me, in consultation with a small number of my most senior Cabinet colleagues and, as necessary, such Departmental Ministers as may be directly concerned.

? omit.

AUGUST, 1956.

Source 1: Transcript

E.R.

Personal (Blue text)

Go to [Private Secretary] (Red text)

*In view of the point, you raised with me, I feel I should explain to you (Red text)

DRAFT

MINISTER OF HOUSING

*I should like you to be clear before the next meeting of the Cabinet, about the limits within which the Cabinet can discuss the possibility of military operation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Up to now the Cabinet have considered this only as a hypothetical question, viz., should we be prepared to take this course in the last resort if all attempts to achieve a satisfactory settlement by other means had failed. If that situation should arise, the Cabinet as a whole will of course be asked to take, (the final decision) in the light of all the circumstances at the time, whether we should seek to impose a settlement by force. With this view I have arranged (meanwhile) for the Cabinet to meet from time to time, since Parliament rose, so that my colleagues might be kept informed of the progress of the international conference.

It would not, however, be possible for the Cabinet as a whole to discuss the plans for any military operations that might have to be undertaken. Knowledge of these details must, for obvious reasons of security, be confined within the narrowest possible circle. [I could not the circle, even if I wished to do so, without breach of the security plan which we have agreed with the French Government.]** Such political guidance as the military authorities may need in the preparation of their plans must continue to be given by me, in consultation with a small number of my most senior Cabinet colleagues and, as necessary, such Departmental Ministers as may be directly concerned.

** Omit? [Norman Brooke's suggested deletion in blue ink]

AUGUST 1956

Source 2: Letter from Duncan Sandys to Prime Minister Anthony Eden 1956. Catalogue Ref: PREM 11/1125



H. Minister (Gen)

42

PERSONAL

TOP SECRET

PRIME MINISTER

Thank you for your Minute of yesterday's date about possible military action in connection with the Suez crisis.

2. Whilst I appreciate your assurance that, if the necessity to use force should arise, the Cabinet as a whole will be asked to take "the final decision", I do hope that we shall be consulted as soon as possible about the broad lines of the military plan which is being prepared.

3. I recognise that, for security reasons, knowledge of the details of the operational plan must be kept within a restricted circle. On the otherhand, the extent of the territorial objective of the operation, the manner of initiating it, and, above all, the grounds on which we should justify it to the world, are obviously matters of major political importance.

4. The choice of the right moment to consult the Cabinet is naturally a matter for your decision; but I hope that you will take us into your confidence before it is too late for any views we may have to be taken into account.

D.S.

23rd August, 1956.

Source 2: Transcript

PERSONAL

TOP SECRET

PRIME MINISTER

Thank you for your Minute of yesterday's date about the possible military action in connection with the Suez crisis.

Whilst I appreciate your assurance that, if the necessity to use force should arise, the Cabinet as a whole will be asked to take 'the final decision', I do hope that we shall be consulted as soon as possible about the broad lines of the military plan which is being prepared.

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4. The choice of the right moment to consult the Cabinet is naturally a matter for your decision; but I hope that you will take us into your confidence before it is too late for any views we may have to be taken into account.

D.S. [Duncan Sands]

23rd August, 1956

Connections to Curriculum

Key stage 3

Challenges for Britain, Europe, and the wider world 1901 to the present day;
Britain's place in the world since 1945.

Key stage 4

Edexcel GCSE: Conflict in the Middle East, 1945–95: The events and significance of the Suez Crisis (1956)

Key stage 5

AQA GCE British Political History: The Making of Modern Britain, 1951–2007. Foreign relations: Suez.

OCR GCE Britain 1951–1997: Conservative domination 1951–1964: Eden; Britain's position in the world 1951–1997: Suez

The Middle East 1908–2011: Ottomans to Arab Spring : Nasserism 1952–1970: relations with Britain, France, the US and the USSR; the Suez Crisis 1956.



Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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