



## PEACEKEEPING AND PEACEMAKING: THE SUEZ CRISIS

The Suez Crisis – the birth of “traditional peacekeeping” and Canada’s emerging identity

### Character Education

- Differentiate among different types of conflict resolution
- Compare the emerging identity of nations and individuals
- Evaluate the personal attributes needed to work through conflict

### Facts

- Soldiers from Brazil, Canada, Columbia, Denmark, Finland, India, Indonesia, Norway, Poland Sweden and Yugoslavia formed the first ever United Nations Emergency Force, UNEF in 1956
- Canadian General E.M.L Burns commanded the 6,000 international UNEF soldiers who were in Egypt by February 1957
- Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, Lester Pearson was awarded the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize for trailblazing work in peacekeeping during the Suez Crisis

### Before the Reading

- List different ways you’ve noticed conflicts resolved peacefully in your personal life, either in your family, school or community. (Compromise? Talking? What works?)
- What part do respect and fear play in peacemaking?
- What have been the most significant world crises during your lifetime?

### Reading

In 1956 the world teetered once again on the brink of war. Great Britain, France and Israel had attacked Egypt when Egypt’s President Nasser declared he would nationalize the Suez Canal. The WWII western alliance was torn apart as the US opposed invasion as a means of dealing with the crisis. Great Britain expected Canada to join in on its side and was mightily surprised when Canadian

### PEACEKEEPING AND PEACEMAKING MINUTES

#### The slight that led to Canada’s flag



*The Canadian Red Ensign, the national flag of Canada from 1957 to 1965  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Canadian\\_Red\\_Ensign.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Canadian_Red_Ensign.svg)*

During the Suez Crisis Egyptian President Nasser objected to Canadian troops for the UNEF peacekeeping force. Not only did Canada’s flag, the Red Ensign, have a British Union Jack in the corner, but also some battalions wore British-looking uniforms. The similarities played upon Egyptian concerns of Canadian neutrality. According to Canadian historian Jack Granatstein, “It required extraordinary efforts by General Burns, (UN Secretary General) Dag Hammarskjold, and the Canadian Ambassador in Cairo, Herbert Norman, to persuade the Egyptians to allow Canada to contribute not the 1(st Battalion) Queen’s Own Rifles but the logistical support UNEF needed to function.”

Prime Minister St. Laurent sent a letter of regret. Canadians did not wish to offend Great Britain and France but they also did not wish to alienate their American neighbours.

Three invading armies had already struck into the heart of Egypt when Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, Lester B. Pearson, was given the confidence of the P.M. and cabinet to try to work out a solution to the escalating crisis through the UN. He had the behind the scenes support of the US who was putting economic pressure on Great Britain to withdraw from Egypt.

Pearson proposed a "peace and police" force commanded by a Chief Officer appointed by the UN and responsible to that body. The United Nations Emergency Force, UNEF, would separate the Egyptian Army and the invading forces and supervise the withdrawal of the three foreign armies. It was solely to maintain quiet during and after the withdrawal; it had no mandate to engage in military actions.

In an emergency session of the United Nations General Assembly, with the support of UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld and in a hot house atmosphere that included nuclear threats from the Soviets, Pearson gathered approval for UNEF.1. The international force of peacekeepers landed in Egypt just weeks after UNEF received UN approval.

President Nasser pre-approved the UNEF force that entered Egypt but at first objected to the Canadian troops on the grounds that the Canadian flag at that time included a British Union Jack. He was in fact challenging Canada's neutrality in relationship to Great Britain (one of the aggressors). After some persuading Canada was able to dispatch 300 logistics soldiers and by December 1956 over 1,000 troops followed (1/6 of the entire force).

Under the leadership of Canadian General E.M.I. "Tommy" Burns, who the UN appointed as the Chief Officer, UNEF oversaw the withdrawal of the three foreign armies while the UN and Egypt continued to debate the fate of the Suez Canal.

Pearson's concept of a creating a neutral army controlled by the UN and used to separate opposing forces set the standard for future peacekeeping, it earned Lester B. Pearson the Nobel Peace Prize and it established Canadians' perceptions of their country as a peacekeeping nation.

Canada's leadership and army had the world's eyes fixed upon them during a tense time during the Cold War and both acquitted themselves very well.

The slight stuck with External Affairs Minister Lester Pearson. When he entered Canadian politics his goal was to have an unmistakably Canadian flag. However, even when Pearson became Prime Minister, the path to that distinctive flag was rocky. The Red Ensign was the flag that Canadian troops had carried into the battles of WWII. John Diefenbaker, head of the Opposition, led the charge for its retention.

An extensive 1958 poll of Canadian adults showed 80% wanted a national flag entirely different from that of any other nation; 60% wanted that distinctive flag to include a maple leaf. The debates raged on inside and outside parliament until a new flag committee in September 1964 looked at 3,541 designs to decide finally upon the version that now represents Canada. The decision was ratified by parliament after debate, filibuster and closure.

Queen Elizabeth signed a Royal Proclamation for Canada's Red Maple Leaf Flag in January 1965 when both Prime Minister Pearson and Leader of the Opposition Diefenbaker were in London attending the funeral of Sir Winston Churchill.

It was the end of an era and the beginning of another.

*Canadians raise first official flag*  
[http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/language\\_culture/topics/80/](http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/language_culture/topics/80/)  
*Proclamation*  
<http://data2.collectionscanada.gc.ca/ap/c/c135374.jpg>

## After the Reading

- What does Canada's diplomatic and peacekeeping involvement in the Suez Crisis reflect about a growing Canadian sense of identity?
- Lester Pearson is hailed as the father of peacekeeping for his actions during the Suez Crisis but who else mentioned in this Reading deserves some credit?
- What conflict resolution strategies are found in this Reading? (Think of your discussions from Before the Reading being put into practice in this international crisis.)

## Extensions

- In which ways is the conflict resolution during the Suez Crisis the same and yet different from what happened in Korea?
- Saying "NO" is a teenage testing of authority that is part of the development of identity. Canada had tested authority before the Suez Crisis and did so afterwards. Research to what situation/conflict Prime Ministers

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Officers of the Canadian Corps of Guides, Cobourg, Ont., 1906. A young "soldier," Burns (centre row, fourth from left) proudly poses in his diminutive uniform and sword beside his father (on right #8) Capt. G.E. Burns. | [www.cda-acd.forces.gc.ca/cfli-iltc/doc/NeitherArtNorScience-eng.pdf](http://www.cda-acd.forces.gc.ca/cfli-iltc/doc/NeitherArtNorScience-eng.pdf) | Burns, E.L.M. / Library and Archives Canada / PA-113014

### Lieutenant General E.L.M. Burns takes charge: the United Nation's first ever UNEF commander

Eedson Louis Millard Burns, born in Montreal, educated at the Royal Military College of Canada and buried in Kingston, Ontario was the man for the crisis, The Suez Crisis. In 1956 as the world sat in front of black and white television screens and listened to transistor

radios wondering how the dangerously mounting international situation would unfold, UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold and Canada's Lester B. Pearson were already talking about the military commander needed to step onto the world stage.

With Hammarskjold's support Canada put in the call to "Tommy" Burns, the Canadian General already in the Middle East as the Chief of Staff of UNTSO, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization. He was there supervising the General Armistice Agreements of 1948.

Burns had earned the Military Cross for personal bravery as a military engineer in the Somme during 1916-18. He served as Commander of the First Canadian Armoured Brigade and First Canadian Corps at various points of the Italian campaign of WWII. He was president of the Ottawa Branch of the United Nations Association in 1947-48 and worked at Veterans' Affairs as Deputy Minister from 1950-54.

Burns had all the credentials. Was he up to the task of heading a multinational force during a delicate political crisis that threatened world peace?

Research how General Burns did it!!

The controversial Canadian General left a broad trail on the internet.

<http://www.junobeach.org/e/3/can-pep-can-burns-e.htm>

Macdonald, King, and Chretien said "No"

- Canadian poet Earl Birney wrote the poem "Canada: Case History: 1945" It talks about Canada being a "high school land." What events in history made Canada grow up?

### Sources

- Anderson, Antony "Lester Pearson and the Suez Crisis" [www.suezcrisis.ca](http://www.suezcrisis.ca) Toronto, 2007
- Burns, E.L.M. *Between Arab and Israeli*, London, George G. Harrap, 1962
- Granatstein, Jack *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002

### Audio Visual Clips

- Pearson wins Nobel Peace Prize  
[http://archives.cbc.ca/war\\_conflict/peacekeeping/clips/1849/](http://archives.cbc.ca/war_conflict/peacekeeping/clips/1849/)
- Canadians raise first official flag  
[http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/language\\_culture/topics/80/](http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/language_culture/topics/80/)

<sup>1</sup> The vote for Pearson's UNEF proposal was 57 for, 0 against and 19 abstentions