

# Egypt

Enquiry: Did tensions over Africa make a European war more likely?

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Egypt is a country in the North-East of Africa, and it was a source of tension between Britain and France. The French had been in control of another North African country, Algeria, since before the Scramble for Africa. As a result the French wanted to spread their influence into Egypt. In the 1850s the French started discussions with the leader of Egypt and Sudan, Isma'il Pasha, about building a **trade route** through Egypt. At first, the British opposed it and criticised the French being involved in the project. In 1869 the project was finished, and a route, named the **Suez Canal**, was opened under French control. It was an extremely valuable trading route.



After initially criticising the project, the British realised that the Suez Canal would also be valuable to them. Britain's biggest **colony** at this time was India, and they made huge amounts of money from trade with them. The Suez Canal was a much quicker route for British steamships to get to India. Therefore, when the Egyptian leader Pasha had some financial problems in the 1870s, the British began to get involved. In 1875, Pasha was in severe financial trouble and was forced to sell his **shares** in the Suez Canal. By this time Britain had realised how valuable it was and bought the shares. This now meant that the British and French were in joint control of the canal. This joint-ownership then caused tension over which country had the most influence. Lord Salisbury (a future Prime Minister), famously said that sharing the canal with the French was the only option which would avoid war.



British and French involvement in Egypt became stronger when Egypt's leader, Pasha, ran into further financial difficulties. Britain and France took joint financial control of the country while Isma'il Pasha was forced to **abdicate**. The British and French supervised the rule of his eldest son Tewfik Pasha – but were still in competition for influence. This did not solve the problem, and there were revolts against Tewfik in both Egypt and in Sudan. These revolts led Tewfik to ask the British for help. As a result of this, in 1882 Britain took political control of Egypt in order to protect their access to the Suez Canal. This increased the tension and rivalry between Britain and France. It is also believed that this action by the British caused lots of other European nations to seek political power in Africa. So, the British **occupation** of Egypt is thought of as one of the causes of the 'Scramble for Africa.'



Although Britain and France were **rivals** in Egypt, by the time the First World War began, they were **allies**. One of the reasons for this is that they were forced to make some agreements after almost going to war in North Africa. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the leader of Egypt also claimed to rule a neighbouring country, the Sudan. This meant that the British believed that their influence over Egypt extended to the Sudan. However, the French also wanted influence there. While the French wanted to expand their empire from West to East Africa, the British wanted to expand theirs from North to South. They crossed paths in the Sudan – and both tried to claim it for themselves! In 1898 their armies met in a small town called Fashoda, and it looked like they were going to go to war. Both nations began the process of getting ready for war before an agreement was reached. In 1899 they came to a **compromise** – France recognised British possession of Egypt and Sudan, while Britain recognised French influence in Morocco.



So, after years of tension over North Africa, Britain and France settled their differences. This new relationship was cemented in 1904 when Britain and France formed an alliance, known as the Entente Cordiale. They made a series of agreements which showed a significant improvement in their relationship. One of the reasons that they did this was because they didn't want to go to war with one another, but also because they were starting to be alarmed by the increasing power of Germany. Signing an alliance between them was a way of keeping Germany's power in check.



# Glossary

**Trade route:** A way through which goods can be carried to trade with other countries.

**Suez Canal:** A man-made trade route, which connected the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, via Egypt.

**Colony:** A country which is under control of another country. In this case, India was under control of the British.

**Shares:** A portion of something owned with others. In this case, Egypt and France both shared ownership of the Suez Canal, and then Britain bought shares from Egypt. This made them part owners.

**Rivals:** Those who are in competition with one another.

**Allies:** Those who work together.

**Compromise:** Coming to a shared agreement.



## Comprehension questions:

1. Where is Egypt located?
2. What did the French discuss with the Egyptian leader?
3. How did Britain's view on this project change over time?
4. What happened in 1882?
5. How did Britain and France's relationship change after 1882?
6. Why did Britain and France nearly go to war?
7. What did Britain and France do in 1904 and why?

Challenge: Describe how the relationship between Britain and France changed over time.

Sentence starter: At first, Britain and France's relationship was... For example...  
This changed however because... This meant that...



# Extension Question

**Use your knowledge from today's lesson to explain the message of the cartoon**

Use the sentence starters and key words below to help you

Sentence starters:	Key words
<i>The cartoon shows...</i>	Britain
<i>Details in the cartoon which tell me this are...</i>	France
<i>This might mean...</i>	Competing
<i>I know... which supports what it shows in the cartoon because...</i>	Fashoda
	Conflict

