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REPORT ON THE INJURIES SUSTAINED BY EGYPTIAN
PROPERTY AND NATIONALS IN RECENT OPERATIONS

A. INTRODUCTORY

1. At the invitation of Her Majesty's Government, I have undertaken a rapid investigation of the charges that Her Majesty's Forces, in the course of the recent hostilities in the Suez Canal Zone area, were guilty of barbarous and inhuman conduct. I thought it necessary to make an immediate visit to Port Said, which, being in Allied hands, was the only part of Egypt at the moment where it would be possible for me to make personal observations. During the 24 hours I was there I interviewed not only members of Her Majesty's Forces who had taken part in the operations, but also several prominent nationals of other countries, including Egyptians, who were available and willing to assist me.

2. I made a thorough tour of Port Said in a Land Rover, and also flew all over the city in a helicopter at a low altitude. By these means I was able to form a judgement for myself of the extent of the physical damage which had been sustained. The interviews mentioned in paragraph 1 above enabled me to supplement the information obtained from personal observation by verbal accounts from some of those who had taken part in the operations; from some of those who were present and had seen them; and from others who were in possession of authoritative information about them.

3. I submit the following report on the events before, on and after the 5th November, 1956 (the date on which parachute landings were made at Port Said) with particular reference to:-

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- (a) the nature of the operations undertaken;
- (b) the steps taken to limit the loss of life and damage to property of Egyptians and other nationals;
- (c) the extent to which these measures were successful;
- (d) the steps taken by Her Majesty's Forces to repair and rehabilitate the essential services in Port Said, and to restore the normal living conditions there; and the results achieved.

4. It is manifestly easier to ascertain the true facts about Port Said than about other areas in Egypt which have been subjected to air attack, but to which I have no means of access. My report is accordingly mainly confined to Port Said, although some reference is made to other areas.

B. THE NATURE OF OPERATIONS

5. On 30th October, 1956, after Israeli Forces had attacked Egypt, the U.K. and French Governments addressed communications to the Egyptian and Israeli Governments requiring both countries to withdraw their forces to lines ten miles on either side of the Suez Canal. The Governments were required to give their acceptance by 4.30 a.m. G.M.T. on 31st October.

6. Israel accepted but Egypt refused, and the Allied forces were ordered to take military action against Egypt.

7. The first phase of this action was designed to neutralise the Egyptian Air Force by bombing and by rocket attacks from low-flying ship-borne and land-based

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aircraft and to engage Egyptian naval forces wherever they might be found. If this action failed to induce Egypt to accept the Allied requirement, the second phase was the capture of Port Said by parachute troops; and then, if this failed to achieve the object, by landing troops over the beaches.

8. Medium level bombing attacks on four Egyptian airfields begun at 4.15 p.m. on 31st October. During the operations airfields at Almaza, Inchas, Abu Sueir, Kabrit, Kasfarest, Cairo West, Fayid and Bilbeis were attacked; an Egyptian destroyer was set on fire and four E-boats were attacked by naval aircraft; air attacks were made on Huckstep Camp Barracks, the Cairo radio transmitter at Abu Zabal on the edge of the desert 15 miles from Cairo, on marshalling yards near Ismalia, and on various other military targets.

9. At 5.15 a.m. on 5th November, 780 British parachutists were dropped on Gamil airfield to the east of Port Said. They were fired on by tanks, mortars and anti-aircraft guns, but no aircraft was shot down. French parachutists were dropped south of Port Said and were opposed by automatic weapons and mortars. In the afternoon more French parachutists were dropped on the south side of Port Fued where there was little fighting. The British and French who had landed near Port Said met considerable opposition as they moved towards the town, especially from defensive positions and strong-points (such as the police barracks) which had been established. The parachutists were armed only with; they had no armour or guns.

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10. In the course of the evening terms of surrender were discussed between the British and the Egyptian authorities and at 7.20 p.m. were reported to have been accepted. Egyptian loudspeaker vans toured the town, however, stating that Russian help was on the way, that London and Paris were being bombed and that the population must fight on. The surrender terms were then rejected and fighting was resumed at 8.30 p.m.

11. At 5.45 a.m. on 6th November two British Marine Commandos landed over the beaches of Port Said, supported by a squadron of the Royal Tank Regiment, and three French Commandos landed unopposed in Port Fuad. A little later a third Marine Commando was landed by helicopter. There was no opposition at first and the landings were watched by many people from balconies and elsewhere. Opposition then developed, and support from the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force and the Royal Tank Regiment was called for.

12. By this time operations against other parts of Egypt had been suspended.

C. THE PRECAUTIONS TAKEN TO AVOID DAMAGE AND CASUALTIES

13. I am fully satisfied that one of the main concerns of those who planned and took part in operations was to limit damage and loss to the lives and property of Egyptians and other nationals. Targets were strictly confined to military objectives, but it was decided whenever possible to issue detailed and repeated broadcast warnings to the local population in advance of the various stages of the operations. Although this increased the dangers to the Allied forces the risk was deliberately accepted. It is safe to say that in no military operation of its kind has greater care been taken to protect the lives and property of the local population.

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14. A warning to all civilians to keep away from military airfields was given before the first bombs were dropped, and was constantly repeated. Other warnings were issued at appropriate times to keep away from barracks, marshalling yards, guns, and other military objectives as they became due for attack. On the other hand, the people of Alexandria and of other towns were told on 3rd November that there was no intention of bombing in their district and that they would have a quiet day. Extracts from instructions issued before and during the operations and from the warnings broadcast to the local population are given in Appendix A.

15. The main evidence of the way in which the instructions to the British forces were carried out is to be found in Port Said, the only scene of operations at present available to us, and the main evidence of their success lies in the limited extent of the damage to the town, mentioned below. Other significant indications are

- (a) three squadrons of the Royal Tank Regiment took part in the fighting. One squadron fired only four rounds of shell fire and one fired six. Only the third, which was concerned in reducing the strongpoint at Navy House, expended any considerable number of shells.
- (b) Although the seaborne troops penetrating into the town in armoured vehicles were harassed by snipers firing from the windows of all floors in 5-storey buildings and grenades were dropped into the vehicles from these buildings, this fire was returned by small arms only not by the tanks.

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- (c) A British civilian resident, who was in the city throughout the operations and witnessed some of the fighting, paid tribute to the "patience and discretion" used by the British forces in replying to snipers, and to the "incredible accuracy" of the air attacks on military targets. The same resident described how bystanders on balconies and elsewhere watched the highly accurate bombing at quite close quarters.
- (d) Officers were instructed not to call for naval or air support unless their progress was completely blocked for lack of it. The R.M. Commandos, for example, deliberately refused offers of air support in order to limit damage. Indeed if air or naval support had been called for more frequently the town could have been reduced much more quickly.

D. DAMAGE TO PROPERTY, LOSS OF LIFE AND INJURIES

16. Damage to Property

Port Said

Port Said is the only place in which the damage to property can be inspected and a full assessment made. The damage can be divided into four classes :

- (a) The Arab quarter. This section of the town consists largely of crudely constructed wooden dwellings which are highly inflammable. Rocket launchers withdrew into the area on the afternoon of the seaborne landing and had to be attacked. The quarter took fire and burned rapidly in a strong north-westerly wind. One-fourth of the section was destroyed. This is the only large area of destruction in the town.

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(b) A number of buildings, or groups of buildings, that had been converted into strongpoints received heavy damage from rocket attacks which were remarkably accurate. These buildings included the police barracks, the Governorate, a group of flats south of the Governorate, and Navy House. They also included part of the British hospital, which was used as a strongpoint.

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(c) A large number of beach huts. This was the first line of buildings confronting the seaborne forces when they landed, and many contained stocks of ammunition. The huts were wooden and caught fire easily. Many others however were undamaged.

(d) Some other buildings received damage which was mainly superficial.

17. The vast majority of the buildings in the city were quite unharmed, as can be seen from the photographs. The fact that the damage is as small as it is in a city of the size of Port Said captured only after considerable opposition provides the strongest evidence of the great care that was taken by the Allied forces to minimise damage, and of the dangers to which they exposed themselves to this end.

18. Elsewhere

It is not possible to inspect the damage elsewhere as it is in Port Said. Photographs suggest, however, that the attacks on airfields etc. were as accurate as were the attacks on Port Said. The only known exception is a bomb directed at the transmitters of the Cairo radio station which is believed to have hit the civilian jail nearby and to have caused loss of life. This incident occurred after warning to keep away from the radio broadcasting stations of Cairo, Alexandria and Port Said.

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19. Injuries and Deaths

Whereas damage to property can be inspected and assessed, it is much more difficult to obtain an accurate estimate of the numbers wounded or killed. [A summary of evidence obtained in Port Said on 25th November is given in Appendix B. This shows a wide divergence of estimates and] I could not, within the limits imposed by the time and materials available to me, ascertain a really reliable figure of the actual numbers wounded and killed. As regards the wounded, I see no reason to question that about 190 casualties went to Cairo in the only hospital train that it was found necessary to provide. Nor have I reason to disbelieve the report that only about 150 still remained in hospital at the date of my visit. It is also clear that a considerable number must have received treatment in hospital and have been discharged to their homes. Accordingly the estimate of 540 given by our Military Authorities as the number of wounded is probably reasonably near the mark.

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20. It is more difficult to make any assessment of the numbers killed or died from wounds. Although a figure of the order of 540 wounded would lead one to expect a number of dead of the order of 100 as originally given, various statements made to me lead me to think it possible that this figure was considerably exceeded. As I have said, however, it was impossible in the time available to me to arrive at anything approaching a firm estimate. [The Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces, has now been requested to make a full enquiry with a view to arriving at as accurate a figure as possible.]

* This appendix is attached temporarily for the information of Ministers. It is not for quotation. /E.

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21. The damage caused by the operations would have been even less than it was but for four circumstances for which the Allied forces were not responsible :

- (a) The decision of the Egyptian authorities not to accept the terms of surrender on the evening of 5th November, although it was already apparent that it could be of no advantage to the defenders to hold out.
- (b) The use of beach huts, flats, houses, police stations and even a hospital for storing ammunition and weapons.
- (c) The indiscriminate issue of arms by the Egyptian authorities to the local civilian population, including women and boys aged 12 and upwards, before the operations began. This led to wild shooting and caused unnecessary damage to Egyptian lives and property.
- (d) The fact that many Egyptian soldiers exchanged their uniform for civilian clothing.

22. No substantial suggestions were made to me of serious looting by British Forces, although there may well have been some cases. There is no question but that there were incidents of looting by the Egyptians themselves. I was told by eye-witnesses of Egyptians carrying sacks and other materials from stores. On the 10th November goods valued at £10,000 which had been stolen by Egyptians were recovered by British Military Police from a damaged warehouse.

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F. RESTORATION OF NORMAL LIVING CONDITIONS IN PORT SAID

23. Full preparation was made in advance to restore normal living conditions in Port Said as quickly as possible. The problem of rehabilitation turned out to be less than had been expected and much of the preparation fortunately proved unnecessary. For example, supplies of both food and water which were ready to be taken into the town were not needed.

24. During the first few days of the occupation both water and electricity were short or completely cut off in some areas of the city, but both were rapidly restored and are now normal. Looting in the early days, for which the Egyptians themselves are believed to have been mainly responsible, discouraged the reopening of shops, and since order was restored an order from Cairo forbidding co-operation with the Allies has discouraged their reopening. Nevertheless, the cafes and many of the shops are now open.

25. The British forces supplied drugs and other requirements to the hospitals in the early days of the occupation. A number of civilian organisations have done good work in caring for the refugees, arranging accommodation for about 2,000 and feeding another 2,500.

26. Banks in the town were closed, but the Governor of Port Said had received ££124,000 from Cairo which enabled him to pay government and municipal employees. He did not wish to be beholden to the Allies for financial assistance and an offer by the British of 10 tons of fruit and vegetables had been refused.

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APPENDIX A

(a)

EXTRACTS FROM SIGNALS SHOWING INSTRUCTIONS DESIGNED
TO AVOID CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

Reference

- 31st October. "2. You are now authorised to attack Cairo West airfield from dawn 1st onwards by day and night taking every precaution to avoid casualties to road traffic on Cairo Alexandria Road."
- 31st October. "You are now authorised to destroy Egyptian Blockships. This operation is not (R) not to take place unless it can be carried out without any risk of damage to neutral shipping."
- 1st November. Attack on Cairo Radio.

Ministers are most anxious that you should endeavour to give some warning of your attack.
- 2nd November. You should avoid those targets where civilian casualties are inevitable and should issue the appropriate warnings.

(The above was part of a signal telling General Keightley to attack Army targets.)
- 5th November. For Hobbs from Powell.

We shall make a general Press release at 0630 G.M.T. "The Ministry of Defence announces that a warning is now being broadcast by the V.O.B. in Cyprus to the people of Port Said to ensure their safety."
Also broadcast by the B.B.C. in English and Arabic in the General Overseas Service.
- 5th November. "You know our wishes about minimum destruction and casualties. Please do everything possible in this respect."
- 3rd November. Paragraph 3. Every effort will be made to keep civilian casualties and damage to civilian property to a minimum.

Paragraph 7. I find balancing Egyptian against British lives a very difficult problem
- 3rd November. Paragraph 4. I urge then that warning should be given to Alexandria at 0600 hrs. G.M.T. on 5th Nov. and to Port Said and Suez at 1800 hrs. G.M.T. on 5th Nov.

Paragraph 5. The warning should be given out simultaneously on B.B.C. and Sharq.

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APPENDIX A (Continued).



Reference

3rd November. Our last light photographs and tactical recon today have given us hope for doing the assault without our full bombardment.

4th November. I have prepared a detailed warning for the people of Port Said which I propose to over Sharq at 0630 G.M.T. 5th November.

6th November. I confirm -
1. That there will be no air bombing.
2. Orders have been given to Task Force Commander that there will be no air action in populated areas and that damage to civilian life and property be kept to a minimum.

6th November. Paragraph 2. I foresee certain problems the main one being irregulars, civilians and children continuing to fire on our men and probable accusations of our having broken the cease fire.

7th November.we can no longer fight with the warnings and care for property which we have exercised so far. If we try to do so the war will be prolonged and our casualties high.

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WARNINGS BROADCAST TO LOCAL POPULATION

2nd November every 5 minutes from 9.40 a.m. to 10.50 a.m. G.M.T. "Important Announcement. Warning to all Egyptians. Keep away from Radio broadcasting stations of Cairo, Alexandria and Port Said. This is for your own safety."

3rd November. At 8 a.m. "Warning to all Egyptians. Avoid all marshalling yards and barracks. So far as we know at present we shall not be bombing targets west of the Rosetta branch of the Nile. As far as we can say, people living in such places as Tanta, Alexandria and Damamhur should have a quiet day today, and we will warn you of any change of plan."

At 2.30 p.m. "We promised the people of Tanta, Alexandria and Damamhur that they would not be bombed today and that we would tell them if there was a change of plan. We may have to carry out bombing attacks against military targets in this area west of the Rosetta branch of the Nile after dark."

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Appendix A (Continued)

Reference

5th November.
10.30 a.m.
G.M.T., and
every 5 mins.
thereafter
for one hour*

To the people of Port Said and Port Fuad

1. All those living North of Sharia Tawfiki and East of the Governorate should go at once to the South of Sharia Tawfiki and take refuge in houses.
2. All those living in Port Fuad to the East of Avenue No.6 should go at once to friends in the Western part of the town.
3. You are strongly advised in the interests of your own safety to stay there for three days or until we tell you that it is safe to return.
4. On no account try to leave the town. It is dangerous outside on the roads.
5. Keep off the streets.



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APPENDIX B.

EVIDENCE ON CASUALTIES

The estimate hitherto given by the local military authorities has been about 100 killed and 540 wounded. A summary of the evidence obtained from various persons in Port Said on 25th November is as follows :-

<u>Source</u>	<u>Estimate</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
Brig. Officer British DDMSL	250-300 died. Approx. 500 wounded.	
Brig. Butler. Commanding Parachute Brig.	About 130 soldiers and armed civilians killed by the Parachute Brigade in the fighting in the first 24 hours, and about 30 civilians killed inside houses during the same period. The number of bodies actually counted up to the edge of the Arab quarter was 80. The French claimed to have killed 60 persons or perhaps more during the same period, and to have counted 50 dead.	The general view was that the greater part of the damage and casualties had occurred after the first 24 hours of the operations.
Cdr. Gillette, American Naval Attache	1,000 dead 2,000 wounded	These were his own rough estimates based on conversations with Egyptian doctors who had said about 10 days previously that 500 deaths had been registered, and the fact that he had seen 100-150 bodies lying near the cemetery and that a number of bodies had also been thrown into the football stadium, and there were still odd ones to be seen round the city.
Mr. Thudikum Swiss Red Cross	2,000 killed	This was given to him as the probable figure of killed by the Swiss Consul, but it was only a rough estimate and the number might be only 1,000

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SECRETAPPENDIX B (Continued)

<u>Source</u>	<u>Estimate</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
The Italian Consul	Estimate of minimum number killed - 2,000. Estimate of maximum number killed - 8,000	The Consul said he had heard estimates of casualties running from 10,000 to 340,000. He admitted all the estimates he mentioned were based on rumour, not on counting, but he said he had seen hundreds of wounded. Out of the total Italian community numbering 1,700 there had been 4 casualties, 1 killed and 3 wounded.
The Director, General Government Hospital	About 600 casualties taken by the Hospital	The Director said about 700 killed or die from wounds had been buried by the Public Health Inspectorate. 135 casualties had gone from the Hospital to Cairo by the hospital train. About 150 remained in hospital.
2 Egyptian doctors, officials of the Public Health Dept.	714 killed	The doctors claimed this number as having been registered, and offered the records for inspection. A preliminary report of a British inspection has been received which says that only 100 of the 714 are identified, and suggests that the record is suspect. A fuller report is awaited.

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Cease-fire

Mr. Bevan argued yesterday that we had gone ahead with our landing at Port Said after both Egypt and Israel had agreed to cease fire and when there was only some doubt about the effectiveness of Israel's agreement. I suggest that the answer to this might follow the same general line as that taken in your speech but be set out in rather more detail.

2. The first Israeli communication dated November 3 stated "Israel agrees to an immediate cease-fire provided a similar answer is forthcoming from Egypt". The Note went on to set out a number of observations. These were not posed as conditions for agreeing to a cease-fire though they clearly imply that Israel was not at that time accepting the other requirement of the November 2 resolution, namely withdrawal behind the Armistice Lines.

3. The effect of this communication which, on the face of it, was a clear acceptance of a cease-fire, was completely changed by the next Israeli communication of November 4. This asked for clarification of five questions, the first of which read:

"Is there clear and unequivocal agreement on the part of the Government of Egypt to a cease-fire? The answer referred to in paragraph 4 of your /i.e. the Secretary-General's/ cable is obscure and does not indicate that that is the case. In the meanwhile Egyptian troops are continuing to fire and Fedayeen attacks continue. In clashes with Israeli security forces tonight four Fedayeen were killed and two apprehended".

The only possible interpretation of this passage is that it withdrew or at least suspended the offer to cease-fire of the previous day, pending further clarification from the Secretary-General.

4. This was the position when H.M.G. drew up their Note to the Secretary-General of November 5. This Note welcomed the idea of an international force and said:

"The two Governments continued to believe that it is necessary to interpose an international force to prevent the continuance of hostilities between Egypt and Israel, to secure the speedy withdrawal of Israeli forces, to take the necessary measures to remove obstructions and restore traffic through the Suez Canal, and to promote a settlement of the problems of the area."

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The note continued:

"Certain Anglo-French operations with strictly limited objectives are continuing. But as soon as the Israeli and Egyptian Governments signify acceptance of, and the United Nations endorses a plan for, an international force with the above functions, the two Governments will cease all military action."

5. The next development was the Secretary-General's Aide Memoire which reached the United Kingdom Delegation in New York in the afternoon of November 5 and was received in London at 2.25 a.m. on November 6. This stated that the Egyptian Government had accepted the request for a cease-fire without any attached conditions and that the Government of Israel "has now, in a clarification of its first reply to the request of the Secretary-General for a cease-fire, stated that in the light of Egypt's declaration of willingness to a cease-fire Israel confirms its readiness to agree to a cease-fire". This Aide Memoire was considered on the morning of November 6 and as a result we notified the Secretary-General that British troops would cease fire unless themselves attacked at midnight on November 6.

6. The general line of argument might therefore be summed up as follows. The Israeli offer to cease fire on November 3 was withdrawn or suspended by their Note of November 4. This was the position when our troops landed at dawn on November 5. As was stated in our Note of November 5, we also considered it essential that to prevent a resumption of hostilities and to secure the settlement of other problems, an international force should be interposed. A firm assurance that Israel as well as Egypt would accept an unconditional cease-fire was only forthcoming in the Secretary-General's Aide Memoire of November 5 which reached us in the early hours of November 6. In answer to this Aide Memoire we agreed to a cease-fire.

J. N. Laskey.
December 6, 1956

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