

B371/118980

Parliamentary Question

\* 78 Captain Waterhouse: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, why his department have officially approved the visit of General Sir Brian Robertson to Egypt for the celebrations following British evacuation.

4

Leicester St

18 JUN 1956

ANSWERED 18 JUN 1956  
REPLY ATTACHED.

Colonel Nasser had invited Shepilov to Cairo before he became Foreign Minister; and now seems to feel the need for some western counter-balance (the Russians may even have suggested to him the need to avoid rousing Anglo-Saxon apprehensions too far).

Brian

2. Colonel Nasser first let it be known that he wanted the Minister of State or the Secretary of State for War to accept an invitation. We did not favour this. He then asked Sir Brian Robertson. Both felt that Sir might act as a counterweight to Shepilov and help to prevent the celebrations from becoming an anti-British demonstration. Moreover we still want to keep Colonel Nasser guessing and should avoid snubbing him in public unduly.

3. Sir Brian Robertson did not want to go in a purely personal capacity because of the role he had played in negotiating Britain's withdrawal from Suez; and asked for the public blessing of Her Majesty's Government. The Foreign Office spokesman put out a statement on these lines.

Text in notes for  
Supplementaries.

(J. H. 46, Watson)  
June 16, 1956.

EGYPT (GENERAL SIR BRIAN ROBERTSON'S VISIT)

78. Captain Waterhouse asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs why his Department have officially approved the visit of General Sir Brian Robertson to Egypt for the celebrations following British evacuation.

Lord John Hope: The 18th of June has been officially proclaimed the National Day of Egypt. It marks the fulfilment of the first stage of the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement. Representatives of many foreign countries have accepted invitations. My right hon. and learned Friend considers it appropriate that a distinguished former Commander-in-Chief should accept the Egyptian Prime Minister's invitation on this occasion.

(63)

F0371/118980

117651

1	2	3	4	5	6

COPYRIGHT - NOT TO BE REPRODUCED PHOTOGRAPHICALLY WITHOUT PERMISSION

BRITISH TRANSPORT COMMISSION

*Handwritten initials*

THE CHAIRMAN.

Tel: Ambassador 7711.

222, MARYLEBONE ROAD,

LONDON, N.W.1.

11/11/76

16th June, 1956.

*Dear Secretary of State*

I see that the "Daily Telegraph" is bitterly attacking my visit to Cairo. Other attacks may well follow.

I hope that H.M.G. will continue to make it very plain that they wanted me to accept the invitation.

As you know, I should not have gone unless I had been urged to do so.

*Yours sincerely,*

*Herbert H. Robinson*

The Rt. Hon. Selwyn Lloyd, C.B.E., T.D.,  
Q.C., M.P.,

*We are in trouble from our supporters  
over this, but I have made clear throughout  
how we strongly supported your acceptance of  
the...*

118980/371

E1197/68

SECRETARY OF STATE

I telephoned Sir Brian Robertson this morning about Nasser's invitation to him to visit Egypt for the June 18 celebrations. I explained that you and the Prime Minister felt strongly that it would be an excellent thing if he could accept. Colonel Nasser had invited Shepilov before he became Foreign Minister and now seemed to feel himself in a bit of a spot. We felt that General Robertson's presence might make all the difference in preventing the celebrations becoming an anti-British demonstration.

After some hesitation General Robertson said that if you and the Prime Minister felt this way he could not possibly refuse to go. He was, however, anxious that his visit should not have too personal a label attached to it. He did not want it to go out that he had been asked in a purely personal capacity because he personally and more than any other single individual was the man who negotiated Britain's withdrawal from Suez. He hoped therefore that in any announcement about his going it would be made plain that he went with the blessing of H.M.G.. I said I felt this was a perfectly acceptable compromise. We could not say that he was H.M.G.'s official representative but would be very ready to say that we approved his

accepting/

References-

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

FO371/118180

1176511

1	2	3	4	5	6

COPYRIGHT - NOT TO BE REPRODUCED PHOTOGRAPHICALLY WITHOUT PERMISSION

accepting the invitation. General Robertson  
said this seemed to him a very fair way of  
putting it. I of course thanked him very  
warmly on your behalf.



(Anthony Nutting)  
June 14th, 1956

371/18986

JE1197/99

*p.w.*

BRITISH TRANSPORT COMMISSION

THE CHAIRMAN.

Tel: Ambassador 7711.

222, MARYLEBONE ROAD,

LONDON, N.W.1.

CONFIDENTIAL

9th July, 1956.

*Dear Selwyn Lloyd.*

In response to your letter of 6th July I give below a synopsis of my impressions of the Parade of the Egyptian Armed Forces on Wednesday, 20th June:

Discipline

The marching was undoubtedly a great improvement on anything I had seen before from the Egyptian Army. One expects the cadets of the Military College to march well but I was surprised by the way in which the ordinary units went by and particularly those of the National Guard. This is, as you know, roughly the equivalent of our Territorial Army. The men appeared to be reasonably well turned out and the officers were on the whole younger and slimmer than they used to be under the old regime. It is of course well known that the Fellahin form good fighting material, being individually brave, hardy and capable of considerable fanaticism. Hitherto they have had no officers to lead them and I was therefore particularly interested to notice the bearing of the officers on parade.

Equipment

The Egyptians have now got a terrible pot-pourri of equipment and samples were shown of French, British, American and Soviet manufacture. The administrative problem which this creates is obvious.

Among the tanks the Centurions stole the show. They went by together, fast and smoothly. The Josef Stalin tanks went by in ones and twos with long intervals in between, and I understand that quite a few never left the starting post. I do not know whether they were driven by Egyptians or not, but it may be that the trouble was due to inexperienced Egyptian drivers. As is well known, the Stalin tank is a rough job compared with the Centurion. Accommodation and protection for the crew is particularly scant.

Organisation

The revolution has not yet succeeded in perfecting organisation of these functions. The air display was ragged and many of the aeroplanes were well out of line so that they did not come over the square at all. Apart from the ragged march past of the armour, referred to above, the

/Parade

The Rt. Hon. Selwyn Lloyd, C.B.E., T.D., Q.C., M.P.

0371/118980

-2-

Parade was interminably long and boring for the spectators. When it was over pandemonium broke out. The saluting base was mobbed and the Generals and other officers had to use their fists while the Prime Minister got into his car. I understand that the same thing had happened at Port Said two days previously and that the party returned from there black and blue. No attempt was made to organize the departure of the guests. Shepilov got away fairly quickly but the rest of us stood about for a long time until our cars could fight their way to the stand.

Perhaps one of the more encouraging features of the morning was that Hakim Amr and Zachari Din, at lunch in the Embassy afterwards, freely discussed the shortcomings of the morning's performance and planned how to improve matters for the future.

#### Comments

My recent visit to Egypt was much too short for me to form any clear impression about the Egyptian Armed Forces at this time. It is, however, certain that there is some improvement visible, both in training and in ~~recruitment~~, *equipment*, by comparison with the position three years ago.

Revolutions such as the one which has occurred in Egypt generally produce an increase in efficiency and ruthlessness in the armed forces.

The probability in my opinion is that the Egyptians would fight courageously particularly against the Israelites. Their efficiency, however, would be considerably handicapped by the hotch-potch of equipment which they possess and by their general incapacity for efficient administration.

*Yours sincerely,*

*Brian H. Robertson*

Reference:-

FC371/118480

1176511

COPYRIGHT - NOT TO BE REPRODUCED PHOTOGRAPHICALLY WITHOUT PERMISSION

1	2	3	4	5	6

*African Expt.***OUT FILE****J.**

JE1197/99

July 13, 1956

You might be interested to read the enclosed letter from Sir Brian Robertson about the Egyptian parade on Independence Day.

(Sgd.) SELWYN LLOYD

The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden,  
K.G., F.C., M.C., M.P.

6371/118980

J

BRITISH EMBASSY,

CAIRO.

No. 97

(2262/78/56)

CONFIDENTIAL

JE 1197/89

June 29, 1956.

Sir,

The completion of the withdrawal of the British troops from the Canal Zone was made the occasion for a series of festivities in Egypt to which many representatives of the Arab world were invited. Those who accepted invitations included the Crown Prince of Morocco, the Deputy Prime Minister of Tunisia and a brother of King Saud. Delegations came from all the Arab countries and military contingents from Syria, the Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and the Yemen. Iraq sent military representatives but no contingent, chiefly on the ground that the Egyptians had sent no contingent to the Habbaniya festivities last year. Monsieur Shepilov was invited as editor of Pravda and accepted as Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union. General Sir Brian Robertson was sent a personal invitation after informal enquiries had been made as to whether an invitation to the Minister of State would be accepted. General Robertson attended the celebrations

.../with

The Rt. Hon. Selwyn Lloyd, C.B.E., M.P.,  
etc., etc., etc.



F0371/118980

with the approval of Her Majesty's Government. I have sent despatches on the visits of Monsieur Shepilov and General Robertson.

2. On any account, it was a great occasion for the Egyptians, since for the first time within living memory there were no foreign troops occupying the country. At the same time, it was not entirely an easy moment for the régime. The proclaimed transitional period was at an end and it was necessary for the revolutionary leaders to redeem their pledge to move towards a parliamentary régime. However, this parliamentary régime was clearly going to be in fact only the dictatorship of Colonel Nasser, supported by a subservient parliament, as real opponents of the régime were to be excluded from standing. Moreover, Colonel Nasser was to legitimise himself by a plebiscite which could only have one result. The régime did not appear to be any more popular, however secure, and the constitution had aroused no great enthusiasm. Satirical stories, endemic in a dictatorship, were circulating in Cairo and there was clearly some dissatisfaction and apprehension at increasing Communist influence, at least among the educated population of the older generation, who had known a considerably higher degree of political freedom in the past. On the other side there were indications of some dissatisfaction among the younger officers with the revolutionary leadership.

.../3.

B371/118980

3. The celebrations were designed to culminate in the plebiscite on the constitution and the presidency. For several weeks beforehand the Ministers, who rarely leave Cairo, conducted a series of political meetings in the countryside. The celebrations, which began with the hoisting of the Egyptian flag on Navy House in Port Said by Colonel Nasser, ended with congratulations on his election. The festivities in Cairo included a major speech by Colonel Nasser at a mass meeting, a parade of the armed forces, a parade of decorated vehicles, and an official dinner at the Officers' Club. Special efforts were directed towards youth through sports festivals, carnivals on the Nile, a march-past of Youth Clubs and a ceremony modelled on that customary at the Olympic Games, involving the carrying of a lighted torch by relays of runners from Port Said. Officers of the Armed Forces received special attention; they were present in large numbers at the dinner at the Officers' Club and themselves gave a dinner on behalf of the newly elected President. They were prominent at all functions and were allowed to entertain approved civilians at various popular receptions throughout the week. A long list of promotions in the Forces was published to mark the occasion.

4. I enclose a note on the parade of the Armed Forces. The troops were well drilled and smartly turned out and the parade, which included about 150 tanks, probably produced a lively impression of increased Egyptian

.../strength

371/118980

strength amongst the spectators from home and abroad. The Centurions made the best showing, while the progress of the Russian tanks was much less even and some of them certainly broke down out of sight of the spectators. The weakest part of the show was the fly-past of the Egyptian Air Force which occasioned adverse comments from General Hakim Amer and Wing-Commander Boghdadi who lunched with me afterwards.

5. From our point of view the least satisfactory item was the parade of decorated vehicles organised by the Ministry of National Guidance which took place before Colonel Nasser and which I and the majority of my diplomatic colleagues did not attend. It was incidentally badly organised and got well out of hand towards the end. Part of it contained vehicles illustrating industrial or agricultural production; the other part was a historical survey illustrating incidents of the British occupation, including the bombardment of Alexandria, the battle of Kafr el Dawar, events of 1919 and 1935 and the Denshway incident, which was played up to some extent during the celebrations in view particularly of the coincidence of its fiftieth anniversary with the end of the British occupation. I do not think that this part of the parade was deliberately planned by Colonel Nasser as an anti-British demonstration. It was no doubt the design of the fellow-travelling Minister of National Guidance and I have been informed that Colonel Nasser ruled out a

.../number

f 371/118980

number of anti-British items before the parade began. The main purpose of this parade was to represent Colonel Nasser as the champion of the fellah, the worker and the ordinary man. There was no more applause for the anti-British items than for the rest of the show. I am conveying to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Ministry of National Guidance our feeling that anti-British items should not have been allowed to appear in the parade. I enclose a detailed report of it.

6. The masses were entertained by decorations, illuminations and fireworks, though the paucity of the decorations on private houses and shops seemed to argue a certain lack of enthusiasm. Concessional fares were given on the railways, but we could see little evidence of the arrival of many fellahs in Cairo for the occasion. The crowds in Cairo treated the celebrations as a good holiday and obviously enjoyed their outings. The squares and open places were filled with young men and women strolling about and with families sitting on the grass like an English Bank Holiday crowd. The Egyptians do not seem to be great applauders and it was clear that organised clagues were in operation throughout the week. There was a certain amount of grumbling heard that food was better than guns, but it would be wrong to minimise the effect of the week's festivities on large numbers of people into whom the Egyptian Government were seeking by these means to instil some modicum of national pride and some genuine feeling for Colonel Nasser and his Government. Reports from my Consular Officers comment on the friendly holiday mood of the crowds in other towns, the absence of any anti-British feeling or of any anti-British references in official speeches,

.../the

10371/118980

the good turn-out of the troops participating in the parades and the evident relief of everyone concerned when conditions returned to normal. A noticeable feature everywhere was the total absence of even the slightest demonstration against individual British, although I travelled on many occasions with the flag up through thick crowds.

7. Colonel Nasser's statement on the 18th of June over the wireless was in the form of a brief address to the Egyptian people outlining their history and emphasising the success of the revolution in freeing them from internal and external domination. The passage about the British was in terms which we naturally regard as objectionable, though the Egyptians professed to see nothing wrong in it.

8. Colonel Nasser, who does not write out his speeches beforehand and speaks only from notes, had told me beforehand that he was going to make a statement in response to a request by the Egyptian State Broadcasting Company, but it was clear that he did not regard this as of great importance and designed the speech on the 19th as his major statement of internal and external policy. The majority of this speech was devoted to internal affairs, being largely an explanation of the familiar six aims of the revolution. The one statement which was received with really genuine applause was the announcement of the abolition of martial law, though the powers which it has since been

.../announced

B371/118980

announced have been granted to the Minister of the Interior, seem to have the effect of retaining much of the previous system in force. In his remarks about the future the emphasis was on the continuation of the revolution and the period of struggle, with stringent warnings against the opponents of the régime and a clear indication that internal security would be rigorously maintained.

9. In the passage on foreign relations, Colonel Nasser underlined his policy of non-alignment. Having been assured beforehand that a friendly reference to Great Britain would be received in the same spirit, he made some attempt to bury the hatchet and acknowledged that Great Britain had fulfilled her pledges. At the same time he made no secret of his policy towards the Arab world. He said: "We must strengthen ourselves to-day, so that we may be free and so that we may be able to liberate the whole of the Arab world from Morocco to Bagdad, and so that the land of the Arabs will be for the Arabs and not for occupiers and exploiters". Colonel Nasser may have been thinking primarily of Algeria. But we should certainly not ignore the implications of this declaration for British interests in the Middle East, though it must still clearly be our aim here to try and convince the Egyptians that they will be unwise, in their own interests, to continue to encourage, by their action and propaganda, opposition to our Treaties and engagements with the territories concerned. I shall take an opportunity to seek an elucidation of this passage.

.../10.

