

ADVANCE COPY

INWARD SAVING TELEGRAM

OUTWARD TELEGRAM

CR

M.F.

En Clair and
By Bag

FROM PARIS TO THE FOREIGN OFFICE

Ko/whi

Mr. Isaacson

No. 334 Saving

September 12, 1956

JE 14217/4527

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UNCLASSIFIED

Addressed to Foreign Office telegram No. 334 Saving of
September 12, 1956.

Repeated for information Saving to: Cairo No. 70
Washington " 329
UKDEL New York " 18

Following is a summary of a speech on the Suez Canal crisis by
the French Prime Minister broadcast this afternoon.

M. Mollet began by briefly recapitulating the history of the
crisis. He described Colonel Nasser's unilateral action both as a
violation of international morality and as a grave threat to free
movement through the Canal, on which the economy of a great number
of European and Asian countries depended. The economic equilibrium
of these countries, and the standard of life of their peoples,
had been put in peril. In describing the recent negotiations in
Cairo M. Mollet paid tribute to Mr. Menzies and the other members
of the Committee of 5, for the authority, competence and tact with
which they had fulfilled their mission. He emphasised the loyalty
shown throughout the crisis by the French and British Governments
to the Charter of the United Nations and the desire they had both
shown to reach a negotiated settlement of the dispute.

2. M. Mollet said that the French and British Governments,
in their efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement, had hitherto
put pressure on the Canal Company to ask its non-Egyptian personnel
to continue in their posts. The French Government now considered
that circumstances no longer justified their asking the Company's
personnel to remain at their posts against their will. The
Government would furnish every assistance to all those who wished
to return to France.

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Outward telegram No. 334 Saving

UNCLASSIFIED

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3. M. Mollet continued that Colonel Nasser's refusal to negotiate on the basis of the 18-country proposals had created a grave situation. Together with the British Government, the French Government were bringing it to the notice of the President of the Security Council. At the same time they believed that Colonel Nasser's attitude obliged each country to take suitable measures itself to assure the full exercise of its rights under the 1888 Convention. These rights could clearly not be preserved if each party acted separately. It had therefore been decided to constitute a co-operative association of countries using the Canal which would, among other functions, provide for pilots and collect transit dues, while paying to Egypt fair compensation for her contribution to the upkeep of the Canal and for transit facilities. The United States Government had been informed of this decision and had notified their complete support. Everything was being done to start the association functioning without delay.

4. M. Mollet concluded: "I told the National Assembly that the Government would not let Colonel Nasser's unilateral action pass without a reply. In presenting to you these latest decisions I am conscious of keeping faith with my engagement. I am also conscious of keeping faith with the tradition by which France first exhausts all the possibilities of peaceful settlement".

5. Text follows by bag.

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FROM FOREIGN OFFICE TO STOCKHOLM

Cypher/OTP.
& by bag

DEPARTMENTAL DISTRIBUTION

No. 531

D. 11.59 a.m. September 12, 1956.

September 12, 1956

IMMEDIATE

CONFIDENTIAL

Addressed to Stockholm telegram No. 531 of September 12.

Repeated for information to Cairo
Washington

and Saving to Paris No. 3224

Mr. Menzies reports that M. Uden was throughout a loyal colleague who supported him throughout with single-minded purpose to secure Nasser's assent to a negotiation on the basis laid down by the eighteen nations.

2. I saw M. Uden this morning. I am sorry to say that I found him in a rather flabby mood.

3. He seems to feel that having failed to put across the views of the eighteen he should now try to cast about for some compromise between this standpoint and that of the Egyptian dictator.

4. But the fact is that there is no room for compromise. We have had one experience of entrusting a vital highway to the caprice of a single power. The administrative delays devised by the Russians brought about the blockade of Berlin. We should be foolish to repeat that experience and to place the Suez traffic at the mercy of Nasser's whims. The Declaration of the eighteen powers represents the minimum necessary to avert that danger. And you can let it be known that we are not disposed to abate our requirements. To do so would represent capitulation to Nasser and would carry with it not only the danger of interference with the Suez Canal traffic, but the gravest repercussions in the Middle East and in Africa.

DISTRIBUTED TO:

African Department
Levant Department
Eastern Department
Northern Department
United Nations Department
General Department
- - - - -

SECRET

FROM CAIRO TO FOREIGN OFFICE

JE 142 III / 1529

Cypher/OTP

FOREIGN OFFICE SECRET AND
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Sir H. Trevelyan

No. 2068

September 12, 1956

D:4.58 p.m. September 12, 1956

R:7.01 p.m. September 12, 1956

SECRET

Addressed to Foreign Office telegram No. 2068 of September 12

RECEIVED IN C.B.
17 SEP 1956
3 2 D.F.T.

Repeated for information to: P.O.M.E.F.
and Saving to: Washington Paris

My telegram No. 1788: Mensies Mission.

I do not think that my telegram under reference needs amendment in the light of recent developments. Nasser's tactics are clearly to offer seeming concessions to the users while maintaining his main position that ownership, management and operation of the Canal must be solely an Egyptian responsibility. His purpose is presumably still to drag out the negotiations while consolidating his hold on the Canal, in the hope that time is on his side and that chances of the use of military force are diminishing.

2. He has probably been encouraged by President Eisenhower's statements and recent reports from Washington suggesting that there is something of a split between the Americans and our view, and he perhaps calculates, on the basis of these reports and of reports of political differences in the United Kingdom, that it will be increasingly difficult for us and the French to wage war on him. Like other dictators he listens to advice from very few, but has plenty of people round him who will tell him that he is securing a succession of diplomatic successes.

3. One influence tending against compromise is if, as is likely, he believes that we and the French mean to have him out anyway, and that a deal on the Canal issue will only diminish his prestige and security in the Arab world and Egypt, without at the same time diminishing British and French hostility. But a last minute compromise is not absolutely excluded, if an obviously solid front is erected against him.

Foreign Office please pass to Washington and Paris as my telegrams Nos. 365 and 292 Saving.

[Repeated Saving to Washington and Paris]

2222

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Press account of comments made by
Ali Sabry on September 11, 1956.

Wing Commander Aly Sabry, Director of President Abdul Nasser's Cabinet, said last night that the defunct Suez Canal Company had issued a statement inciting non-Egyptian staff in the Suez Canal to quit their work at the end of the week.

He pointed out that the statement was issued after the meetings which took place between the Prime Ministers of Britain and France, and said that this showed that there was a prearranged plan aiming at delaying navigation in the Canal.

"This also shows that the purpose of the two governments is to stage events that will enable them to intervene to achieve their aim of usurping Egypt's legitimate rights in the Suez Canal after having failed to find any example of Egypt having violated any international agreement", he said.

Wing Commander Sabry pointed out that the directors of the former company were British and French.

Commenting on the Eden and Mollet communiqué which said that President Abdul Nasser's rejection of the 18-Power proposal had "created a very grave situation", Wing Commander Sabry said:

"The grave situation has been created by Britain and France by their attempts to seize the Egyptian Suez Canal, and by their threats to use force despite Egypt's declarations pledging to respect all obligations towards all countries.

"The proposals put forward by the Menzies Committee contradict the United Nations Charter and the principle of international justice. The Committee asked Egypt to discard her sovereignty by relinquishing her rights in the Suez Canal, an inseparable part of Egypt, in favour of an international body.

"This demand was accompanied by threats to use force to compel Egypt to accept it. This shows that the purpose was to impose a specific system, and not conduct free negotiations.

"Egypt has announced that she adheres to all her international obligations, and has asked the committee to indicate any international agreements that may have been violated by Egypt. The Menzies Committee has not been able to reply to this question since the only international agreement relating to the Suez Canal is the Constantinople Convention of 1888 which deals with freedom of passage in the Canal. Egypt has announced her determination to guarantee freedom of navigation and adhere to this convention.

"Egypt has also expressed readiness to negotiate with users of the Canal to reach an agreement guaranteeing the following without any encroachment on Egypt's sovereignty and prestige:

1. Freedom of navigation in the Canal.
2. The development of the Canal to meet the future requirements of navigation.
3. The establishment of just tolls and charges.

Wing Commander Sabry pointed out that the statement issued in London yesterday referred to the wishes of the

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governments of Britain and France to uphold the rule of law in international affairs. He said that Egypt considered that threats and the attempt to seize the Canal was contrary to international justice and international law.

Continuing, he said:

"In their communiqué, Mr. Eden and M. Mollet said their countries had adhered to the spirit of the United Nations. It is strange that this should be said at a time when the two governments are concentrating their troops and at a time when the authorities of the two governments issue statements threatening to use force. The whole world knows that the threat to use force, the economic measures taken by the two governments against Egypt and the attempt to force Egypt to relinquish her legitimate rights in the Suez Canal are completely contrary to the United Nations Charter."

1956

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AFRICAN DEPARTMENT

107

J E. 14/11/1956

EGYPT

FROM S. W. B. Burrows
Bahrain

Discuss the effect that the resignation
of the pilots will have on the Gulf states

No. 810

Dated 12 Sept 1956

Received in Registry 13 Sept 56

References to former relevant papers

MINUTES

→ E Dept

W 18/9

Discussed with I.P.D.L. ^{and Mr. Walsby} Guidance No 73
of September 15 covers some of the
points raised. We cannot yet
say anything about the companies'
plans in the event of it being
necessary to divert most tankers
round the Cape.

Jcm.
20.ix

Jcm.
24/9.

(Print)

(How disposed of)

Usual dist. Sept 14

(Action completed)

Ab 19/9

(Index)

S
19/9/56

References to later relevant papers

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Bahrain telegram No. 810 to Foreign Office

- 2 -

2. Local governments and people will probably find it possible to understand that we are willing to accept some sacrifices in pursuit of our political aims. It will be difficult to convince them of the need for them to share in these sacrifices for the aims of oil [? gp. omitted] which most of them do not yet sympathize.

3. We are continuing to distribute locally all available publicity material on the Canal question but radio from outside remains the most valuable single medium. Bahrain Radio has considerably improved since date of our letter 1136/5/56 of September 4 to Information Policy Department and is now putting out reasonably factual and objective news.

Foreign Office pass to Bagdad, Beirut and Jeddah as my telegrams Nos. 111, 119 and 93.

[Repeated to Bagdad, Beirut and Jeddah].

PB1015/1106

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Information Policy Department
Regional Advisers
African Department
Eastern Department
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News Department

11111

J

AFRICAN DEPARTMENT

JE 14211/1545

FROM P. Westlake,
Tel Aviv.

Reports Israeli press attitude to developments in Suez.
 A claim is being sought to the western shore of the Gulf of Akaba.

No. 1261/56
 Dated 4 Sept 56
 Received in Registry— 13 Sept 56

References to former relevant papers
 -/1208.

MINUTES

I have always understood, though I do not know on what authority, that Saudi Arabia ceded the Tiran Islands to Egypt in 1950 or 1951.

(Print)

(How disposed of)

Dfd P. Westlake TEL Aviv
 from HR to Cleo Oct. 9.

[Signature]
 18/9

Easter Dept. I do not know. Perhaps Research Dept. can help

Research Dept.

John B. Denson

(Via - Gen. Buss)

27/9

In 1950 the Egyptian gov. in a note, said they had occupied TIRAN and SANAFIR islands of agreement with the SAUDI gov (JE 1081/1 - 1950). It was never clear whether the islands had actually been ceded to Egypt and in 1952 H.M. Ambassador Jiddah failed to get a definite reply from YUSUF YASIN (JE 1081/1 - 1952) who said there is no accounting between friends.

49957

H. Denson African Dept (Mr. Walker) 24/12/56

(Action completed)

(Index)

EB 11/10

W 10/9/57

References to later relevant papers

JE 1421/1525

CONFIDENTIAL

(1261/56)

[Handwritten signatures and initials]

BRITISH EMBASSY,

TEL AVIV.

September 4, 1956.

Dear Rose,

Roy Elston has given me some interesting background to the change in editorial line of the Jerusalem Post which was reported in our telegram No. 381 of September 3. He said that the line that British and French preparations are of a kind that indicate that the two governments are not bluffing was originally contained in a slightly different form in an article which he submitted for his regular weekly column. He presumed that this had been read in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, as he thought was sometimes the case, and the next he heard was that the Jerusalem Post editorial staff told him that they were "under instructions" to carry something on these lines editorially, and they wanted to know whether they could use material from Elston's article.

....

2. There is no evidence that the editorial comment, a copy of which I enclose, represents official thinking as opposed merely to official propaganda, but I am inclined to think that it does do so and that there may have been a sudden reappraisal by the Ministry of the prospects for an imposed solution. My own guess at the moment is that their thoughts may turn in the direction of leaving the London powers to secure freedom of transit through the Suez Canal and themselves bending their own efforts to procure freedom of transit through the Straits of Tiran at the mouth of the Gulf of Akaba. Two senior officials with whom I have spoken in the Ministry have shown an interest in historical variations in Egypt's Sinai frontier which might be used to give Israel a claim to the West Bank of the Gulf. One of these instances occurred almost immediately after the Suez crisis started, the other was very recent and included the comment that the official in question had been unable to discover any historical evidence concerning the ownership of the two islands off the Straits of Tiran which had been presumed to be Saudi-Arabian at the time of their occupation by Egypt, but which he now understood were being claimed by Egypt as Egyptian territory.

Yours ever,

Peter Westlake

(P. Westlake)

E.M. Rose, Esq., C.M.G.,
Levant Department,
Foreign Office, S.W. 1.

THE Menzies Committee is expected to meet Colonel Nasser and his advisers today. A Reuters report from Cairo indicates that the Egyptian ruler is in no mood to concede anything of substance while a Beirut report talks of the likelihood of "an amicable solution". Some of the left-wing Press in England, which ordinarily is warm for internationalizing the affairs of the world, seems this time to be warm for nationalism, or at any rate against everything Britain is doing about the Suez Canal dispute. The "Manchester Guardian" seems more concerned to rebuke Sir Anthony Eden for his sins than to tell Colonel Nasser on the carpet. Whether some of these comments object to Britain's threat of force, or to what they allege is mere British bluff, is not always clear.

A definite threat of force is now in being. Big convoys of troops are either at sea or have reached their Mediterranean destination. Quite big convoys of requisitioned cargo ships have left Southampton loaded with military vehicles painted in yellow desert camouflage. The kind of thing does indeed look like force. Is it bluff? If it is, that is highly expensive bluff. It should be possible to wage an impressive bluff without spending millions of pounds sterling on it and without all the fuss and bother, all the military reorganization and domestic inconvenience, involved in sending large numbers of troops and equipment long distances by sea.

There are other signs indicating that the British Government is not "playing around," not bluffing, and not getting ready to appease in any matter of principle or substance. Apart from these auguries, there is the fact that Egypt herself on more than one occasion has referred to the British threat, not as a bluff but as a reality. "Akhbar el Yom" has just reminded Mr. Menzies that if he is coming to Cairo with a dagger in his hand, he will be met by Egyptians with daggers in their hands, or words to that effect.

Now whether there should be a threat of force, and whether in certain circumstances the threat should develop into the use of force, is quite another matter. What the British public think about the likelihood is hard to say. Most of them are tired of being "pushed around" but whether tired enough to prefer going to war about it no one can say with any confidence.

A world war is unlikely to develop from any kind of localized war that might be the outcome of the present dispute. The risk, of course, is always there; but the main question now is whether Colonel Nasser has taken the West, and particularly British precautions, seriously enough to recognize the danger of at least a localized war, and will make that "indispensable contribution" to a peaceful solution of which Mr. Dulles spoke the other day. Even Mr. Menon, who is always very helpful, admitted that not only India's present standards of living, but her survival, depend on free use of the Suez Canal; and that millions would go hungry if the canal were closed even temporarily, because of war.

J

*See attached
re draft*

JE 14/2/11/1547

Sir G. Fitzmaurice

We need a general guidance telegram on the arguments supporting the illegality of Nasser's purported nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company. We have supplied some arguments in guidance telegrams already. But I think something succinct and clear is now needed. I have attempted on the attached sheet of paper to set out what seems to Mr. Ross and myself the three main arguments.

Could one of the Legal Advisers perhaps have a look at this and produce something a little more adequate?

J.H.A. Watson
(J.H.A. Watson)
September 7, 1956

Mr Ross. It is perhaps a good idea to send this out now as a guidance: then it can go having to many parts.

J.H.A. Watson
19/9.