

No. 1236

641,74/16-2558: Telegram

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Department of State*¹

SECRET

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1780. Foreign Office version of Wednesday's Suez base meeting is that after Robertson stated British position and Egyptians rejected British proposals on availability and uniforms, (making no counter-proposal in availability but suggesting "unified civilian dress") Robertson assumed very grave manner and told Egyptians he very disappointed their reply. He told them he did not see anything in their reply which would warrant his referring it to London. Robertson stressed UK position these two outstanding points was clear. According Robertson's report to Foreign Office, Egyptians manner then changed completely leading him conclude they had been trying see how far they could push him. He further thinks they were not in any event fully empowered to make agreement or break off talks then and there without referring to higher authority. In other words, British do not believe, in spite of Egyptians having characterized Wednesday's meeting as crucial that Egyptians really meant this. Foreign Office considers this impression confirmed by cordial atmosphere of meeting.

Robertson informed Egyptians their formula re "unified civilian dress" wholly unacceptable. As Egyptians had not made any suggestion re availability, there was no further discussion this point, although Foreign Office states Robertson left Egyptians in no doubt UK would consider counterproposal.

Cabinet yesterday approved reply to Robertson confirming position he took at Wednesday's meeting and next move is therefore up to Egyptians. No further proposals have been sent to Robertson.

When Embassy officer commented according our information Egyptians not prepared give in on British military uniforms, Foreign Office official pointed out Egyptian proposal of cork helmets, overalls or shorts and shirts (not khaki) with badges of rank (although according to Foreign Office "nonmilitary") were "out of question" adding Egyptians had been informed of this previously. On availability, however, Foreign Office hopeful some formula could be found that would be acceptable to Egyptians while retaining British wording re UN recommendation. Official added impossi-

¹ Repeated to Cairo as telegram 46.