

No. 1299

641.74/2-1864: Telegram

*The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Aldrich) to the
Department of State*

TOP SECRET NIACT

LONDON, March 18, 1954—noon.

4008. Eyes only Secretary. Just before dinner last night Eden called me on phone and asked if I would come to see him. I met him at his house at 11 p. m. and was with him alone for about an hour.

He began by asking me whether I had yet received any reply to Embtel 3991. I replied that I did not think any answer could be forthcoming for a considerable time. He said Churchill and he were extremely concerned with present political situation here regarding Canal base, that conferences had been going on all day yesterday between himself, members of Cabinet and Churchill regarding this situation, and that matter had been discussed by Committee of 23 which he said constituted executive of Conservative Party. He said Churchill and insurgent back benchers were extremely reluctant to go along with him in withdrawing all military personnel from Canal base. He then said that if the United States Government would be willing to associate itself with future operations of base in manner described in reference telegram or in any other manner which might be satisfactory to yourself and the President, he felt certain that settlement with Egyptians could be completed within a month and redeployment of British forces commenced. Eden said he needed this association to carry Churchill with him and that if it were not possible he was convinced "old man" would insist on maintenance large British forces at Suez base indefinitely. He stated categorically that association of United States Government on any basis would satisfy Churchill and whole Conservative Party in giving in on having British military technicians on base and thereby eliminating question of uniforms.

I asked Eden whether he felt at all sure that Egyptian Government would invite United States Government to use base on same terms as it would be available to Her Majesty's Government and pointed out to him fact that Egyptian Government had not been willing to invite United States Government to participate in negotiations regarding base. Eden said situation had changed completely since then and that he felt sure Egyptian Government would now extend such an invitation.

I have never seen Eden show such concern about anything as he did last night about Egyptian negotiations. In my opinion he is not