

**Middle East - Suez story No
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Suez story-31

13-17 Nov. 56

Katzin, A.G. (Col., U.N. New York)

- 5 memoranda/reports to D.H.
conc. Canal clearance.
- 1 cable from I. Smith

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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: The Secretary-General

Date: 12 November 1956

FROM: A.G. Katsin

FILE NO.: _____

SUBJECT: Canal Clearance

SENDER'S TELEPHONE EXTENSION: _____

CONFIDENTIAL

The Secretary of State of the United Kingdom brought over with him a senior naval officer, Mr. Dawmay (who, I understand, is an Admiral) as his expert on the Suez Canal and salvage operations. He has made available to me for the next 48 hours charts and photographs of the Canal blockages as known to the Admiralty on the 11th of November. However, the information is not complete. Although it denotes approximately 29 sunken vessels or obstructions, some are not obstructing or only partly obstructing the main shipping channel.

It is the contention of the British Admiralty that normal salvage gear available to salvage companies is not appropriate to any speedy clearance of the waterway and that the heavy lift and other special equipment required in the first stages is of a "port clearance" instead of "salvage" type. As far as the British Admiralty knows, such equipment is in the main lacking other than in the U.K. where it was specially built for World War II operations and has been taken out of mothballs. This equipment, with two vessels similarly equipped from West Germany and one or two from France, are at present converging on the Suez from European ports and from Ceylon. They will in total amount to approximately 34 vessels, some few pieces of which are in or nearing the area, and most of which will reach the area towards the end of the month. The Admiralty felt that use of these vessels and their expert crews would be the only assurance of relatively rapid Canal clearance.

I undertook to convey this information to you and explained to Mr. Dawmay your immediate problem of obtaining Egyptian and U.N. agreement to the principle of clearance by the U.N. and that it would seem doubtful at the present stage that the activity could be successfully negotiated on the basis of the use of British or French personnel, but that your concerns for negotiating conditions under which the international waterway could be re-opened to traffic would be dictated by the best practical political means for achieving this end.

He asked me to advise that he was at your disposal at any hour, through contact with the British Delegation, if you wished to have personal clarifications from him at this stage.

UNITED NATIONS  NATIONS UNIES

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: The Secretary-General

Date: 13 November 1956

FROM: A. G. Katzin ~~AK~~

FILE NO.: _____

SENDER'S TELEPHONE EXTENSION: 3395

SUBJECT: Canal Clearance

CONFIDENTIAL

With reference to your wish for the maximum possible exploration of cost factors in the canal operation, the following first probes in this direction yesterday produced some major pointers which will influence both the costs and the nature of the U.N. plan:

1. (a) The U.N. might limit itself to clearing the main shipping channel only. This would not necessarily involve salvage of sunken vessels but merely their underwater movement sufficient to free the main channel of obstruction. The British plan envisaged this as the first task and their type of equipment en route is designed to this end. Admiralty salvage experts advised the U.K. Government that they could give it no estimate of the time factor involved without fuller survey on the spot. Such part of the equipment as they have obtained under charter from German sources runs to a cost of £1000 Sterling per vessel per day.

(b) Mr. Kleyn van Willigen, Managing Director of L. Smit & Co., Rotterdam, with whom I spoke yesterday advised that they could not begin to assess a basis for costing the operation until they had some surveyors on the spot.
2. Other points which emerged and which I shall follow up tentatively with our legal people and others were:

(a) Insurance underwriters might have a stake in some part of the operation and we would probably eventually have to be in touch with them on cost factors. Most of the vessels sunk in the British/French-held sector were Suez Canal Co. owned and presumably under the nationalized status of that Company, original underwriters would not be involved.

.../

(b) If the U.N. engages in "salvage" as distinct from clearance only of obstruction of the main shipping channel, a different set of cost and other technical factors will apply. You might possibly consider it wise therefore to develop any plan in a series of stages of greater or lesser U.N. involvement.

(c) Main channel clearance will have to be followed immediately by dredging procedures to re-open the waterway. All dredgers and desilting equipment are believed sunk.

.....
3. The attached from the "London Times" is pertinent. I have asked George and David to keep me advised of summaries of opinions expressed in the press, etc.

4. I shall attempt to have some firmer basis which might help your consideration of cost questions and other factors on your return, but believe that there are so many imponderables and complexes which will have to be worked out first, that it might be difficult to find an opening point for practical cost exploration at this stage and until we can get some clearer picture for evaluation of the elements involved.

5. Would you think it wise for me to bring Mr. Dawnay of the U.K. and Mr. van Willigen of the L. Smit Co. into joint discussion with me at this stage? It would certainly be helpful for the clarification of many technical matters known to Dawnay as well as to the development of my report to you on your return and I would like to recommend it, but you might not wish it on other grounds. Dawnay proposes to return to London tomorrow, Wednesday, but to return at once if required.

6. As a footnote of interest, the British Admiralty is apparently concerned that an Egyptian request for crews of stranded vessels in the canal of different nationalities to move off the vessels might be a prelude to the scuttling of all or some of these.

Note from the TIMES of London, Wednesday, 7 November 1956.

Debate on the Middle East

Extract from the opening address by Mr. Gaitskell, leader of the opposition:

"The first thing that was necessary to get the canal going again (he continued) was to end military operations. The job would be one not for troops but for civilian contractors, and the House should not think that the Egyptians would show any great enthusiasm for British troops or contractors to help in clearing the canal. They would go to other countries."

COPY

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OMNIPRESS NY

346 KATZIN FURTHER MY 339 STOP BBC NEW REPORT TONIGHT CLAIMS
NOW KNOWN THAT 32 SHIPS WERE SUNK INCLUDING DREDGERS QUOTE FROM
END TO END OF CANAL UNQUOTE IVAN SMITH

CFM 346 339 32

The Secretary-General

14 November

6

A.G. Katzin

3395

Suez Canal ClearanceCONFIDENTIAL

Mr. Remigio Grillo, Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy, visited me today to advise that he was under instructions to represent to you that the Italian Government had taken note of the "appointment" of Dutch and Danish contractors to clear the Suez under a U.N. plan and to advise that the Italians were also equipped with heavy salvage gear and technicians and would hope not to be excluded from consideration for participation in any U.N. plan. He had been asked to obtain assurance that the Italians would "not be faced with a fait accompli before they had had a chance to submit details of their facilities".

I agreed to apprise you of this message and advised Mr. Grillo that the information released was premature and that you had not developed any plan or procedures as yet other than that the two companies named in the reports had offered to hold themselves at your disposal if needed; that this did not exclude any other possibilities or approaches which you might find it desirable to explore after you had considered the situation in the light of your continuing examination of the problem and that you would be glad to receive any information as to facilities of which the Italian Government might care to apprise you.

Representation in similar terms has just come to me from Mr. Jules Woulbroun, Counsellor to the Belgian Mission. He advised that the Delegation has been instructed at Prime Minister level to represent to us that a Belgian firm which has been working both for the Suez Canal Company and the Government of Egypt since its control of the Canal and which has equipment in the area, is hoping to participate in a U.N. plan. Formal note from the Delegation is to follow. I have answered him in the same sense as Mr. Grillo.

The Secretary-General

17 November

6

A. G. Katzin

3395

Suez Canal Clearance

CONFIDENTIAL

You would wish to be informed that Mr. Boillot, the Suez Canal Company Representative in New York, has made contact with us offering to provide technical data on sunken craft and suggesting that the Company might consider separation of a group of technicians from its service who were familiar with details of the vessels to be salvaged, and offering them to you for United Nations service.

I advised him on the latter point that any publication or leakage of such offer might seriously embarrass the delicate area of agreements in which you were likely to be involved to the prejudice of all concerned. Further, that it might be undesirable that there should be contacts between the U.N. and the Canal Company. He assured me that he understood fully and would not pursue or publicize this suggestion in any way.

Mr. Dawnay of the U.K. Admiralty, Mr. van Willigen of the Smit Company, and Mr. Boillot have collectively met with me but I have cautioned for the present against a meeting which had been arranged to exchange technical data between a representative of the Smit Company with an engineer of the Suez Canal Company and the British Admiralty in London on Monday, 19 November, in view of the receipt of the attached cabled information. The Smit Company want the information urgently and the Admiralty have pressed for the meeting by cable this morning (Saturday) but I felt you would nevertheless want to give your opinion. I have undertaken to both to advise them as soon as I have consulted with you as to the advisability of it being proceeded with at this time.

(COPY OF CABLE RECEIVED FROM UNIC LONDON 16 NOVEMBER 1956)

UNLON 361 KATZIN EVENING STANDARD SIXTEEN NOVEMBER
CARRIES STATEMENT BY MURK LELS MANAGING DIRECTOR
L SMIT COMPANY ROTTERDAM QUOTE DAG HAMMARSKJOLD
HAS GIVEN US FIRM ORDER TO SALVAGE SHIPS SUBJECT
TO OTHER MEMBER UNATIONS AGREEING STOP THE CHIEF
COUNTRY WHICH HAS TO GIVE ITS AGREEMENT EGYPT AND
SHE HAS NOT YET ANSWERED THE UNO APPROACH TO HER
STOP SIX EXPERTS DASH THREE FROM US AND THREE FROM
SVITZERS OF DENMARK DASH HAVE BEEN CHOSEN TO MAKE A
SURVEY OF THE SUNKEN SHIPS BUT SO FAR THEY HAVE BEEN
REFUSED ENTRY STOP IT WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY WHAT
EQUIPMENT IS NEEDED AND HOW LONG JOB WILL TAKE UNTIL
EXPERTS GET IN UNQUOTE LONOMNIPRESS

(COPY OF CABLE RECEIVED FROM SMIT COMPANY ROTTERDAM 16 NOVEMBER 1956)

FRENCH ADMIRAL AT PRESS CONFERENCE IN PORT SAID ANNOUNCED
TODAY THAT BRITISH AND FRENCH SALVAGE ORGANIZATIONS CONTRACTED
IN LONDON WITH PRIVATE DUTCH AND DANISH FIRMS TO ASSIST IN
THE CLEARANCE OF THE SUEZ CANAL STOP THIS AS YOU KNOW
COMPLETELY UNTRUE STOP

SUEZ CANAL CLEARANCEPROGRESS REPORT - SATURDAY, 17 NOVEMBER1. Situation Report

- (a) Total number of obstructions firmly established and confirmed as of today is 49, of which two are collapsed bridges.
- (b) Seventeen of these are known to be ineffective and are mostly clear of the main channel.
- (c) Taking the passage of a 25-ft. draft ship as a criterion, of the remainder (32) four are provisionally considered as possibly effective and some additional obstructions may also exist below the surface as has been found in Port Said.
- (d) Seventeen ocean vessels registered under different flags are listed as bottled up in the Canal and their crews have moved from the ships at Egypt's request.

2. Operational

- (a) Twenty of the 49 obstructions reported are wrecks at Port Said. These are currently being worked on by British and French salvage teams.
- (b) Anglo/French salvage experts are at date unwilling to predict time required for their salvage, but two issues are clear:
 - i. The shipping channel can and is being cleared to permit passage of 25-ft. draft vessels without need to raise the wrecks but merely to move them as a first stage clear of the main shipping channel.
 - ii. Insofar as the wrecks comprise operational craft necessary for resumed working of Canal traffic - and most of them are - replacement craft will be immediately needed for this purpose.
- (c) Thirty-five Anglo/French salvage craft of various types are in or en route to Port Said. Eleven are proximate to the Suez entrance. London reports, as yet unconfirmed, indicate airlift of four hundred army engineer technicians for salvage at Port Said starts this weekend plus dispatch of two troopships carrying specialized technicians also this weekend.

3. U.N. Operations

- (a) Mr. van Willigen of L. Smit & Company; Mr. Dawmay, Admiralty technician; and Mr. Boillot of the Suez Canal Company have been in daily contact and several delegations have conveyed personal messages for you. Action taken where necessary, or suspended pending your reaction, is contained in the two notes attached.

- (b) The "Switzer" Company has withdrawn from talks it had initiated with the U.K. Admiralty in order to be free of any implication of "entanglement" pending U.N. action. It has, on its own initiative, dispatched a salvage craft and 22 men to the Mediterranean to be on U.N. call.
- (c) It is clear to the L. Smit Company that it will need to have the assistance of all possible larger international salvage companies equipment and crews to the extent that this is "politically" feasible, in addition to all that Smit and Switzer can muster from their own resources. Much would be solved in the unlikely event that the U.N. could feasibly utilize under these companies present available Anglo/French equipment and crews. Much of such equipment will not be readily useable with crews of other nationalities not familiar with it, except perhaps U.S. technicians if this were possible.
- (d) No basis for reasonable cost guesses is available to anyone. Best "guesstimate" would at this stage be £1000 Sterling per day per major salvage craft employed plus 33-1/3%. On the basis of twenty such vessels at minimum (though thirty or more are presently considered desirable) it seems safe to predict that no bill could run at less than the rate of \$2,500,000. per month, but probably considerably more, for as long as the major salvage work continues. To this would have to be added first hire and/or purchase cost of sunken operational craft needed for resumed transit of vessels once the main shipping channel is clear.

Handwritten signature