

**Middle East - Suez story No
27-32: Middle East - Suez
story No 27-32 - 52**

HS L 179:114



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Suez story - 31

27-29 Nov. 56

Lloyd, Selwyn (Foreign Minister, England)

- 1 message from D.H.
- text of S. Lloyd's statement in the House of Commons
- 1 message from D.H. (never transmitted)
- 1 memorandum to D.H. (via P. Dixon)

27 November 1956

Copy

Personal message for Mr. Selwyn Lloyd:

Dear Selwyn,

From my technical people I have received the annexed note concerning the technical situation as of mid-December. However, they add that with the pressure I put on this afternoon, they believe that by Thursday they would be able to very much increase all figures. They further believe that, once I can put Wheeler into the picture so as to give him a direct feeling of the needs, the situation may become even better. On the basis of these considerations, I would suggest something like the following for your statement:

"I am informed by the Secretary-General that the planning of the clearing operation is making rapid progress and that the salvage equipment directly under the United Nations contract available a couple of weeks from now, will be sufficient to start an effective operation. It is foreseen that that equipment step by step will be increased. Survey teams necessary for a complete planning of the operation, have been selected and will be sent out as soon as general circumstances permit. Their work which is necessary for a successful completion of the whole operation, is not supposed in any way to delay the start of the salvage work. It is the hope of the Secretary-General that it will prove possible to arrange for a quick follow up by the United Nations of the work already begun with the equipment we have brought in. The basic decision of the General Assembly, authorizing the operation, was passed only last Saturday. It is therefore understandable that it has not been possible yet to establish a time table going beyond the indications the Secretary-General has already given me and which indicates that no time will be lost if the United Nations is put in a position to go ahead with its plans".

The trouble is, of course, that every day at this early stage of the operation adds to our knowledge, and that, therefore, what I can say Tuesday night, is not likely to render justice to what I might be able to say 48 hours from now. Personally I find, however, that the facts already established, are not bad. I can assure you that I shall do what

I can in order to find a formula also for a start with available material on the operation at the North end, even in advance of a withdrawal once the date of withdrawal has been firmly established.

With all good wishes,

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Memorandum on Suez Canal Clearance

Salvage equipment that is being dispatched to arrive at Port Said by December 14th consists of 2 salvage vessels, 2 tugs, 2 lifting craft and 60-100 personnel to man available vessels already on the spot. One salvage vessel, 1 tug and 1 30-ton floating crane will arrive at Suez by December 14th. Additional salvage equipment is being dispatched to arrive in the period December 18th-20th consisting of 3 salvage vessels, 1 tug, one 200-ton sheerlegs and 6-10 camels of 100-140 tons lifting capacity each. Additional equipment is being dispatched to arrive about a week later (December 27th) consisting of 1 tug, one 200-ton sheerlegs and a further minimum of supplementary 40-60 personnel to operate existing vessels on the spot.

The above equipment will be supplemented by December 14th with equipment from Mediterranean ports manned by experienced personnel. Details will be available by Thursday, November 29th. By the end of December, additional salvage equipment from yet other sources could be in situ.

A summary table reflecting the above follows:

Salvage equipment arriving at Suez Canal:

December 14th. At Port Said: 2 salvage vessels, 2 tugs, 2 lifting craft 60-100 personnel to man available vessels already on spot. At Suez: 1 salvage vessel, 1 tug, 1-30 ton floating crane. At port Said from Mediterranean Ports: A number of additional suitable craft and equipment. Estimate of number by 29 November 1956.

December 18-20. At Port Said: 3 salvage vessels, 1 tug, 1-200 ton sheerlegs, 6-10 camels each 100 to 140 ton lifting capacity.

December 27: At Port Said: 1 tug, 1-200 ton sheerlegs, 40-60 personnel to man available vessels already on spot.

At Port Said from other ports by end of December: A number of additional suitable craft and equipment.

Text of Mr. Selwyn Lloyd's Statement on the Middle East
situation in the House of Commons on the afternoon of
29 November 1956

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, and that of the House, I wish to make a statement with regard to my recent visit to New York and the discussions there with regard to the situation in Egypt.

My statement can only be of an interim character. There are important questions to be decided and they must be discussed with our French allies before decisions can be announced. Monsieur Pineau is coming to London tomorrow afternoon and I propose to make a further statement next Monday.

I found the general atmosphere in the United Nations considerably improved and a wider understanding of our position in certain sections of American opinion. The debate on the Afro-Asian resolution during Friday and Saturday of last week indicated the change in the atmosphere in the United Nations. I pointed out that we could not accept that resolution, because it implied a measure of censure which we could not accept and because it demanded that we should withdraw forthwith. Also the resolution was unrealistic as it made no reference to an international force. I indicated our desire to co-operate with the United Nations in these matters and I hoped for a resolution which we could accept. After I express these views, the representative of Belgium, M. Spaak, put forward an amendment to the Afro-Asian resolution calling upon us to expedite the application of the resolutions of the 2nd and 7th November, (which among other things urged us to withdraw) in the spirit in which they were adopted, particularly in regard to the functions vested in the United Nations Force. I stated that if that amendment was accepted the United Kingdom would be able to vote for the resolution. That also was the position of France. On the Belgian amendment the vote was 23 in favour, 37 against, and 18 abstentions, including the United States of America. In other words, the majority of the Assembly either voted with us or abstained. That constituted a considerable shift of opinion. The original resolution was then put to a vote and carried by a very large majority. I should, however, point out that the vote on this resolution was affected in my view by the fact that Mr. Cabot Lodge, representing the United States, had stated that he interpreted the word "forthwith" to mean "a phased operation".

We have repeatedly indicated our willingness to withdraw our forces from Egypt when an international force was effectively constituted and competent to carry out its functions. The House will recall the suggestion originally made by the Prime Minister on the 1st of November with regard to the United Nations undertaking the physical task of keeping the peace in the area. From that date the conception of an International Force rapidly gained support. The United Nations Force has now been constituted and is growing in numbers and I pay tribute to the speed with which the Secretary-General and his advisers have acted. There are already some 1,400 men in Egypt. By the 1st December there will be about 2,700. Within about 14 days the Force should number 4,100, apart from some air personnel, approximately 300 in number, stationed at Naples. The 4,100 will be in Egypt. Among these 4,400 will be some 700 Canadians. Within a fortnight there should be an organised military force with a Headquarters and staff under the command of General Burns, with two armoured car companies and the necessary supporting units including

medical, engineer, transport, signals, supply, workshop, provost and post units and other army services elements. The provisional target of the Secretary-General is to increase that Force to two combat brigades with appropriate administrative backing, including air transport.

I mention these facts to the House because obviously the build-up of this Force must have an important relationship to a phased withdrawal of our own and the French troops. There are however other important matters to be considered, such as the speedy clearance of the Canal, and the negotiations of a final settlement with regard to the future operation of the Canal. Decisions upon these matters must be discussed with our French allies and I also await certain clarifications with regard to the carrying out of the resolution passed last Saturday by the General Assembly.

This resolution authorised the Secretary-General to proceed with arrangements for clearance as a United Nations operation. I shall be able to deal with those aspects of the matter next Monday.

Grave anxiety has been caused in this country as to the position of British subjects in Egypt. The House will recall the statement made by my Rt. Hon. friend the Minister of State on November 26. As soon as I received the report from the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs I made known to the Secretary-General of the United Nations the very serious view which H.M.G. took of it and of the consequences which would inevitably follow if the expulsions were put into effect. On November 27 I sent a letter to the Secretary-General which I will circulate in the official report, pointing out the hardship that would be caused to thousands of British subjects, many of them poor people, who were to be forced to leave the country where they had lived many years without being permitted to take sufficient money with them to start a new life elsewhere.

The present position is not entirely clear, but it seems that no general expulsion order was made. The Egyptian Government did however issue a very large number of individual expulsion orders against British and French subjects. In addition several hundred British subjects in Egypt (subjects) remain interned. The Swiss Minister in Cairo, to whose work I should like to pay a warm tribute, is doing everything he can both to improve the position of British subjects in Egypt and to clarify the Egyptian Governments intentions. We await his further report.

Bearing in mind, Sir, what I have said earlier, I hope that the House will be willing to await my further statement on Monday.

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I would ask you to transmit the following personal message to the Secretary of State.

"Dear Selwyn,

So far I have only received the Reuter version of your statements in Parliament. With reserve for misrepresentation I would like, without delay, to give you my immediate reaction.

I am worried by the effect of your statements, if they were to limit your freedom of action next Monday. I am also afraid that they may be found to give a presentation of the situation requiring an exceptional act of faith from the Government of Egypt in the light of what has preceded. I hope they will show it, but - .

Particularly I am worried about what you say about a settlement of the Suez administration question, as the next word, as I understand the tactics, must be yours.

I say this out of sincere concern for what we are both trying to achieve. In the same spirit I would draw your attention to my own stand on the relationship between the timing of the United Nations clearing and the withdrawal from Port Said. This can be stated roughly as follows:

The Egyptian Government requested assistance of the United Nations in clearing the Canal. Promise of such assistance was given and accepted by the General Assembly. The Egyptians indicated that they would want the operation to start immediately on withdrawal of the Anglo/French - Israeli troops from the Canal area and Port Said. I never accepted that as a condition and gave no promise as to the timetable, but it is my personal view that it would be irresponsible for the Secretary-General to bring United Nations teams in on the operation as long as Port Said and the Canal area, in view of the continued presence of foreign troops, must be regarded as a potential war zone. Thus, for practical, and I hope obvious, reasons I would not consider it possible to give instructions for a beginning of the operation until a withdrawal has taken place. Technically we are in a position to begin around the middle of next month.

This stand may have to be brought out in the open, if the development would squeeze me between the two conflicting political positions."

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D refs to my message
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MEMORANDUM

Sir Pierson Dixon transmitted at around 4 p.m. the following message from Mr. Selwyn Lloyd.

Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, whose stand on the question of withdrawal was unchanged, had found in his contacts in London that two points were of vital importance for further progress along the lines he had suggested.

1. Colonel Nasser had said that he considered Egypt to be in "a state of war" with France and England. Did Egypt draw the conclusion that, after a withdrawal, Egypt would stop the passage for British and French ships through the Canal, in analogy with the policy applied to Israeli ships (whatever view was held on the legality of this latter policy). A withdrawal, as planned, could not be achieved unless it was perfectly clear that Egypt would not block the passage of British and French ships after the withdrawal. As the situation was, Mr. Lloyd did not consider it sufficient with an informal declaration of the type "it is understood etc." In his view it would be absolutely necessary to have some kind of public commitment to the desired effect.

2. In view of the necessity for a quick clearing operation, it was considered essential that the United Nations should be able to draw its resources freely from such sources as would provide for the quickest possible operation. In this respect I should be able to say that the United Nations had a free hand to use all available resources.

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Sir Pierson Dixon transmitted at around 4 p.m. the following message from Mr. Selwyn Lloyd.

Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, whose stand on the question of withdrawal was unchanged, had found in his contacts in London that two points were of vital importance for further progress along the lines he had suggested.

1. Colonel Nasser had said that he considered Egypt to be in "a state of war" with France and England. Did Egypt draw the conclusion that, after a withdrawal, Egypt would stop the passage for British and French ships through the Canal, in analogy with the policy applied to Israeli ships (whatever view was held on the legality of this latter policy). A withdrawal, as planned, could not be achieved unless it was perfectly clear that Egypt would not block the passage of British and French ships after the withdrawal. As the situation was, Mr. Lloyd did not consider it sufficient with an informal declaration of the type "it is understood etc." In his view it would be absolutely necessary to have some kind of public commitment to the desired effect.

2. In view of the necessity for a quick clearing operation, it was considered essential that the United Nations should be able to draw its resources freely from such sources as would provide for the quickest possible operation. In this respect I should be able to say that the United Nations had a free hand to use all available resources.

29 November 1956