

**Middle East - Suez story No
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23 Dec. 56

Text of memorandum (dictated by D.H., never used)

Internal
Dictated by H.C.

Not sent in the way

23 December 1956

In Light DRACO 35 I have to re-capitulate developments.

9 December we gave instructions on Port Said operation reading:

"However it will not be legitimate that specific and limited salvage projects under way on individual vessels should be dropped by Anglo/French salvage crews and the long and complicated salvage task recommenced (repeat "re"-commenced) by the United Nations". We have always taken for granted that this was understood as a strictly limited exception to the general rule that we run operation with own crews and that the exception was caused only by our concern not to suffer direct set-back by sacrifice of work already invested in individual operations.

On the basis of Wheeler's reports after inspections in Port Said we informed Egyptians, 16 December, about the retention, roughly until 20 December, of 6 ships with some 180 crew members involved, supported by 50 men. After that time, likewise on the basis of Wheeler's report, we counted on retaining 2 ships with some 60 as crew until 10 January. This information to Egyptians was transmitted back also to Wheeler.

19 December the British reported that Slater had understood Wheeler's request to him to be limited to retention only of Sea Salvor, Salveda and French L.C.T. We told British, and informed Wheeler, that we felt this to be a misunderstanding as, above the 2 (or 3) ships, the others mentioned in Wheeler's previous information to us as working until 20th should, of course, follow up their work, as repeatedly stated in our instructions and as assumed by Wheeler in his calculation concerning end of work 20th. In giving this explanation to the British and to Wheeler we considered it obvious that what we had in mind was not a change or an amplification of our basic instruction but only that, were Wheeler's time table to prove too optimistic in relation "E" Day which we knew to be 22 December, we should have such arrangements with the British as to guarantee that the ships would then not suddenly drop what they had in hand but wind it up in an orderly way safeguarding us against losses of effort already invested. This is obviously/^{something} entirely different from arrangements concerning those ships which would mean that they proceed with a major part of their operation until completion. If our wish had been to depart from the basic inter-

pretation which followed from Wheeler's previous information, and not only to see to it that - short of a request from our side regarding ships working - they would follow up what they had immediately in hand, we would have said so.

It is clear from our DRAGO 40 that the switch now agreed in Port Said from our point of view presents an entirely new problem in relation to the Egyptians and - in view of the necessary explanations to the British in case of a drastic phasing out - also ^{in relation} to them. In the situation prevailing "E" Day we had, of course, to accept Wheeler's agreement as we had to put all the ships retained in Port Said, immediately, under our command and UN flag, but in doing so we in no way accepted what now seems to be the underlying idea as it emerges in Wheeler's later clarifications.

The only bridge to a sound development now is a smooth and well-argued use of the phasing out possibilities. That has been pointed out to the Egyptian Foreign Minister who naturally is worried although he has not exerted any pressure and obviously for the moment protects our position. In order to advise Wheeler on this phasing out, which must not show up as a new reversal in policy but as a logical development of our consistent stand, we need to know whether and to what extent Wheeler may have discussed the latest agreement with Younis. It is our feeling that the matter should now be as completely as possible depoliticised and treated as a day to day development on the spot. This makes relations to Younis and his reactions most important. We are afraid that by supporting Wheeler from here in such a way as to make us openly parties to his implementation of the phasing out, we might turn again the whole story into one of principles.