

Telegram from the British Embassy in Cairo on reactions in the press following the nationalisation of the Suez Canal (Cairo, 29 July 1956)

Caption: In a telegram dated 29 July 1956, the British Embassy in Cairo informs the British Foreign Office of the press reactions to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company. The press particularly reports on the address given on 26 July by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, the initial British reactions and the attitude of the United States and the Commonwealth countries.

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FROM CAIRO TO FOREIGN OFFICE

En Clair

FOREIGN OFFICE AND
WHITEHALL DISTRIBUTION

Sir H. Trevelyan

No. 1309

July 29, 1956.

D. 8.15 p.m. July 29, 1956.

R. 12.15 a.m. July 30, 1956.

Addressed to Foreign Office telegram No. 1309 of July 29.
Repeated for information to Washington P.O.M.E.F.

Paris

My telegram No. 1299: Suez Canal.

Press today gives very full coverage to Nasser's speech, his triumphal journey from Alexandria to Cairo, the Treasury announcement, the attitude of America and Commonwealth countries, the Arab and world support for nationalization of the Canal.

2. Nasser made four short speeches on journey from Alexandria which add little to his Cairo speech. At Benha he referred to the struggling Egyptian people who had declared their mobilization in order to repel conspirators and face the imperialists and said "This spirit will enable us to win. We will not give the imperialists and exploiters a chance. We march forward to our freedom".

3. Treasury announcement is fully reported including explanation by Treasury spokesman that the general agreements on the release of Egypt's frozen balances will not be affected by Britain's measures. Al Ahram does not expect special authorization for purchases to be given in view of the tension between both countries. Akhbar quotes a responsible source as saying that the blocking of Egypt's balances is invalid and will not benefit British interests in Egypt.

4. State Department circles are quoted to the effect that any joint Western plan will aim at demanding guarantees on navigation. "Other United States circles" are reported as saying that America does not object to nationalization in principle, but only wants to ensure freedom of navigation. Other United States experts believed that reference to the Security Council or the International Court would not have sure results.

Al Akhbar refers to doubt of "responsible American circles" regarding the West's ability to ease Nasser's grip on the Canal and to Paris reports that France and Britain had asked the United States to join them in military measures, but that the United States had described such interference as impossible without a United Nations decision.

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5. Al Akhbar states that the Commonwealth is divided into three groups over nationalization of the Canal. India and Ceylon support it on condition that freedom of navigation is maintained, Australia and New Zealand demand severe measures against Egypt, while the rest of the Commonwealth are passive.
6. Considerable prominence continues to be given to messages of support from the other Arab countries. Today's batch contains messages from Syrian House of Representatives, Jordanian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, King Saud, President Kuwathy, Prince Badr, Lebanese parties and nationalist organizations, Sudanese student and popular organizations, Khalid Bikhdash and Prince Abdel Kerim who expect Nasser's next step to be an economic, political and cultural boycott of France.
7. Al Ahram reports from London that Her Majesty's Government are studying possibility of directing tankers round the Cape and extending its pipelines. Al Akhbar reports that British Prime Minister is afraid that other Middle Eastern countries may follow suit and nationalize British concerns. Also that Her Majesty's Government are trying to prevent two destroyers bought by Egypt from leaving and carries an A.P. report that Britain will put off arms shipments to Egypt.
8. Press also reports that Canal Company's funds including £E 9 million in hard currencies had been deposited with Egyptian National Bank in name of "Suez Canal Management Board", that leading Egyptian financiers had asked their agents abroad to buy all Canal Company shares offered for sale, that Mahmoud Younes had cabled company officials in London and Paris instructing them to return to Egypt and that official Cairo circles had asserted that Egypt did not want to restrict the freedom of shipping, respect for which was in Egypt's own interests.
9. My immediately following telegram contains editorial comment.
Foreign Office pass to Washington as my telegram No. 161.
[Repeated to Washington.]

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