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Eden Would Go Far to Meet Demands Of Cairo But Will Safeguard Canal

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

LONDON, Feb. 9—To get a settlement of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty dispute the British Government is prepared to go to any lengths that will not prejudice or impair the defense of the West.

That is the attitude with which the Government will enter any discussions that may now be arranged with the new Egyptian regime headed by Aly Maher Pasha.

No one can predict, of course, whether the lengths to which Britain will go will satisfy the aspirations of Egypt or whether the Egyptians will reciprocate the professed British willingness to compromise and accommodate.

The British Government knows clearly what it wants and what the West must get out of any negotiations. In brief, that is a functional military base in the Suez Canal zone for the defense of the Middle East, which is the right flank of the Allied position in Western Europe.

That base is needed, it cannot too often be repeated, not simply for the protection of the canal itself, as important as that waterway is to the commerce and communications of the western world. It is needed also as a site for staging and mounting a defensive campaign for the Middle East and Africa in case of Communist aggression.

Egypt's Vital Role

"If war comes," Field Marshal Sir William Slim, chief of the British Imperial General Staff, told Egyptian Ministers in 1950, "one of the Soviet interests is this country—Egypt."

"Anybody who wants to hold the Middle East must hold Egypt," he added.

Egypt, the field marshal argued, cannot defend herself and cannot remain neutral. She must have an ally and must prepare her defenses in advance in cooperation with that ally.

"I am convinced that Russia plans for war," Sir William told the Egyptians; "they want to get into Africa."

In case of war, he said, the Soviet Army would approach Egypt by way of Iran or Turkey and could reach Egypt in four months. Ten to fifteen divisions would be used, he estimated.

As a base for defense against such an assault, there is no alternative to the Suez Canal Zone, with its ample labor force, food resources, fresh water supply, rail and road network, maneuver and storage space, and sea communications north and south. Allied strategists have been saying that for years and they keep on saying it.

That fact is the rock-bottom basis of British and Allied policy in relation to the Suez Canal. It explains Britain's insistence on maintaining the Suez base in spite of all Egypt's political and military arguments against it.

Maintaining the base would not necessarily mean continuing what is in effect a British military occupation of Egyptian territory or using it as a garrison for Britain's Middle East forces.

Last April the British Government offered to "civilianize" the base, gradually evacuating British troops over a four-year period, leaving civilian technicians in charge of the installations and entrusting its security to the British Army.

Possible Move

If a functional base—that is a base whose storage, repair, communications and housing facilities were kept in good order—could be maintained without the presence of British troops, the troops might be moved to encampments in Cyprus, Libya and other neighboring areas.

No such suggestion is being made in specific terms to the Egyptian Government, however. Now that fluidity has been restored in relations between Britain and Egypt, as the result of the shock of recent events and the change in the Cairo Government, the British want to avoid a new solidification of attitudes.

The British do not intend at this stage to put up any propositions that can be exposed to criticism in the Cairo press and knocked down by the new Government's opponents. They hope that Aly Maher Pasha on his side will not strike any uncompromising attitudes, such as making the evacuation of British forces a precondition for discussions.

Past exchanges have consisted of first one side and then the other putting forward mutually irreconcilable proposals that neither considered very seriously.

"It was like a conversation between two deaf men," a British official remarked recently. What the British hope for this time is that the Egyptians will listen and that from the beginning Egyptian thinking will enter into the search for a solution that will satisfy all.

The thought should be, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden said last Tuesday, "not how much can each get out of the other but how can we best help each other."

The idea here is that the Egyptian demand for the termination of the 1936 treaty, by right of which the British occupy the Canal Zone, and the British desire for the continued protection of the zone would be considered jointly and simultaneously.

New From the Old

In other words, it is hoped that if the British occupation is to be replaced by some other arrangement that there will be no hiatus and no vacuum, that the new system, whatever it may be, will emerge from the old.

As now envisioned the order of procedure will be that Britain and Egypt will enter into talks on a revision of the 1936 treaty and if and when they approach agreement other powers will be consulted about a defense system to replace the present bilateral arrangement which Egypt has repudiated already.

Presumably the basis of discussions for a new arrangement would be the proposals which Britain, France, the United States and Turkey have made to Egypt, that the British command in the Canal Zone should be replaced by a five-power command in which Egypt would be a full and equal partner.

Mutual Arrangement

The occupation would be replaced by cooperation and Egypt would take her place beside the great powers in a mutual defense alliance. Needless to say, no such arrangement would be possible if Egypt should persist in considering any Allied command based on her soil as a continuation of the occupation.

Besides Egypt's obsession with evacuation, there is another obstacle to agreement. That is her equally insistent demand for sovereignty over the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

King Farouk has been proclaimed in Egyptian law sovereign of the Sudan, an accomplished fact that it will be difficult for the Egyptians to repudiate. Britain has not accepted that fact and continues to insist that the Sudanese must have a free choice in the matter of their political future. Self-determination, free and genuine, will be Britain's theme in any talks with Egypt. As Mr. Eden acknowledged last Tuesday, that may not facilitate agreement.

If there is to be any Sudanese link with the Egyptian crown it must be within the framework of self-determination.

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