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LETTER DATED 15 SEPTEMBER 1956 FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNION OF
SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF
THE UNITED NATIONS

I have the honour hereby to request you to have the "Statement by the Soviet Government on the need for a peaceful settlement of the Suez question" of 15 September 1956 published as an official Security Council document.

I have the honour to be etc.

(Signed) A. SOBOLEV

Permanent Representative of the
USSR to the United Nations

STATEMENT BY THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT ON THE NEED FOR A
PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF THE SUEZ QUESTION
15 SEPTEMBER 1956

The Soviet Government considers it necessary to restate its position on the situation which has at present arisen in connexion with the Suez question.

It is known that the United Kingdom and France are continuing to threaten Egypt with force and that a growing concentration of United Kingdom and French military and naval forces is taking place in immediate proximity to Egypt. This is undoubtedly leading to an even greater exacerbation of the situation with regard to the Suez Canal and is creating a situation dangerous to peace.

In its Statement 9 August 1956, on the Suez Canal question, the Soviet Government already pointed out the incompatibility with United Nations principles of the threats and military preparations begun by the United Kingdom and French Governments with respect to Egypt in connexion with the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. In this Statement the Soviet Government outlined its point of view concerning the legality of the act of nationalization of the Suez Canal Company by the Egyptian Government, and the question of ensuring freedom of navigation through the Canal, and pointed to the need for a peaceful solution of the Suez question.

Being firmly in favour of a relaxation of international tension, consistently pursuing a policy of peace and friendship among nations, and striving to promote in every way the peaceful settlement of international disputes, the Soviet Union accepted the invitation of the United Kingdom to participate in the London conference, despite the fact that this conference could not by its composition or its nature be regarded as an international and representative conference with legal capacity to take any decisions with regard to the Suez Canal. On this point the Soviet Union based itself on the fact that if the countries concerned so wished, even such a conference could assist in finding an approach to the settlement of the problems connected with freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal as could promote a peaceful solution of this question.

Guided by these considerations, the delegation of the Soviet Union set out at the London conference the Soviet Government's position on the Suez Canal question, namely that the Suez question must be settled by peaceful means, in strict accordance with the requirements of the United Nations Charter and with

the indisputable sovereign rights of Egypt, as complete master, owner and administrator of the Canal, while guaranteeing freedom of navigation through the Canal at all times and for all countries using this waterway.

The Soviet delegation accordingly endorsed the proposal submitted by India on the question of the Suez Canal, based on the principle of the proper adjustment of Egypt's interests as a sovereign State and the interests of all other users of the Suez Canal.

At the London conference the lawfulness of the Egyptian Government's act of nationalizing the Suez Canal Company was, in its essence, recognized by the majority of participants. Representatives of several countries, touching upon the methods of settlement of the Suez question, expressed themselves quite positively in favour of its settlement by peaceful means. Such a settlement of this question was also supported by the Governments of many countries which did not take part in the work of the conference, but which are interested in navigation through the Suez Canal.

The attempts of some Powers to impose upon Egypt, in the name of the London conference, proposals to remove the Suez Canal from the control and sovereignty of Egypt have failed. The conference took only one decision: to transmit to the Egyptian Government the full verbatim report of the conference. The initiators of a proposal for the international administration of the Suez Canal took the step of acting separately, outside the conference, having formed for this purpose the so-called Committee of Five. This Committee was clearly created in order to attempt to impose upon Egypt the so-called Dulles plan, which provides for the handing over of the Suez Canal to foreign administration.

Simultaneously with the attempts to impose the Dulles plan upon Egypt the United Kingdom and French Governments, in order to exert pressure on Egypt and other Arab States, have embarked upon the path of military measures. They have concentrated and continue to concentrate naval, air and land forces at the approaches to the Suez Canal. By agreement with the United Kingdom Government, the French command has despatched military units, including parachute and air force units to the island of Cyprus. French transport planes with parachute units from Madagascar are arriving in the region of Djibuti in French Somaliland. Increasingly extensive mobilization measures are being carried out in the United Kingdom and merchant ships are being requisitioned for the speedy

transportation to the Near East of troops and military equipment. More and more military contingents are being despatched from British and French ports to the regions adjoining the Suez Canal. The press, incited by militant circles in the United Kingdom and France, is demanding the adoption of immediate and resolute military measures with regard to Egypt.

The recent extraordinary session of the Atlantic Bloc Council (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) at which the Suez Canal question was considered was obviously convened for the same purpose of exerting pressure upon Egypt. The United Kingdom and France, supported by the United States, are attempting to use NATO against Egypt, undisturbed by the fact that they do not cease to advertise this bloc as "a defensive and regional organization". The organizers of the Atlantic bloc apparently wish to draw into these dangerous plans other members of the Atlantic bloc who might wish to stand aside.

Reports about the conference of the Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom and France held in London a few days ago, with the participation of military representatives of the two countries, show that the Governments of these countries are continuing a policy of military preparations against Egypt. At an emergency session of the British Parliament on 12 September, Prime Minister Eden, quoting an agreement reached with the Governments of the United States and France, made a statement on the immediate setting up of a so-called canal users' association which the above-mentioned three Governments are to join in the first place, and which, in the British Prime Minister's words, is to take over "coordination of navigation through the Suez Canal", the recruitment and use of pilots and the levying of dues for the passage of ships through the Canal. It was stated in this connexion that if the Egyptian Government refuses to co-operate with this organization, Egypt will be deemed to have violated the 1888 Convention.

In wide international circles this plan of the three Powers is rightly evaluated as a dangerous provocation leading to a further aggravation of the situation with regard to the Suez Canal and to the creation, by artificial means, of incidents which could be used as a pretext for the use of force against Egypt.

Connected with this plan there is also the measure which is obviously designed to disrupt normal operations in the Canal: the recall by the Western Powers of the foreign pilots working on the Canal.

It is easy to realize that the whole of this plan is aimed at removing the administration of the Canal from the hands of Egypt and transferring it to a foreign administration, although it is perfectly plain that such a plan can only be implemented by the use of force against Egypt. If this plan were not aimed at an artificial aggravation of the situation and the creation of incidents, the question may be asked: why, then, was it necessary to create some kind of foreign association for the administration of the Egyptian Canal, which is the property of the Egyptian Government and the Egyptian people? The British Government attempts to justify military preparations against Egypt by alleging that Egypt, having nationalized the Suez Canal Company, has used force. However, such an allegation is evidently designed for the very naive. As a matter of fact, the nationalization by Egypt of the private Suez Canal Company, which is an internal affair of Egypt's, was carried out in accordance with her legal rights, and it would be absurd to justify attempts to use armed forces against Egypt by references to this nationalization. In addition, it is not Egypt that is sending its troops against the United Kingdom and France, but, on the contrary, the troops of these Powers are being concentrated near Egypt.

The French Government, carrying out military measure aimed against Egypt, alleges that it is doing this with the aim of defending French citizens living in Egypt. But who can take such assertions seriously, when it is well known that no one has threatened or is threatening French citizens in Egypt? It would not be superfluous to recall in this connexion that such means have frequently been resorted to in the past, as an excuse for the invasion and enslavement of the countries of the East.

It is impossible not to point out that, although in the United States of America there is much talk about a peaceful settlement of the question, in fact the United States of America is not protesting against the concentration of troops and the threat of their use, which cannot but encourage the advocates in the United Kingdom and France of the use of force against Egypt. Furthermore, in his statement at his press conference of 11 September, President Eisenhower did in fact recognize the admissibility of the use of armed forces by the United Kingdom and France against Egypt. A still clearer picture of the attitude of the United States of America is given by the statement made by Secretary of State Dulles at a press conference on 13 September at which he, first, admitted the

possibility of the United Kingdom and France using force against Egypt during the passage of their ships through the Canal, and secondly, stated outright that the United States of America is the initiator of the proposal to set up the so-called "association of canal users".

The Soviet Government considers it necessary to state that the military preparations of the United Kingdom and France, conducted with the support of the United States of America, for the purpose of exerting pressure on Egypt over the Suez question, are grossly at variance with the principles of the United Nations. The United Nations was set up by the joint efforts of States, and especially of the great Powers, for the very purpose of securing a peaceful life for the peoples. Its prime duty is to consider conflicts and disputes which may arise in relations between States, so as not to allow a development of events which might lead to the violation of peace.

The United Nations Charter directly forbids the use or threat of force against any State, except for self-defence in the event of an armed attack on a given State and makes it obligatory to seek peaceful means for the solution of disputes which may arise among States. Of course the Charter does provide for the possibility of using force in the form of sanctions, but only in those extreme cases when it is necessary to repel an aggressor and ensure the maintenance or restoration of peace. But in these circumstances, which do not apply to the present case, the question of the use of force must be decided, not at the discretion of a given country or group of countries guided by their own narrow calculations, but in accordance with the decision of the Security Council which has appropriate powers to this end under the United Nations Charter.

Consequently the Governments of the United Kingdom and France have no grounds whatever for resorting to a threat of force or the use of force against Egypt, which has exercised its legitimate rights as a sovereign State in respect of the Suez Canal Company. The actions of the United Kingdom and France are incompatible with their participation in the United Nations, especially taking into account the fact that both countries are permanent members of the Security Council, which has a special responsibility for the maintenance of peace. The military preparations carried out by these Powers against Egypt can only be regarded as a manifestation of the intentions of the United Kingdom and France

to seize the Suez Canal which passes through Egyptian territory and is under Egyptian sovereignty. Such actions cannot be regarded otherwise than as an act of aggression against Egypt, no matter what attempts are made to present them differently.

By embarking on military threats, the United Kingdom and France not only create a situation dangerous to peace, but also risk irretrievable damage to themselves. There can be little doubt that a military attack on Egypt and hostilities in that area would lead to immense destruction in the Suez Canal and in the oil fields in the countries of the Arab East, as well as to the oil pipelines passing through the territory of those countries. Undoubtedly also such a development of events would cause considerable damage to other countries which have extensive economic contacts with the countries of the East.

If foreign invasion should be undertaken against Egypt, then undoubtedly, in addition to the aforementioned material consequences of such an act, the peoples of Asia and Africa would be aroused against the Governments of the countries which had embarked on aggression. These peoples are profoundly aware that the historical development of mankind is leading toward the complete liquidation of vile colonialism, and that no forces are capable of stopping this process.

The campaign of military threats and the military measures launched by the United Kingdom and France show that there are certain circles in those countries that are instigating the adoption of military action against Egypt. They aim to impose upon Egypt a solution of the Suez Canal issue by force of arms. However, they forget that in our times, with the vigorous upsurge of the peoples of the East that have entered a broad path of independent development and national rebirth, and in an age when there exist such destructive types of weapons as the atomic and hydrogen weapons, it is useless to threaten and rattle the sabre, or act in the manner characteristic of the past period of colonial conquests.

The threats to use force against Egypt are meeting with decisive condemnation by world opinion, including ever broader public circles in the United Kingdom and France. In this connexion one cannot fail to note the stand taken by the British Trade Unions which at their recent Congress in Brighton categorically opposed the use of force or the threat of force in the solution

of the Suez question, and also the stand taken by the French General Confederation of Labor, which condemns the above measures, threats and sabre-rattling.

The Soviet Government considers it necessary to state once again that it adheres to the view that freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal must be safeguarded for all countries, and that this can and should only be achieved by peaceful means, taking into account both the inalienable sovereign rights of Egypt, and the interests of the States using the Suez Canal. There is no other way if one does not wish to create a serious conflict and artificially to aggravate the situation.

The Soviet Government realizes the importance of the Suez Canal to France as maritime powers, and the role it plays in their economic relations with the countries of the East. The Soviet Union itself attaches great importance to freedom of navigation through and the normal functioning of the Suez Canal, as was pointed out in the Soviet Government's statement of 9 August and in the statements of the USSR delegation at the London conference.

The USSR Government is, however, deeply convinced that the Suez question can and must be solved by peaceful means, especially as the Egyptian Government for its part expresses full readiness to take an active part in such a solution. It is widely known that the Egyptian Government has repeatedly stated its readiness to observe the 1888 Convention on the freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal, and also expressed its readiness to take part, together with the interested States, in the work of preparing and concluding a new international convention corresponding to present conditions and the spirit of the times, to replace the Convention of 1888. At the same time, as is known, the Egyptian Government, wishing to ensure freedom of navigation through the Canal, is taking the measures necessary for the normal functioning of the Canal which is in uninterrupted use. On 10 September 1956 the Egyptian Government despatched to all the States interested in the freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal, a note reaffirming its readiness for a peaceful settlement of the Suez problem and proposing to convene, along with other Governments, signatories to the Constantinople Convention of 1888, a conference to revise this Convention and discuss the problem of concluding an agreement confirming and guaranteeing freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal. Wishing to promote a peaceful settlement of the Suez problem, the

Soviet Government has received this note of the Egyptian Government with satisfaction and expressed its readiness to take part in the aforementioned international conference. At the same time the Soviet Government has expressed itself in favour of the representation at the conference of all the countries which signed the Convention of 1888, including the rightful successors of the countries which signed that Convention, the Arab countries whose territories lie in immediate proximity to the canal and which are vitally interested in a peaceful settlement of this problem, and other countries which use the Suez Canal.

On the basis of this consideration and guided by the necessity for a peaceful settlement of the Suez issue, the Soviet Government expresses its readiness to take part in the work of the body proposed by the Egyptian Government for holding negotiations, on which would be represented the different viewpoints of the States which use the Canal, for the purpose of finding an acceptable basis for the solution of the Suez Canal issue.

The Soviet Union has taken a number of steps to promote a just solution of the Suez issue by means of negotiation. It is continuing and will continue efforts in this direction.

The Soviet Government expresses its hope that all those who hold dear the interests of peace and who, not in words but in deeds, wish to build their relations with other countries on the principles of equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, will take steps to ensure that the Suez question is settled by peaceful means in accordance with the national interests and rights of Egypt and in the interests of strengthening peace and international co-operation.

The USSR as a great Power, cannot stand aside from the Suez problem. It cannot fail to show concern at the situation which exists at the present time as a result of the action taken by the Western Powers. This is understandable, because any violation of the peace in the area of the Near and Middle East cannot but affect the security of the Soviet State.

The Soviet Government considers that the United Nations cannot fail to react to the existing situation and to the threats of force against Egypt which are being made by some States Members of this Organization. Such threats are grossly at variance with the principles and the Charter of the United Nations, which put all Members under an obligation to refrain, in their international relations

from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the solemn purposes, and peaceful principles of the United Nations.

