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STATEMENT ON SUEZ, BROADCAST BY CHRISTIAN PINEAU  
FRENCH MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
ON SEPTEMBER 14, 1956  
ON THE EVE OF THE SECOND LONDON CONFERENCE, OPENING SEPTEMBER 19

In the past few weeks, and particularly in the last few days, a campaign has been taking shape in several countries—a campaign which tends, on the Suez issue, to pit the advocates of force against those of negotiation.

We cannot allow a situation that is so serious, and in which our country is so deeply involved, to be presented in a manner so tendentious and contrary to the facts.

For several months now the French Government has stated before the world that it was necessary to put an end to the cold war, to improve relations between East and West and to solve as soon as possible the fundamental problem of our time, the problem posed by the impoverished condition of a certain number of countries termed "under-developed."

Our position in this respect remains absolutely unwavering.

Moreover, we have often repeated that peaceful coexistence required due respect for the institutions in force in the different nations and that we should not, whatever our opinion, interfere in the internal regime of any country.

We have not changed our mind on that point either, but the success of a policy based on such principles presupposes that a certain number of conditions have been fulfilled.

The first is that individual nationalisms should sometimes agree to bow to the general interest.

The second is that international agreements should be scrupulously respected. We must see to it that the prestige-bearing terms of anti-colonialism and independence do not conceal the desire which certain countries may have of repudiating their promises or of violating the treaties they have signed.

The third is that dictatorships—since we cannot prevent their existence in the world—should resist the temptation, which is characteristic of them, to settle international problems by unilateral acts. The memories of Nazism and Facism are still too fresh in our minds for us to be able to forget the dangers of methods which led us to the Second World War.

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France's foreign policy, therefore, remains perfectly consistent when it attempts at one and the same time to bring about a relaxation of international tension and to stop ventures like that of Colonel Nasser, which tend to jeopardize the very principles on which peace and international cooperation may rest.

The problem to be solved is difficult for the French Government since it consists both in avoiding war and in not recognizing the "fait accompli."

I shall make short work of the accusation that our action is aimed solely at defending the private interests of the Universal Company of the Suez Canal. If such were the case, the solutions we would have proposed would naturally have been quite different.

But the fact that certain persons lay such stress on an accusation, which they know better than any one else to be unfounded, proves how little trust they have in themselves when they put themselves forward as champions of Colonel Nasser and his methods.

The problem is actually twofold: it is political, in the sense that it is not possible to accept the idea that a question which concerns so many nations, and the international character of which was confirmed by the Treaty of 1888, should be settled by a single man, in terms of his personal pride, without consulting or cooperating with the various interested nations.

It is economic, since the free transit of vessels through the Suez Canal has a direct bearing on the supply lines and foreign trade of a certain number of countries, such as Great Britain, Italy, France and many others, in Europe as well as in Asia and Africa.

What means did we have of settling such a problem without recourse to force?

Eighteen nations, representing 95% of the canal users, believed that they had found this means and suggested it to the Egyptian dictator:

It consisted essentially in creating an international operating agency, which would give the users the necessary guarantees while reserving all the profits of the canal for the Egyptian people. I do not doubt for a moment that a democratic Egyptian regime, more concerned with the people's interests than with questions of personal prestige, would have accepted such a solution right away.

Colonel Nasser preferred to meet the reasonable proposals, submitted to him by the five nations chosen to represent the 18 nations of the London conference, with outright refusal.

Thus he placed both himself and us in the most dangerous of positions.

He made it impossible for the French and British Governments to maintain the pressure they had exerted for seven weeks on the canal pilots to remain at their posts, in spite of their fatigue and their desire to escape from insecurity and vexations.

He obliged the interested Governments to seek a solution which, while remaining peaceful, did not, in spite of their wish, meet with Egypt's consent.



The solution that we propose, which was suggested by the Government of the United States, follows the same logic as our previous positions. It consists in applying--through the creation of a new international authority--the principles accepted in London by the eighteen nations.

We do not deceive ourselves as to the difficulties of applying a solution of this nature, while still hoping that Egypt will not stand in the way of the proper functioning of the new organization.

In any event, this solution presents a certain number of obvious advantages.

It indicates that the great democratic nations, ready to discuss at all times with an open mind, do not bow before the policy of the "fait accompli."

It testifies to a tightening of Western solidarity, all the more important as Colonel Nasser, has, up until now, evidently gambled on division among the interested powers.

It does not stand in the way of the search for a definitive solution, acceptable to all the users of the canal and in conformity with the true interests of the Egyptian people.

There remains the question of determining the proper course to take if Colonel Nasser, violating the Convention of 1888, denies the new international organization the means of operating.

In this case a military conflict can still be avoided if the canal users give such evidence of their steadfastness and their solidarity that Colonel Nasser will hesitate to sacrifice, once again, the interests of his people to his rash dreams.

These explanations show that the French Government, not only has not decided upon war, but is seeking every means of avoiding it.

As for those who criticize certain troop movements, I request them to reread, not the speeches of the British or French Ministers, but those made by Colonel Nasser or his collaborators. They will understand what legitimate fears we could have for the security of our nationals, threatened by the wave of xenophobia unleashed by the Egyptian dictator. If these preparations for merely keeping order had had no other results than avoiding disturbances and obliging Colonel Nasser not to apply his own law regarding the retention of foreign pilots on the canal by force, they would not have been useless.

I want, in answer to tendentious propaganda, to make it perfectly clear that never was the presence of French troops on Cyprus intended to threaten in any way the integrity of the Arab countries, particularly Syria and Lebanon, nor did it imply a desire to intervene in the conflict on that island between our British friends and the Greek population.

This is the position of the French Government, which does not wish to resort to force but does not intend to bow to it. We can regret, however, that there are some groups in France which are so unaware of the honor and interests of our country that they accuse our Government of being responsible for the present tension. Let them at least have the courage to reveal the truth and to show--according to his writings and his speeches--what the Egyptian dictator is like and what he wants. If some people put themselves forward as the defenders of Nasser, we ourselves, steadfastly and calmly, shall remain the defenders of France.