

CONFIDENTIAL



Prime Minister

Agree that Sir Robert Armstrong should,

as he proposes:

a. speak to Mr Macmillan and Lady Aron;

b. approach Lord Brabourne on the basis of paragraphs 13 + 15 below?

AH

Ref. A02597

PRIME MINISTER

Lord Mountbatten's Memoirs

May I take your mind back to the minute which I sent you on 16th January about the scripts of six television programmes based on Lord Mountbatten's filmed memoirs, and to Mr. Whitmore's minute and your own manuscript minute of 22nd January.

2. Following that exchange of minutes, I wrote to Lord Brabourne, proposing a number of specific changes in the scripts, saying that it was judged that the showing of the Suez programme at that time could have untoward consequences for international relations in the Middle East and asking for the showing of that programme to be deferred until some more propitious time.

3. In Lord Brabourne's reply (which was copied to Mr. Whitmore) he confirmed that the contract between the BBC and the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement provided that any amendments or omissions required by the Government would be accepted. He said that all the suggestions which I had made for modifying the scripts on questions of confidentiality would be accepted. He implied that all the important points I had made on matters of taste and judgment had already been dealt with. He said that the request for postponement caused a considerable problem for the BBC and said that he would contact me again in June to see if a transmission in September would be possible.

4. It so happened that in May I was in contact with Mr. Philip Ziegler, who has been appointed Lord Mountbatten's official biographer. He had learned from Lord Brabourne that the Cabinet Office had "vetoed any showing" of the programme about Suez. Mr. Ziegler said that he did not wish to lobby against the veto, and that he fully understood the reasons for it; but he would like to know whether it was seen as a permanent veto or a temporary one which would be reviewed. I explained to him that we had not "vetoed any showing" of the programme: we had judged that its showing could have untoward consequences for international relations at that time, that I could not say how long the deferment

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would need to be, because that would depend on events; and that it might well need to be for some months. Mr. Ziegler said that he would not have been surprised if we had asked for the programme to be deferred until after the death of Mr. Macmillan. It was clear that he hoped that the outcome would be that Lord Brabourne and the BBC would decide to go ahead with the other programmes and drop the idea of putting out the Suez programme.

5. Lord Brabourne has now, as expected, written to ask that I should clear all the programmes, including the Suez programme, for transmission in the near future. I attach a copy of Lord Brabourne's letter.

flg A

6. The fact that the matter is under discussion has been leaked to the Sunday Times: I enclose a copy of what was published in that paper on 29th June.

flg B

7. I wrote to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 19th June, in anticipation of a letter from Lord Brabourne. I said that it seemed to me that the situation in the Arab world was no less critical now than it was in February, and that I was bound to say to Lord Brabourne that I must ask him to continue to defer the transmission of the Suez programme. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office reply, a copy of which I attach, written after consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, says that the Foreign Office do not ask for a further deferment of the Suez programme on international political grounds. It is clear that they do not wish to have any part of the public odium which would no doubt attach to a further deferment.

flg c

8. There remain the points which you made on 22nd January about the effects of the publication of the Suez programme on those mentioned in it, and particularly on Mr. Macmillan and Lady Avon. You asked me to consider how they might best be warned. I have not pursued that, while the programme was being deferred for international political reasons. If that ban is to be removed, the effect on Mr. Macmillan and Lady Avon becomes a matter of immediate consideration and concern.

flg D.

9. The damaging references to Mr. Macmillan are on pages 17 and 18 of the revised script. I doubt whether there is anything that has not been said before in one place or another. The damaging references to Lord Avon pervade the whole script. Again, they present a picture of him in which there are no new features; what is damaging, and very distasteful, is that it is Lord Mountbatten saying it.

attached



10. The references to Mr. Macmillan would, if published, cause him some annoyance. Those to Lord Avon would, I think, cause Lady Avon both anger and distress. What is said by Lord Mountbatten is a betrayal of professional trust and personal friendship. What makes it worse is the deliberation with which he arranged for this betrayal to take effect after his death, when he could no longer be asked to justify his behaviour and what he has said in the programme.

11. I have two questions to consider:

- (1) whether to ask or advise Lord Brabourne to defer the showing of the Suez programme until after Mr. Macmillan's death;
- (2) if so, whether to be ready to exercise whatever right of veto I possess (on behalf of the Government) by virtue of the agreement signed between the Lord Trend and the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement.

12. I have considered these questions in the light of the recommendations of the Radcliffe Report on Ministerial Memoirs (Cmnd 6386), which is my bible for these purposes. The relevant sections are paragraphs 49-57, 74-80, and 82-87. My role is advisory, not that of a censor. Where it is a matter of clearance in respect of national security and the preservation of international relations, there is "a positive duty" on the author to give way to my objections, if they are maintained against representations (and appeal to the Prime Minister if necessary). There is no specific time limit to this. In respect of breaches of confidential relationships, my duty is to offer my views, and advice, whether I am invited to do so or not; the author is under an obligation to pay careful attention to my advice but is not under a duty to give way to it: it is for him to take upon his own shoulders the responsibility of deciding what he is going to say and how he is going to say it. For fifteen years from the date of the events in question he should regard himself as bound by approved rules and procedures governing confidential relationships; thereafter he can, if he so wishes, take his own unrestricted line in dealing with the subject.

13. Applying these recommendations in this instance, I propose to invite Lord Brabourne to come and see me, and to represent to him that this programme, if broadcast, would represent a breach of professional trust and personal friendship, and would cause ^{annoyance} and distress to Mr. Macmillan, Lady Avon



and others whom Lord Mountbatten has put in an unflattering light in order to highlight the virtue of his own position. I shall say that I do not think that Lord Brabourne can shelter behind Lord Mountbatten's desire that the programme should be transmitted as soon as possible after his death: the responsibility is now his, not his father-in-law's. I shall draw his attention to paragraph 86 of the Radcliffe Report. That draws attention to the rule that an ex-Minister should not reveal the advice given to him in confidence by those in the Service whose duty it is to advise him, so long as they are still in the Service. In this case the boot is on the other foot; but the principle is valid. I shall say that I believe that he is bound to consider very seriously withholding the Suez programme while some of those named in it are still active in public life, probably at least until Mr. Macmillan's death, and perhaps while Lady Avon is alive. I shall say that, if questions are asked, I (or you, if the questions were put to you in Parliament) would be bound to say that that was the advice which I had given.

14. As to whether I should seek to enforce my advice with a veto, it has to be said that it is not clear that the right of veto which the agreement with the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement extends to these scripts, which are not material retained by Lord Mountbatten from his official service, or to the particular aspects of the scripts to which I should be taking exception. Nonetheless I doubt whether my right would be challenged by Lord Brabourne; and if I ruled that the Suez programme should not be published and he accepted my ruling, I think that the BBC would be bound to comply with it, though they would certainly publicise the fact that I had made it. It would be clear that I had made the ruling - as the Sunday Times piece says - in the interests of protecting political reputations rather than for reasons of genuine national security. It would no doubt be pointed out that the events in question occurred over 23 years ago, and thus well outside the period of fifteen years which the Radcliffe Committee thought should be the period during which confidentiality on those grounds should be preserved.

15. I have come to the conclusion that the right course is to act in accordance with the recommendations of the Radcliffe Committee: to give Lord Brabourne my views and advice, on the lines of paragraph 13, but not to seek to exercise a veto.



Though neither the correspondence between Lord Trend and Lord Mountbatten nor the agreement with the Trustees specifies the purposes for which the Secretary of the Cabinet was to be given a veto, it must be assumed that it was primarily for the purpose of safeguarding national security. The Radcliffe Committee clearly considered that the responsibility for decisions in questions of disclosure of confidential relationships should (particularly after fifteen years) rest with the author, not with the Secretary of the Cabinet. For me to seek to exercise a right of veto (if I have it) would not only be to go well beyond the duties laid upon me by the Radcliffe Committee; it would take the responsibility off the shoulders of Lord Brabourne, on whom it should rest.

16. I think that Mr. Macmillan and Lady Avon ought to be warned; if you agree, therefore, I propose to get in touch with both of them, to tell them what is proposed to be published, the views and advice which I propose to give, and why I think it difficult for me to prevent publication, if Lord Brabourne is determined to go ahead.

17. As you know, I have already discussed this with Lord Hailsham, who has been content to leave the matter entirely in my hands. Lord Brabourne and the BBC have in fact accepted the deletions which I proposed relating to Lord Hailsham, and what remains is a good deal less damaging than what was originally there.

18. I should be glad to know whether you are content for me to proceed as I now propose. If so, I intend to see Mr. Macmillan and Lady Avon before I see Lord Brabourne.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

11th July, 1980

I entirely agree with your advice. As national security is not involved we can't veto the publication. If Lord B.

-5- decides to go ahead I should be grateful if you would see Lady Avon & Mr. Macmillan. But should we discuss them before Lord B. decides? — not.

Secrets of Suez

A CABINET Office decision appears imminent over controversial material included in a BBC TV series featuring the frank and sometimes startling reminiscences of the late Lord Mounbatten.

Senior BBC officials expect to be told tomorrow whether the government has cleared the material—about the 1956 Suez invasion—for public consumption. The six-part series should have started in January. It was postponed while discussions took place between the Cabinet Office and Lord Brabourne, Mounbatten's son-in-law and owner of the material.

Just what Mounbatten says in the film, which was shot by a freelance crew in 1971, has been smothered in official discretion. I understand however that he makes two points. (1) That there was collusion between the French and British over the invasion and (2) That he disapproved of it and considered resigning as Defence Staff chief at the time.

Although collusion has been conclusively established since then, it was always denied at the highest government levels, notably by Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden and foreign secretary Selwyn Lloyd. The BBC has steadfastly refused to be involved in what it regards as a personal affair between Brabourne and the Cabinet Office. Even so, senior officials are anxious that the material should not be axed. Having committed themselves to the film once, they would not wish to be party—even by association—to a cover-up, especially in a matter which involves old political reputations rather than genuine national security.

Sunday Times 29.6.80

(Mercury Notebook)

Extract from Sunday Times 29.6.80

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Memo 21

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

LORD MOUNTBATTEN'S MEMOIRS

The Prime Minister has seen your minute A02597 of 11 July 1980 about Lord Mountbatten's filmed memoirs and she has commented as follows: "I entirely agree with your advice. As national security is not involved, we cannot veto the publication. If Lord Brabourne decides to go ahead I should be grateful if you would see Lady Avon and Mr. Macmillan. But should we distress them before Lord Brabourne decides?"

If you still think that you should see Lady Avon and Mr. Macmillan before you see Lord Brabourne, as you proposed in your minute, may I suggest that you have a word with the Prime Minister first?

TWH

14 July 1980

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

7 July 1980

Sir Robert Armstrong KCB CVO
CABINET OFFICE

pl attach X

CABINET OFFICE
A 3690.....
- 8 JUL 1980
FILE INSTRUCTIONS
FILE No.

Dear Robert,

1. In your letter of 19 June about the Mountbatten television series you asked whether I agree with you that, because of the continuing critical situation in the Arab world, you should ask for the programme on Suez to be further deferred.
2. Any programme on Suez is liable to cause a flurry and no doubt a programme in which Lord Mountbatten is the central figure will attract greater interest and an above average audience, many of whom will have little interest in international relations but will follow the series for the sake of seeing Lord Mountbatten. The interest the Suez programme arouses is likely to be short-lived, but its 'suppression' would be liable to attract considerable adverse and recurrent comment in the press, of which the piece in last week's Sunday Times is but a forerunner.
3. *Attached below* The situation in the Middle East is never easy, but I do not believe that the transmission of a programme of Lord Mountbatten's reminiscences will affect it seriously or damage British interests. I have consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary about this and he agrees that we should not ask for a further deferment of this programme on political grounds.

Yours sincerely,
Michael

Michael Palliser

SUEZ

Opening titles:
Montage Photos of
Mountbatten

MUSIC S.O.F.
(Preobajensky March)

Egypt 1956

S.O.F.
Battle Effects

L.M.: Nothing that has ever occurred to me in time of peace caused me so much trouble, so much worry, so much pain and so much grief as the Suez fiasco.

One man was responsible, Anthony Eden the Prime Minister. He was one of my greatest friends and had been so for more than 20 years.

LUDO: In this programme, on an event that has become the most debated and controversial British military operation since the War, Lord Mountbatten tells us not only of the pain and grief that Suez caused him, but of his own acute personal dilemma. For him the story began a full year beforehand.

L.M. As recently as 1955, the week before he became Prime Minister, he came and stayed at Broadlands with Nehru and Edwina and myself, and was charming, friendly, normal, absolutely his old self. And then he became Prime Minister. He'd been waiting for years and years to succeed old Sir Winston Churchill. I think it must have gone to his head. He changed. He became quite unlike himself. He started being extremely severe, a very strong disciplinarian. He frightened people.

One day the Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Oliver, came to me and said, in the absence of the CIGS, General Templer, the Prime Minister had rung him up and said, I see in the Times that the Rifle Brigade have been moved. Don't you know that was my regiment? How dare you move my regiment now I'm Prime Minister. In future nothing will happen to the rifle brigade without my personal permission for it. Do you understand? He then was very, very rude to him. We all thought that pretty odd.

And there were other incidents I could quote but won't go on. Except to say that I didn't realise how physically ill he was, although we'd heard stories, until he broke down at the very end.

LUDO: That, said Mountbatten, was the background against which subsequent events had to be seen, one known to very few people at the time, and yet which was to have incalculable results.

L.M.: Now for the story itself. It starts on the evening of the 26th July, 1956, when I was out on one of my rare evenings out with my daughter Patricia at the Savoy. The head waiter came up and said 'the Prime Minister wants to see you at once.' So we got up, took a taxi, she dropped me at No. 10 Downing Street, I came in to an astonishing scene.

Seated round the Cabinet table were first of all the Prime Minister resplendent in the Order of the Garter, Lord Salisbury also wearing the Garter, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Kilmuir, the Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Dermot Boyle, all in their Grand Crosses. I sat down and I whispered to the Lord Chancellor 'What's all this in aid of?' And he, thinking I was

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enquiring about the decorations, said 'We've just been having dinner with the King of Iraq.' 'No, I said, 'What's going to happen now?' He said 'Wait and see.'

In the meanwhile, the CIGS, General Templer, who'd been in bed, had hurriedly dressed and arrived just after me. The French Ambassador came in, the American Charge d'Affaires, the Law Officers of the Crown, and when we were all seated, the Prime Minister addressed us.

He said 'Gentlemen, I'm sorry to have to inform you we've just had information that Nassar has nationalised the Suez Canal. He's seized the Suez Canal company's head offices, he's going to run the Canal himself because of our failure to back the loan for the Aswan High Dam.'

'This is the end,' he said, 'we can't put up with any more of this. By this means he can blackmail us, he can put up the Canal dues, he'll run it very badly, this will absolutely stifle our trade, it will be impossible. Our whole position demands strong action. I want to seize the Canal, and take charge of it again.' He turned to me and he said 'You're in the chair for the Chiefs of Staff, aren't you'. I said 'Yes,' because Dickson the chairman was on the sick list. 'What do you propose?' I said 'Well, if you really want military action it must be done very quickly, without warning anybody. It happens that the Mediterranean fleet is complete at Malta. None of them are refitting. All of them are ready for an inspection by me next week. They're all at four hours notice. If you let me go next door I can ring up the duty commander at the Admiralty and send a flash message to raise steam for full speed at once. They'll be off before daylight. They've got 1,000 miles to do down to Cyprus; they'll get there in

plenty of time to embark the whole of the Royal Marine Commando Brigade, 1200 highly trained Marines with light vehicles. They can be taken in warships. And on the third morning, the 29th, just before daylight, they can run quietly into Port Said, they go alongside everywhere, land the Marines. If there's any trouble we've got aircraft carriers with air support, we've got gun power support. I don't think you have to fire a shot. They'll be so surprised we'll just take it. The Marines will ~~then~~ motor up the causeway in their jeeps, and they'll of course requisition vehicles. Within a couple of hours they'll be at El Qantara. There they'll stop. There won't be enough to go any further. Furthermore they will not be strong enough to stay there indefinitely against very strong attack. They will have to have, if we want to stay there, more troops behind them.' 'Yes, I see that', he said. 'What do you say, CIGS?' 'I agree with the First Sea Lord,' he said. 'We had 70,000 men on the Canal before. We want at least 60,000 or 70,000 there now, at least two or three divisions. We've got to mobilise them, get them ready. That'll take six or seven weeks.' 'Weeks,' said the Prime Minister. 'What about the Air Force?' The Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Dermot Boyle, said 'Well, we can do it quicker than that but I'm afraid it'll take us three weeks to get the Metropolitan Air Force in position in Cyprus.' 'Three weeks?' 'Yes,' I said. 'Well, Prime Minister, as you know, the aircraft carriers are there immediately. We're ready in every way but we can't go the whole hog.' 'However', I said, I should think you're much better off if you're going to do anything to do it now quickly. Seize Port Said down to El Qantara and then you can negotiate from strength.' 'That's not good enough. I want to topple Nasser, I want to seize the Canal. No. I want the Chiefs of Staff to go away and look into it.'

Then the Law Officers of the Crown, one of them was there, chipped in I remember and said 'Prime Minister, you know he's doing nothing illegal in nationalising the Canal.' I don't care whether it's legal or not, I'm not going to let him do it. He's not going to get away with it.' He became very fierce. He ordered the Chiefs of Staff to do an all-night session and then prepare plans for seizing the whole of the Suez Canal militarily and to come back and see him at 11 O'clock the following morning. We did. We brought our plans with us and indeed the time scale was just the same as before. The Cabinet then ordered us to make all preparations for this military operation. So we went away to do so.

Two days later, the 29th, my old friend Admiral Nomy the Chief of the French Naval Staff, flew over. I'd known him since he was a young lieutenant commander. We were great friends. And they were absolutely ready. They had two carriers and a large Fleet to put at our disposal, and they were of course willing to serve under British command all the way through. I took him up to see our operations room and show him our dispositions. I then took him over to see the Minister of Defence, Sir Walter Monckton, another very old friend of mine.

LUDO: It was now becoming increasingly clear to his advisers and in particular to Mountbatten that, whatever the rights or wrongs of the affair, Eden was bent on an imperialistic course - as this answer to a question posed by Eden to Mountbatten shows.

L.M.: 'Prime minister, you sent a message enquiring whether it would be possible to pass ships through the Suez Canal against Egyptian wishes if they were escorted by

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naval vessels. There are two reasons why I do not consider this a feasible proposition.' I then enlarge on them in detail and then: 'It would not therefore be a practical operation to defend ships in convoy from field guns which the Egyptians could easily mount at safe places along the Canal bank and sink the ships in the Canal.' I then went on 'I should add that we have reliable information from a secret source that the Egyptians are preparing to block the Canal with sunken ships if necessary. In their present mood I believe that any attempt on our part to force our way through the Canal might make the Egyptians resort to blocking it.' Of course the Prime Minister will have had the same information. But he had so much stuff coming on his desk, he might not have noticed it. He had a habit of shutting his mind to things he didn't want to see. This time it brought it out into the open.

At all events he rang me up the next day, on an open line funnily enough, to ask about the two destroyers that we had sold to the Egyptians. He wanted me to hold them back. I said 'the Egyptians have paid for them, they own them. There's no means by which we can hold them back now, without causing very grave suspicion. However, they haven't got their ammunition or their torpedoes on board, they're no good without that. They haven't been paid for. I suggest you let them go without.' After some thought he said he thought he agreed with me.

He then went on to say, 'my dear Dickie, I can't tell you how glad I am to have you with me in this time of crisis. It's a great comfort and a great source of strength to me, and I do hope you agree with everything I'm doing.' It was an open line. How could I possibly answer?

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So I said, 'The Navy will do whatever you want,' and hung up.

LUDO: By now Mountbatten was so out of sympathy with what Eden was doing that he drafted a letter of resignation to be used, as he put it, 'when the time was appropriate.' The Minister of Defence, Sir Walter Monckton, to whom he showed it, said categorically that he couldn't resign. Mountbatten went ahead with planning the operation and on September 3rd the new First Lord, Lord Hailsham, took office.

L.M: I'd been warned by Monckton that he was what we now call a 'hawk'.

He'd been advocating the use of force. He was of the tough school. He warned me I was going to have difficulty with him. I had none. The very first time I saw him I said 'Do you realise what this plan involves? Do you realise that the Navy is going to be used to shoot up and butcher women and children? That's a nice use for you to authorise to the Navy on taking over as First Lord.' I left him a very worried man.

LUDO: Lord Mountbatten was no less worried himself and once again gave thought to his own personal position.

L.M: I then thought I really must put the record straight, so I sat down and drafted a letter to the Prime Minister saying 'I couldn't answer on the telephone when you asked me if I agreed with all you're doing. I'm writing now to tell you I don't. I don't agree with anything you're doing. I think what you're doing is terrible. It can only end in disaster, etc., etc.' It doesn't matter because the letter never went because when I showed it to the First Lord he said 'You can't send a letter like this to the

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Prime Minister.' I demanded he should consult the Minister of Defence, Monckton. Monckton said 'I'm afraid you can't. It's entirely inappropriate and improper for a Chief of Staff to address the Prime Minister on a political matter like this. You cannot send that letter.' So with great regret I didn't.

LUDO: With Lord Hailsham still in Mountbatten's words 'absolutely miserable and worried stiff' and Nigel Birch the Air Minister 'horrified at what the Air Force were going to be asked to do', Lord Mountbatten had a further meeting with Walter Monckton.

L.M: I said once more I thought we ought all to resign. Walter Monckton said 'Well in my case I shall have to consider it very carefully. It'll be the most difficult decision I've made in the whole of my career. But for you, Dickie, it's much worse. It's not straightforward for you. Chiefs of Staff can't resign when they're given military orders. You've got to carry out military operations. You're not the elected representative of the people. You're there to carry out your military duties, and if you resign it will shake the entire Navy. You can't do that. You think very carefully what you're going to do. For you the decision is 10 times as difficult as it is for me.'

I remember on the 5th of September General Keightley, the Allied Commander-in-Chief, asked to see me alone at the Admiralty. I was rather surprised at this. He said, he felt he could talk to me freely, rather differently from the other Chiefs of Staff, because he felt I was in sympathy with him. He said 'I'm worried stiff about this operation. It's going to start off with a lot of heavy civilian casualties, and where is it going to get us?'

He said 'At the end of it all, I'm still Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East. What's going to happen in the Middle East?' What's going to happen to all the Arab countries? Where are we going to in future? What's the long-term policy?' I said 'It's funny you should ask that, but I've been trying now for some time to get the Chiefs of Staff to go into that. I'm going to pursue it again.'

Then I took him along to see the Chiefs of Staff. It was a very difficult meeting. This was the meeting when he put up the proposal that we should not start with a landing, with fire support and so forth; we should start with air operations. We should have a fortnight of softening up, knocking out all the runways, air battes, knocking out the different air forces on the ground, parading our fleet up and down, so that if their ships came out we would sink them, perhaps in the end if necessary land in some remote beach and go across to take over across the desert. This didn't really appeal to my colleagues in the Chiefs of Staff. In fact when I spoke strongly in favour of this plan, it was then I think that General Templer called me yellow. I said, you may think it's yellow but it takes a damn sight more courage to stand up and talk to you bellicose people the way I'm doing now than to go along with you all.

We asked to see the Prime Minister and two days later he saw us with General Keightley. General Keightley put forward his plan. I could see it wasn't going very well with the Prime Minister, so I intervened at the appropriate moment. I said 'Prime Minister, would you allow me to talk absolutely freely to you without any restrictions about whether it has a political slant or not?' 'All right' he said, 'go right ahead. Say whatever you like.' So I did. I talked to him about the horrors that the present plan involved. I said 'do you realise that the only

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places we can land in Port Said are in the built-up area? Do you realise that in order to land with safety we'll have to have preliminary bombardment by ships? Do you realise the naval gun trajectory at close range is practically flat? All our six-inch guns from the cruisers will go bursting into the town. And as for the great 15-inch guns of the French battleship Jean Barr, think of the mess they're going to make, think of the casualties and horrors, think of all the photographs the Egyptians will take. We'll be plastered round the world as assassins and baby killers. It's a horrible thought.'

I shook the Prime Minister. He said he'd give great thought to General Keightley's alternative plan. He took it to the Cabinet that afternoon. I have a very nice note written by Lord Hailsham, First Lord, after that Cabinet meeting. It appears that Eden spoke practically along the lines that I had used and said we must try and find a different way of doing this.

LUDO: But the alternative plan, said Mountbatten, still involved the use of force, and Walter Monckton was still unhappy.

L.M: We had a talk and I urged him, I said 'I think you should resign and explain to the country why you'd resigned.' He went and saw the Prime Minister. He offered him resignation. He came back and told me, he said 'I resigned, Dickie. The Prime Minister accepted my resignation.' 'Well,' I said, 'now are you going to speak?' He said, 'I can't, because he's forced me to accept the post of Paymaster General in the Cabinet. I said 'Why, in heaven's name?' 'He doesn't want me to leave the Cabinet. He said if I resign now it would break the government, the

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government would fall, and it's a good government, Dickie, except for this bit of nonsense going on, and I don't want to be the cause of it falling. I feel by staying in the Cabinet I can hold the hotheads.' I said 'Hold the hotheads? There's only one hothead and that's the Prime Minister. How can you control him unless you go yourself and speak out freely?' 'I've made up my mind, Dickie, it's been difficult enough,' he said. 'Don't bully me.' I let it go.

LUDO: The next day Mountbatten received a letter confirming his own views, which the Admiral commanding our aircraft carriers had sent to the C-in-C of the Mediterranean Fleet.

L.M: This was from Admiral Power who'd been my Chief of Staff when I was Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, who'd been one of the most gallant submarine officers, a tremendous go-getter, a really brave man and a great fighter. This is what he said.

'Our pilots are trained for war, not for indiscriminate killing. They will, of course, do what they are told to do however repugnant it may be. But I wish to state most emphatically that I do not consider it either right or fair that they should be used in a manner which can only earn the obloquy of our own people and of the whole world.'

LUDO: Meanwhile the planning went ahead, and there were no less than 24 meetings, Mountbatten noted, between the Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff, with very few other Cabinet ministers present.

L.M: He called it 'the Egypt Committee of the Cabinet,' which was just the Prime Minister,

the Minister of Defence, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Minister, Selwyn Lloyd, just a few. I only had a chance of talking to him quite alone once. He invited Dickson and me, the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff, to come down to lunch at Chequers on the 24th of September. On the way down in the car I asked Dickson if he'd be kind enough to leave us after lunch so I could talk alone with the Prime Minister. He did. When I found myself alone with Anthony Eden, I said, 'Now Anthony, can I talk to you as your old friend Dickie Mountbatten to Anthony Eden and not as the First Sea Lord to the Prime Minister? 'Of course, Dickie, by all means, of course. Say what you think'.

I then really took him apart. I said 'Anthony I can't think what you're doing. Don't you realise that this is going to end in disaster? Militarily it's a pushover. It's the easiest operation we've ever been asked to do. But from your point of view it's going to be a disaster. The world's going to be against you, the Commonwealth is going to be against you, there'll be a run on the pound sterling. You will never be allowed to go through with this. What's the point of starting something you can't finish? Now about what you're doing with Israel. Everybody's going to see through its being collusion. You can't prepare for weeks and weeks a great force and then conveniently find the Israelis go in so you can say you're going to intervene. The thing isn't going to work from beginning to end. For your own sake, for the sake of the country, for God's sake, give it up.'

He was effusive in his thanks. He said how much he appreciated having a friend who really spoke his mind. He didn't indicate what he was going to do and apparently it had absolutely no effect on him.

LUDO: What was now worrying Mountbatten and the Chiefs of Staff even more than the actual operation was what would be our position in the Middle East after it was over. They prepared a paper expressing their concern.

L.M.: It was circulated to the members of the Egypt Committee, and when the Prime Minister saw it he ordered its withdrawal. He didn't want to see any reason that could possibly stop him carrying out his intentions of attacking Egypt.

Afterwards General Keightley told me that about this time he asked to see the Prime Minister alone to ask him what his instructions would be to the C-in-C Middle East after the operation was over, and pointed out the difficulties that I was trying to point out. He got an imperial rocket. He was told to mind his own business and carry out his orders and not question what was going on in the future; he wasn't there to argue with the Prime Minister, he was there to do what he was told; and he was kicked out. Nothing would stop the Prime Minister. He was set absolutely in his way. It really was very worrying.

LUDO: We now come to what Mountbatten called 'the beginning of the end.'

L.M.: On the 25th of October the Prime Minister gave a dinner party for General Gruenther and Mrs. Gruenther. He was the Supreme Allied Commander Europe. Edwina and I were asked to the dinner. At the end of dinner he came out in his usual friendly way. When he got into the front hall he put his arms, one round me, one round Edwina, and squeezed us and said 'Dear Dickie, he disapproves violently of everything I'm trying to do and yet nobody's working more loyally to make it possible for me to carry them out'. He said it in front of everybody.

Well, the next thing that happened of course was that on the 29th of October, as agreed, Israel advanced and as agreed we issued our ultimatum on the 30th, the French and British ultimatum telling both sides to stop fighting, both sides to withdraw 10 kilometres from the Canal. The next night I was ordered to sail the assault force from Malta. It was a very slow force of landing craft; it would take about five or six days to reach the landing beaches at Port Said. That morning also we ordered the carrier fleet, five great aircraft carriers, to start their strikes. The Air Force started their strikes. I really was worried. So I sat down and I finally wrote entirely on my own a letter to the Prime Minister which went as near resignation as I possibly could.

ACTOR reads letter: 'My dear Prime Minister, I know that you've been fully aware over these past weeks of my great unhappiness at the prospect of our launching military operations against Egypt. Indeed as recently as Thursday last week after your dinner to the Gruenthers you told Edwina and me that you realised how much I hated making the preparations which had been ordered. It's not the business of a serving officer to question the political decisions of his government, and although I did not believe that a just and lasting settlement of any dispute could be worked out under a threat of military action, I did everything in my power to carry out your orders as in duty bound, loyally and to the full, and making all the necessary naval preparations and building up a position in which we could negotiate from strength. Now, however, the decisive step of armed intervention by the British has been taken. Bombing has started and the assault convoy is on its way from Malta.'

I am writing to appeal to you to accept the resolution of the overwhelming majority of the United Nations to cease military operations, and to beg you to turn back the assault convoy before it is too late, as I feel that the actual landing of troops can only spread the war with untold misery and worldwide repercussions. You can imagine how hard it is for me to break with all service custom and write direct to you in this way. But I feel so desperate about what is happening that my conscience would not allow me to do otherwise.'

L.M.: The next day, the 3rd, he rang me up on the scrambler telephone. He said, 'My dear Dickie, thank you so much for your letter. I do appreciate having a friend who really speaks his mind. I like to know what you're thinking. I think it's splendid.' And I said, 'Are you going to let me turn back the assault convoy?' He said 'I'm not obliged to take your advice, you know.' I said 'Of course you're not obliged to take my advice. But may I nevertheless turn back the assault convoy?' He said 'No, certainly not. No, no.' And he hung up the telephone. I went back and looked for the First Lord. He'd gone away for the weekend. He'd just driven off; this was a Saturday. A meeting of the Egypt Committee of the Cabinet was called, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to get him back. So I rang up Scotland Yard. I gave the registration number of the private car he was driving; I said 'Stop this car and say that the driver must come straight back to the Admiralty.' In due course Guintin arrived. I told him what

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was happening. He thanked me. I didn't yet tell him about my letter to the Prime Minister; I wanted to think it over. And then I remember that I got actually - I drafted a final letter to the First Lord himself.

'However repugnant the task, the Navy will carry out its orders. Nevertheless, as its professional head, I must register the strongest possible protest of this use of my Service, and would ask you as the responsible Minister to convey that Protest to the Prime Minister. I recognise that a serving officer cannot back his protest by resignation at a time like this, so I must ask you to handle this whole matter on behalf of the Navy, bearing in mind all the implications, I must ask you after consulting the Prime Minister to give me an order to stay or to go.'

We came to the conclusion that was the nearest I could get to a letter of resignation. The next morning, the 5th, the British and French paratroops were dropped. I got a letter from the First Lord.

'My dear First Sea Lord, this is just to tell you that the Prime Minister has now confirmed the order I gave you yesterday.'

So I had to stay. I had to stay at my post although I made it very clear that I really hoped and expected to be told to go.

LUDO: That same day, November the 5th, the news of the Anglo-French invasion broke on an astonished world, and all hell broke loose.

L.M.: Meanwhile the operation went forward very successfully. Militarily it was a great success. The Marines rushed through with their transport up as far as El Qantara along the causeway. Then the Prime Minister ordered a ceasefire. The pressure from the Commonwealth, the pressure from the United Nations, and finally the threat of the pressure on the pound which caused Macmillan the Chancellor to say stop, they stopped. So where were we? We were where we could have been within the first four or five days of the nationalisation of the Canal. We were in exactly that position, with the world now against us, unable to move. It was a tragedy.

Ludo to cam

LUDO: Three days later the Queen's Annual Diplomatic Party took place at Buckingham Palace.

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L.M.: The Prime Minister had asked her not to cancel it before, for fear of disturbing his position, and now that the operation had been called off there was no point in calling off the party. It went ahead under very electric circumstances. In the absence of the Prime Minister in Washington, the senior Minister was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Harold Macmillan. The Queen invited him in for a farewell drink when the party was over. He turned to me and said, 'Dickie is it true that they've blocked the Canal?' I said 'Yes it is.' 'Oh, God, how awful. This is the most terrible thing. We can't afford to have the Canal blocked; it would be ruinous for our trade. Why wasn't I told?' 'Why weren't you told?' I said. 'From the 30th of July onwards I have put it in writing, at every possible opportunity

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I've said loud and clear that they will block the Canal, they'll block the Canal, they'll block the Canal. So you can't pretend you didn't know.' 'Why weren't any steps taken.' I said 'Nobody told me to take any steps, I took them myself. From the very moment I saw you were going ahead, I mobilised the Navy, the salvage resources as for war. They're all ready, they've been sailed out to the Mediterranean, they're ready to unblock the Canal.' 'Oh thank God' he said. 'You needn't worry' I said, 'we're not going to be allowed in'. 'What do you mean?' 'You don't think the United Nations are going to let us go into the Canal now to clear up our own mess. They'll insist on doing it. That'll slow things up.' 'Oh we can't afford to have any delay. We can't afford to have the Canal closed.' I said 'You should have thought of that before you went into the operation.' I said 'You were one of the few Ministers in the know from the beginning. You backed the Prime Minister to the hilt. You're just as guilty as he is, you've brought this trouble on yourselves. It's nothing to do with the Chiefs of Staffs, they've done their job.' And I walked away.

S52 T1

When Eden's health finally broke down, and he was unable to continue as Prime Minister, Macmillan took his place, and I remember saying to Edwina, this is the end of my career. After what I said to Macmillan at Buckingham Palace he'll never say another word to me again, he can't keep me as First Sea Lord. But he did. What is more, he listened to my advice more than anybody else. We became firm friends.

Edit

Ludo to cam

LUDO: If many people throughout the country and the world were shocked by what they

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considered the folly of Suez, they would have been even more shocked if they had known the steps that were taken to disguise the fact that we and the French had been in collusion with the Israelis.

L.M.: On the 7th of January, General Keightley asked me to read immediately and then decide what to do about the Naval Force Commander's report. Admiral Durnford Slater in paragraphs six and seven had put the dates of movements being ordered in which were ahead of the date on which Israel was supposed to carry out her unpremeditated attack on the Canal. This clearly proved collusion. So I called in those pages, went to the First Lord, the new one was Lord Selkirk, and I said, I required a political direction of what to do. He consulted his colleagues and said, these pages must be redrafted so as to conceal the fact that there was any collusion, and the originals must be burnt. This was done.

Edit
Ludo to cam

LUDO: Lord Mountbatten ends his narrative of Suez by considering first the military and then the moral side of the operation.

L.M.: Many people think it was a failure. It wasn't. It was a pushover. It was the best combined operation I've ever taken part in. The plans were perfect. Everything went without a hitch. The casualties were minimal. In Port Said they had actually surrendered to us but Nasser ordered them to take back the surrender when he saw the United Nations were backing him. It wasn't the fault of the Chiefs of Staffs. It wasn't the fault of the Services. They did their stuff. It was entirely the fault of the way

the operation was laid in the face of every possible opposition. It was astonishing to me to see what one really persistent man could do if he was Prime Minister. He never let Parliament know what was going on. He never really let the Cabinet know. He formed this thing called the Egypt Committee of the Cabinet which consisted of only two or three handpicked Ministers and the Chiefs of Staff. We were unable to get our approaches through. I of course failed as I was bound to fail because the Chiefs of Staff have no standing. One or two of those Ministers might have. Monckton, Macmillan himself, Selwyn Lloyd. They didn't. The result was that Anthony Eden was able to go through with one of the most disastrous operations ever, entirely on his own. And we think that we have a secure democracy that can prevent that from happening.

LUDO: Two things, surely, emerge from the memoirs of Lord Mountbatten on Suez. First, for the historical record, his own understandable wish to clear his own yard-arm of any charges of being personally as opposed to professionally committed to the operation, and one which you may think he proves convincingly with chapter and verse. Secondly, the action, or rather the inaction, of Ministers like Monckton, Macmillan, Selwyn Lloyd and Hailsham who seem to have been fundamentally opposed to what Eden was doing, yet lacked the will to bring it to a halt by resigning. Indeed there may be some critics who will say that even though Mountbatten himself went as far as he felt he could, he still didn't go far enough.

Next week we shall be looking at Mountbatten's relationship with Lord Beaverbrook in the light of the newspaper vendetta which Beaverbrook and his Express group carried on against him for nearly 20 years.

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Your Ref: A01368

1st July 1980

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Dear Sir Robert

I am writing again in connection with our correspondence last February about the television series entitled "Lord Mountbatten Remembers". I am sure you will remember in my letter dated February 15th, I promised to let you have copies of the revised scripts and I am now enclosing these with this letter. I am glad to say that nearly all the points which you raised in your letters dated February 8th have been incorporated in the revised scripts.

At that time, you agreed that I should write to you again in June to see if the situation had changed as the BBC are most anxious to go ahead with their transmission. Apart from this, as I mentioned to you previously, my father-in-law was also keen that these programmes should be shown as soon as possible after his death, and it is now certain that this can not happen before August 27th, which is the first anniversary of his death.

Now that nearly all your points have been incorporated in the revised scripts, I do hope that you will be able to clear these programmes for transmission in the near future. It does seem to me that all these events happened a very long time ago and that nearly everybody connected with them have already had their say, apart from my father-in-law. Quite apart from this, I think it can only be held in his favour, and this country's, that he was so strongly against the actions taken at the time of Suez.

I look forward to hearing from you again in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Thasomine

Sir Robert Armstrong, KCB., CVO.