

PREM19

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ARCHIVES

(Suez)

MT

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18/1

Confidential filing

The Question of reviewing
the Suez Papers.

HISTORIES

FEBRUARY 1980

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
21.2.80							
4.3.80							
24.4.80							
17.6.80							
27.8.80							
2.10.80							
8.10.80							
28.3.83							
30.6.86							

PREM 19/1

(F) PERSONAL

Prime Minister

Just possible R

Dalyell will raise this tomorrow at P.D.s.

NR U 30-6

Ref. A086/1917

MR WICKS

It appears that Mr Tam Dalyell is going to suggest that the reason why the Prime Minister has asked me to stay on till after the Election is because I am the only person (now that Clive Whitmore and Robin Butler have moved on) that she can trust to shred unwanted documents (presumably about the South Atlantic war).

2. By way of background to this far-fetched suggestion, you should be aware of a fact relating to the Suez papers, which are due to reach the Public Record Office on 1 January 1987.

3. On 24 October 1956 a secret meeting was held in a villa in Sèvres, near Paris, at which the French Foreign Minister, Monsieur Pineau, the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Ben Gurion, and Sir Patrick Dean and Sir Donald Logan, representing the British Government, discussed the plan for Israeli invasion of Egypt and subsequent Anglo-French intervention in the Suez Canal region. The plan of events agreed as a result of this discussion was written down, and the document was signed by the representatives of the three Governments, each of which took away a copy. Sir Patrick Dean has recorded that he brought his copy back with him to London and gave it to the then Prime Minister that same evening. That the document existed, and the gist of its contents, is known from books subsequently published by Monsieur Pineau and General Moshe Dayan. There is, however, no copy of the document in the British archives. It is not in the No 10 or Foreign Office papers relating to Suez, and it is not among Sir Anthony Eden's papers. Nor is it among the Cabinet Office papers. The fact that it is not among the papers will become evident after 1 January 1987. As to what became of it, I can only speculate. I think that it was probably destroyed, either

PERSONAL

by Sir Anthony Eden himself or possibly by the then Secretary of the Cabinet, Sir Norman Brook, who is known to have destroyed a file of private papers which he had relating to the Suez affair.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

30 June 1986



CONFIDENTIAL



2.11 AH
Hastings

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

MOD STUDY GROUP : ACCESS TO SUEZ RECORDS

Thank you for your minute of 25 March (A083/0942) about the proposal that MOD officials should have access to the Suez records relating directly to censorship and relations with the press for the purpose of preparing a paper on this subject for the study group on military information immediately before or during a conflict.

The Prime Minister agrees that the matter should be handled in the way you propose and notes that you will look at the paper in draft before it is sent to the study group, so that you can satisfy yourself, and if necessary consult the Prime Minister, on the question of whether it is suitable for them.

F.R.B.

28 March 1983

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CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister

Ref.A083/0942

MR BUTLER

It is not proposed that the study group should have access to the Suez paper themselves; but that MOD officials should prepare a note based on the paper, which Sir Robert Armstrong will see in draft.

Content on this basis?

MOD Study Group: Access to Suez Records

FERB

25.3.

Following the report last year by the House of Commons Select Committee on Defence on relations between the Ministry of Defence and the Press during the Falklands conflict, the Ministry of Defence has established a study group under the chairmanship of General Sir Hugh Beach, formerly Master General of the Ordnance, to consider whether any new measures, including the introduction of a system of censorship, are necessary in order to protect military information immediately before or during a conflict. The members of the study group (list attached) have signed an Official Secrets Act declaration and are cleared for access up to secret.

2. The study group have asked for information on the approach to censorship and military control of information in "small wars" since the Second World War, and the Ministry of Defence is preparing a paper for the group on the practice both in the Second World War and since. Probably the best example and, apart from Korea, the only post-war example of censorship being imposed on the British media during a limited conflict was the Suez operation, and it would therefore clearly be useful for the Suez experience to be included in this paper.

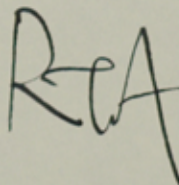
3. The official papers relating to the Suez operation are not due for release under the 30 year rule until 1986. Ministry of Defence papers on the operation have, since 1963, been subject to a special embargo imposed by the then Prime Minister, Mr Harold MacMillan, which prevents them from being made available for study or for reference. The embargo was lifted by the Prime Minister in June 1980 to the extent necessary to enable the archive to be reviewed in preparation for deciding what should be released to the Public Record Office and what should be retained when the 30 year point is reached. The embargo

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still prevents the Ministry of Defence from providing the study group with information relating to Suez. The omission of this information would be a very obvious one and likely to give rise to critical comment.

4. Although it is now more than 25 years since the Suez operation, much of the archive material relating to Suez could still be highly sensitive. In view of the composition of the study group, we need to be particularly careful about the release of information. But the study group is concerned only with censorship arrangements which are not a particularly sensitive aspect of the operation; and they would not have direct access to source documents but see only the paper which the Ministry of Defence would prepare on the basis of the archive material.

5. I should therefore be grateful if you would seek the agreement of the Prime Minister to a further slight relaxation in the embargo to permit the Ministry of Defence officials to examine the records relating directly to censorship and relations with the Press during the Suez operation so that they can complete the paper they are preparing for the study group. I would propose to ask the Ministry of Defence to let me see the paper in draft before it is sent to the study group, so that I can satisfy myself, and if necessary consult the Prime Minister, on the question whether it is suitable for release to the group.



ROBERT ARMSTRONG

25 March 1983

Attachment to
A083/0942 dated 25 March 1983

CHAIRMAN: General Sir Hugh Beach, Warden of St George's House,
Windsor

MEMBERS: Mr John Grant, formerly Deputy Director, The Times.

Mr John Groves, ex-MOD and COI.

Mr David Holmes, Chief Assistant to the Director-
General BBC.

Mr Donald Horobin, Deputy Editor ITN.

Mr Peter Hudson, ex-MOD

Mr Chapman Pincher, ex-Beaverbrook Newspapers.

Mr Norman Reddaway, ex-FCO

Mr John Thompson, Director of Radio, IBA.

Rear-Admiral Anthony Whetstone, MOD.

NB Top copy filed on
Memoirs : Lord Mountbatten Jan 1980

CONFIDENTIAL

Ref. A03522

MR. SANDERS

Lord Mountbatten and Suez

There has been another article by Bernard Levin in today's Times, with further extracts from Lord Mountbatten's filmed recollection of his part in the Suez affair.

2. Mr. Levin now says that he is not concerned with whether the account was true or not ("I was in no position to evaluate his words") but with Lord Mountbatten's concern that the truth should not be suppressed and with ensuring that Lord Mountbatten's version was not altogether suppressed.

3. The comments made in Mr. Levin's first article (including Lord Hailsham's, but others have commented as well) suggest that it cannot be assumed that Lord Mountbatten's version is "the truth".

4. There is no question of his version being "altogether suppressed". The Secretary of the Cabinet made clear (to Lord Brabourne and to Mr. Kennedy) his view that Lord Mountbatten's account of his role in the Suez affair should in due course be on public record. The question is one of timing. Lord Mountbatten thought that it should be as soon as possible after his own death (he seems to have been more concerned with potential embarrassment to himself than with anyone else's interests). The Broadlands Archives Trustees and the Secretary of the Cabinet took the view that it should not be published while some of those concerned were still active in public life. It is a matter of judgment.

5. The Sunday Telegraph of 9th November 1980 carried a report that "top secret Cabinet papers [on Suez] were extracted from the official record and destroyed either by or under the supervision of Lord Normanbrook". The Daily Telegraph for 10th November reported that Lord Normanbrook had said to Sir Robert Lusty shortly before he died that he "had destroyed all my papers, every note, relating to Suez". A rather similar story was told by Sir Hugh Greene in a letter to the Times on 27th June 1978, when he reported

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Lord Normanbrook as saying that "damned good care has been taken to ensure that the whole truth never does emerge". Sir Hugh Greene assumed that Lord Normanbrook was referring to the destruction of important papers.

6. The memoranda and minutes of the Cabinet and of the Cabinet Committee particularly concerned with the Suez matter are complete throughout the period. If Lord Normanbrook destroyed any papers, they were not Cabinet records.

7. Apart from that, if the Prime Minister is questioned about the destruction of Suez papers, I suggest that she should say that she cannot comment, and we shall have to wait until the official papers become available for public inspection under the rules in the Public Record Acts 1958 and 1967.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

(Robert Armstrong)

11th November, 1980

*Noted, thank you.
CVP. 4/11.*

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Meeting on Suez Records held in the Cabinet Office 4 November 1980

A meeting very much in a vacuum as no department has yet started its preliminary review of Suez records. The Ministry of Defence, however, anticipate that they will begin to come across material early in the New Year relating to the build-up to Suez. There is very little material in the Foreign Office.

The general view was that no different criteria should be applied in the process of review to any other records. The process should be light-handed and then the sensitive material dealt with. Two points which arose:-

1. The question of collusion - should it be admitted that it existed?
2. Should all the material be released in one year or over a period?

It was agreed that topics should be identified as they arose where difficulties were likely to be experienced and that there should be six-monthly meetings.

J.D.D.

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 01-218 2193 (Direct Dialling)

01-218 9000 (Switchboard)

PERMANENT UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE

SIR FRANK COOPER GCB CMG

FUS/80/985
45/2

Sir Robert Armstrong KCB CVO
Cabinet Office
Whitehall
LONDON SW1

14 October 1980

Sir Robert

REVIEW OF SUEZ RECORDS

Thank you for copying to me your letter of 1 October to Michael Palliser.

2. I am not sure that review problems on Suez records can yet be identified, and it may thus be a little early to seek common guidance. But we should of course be happy to attend a meeting convened by your Departmental Records Adviser.

3. I am sending copies to the other recipients of your letter.

Yours sincerely
Frank Cooper

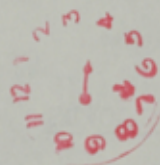
FRANK COOPER

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Feb 80

15 OCT 1980





Histories

H M Treasury
Parliament Street London SW1P 3AG

Sir Douglas Wass GCB
Permanent Secretary

Switchboard 01-233 3000
Direct Dialling 01-233 3620

Sir Robert Armstrong KCB CVO
Cabinet Office
Whitehall
LONDON SW1A 2AS

h. Rmt
8 October 1980

Dear Robert.

REVIEW OF SUEZ RECORDS

Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter to Michael Palliser of 1 October.

I think it would be a good idea for the five Departmental Record Officers concerned to meet to co-ordinate action and examine the possibility of formulating common guidance. The Treasury are ready to take part.

Copies of this letter go to Michael Palliser, Frank Cooper and Clive Whitmore.

*Yours ever,
Douglas*

DOUGLAS WASS

1-8 OCT 1980

10 11 12
9 10 11
8 9 10

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

2 October 1980

cc: FCO
AMT
MoD
Histories

REVIEW OF SUEZ RECORDS

Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter of 1 October to Michael Palliser about the review of Suez records.

I think that it would be helpful if somebody from No. 10 were to be present at the proposed meeting of Departmental Records Officers, and I should be grateful if you could ask your Departmental Records Officer who will be arranging the meeting to invite June Drever to attend.

I am sending copies of this letter to Michael Palliser, Douglas Wass and Frank Cooper.

C. A. WHITMORE

Sir Robert Armstrong, KCB, CVO.

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CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS Telephone 01-233 8319

From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB CVO

Ref. A03120

M. Whitmore
You may care to see
this correspondence.
Would it be helpful if
Miss Down were along
to this meeting? If you want
so, I will write asking for
her to be included -
1st October, 1980
2x.
M. Whitmore.
Yrs, please CVP
2/10.

Review of Suez Records

Thank you for your letter of 27th August. I agree that it would be helpful for the Departmental Records Officers principally concerned - No. 10, FCO, Treasury, MOD and Cabinet Office - to get together to consider any problems which had arisen in dealing with the review of the Suez records. They could also consider in due course - we have a little time in hand - the preparation of a suitable press release.

It could be helpful if the Departmental Records Officers met fairly early in the piece, to consider how best to keep in step during the course of the review and to see if any common guidance could usefully be given to their reviewing officers. If you, and the others to whom I am copying this letter are content, I will invite the Departmental Records Adviser here to convene such a meeting.

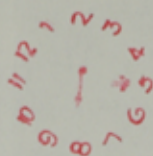
Copies of this letter go to Douglas Wass, Frank Cooper and Clive Whitmore.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Sir Michael Palliser, GCMG

CONFIDENTIAL

0861 J30 -2
-2 OCT 1980



ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Histories.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

27 August 1980

Sir Robert Armstrong KCB CVO
CABINET OFFICE

Dear Robert,

REVIEW OF SUEZ RECORDS

1. Thank you for your letter of 13 August.
2. Our exchange of correspondence has underlined some of the difficulties which may arise when reviewing the Suez records in readiness for their opening at the Public Record Office. I do not think however we can take the consideration of this problem further forward at present. When our records staff start work on these particular papers they should be well aware that extra care must be observed with their review. During the course of, or at the latest on the completion of, sensitivity reviews on Suez records I see advantage in a meeting being called of Departmental Record Officers, to consider any problems which had arisen when dealing with these papers. Permanent Secretaries could then be informed about any documents requiring special consideration, possibly at Ministerial level.
3. Another aspect of the review which Departmental Record Officers might also be invited to consider is the preparation of a press release when the bulk of Suez records are opened to the public in January 1987. This release could be more detailed than the usual one which the Public Record Office draft for interested journalists at the beginning of each year. It would link together the Suez papers of the various Departments concerned.

*Yours,**Michael*

Michael Palliser

/cc:

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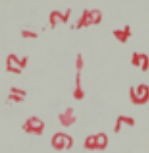
cc: Sir Frank Cooper GCB CMG
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Sir Douglas Wass GCB
HM TREASURY

Clive A Whitmore Esq
NO 10 DOWNING STREET

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28 AUG 1960



C.A. Whitmore, Esq.



CABINET OFFICE

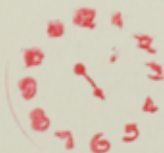
① HAD
② CAV (OR) to see
MS 14/8

With the compliments of

Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

Secretary of the Cabinet

14 AUG 1980



70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS
Telephone: 01-233 8319

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CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS Telephone 01-233 8319

From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

Ref. A02890

13th August, 1980

Review of Suez Records

I was grateful for your letter of 23rd ^{attached} July and Frank Cooper's letter of 8th August. ^{attached}

As you say it is unusual to bring Ministers into the review of public records. But under section 5(1) of the Public Records Act 1958 the Lord Chancellor's prescription that a record should be closed for a period longer than the normal 30 years is made "with the approval, or at the request, of the Minister or other person, if any, who appears to him to be primarily concerned". Although officials may normally act for Ministers in submitting recommendations to the Lord Chancellor about extended closure, this statutory provision confers a duty upon Ministers to give approvals or a right upon them to make requests; and that must surely mean that the possibility of their being consulted cannot be excluded.

In my letter of 30th June I was not intending to suggest that the arrangements for reviewing the Suez records should be different from those customarily employed. It was in my mind, however, that the Suez records might present some unusually difficult aspects which could call for consultation of Ministers. I agree with you and Frank that, if instances arise where Departments think it necessary to consult Ministers, I should be consulted first, so that we can then consider whether to seek the views of Ministers and how. As Frank says, this would help to ensure consistency of treatment.

In this connection I am not too troubled by the convention by which Ministers do not have access to the papers of a previous Administration of a different political complexion, although, if the question of consulting Ministers about Suez papers arose during the term of office of a Labour Government, compliance with that convention could well require the Prime Minister of the day to consult the Leader of the Opposition before a Departmental Minister was

/consulted,

Sir Michael Palliser, GCMG

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consulted, and they might want to agree upon a procedure which minimised risk of embarrassment. I am conscious, however, that on this subject we could run into problems of no less sensitivity about consulting Ministers in a Conservative Administration, even though the convention itself would not be at issue; and it might well be necessary to take the mind of the Prime Minister of the day as to how a problem should be dealt with.

I am also conscious of a potential problem that could arise if the Lord Chancellor to whom a submission had to be made for a prescription under section 5(1) of the 1958 Act was himself someone who had held Ministerial office - say, as First Lord of the Admiralty - at the time of Suez; but perhaps we need not address our minds to that problem unless and until it presents itself with pressing practical significance.

I am sending copies of this letter to Frank Cooper and Douglas Wass. I am also sending copies of the whole correspondence to Clive Whitmore, since there will certainly be copious records of the Suez affair in the 10 Downing Street files, and he will need to make sure that those responsible for reviewing those records follow a line consistent with that being followed in other Departments.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ *Prepse.*



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 01-218 2119 (Direct Dialling)

01-218 9000 (Switchboard)

PERMANENT UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE

SIR FRANK COOPER GCB CMG

PUS/80/769

45/2

CABINET OFFICE	
A	5070
11 AUG 1980	
FILE INSTRUCTIONS	
FILE No. _____	

Sir Robert Armstrong KCB CVO
Cabinet Office
Whitehall
LONDON SW1

8 August 1980

Jim Robert

Michael Palliser copied to me his letter
P4412 of 23 July about the release of the Suez records.

2. I agree with Michael that, if instances arise where we think it necessary to consult Ministers, it would be best first to consult you. There are not likely to be many such cases and reference to you would have the merit of ensuring consistency of treatment on the more contentious and difficult issues.

3. Copies to Michael Palliser and Douglas Wass.

Yours faithfully
Frank Cooper

FRANK COOPER

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Mrs. to come f.c.



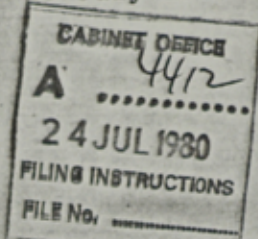
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

23 July 1980

Sir Robert Armstrong KCB CVO
CABINET OFFICE

See R.A.M.



1. I have been thinking about the correspondence between you and Frank Cooper and others, about the release of Suez records, and a point has occurred to me which you may like to consider further.
2. It concerns the passage in your letter of 30 June to Frank, where you note that, over the release of the Suez papers, there may be more cases than usual when Departments might find it necessary to take the views of their Ministers. In point of fact, Ministers - in this Department at least - seem rarely, if ever, to have been consulted about the release of documents to the public domain. One reason for this is no doubt the convention by which Ministers do not have access to the papers of a previous Administration of a different political complexion. If this convention were to be strictly applied over the release of the Suez records, then reference to Ministers could mean either that the convention were flouted or that we would be pursuing different courses of action depending upon which Party was in power at the time.
3. Much will depend upon the nature of the documents concerned, but I can see that it might prove necessary to take the view of Ministers in certain cases. I should have thought however that, in such cases of doubt, it would be best if in the first instance you were alerted by the Department affected so that you could then decide whether to seek the views of Ministers and if so how. It would seem preferable to act in this way rather than for officials in the various Departments to seek the views of Departmental Ministers in a piecemeal fashion before you had been consulted.

Tom W.

Michael

Michael Palliser

cc: Sir Frank Cooper GCB CMG
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
Sir Douglas Wass GCB
HM TREASURY

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 01-218 2119 (Direct Dialling)

01-218 9000 (Switchboard)

PERMANENT UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE

SIR FRANK COOPER GCB CMG

PUS/80/665

45/2

Sir Robert Armstrong KCB CVO
Cabinet Office
Whitehall

14 July 1980

CABINET OFFICE
A 4039
16 JUL 1980
FILING INSTRUCTIONS
FILE No. _____

I am grateful for your helpful letter of 30 June about the release to Public Record Office of records of the Suez Campaign.

The need for special care in reviewing these documents is recognised and we are putting in hand a special procedure for their review; my Departmental Records Officer will, as you suggest, liaise with his counterparts on its conduct and progress. I am sure you are right in suggesting that there may be more than the usual number of occasions when Ministers might have to be consulted; and I have made certain that the Prime Minister's wish that you should be consulted on the more difficult cases is kept in mind. All this could be upon us fairly soon. Some early papers could appear for review in the next year or so for possible release in 1986, and we will maintain a particular watch for these.

I am also informing my people concerned with considering applications for privileged access that papers are not to be made available for research before they are opened at the PRO.

We shall probably need at some stage to contemplate what is to be said publicly about the situation.

Copies go to Douglas Wass and Michael Palliser.

Yours ever
Frank Cooper

FRANK COOPER

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

File

2. M. Byde &

CABINET OFFICE
Ref. A02474.....
- 1 JUL 1980
FILING INSTRUCTIONS
FILE No.

30th June, 1980

JW
1/2

Earlier this year your Departmental Records Officer raised with the Cabinet Office the impending review of the Suez papers. In particular, he was concerned to know whether the embargo which had been placed on access to the papers in 1963 for purposes of a study of the Suez campaign by the JSSC precluded the review of these records in the normal way.

This embargo had been imposed by Mr. Harold Macmillan when Prime Minister and I thought it right to consult the present Prime Minister about lifting it. After consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, she has agreed that the embargo should be lifted to the extent necessary to enable the Suez records reviewed, so that Departments can decide which papers can be opened to the public in 1987, and which must be held or closed for an extended period. The papers should not be made available, however, for purposes of study or reference before they are transferred to the public domain.

There is still, of course, intense interest in the Suez affair, and the Suez papers will need to be reviewed with especial care. There are likely to be more difficult judgments to be made about the papers to be released than is normally the case. In considering the closure of particular records for more than 30 years, the reviewers will need to have regard to the categories of records which the Advisory Council on Public Records agreed in 1970 with the Lord Chancellor as the basis for closing records for longer than 30 years. These are:

- (i) Exceptionally sensitive papers, the disclosure of which would be contrary to the public interest, whether on security or other grounds (including the need to safeguard the Revenue).
- (ii) Documents containing information supplied in confidence, the disclosure of which would or might constitute a breach of good faith.

/(iii)

Sir Frank Cooper, GCB, CMG

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- (iii) Documents containing information about individuals, the disclosure of which would cause distress or embarrassment to living persons or their immediate descendants.

In addition, there may be intelligence-related records which should be retained in Departments under the authorisation granted by the Lord Chancellor in 1967.

Where there is doubt about whether certain papers should be released, the reviewers should of course seek the views of parent Departments in the usual way. There may be more cases than usual in which departments find it necessary to take the views of their Ministers. The Prime Minister has asked that the Secretary of the Cabinet should be consulted in particularly difficult cases.

I think it would be as well if the Departmental Records Officers of the four Departments principally concerned were to consult together from time to time about the progress of the review, and to ensure that similar records are accorded similar treatment.

I would be grateful if you and the Permanent Secretaries of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and of the Treasury, to whom I am copying this letter, would give the necessary instructions and proceed accordingly.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary
SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

SUEZ RECORDS

The Prime Minister had a meeting with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and you this morning to discuss your minute A01692 of 14 March 1980 about the review of Suez records.

You explained that the embargo which Mr. Macmillan had imposed when he was Prime Minister prevented the Ministry of Defence from reviewing their papers relating to the Suez campaign with a view to deciding which could be released in 1986 and which needed to be held for a longer period. There was no question of releasing the papers to the PRO immediately. The review would be undertaken by "weeder", who were normally retired senior civil servants.

The Prime Minister said that there was still intense interest in the Suez affair, and some of the active participants, including of course Mr. Macmillan himself, were still alive. The Foreign Secretary added that in reviewing these records, the weeder would have to take into consideration not only the usual factors such as security but also the political attitudes of the time. They would find it much more difficult to make judgements about which papers should be released than was normally the case.

After further discussion it was agreed that the embargo should be lifted and the Suez records reviewed. The weeder should be told, however, that they should approach their task with particular regard to personal and political sensitivities as well as taking into account the normal factors they had in mind. Whenever they were in doubt about whether certain papers should be released, they should seek the views of Ministers.

I am sending a copy of this minute to Mr. Walden (FCO).

C. A. WHITMORE

17 June 1980

CONFIDENTIAL

Copied to master Ser

Histories

C.A. Whitmore, Esq.



CABINET OFFICE

B/F 16.5.80

With the compliments of
Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

Secretary of the Cabinet

fmh

24 w

*Arranged for 1500
on Monday 19 May.
el-2414*

70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS
Telephone: 01-233 8319

CONFIDENTIAL



CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS Telephone 01-233 8319

From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

Ref. A02019

24th April, 1980

— I enclose a copy of a minute which I sent last month to Clive Whitmore about Suez records.

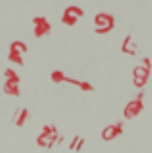
Clive Whitmore tells me that the Prime Minister will wish to discuss this matter with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Clive Whitmore.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

G.G.H. Walden, Esq.

CONFIDENTIAL



5 - 07.1980

Ref: A01692

CONFIDENTIAL

MR. WHITMORE

Will consider with
Lord C. out.

Prime Minister

Apex A?

Paul

Suez Records

Under the 30 Year Rule the official papers relating to the Suez affair will be due for release to the Public Record Office in 1986.

2. There are, as you will imagine, a very large number of them in the Whitehall archives, and many of them are still very sensitive. Before 1986 they will have to be reviewed, and decisions will have to be taken about which papers can and cannot be released to the Public Record Office at that date. The review will take some time, and the Ministry of Defence - the Department principally concerned - will want to put the review in hand soon, so as to make sure that release is not delayed when the time comes in 1986.

3. The Ministry of Defence papers on Suez have, since 1963, been kept under a special embargo within the Ministry which has prevented them from being available for study or reference. This embargo was imposed by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Macmillan, following an attempt by the then Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Mountbatten of Burma, to have them made available for a study of the Suez campaign by the Joint Services Staff College. This embargo will need to be lifted, if the review of the papers with a view to release to the PRO is to be started; and, as the embargo was imposed by a Prime Minister, it can be lifted only by his successor.

4. When the embargo was imposed, the events of Suez were only 7 years away, and many of those directly concerned were still active in public life. It is now over 20 years since the Suez affair: almost all of those directly concerned at senior level are out of public life, and many are no longer living. It seems to me to be not unreasonable to lift the Macmillan embargo to the extent required to enable the Ministry of Defence to review the papers and to decide which can be released in 1986 and which must be held for a longer period. I think, however, the papers should not be made available for other purposes of study or reference before 1986.

5. I should be grateful for the Prime Minister's authority to lift the embargo to that extent.

RA

14th March 1980

(Robert Armstrong)

14 MAR 1980

file
KAL
PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

MR WRIGHT
Cabinet Office

1. Miss Wright to see & retain attachment
2. Pa HAF 22/2.

Mr Harrop consulted me about your papers on Suez Records. I attach your string.

There is very little additional light to be shed from here. I have consulted the original of Sir Burke Trend's personal and private minute of 10 April 1963 to Mr Bligh: you have a carbon of this. Mr Bligh has noted the original: "Spoke to Sir Burke Trend. Nil further on this".

For what it is worth, I do not interpret the papers as recording a blanket embargo on access to these papers. The issue seems to me to have been a specific one of whether the subject should be specially researched for a current exercise. The exchanges imply that somebody had made an error of judgement in selecting this subject without consultation. I am not surprised to find that view taken at the time. I do not think that this need affect the normal review procedure when the time comes.

Services (gen) April 1963

M. A. PATTISON

21 February 1980

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END

Filmed at the National
Archives (TNA) in London

February 2010