



CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister

A very satisfactory outcome. Sir Robert Armstrong must have been most persuasive.

Content with the proposed time for use with the Press if needed (paragraph 9)?

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23iii

Ref. A02702

PRIME MINISTER


Lord Mountbatten's Memoirs

I sent you a minute on 11th July about the scripts of the six television programmes based on Lord Mountbatten's memoirs, and in particular about the breach of confidential relationships represented by the Suez programme and the effect which it would have on Mr. Macmillan and Lady Avon. In the light of your comments (Mr. Whitmore's minute of 14th July), I asked Lord Brabourne to come to see me. He called on me on Friday, 18th July.

2. I thanked Lord Brabourne for the changes which had been made in the scripts following my letter to him of 8th February. I told him that I did not wish to require the further deferment of the Suez programme on the grounds of the damage which it could cause to international relations. I felt bound, however, to make clear my view that the broadcast of the Suez programme would be a serious breach of professional trust and personal friendship, particularly while some of those concerned were still active in public life. I said that I thought that it was arguable that in making the material available to the BBC for the purpose of preparing the programme the trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement were already in breach of their agreement with my predecessor. But, I went on, I did not wish to rely on that; I was basing my position and my advice upon the responsibilities laid upon me in the report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors on Ministerial Memoirs (Cmnd 6386), the relevant paragraphs of which I read to him, and upon the obligations deriving from that report which senior public servants, such as Lord Mountbatten as First Lord of the Admiralty in 1956, were expected to observe. At the end of our meeting I gave Lord Brabourne a letter (copy attached) in which I summarised my views making it clear that I could only give advice, and that the responsibility for a decision rested with him and his trustees.

3. In further discussion, I said that, although it might be possible to take the references to Mr. Macmillan, Lord Selkirk and Lord Hailsham out of the programme, it would be impossible to do the same with the extensive references

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to Lord Avon. These were certain to cause great distress to Lady Avon, not so much because they added anything new as because they came from Lord Mountbatten. Furthermore, it was unlikely that another First Lord of the Admiralty, who had not been a member of the Royal Family, would have been permitted to make public comments of this kind. If the programme went out, there would be a risk of criticism that there was one law for Lord Mountbatten and another for other public servants.

4. I told Lord Brabourne, that in addition to the breach of trust and confidence which would be involved in the broadcast of the programme on Suez, there was also a risk that the late Lord Mountbatten's account could be criticised on the grounds that some of his statements were inaccurate (particularly in regard to Lord Selkirk). I realised that the Suez affair was a matter of great public interest, and that Lord Mountbatten's account of his own contribution to it should in due course be on public records. But it was questionable whether this was the right time to show it on television.

5. Lord Brabourne said that he understood the grounds on which I had been obliged to take this line and that he was himself in a difficult position. If he had a free hand in the matter he would wish the programme to be put off. But Lord Mountbatten had himself proposed, shortly before his death, that this series of programmes should be prepared, and an agreement between the trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement and the BBC had been prepared in June last year. Immediately after the murder of Lord Mountbatten he could perhaps have gone back on this agreement and taken the necessary action to suspend the work of the BBC. But he had not done this, because he had himself been in hospital with serious injuries sustained in the same explosion that killed Lord Mountbatten. There was a clause in the agreement with the BBC that the programmes would be broadcast unless it was decided by the Cabinet Office that this would be undesirable.

6. After a time, however, he told me that this agreement had not actually been signed. He saw the force of the objections which I had raised; the problem for him was now to find a way out of the difficulty. He wondered, for instance, whether it might be appropriate to consider whether the broadcast of the



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programmes in general and particularly the one on Suez should take place later this decade, perhaps for instance in 1984-85 when Philip Ziegler's authorised biography of Lord Mountbatten was due to be published. I said that it was difficult to see what would be possible so far ahead but that much would depend on whether Mr. Macmillan, Lord Hailsham and Lord Selkirk were still active in public life. Another appropriate occasion for showing the programme might be when the official papers on the Suez affair were released under the thirty year rule.

7. Lord Brabourne accepted that the decision was now for him, taking account of the advice which I had given him. He would speak to his fellow trustees and then to the BBC to see if they would be willing to accept a postponement of the Suez programme. But he was doubtful about the likelihood of success and wondered whether it might be more effective if the BBC were to receive an approach from me. I told him that I would in principle be willing to talk to Sir Ian Trethowan about this, if that would help matters.

8. Lord Brabourne has now let me know that, following a discussion with his fellow trustees (who were less bothered than he was about the unsigned agreement and urged him to take a robust line with the BBC), he has seen Sir Ian Trethowan who has agreed that the Suez programme should not be included in the series. Lord Brabourne has not given Sir Ian Trethowan any undertaking on when the programme could be shown. The material in question is to be deposited with the Imperial War Museum in the joint names of the BBC and the trustees, so as to ensure that it cannot be made available to any other television company. I attach a copy of Lord Brabourne's letter, and of my reply.

9. This is a satisfactory outcome. I think, however, that we have to assume that the postponement of the Suez programme will leak to the Press and that comments will be made about the role of the Cabinet Office in the affair. Lord Brabourne has said that, as far as he is concerned, he will try to keep such comments to a minimum. If questions are asked about the Cabinet Office's role, they should be answered to the effect that in accordance with the responsibilities laid upon me by the Radcliffe Report on Ministerial Memoirs

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I gave Lord Brabourne my views on the breach of confidential relationships, some of them with people still active in public life, which the showing of the programme would represent, but that I made it clear that the responsibility for deciding whether the programme should go ahead or be withdrawn for the time being rested with Lord Brabourne and his fellow trustees, and that the decision is theirs and (as we understand) taken in the light of careful consideration of the advice given to them.

10. I am sending a copy of the minute and of my exchange of letters with Lord Brabourne to Mr. Ingham in view of possible Press interest.

RA

(Robert Armstrong)

23rd July, 1980

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**THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT.**

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cc Mr Ingham



Memoirs

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

LORD MOUNTBATTEN'S MEMOIRS

The Prime Minister was very pleased to learn from your minute AO2702 of 23 July 1980 of the successful outcome of your negotiations with Lord Brabourne about the Suez programme based on Lord Mountbatten's memoirs.

She agrees with the line which you suggest in paragraph 9 of your minute we should take if the Press get on to the affair.

AWL

24 July 1980

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