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COMMENT:

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FM RIYADH
TO DESKBY 260900Z FCO
TELNO 1080
OF 260830Z OCTOBER 90
INFO IMMEDIATE MODUK
INFO SAVING HQCBFME

SIC I9M

OUR TELNO 1070: UK JOURNALISTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

SUMMARY

1. LETTER SENT TO MINISTER OF INFORMATION. ASSURANCE FROM THE KING THAT BRITISH PRESS CORPS SHOULD NOT DECREASE IN NUMBERS. WE WILL TRY TO DISCUSS DETAILED ARRANGEMENTS WITH MINISTRY OF INFORMATION. JOURNALISTS WHOSE VISAS EXPIRE WELL PROBABLY HAVE TO BE REPLACED, OR RETURN TO THE UK AND APPLY FOR NEW VISAS THERE. MATTER MERITS FURTHER HIGH LEVEL ACTION IN LONDON.

DETAIL

2. ON 22 OCTOBER, AS I HAD RECEIVED NO REPLY TO OUR EARLIER DEMARCHES, I WROTE TO THE INFORMATION MINISTER IN JEDDA, REITERATING UK MINISTERS' CONCERN THAT BRITISH PRESS PRESENCE IN SAUDI ARABIA WAS TO BE DIMINISHED, AND INDICATING THE LIKELY EFFECT OF THIS ON UK PUBLIC OPINION. WHILE IN JEDDAH SUBSEQUENTLY I WAS ABLE TO RAISE THE MATTER WITH MOHAMMED SULIMAN, THE KING'S PRIVATE SECRETARY. SULIMAN LATER CALLED ME TO SAY HE HAD DISCUSSED THE MATTER WITH THE KING WHO HAD RULED THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF BRITISH JOURNALISTS HERE (CURRENTLY 42), BUT THAT EQUALLY NO INCREASE WAS POSSIBLE EITHER. A SYSTEM OF ROTATION WAS NECESSARY AND THIS SHOULD BE NEGOTIATED WITH THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION. I ARGUED THAT ROTATION MADE NO PARTICULAR SENSE. SULIMAN WAS NOT TO BE MOVED (I SUSPECT THE SAUDIS ARE CONCERNED THAT JOURNALISTS WHO HAVE BEEN HERE A WHILE WILL LOSE INTEREST IN THE FRONT AND BEGIN TO WRITE ABOUT MORE SENSITIVE ISSUES).

3. I SPOKE TO JAMJOOM, ASSISTANT DEPUTY INFORMATION MINISTER, FOLLOWING THIS. HE WAS ENCOURAGED BUT INDICATED THAT VISAS WERE STILL BEING HELD UP BY HIS SUPERIORS. HE BELIEVED THE BEST WAY FORWARD WAS TO SPEAK TO FOUAD AL FARSI, DEPUTY INFORMATION MINISTER (WHO IS IN LONDON UNTIL 27 OCTOBER), ABOUT MODALITIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE KING'S RULING. I SUBSEQUENTLY ASKED SULIMAN TO HELP US UNBLOCK VISAS: HE SAID HE WOULD FOLLOW UP.

4. WE HAVE ALSO SPOKEN AGAIN TO PRINCE KHALID BIN SAUD AT THE MFA WHO AGREED TO PUT PRINCE SAUD AL FAISAL IN THE PICTURE.

COMMENT

5. THE KING'S RULING IS USEFUL IN THAT IT ALLOWS FOR AN ADEQUATE NUMBER OF UK PRESSMEN IN THE KINGDOM, SUFFICIENT FOR ALL THE MAJOR PAPERS, TV CHANNELS ETC TO BE REPRESENTED. BUT WE NEED TO WORK OUT THE DETAILS INVOLVING BOTH THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. THINGS MAY BE MESSY UNTIL DIRECTIVES ARE ISSUED AND THE DILATORY EMBASSY IN LONDON UNDERSTAND THE NEED TO ISSUE VISAS EXPEDITIOUSLY.

6. THE KING'S DECISION MEANS THAT JOURNALISTS HERE WITH EXPIRED VISAS WILL PROBABLY HAVE TO RETURN TO LONDON TO MAKE WAY FOR REPLACEMENTS OR GET A NEW VISA THEMSELVES (WE BELIEVE THE LATTER WILL BE POSSIBLE, BUT HAVE NO FIRM PROMISE). WE ARE CURRENTLY ADVISING JOURNALISTS ON THESE LINES WHILE ADDING THAT THE PICTURE SHOULD BE CLEARER IN A FEW DAYS. A GROUP (INCLUDING DAILY MAIL,

EVENING STANDARD, DAILY MIRROR) WISH TO SEND THE SAME JOURNALISTS BACK AS SOON AS POSSIBLE IN ORDER TO CONTINUE COVERING THE STORY: OTHERS WANT TO CHANGE.

7. DH WILL SPEAK TO AL FARSI AS SOON AS HE IS BACK AND WE WILL TRY TO ARRANGE A MEETING TO DISCUSS THE EXACT ARRANGEMENTS. ONCE THESE ARE AGREED IT MAY BE NECESSARY FOR YOU TO PUSH SAUDI AMBASSADOR ONCE AGAIN, OR FOR THE DEPARTMENT TO TAKE STEPS TO ENSURE THAT THE SAUDI EMBASSY IS AU FAIT WITH PROCEDURES.

8. SINCE DICTATING ABOVE I HAVE HEARD THAT PRINCE BANDAR MAY BE IN LONDON NEXT WEEK. IT WOULD BE WORTH RAISING THIS WITH HIM, AND MIGHT INDEED BE TAKEN AS A SIGN OF LACK OF CONCERN IF WE DO NOT, GIVEN THE LEVEL AT WHICH WE HAVE LOBBIED HERE.

MUNRO

YYYY

ADVANCE	38	
IRAQ/KUWAIT		1
PS		1
PS/MR WALDEGRAVE		1
PS/S OF S FOR DEFENCE		1
PS/PUS		1
MR GORE-BOOTH		1
MR FAIRWEATHER		1
MR GOULDEN		1
MR JAY		1
MR SLATER		1
MR BERMAN (LEGAL ADVISERS)		1
HD/MED		1
HD/NENAD		1
HD/NAD		1
HD/SED		1
HD/UND		1
HD/CONSULAR D		1
HD/NEWS D		1
HD/NPDD		1
HD/SECPOL D		1
HD/AMD		1
HD/ECD(E)		1
MR PRIDDLE, DEPT OF ENERGY		1
MR APPLEYARD CABINET OFFICE (BY TUBE H29)		1
MR W D REEVES CABINET OFFICE (BY TUBE H29)		1
MR D J GOWAN CABINET OFFICE (BY TUBE H29)		1
MR BARRASS, CABINET OFFICE (BY TUBE H29)		1
PS/NUMBER 10 DOWNING ST		2
SIR P CRADOCK, (NO 10 DOWNING ST)		1
CABINET OFFICE DIO (BY TUBE H29)		1
SIR ROBIN BUTLER, CAB OFFICE		1
AUS (C) MODUK		1
HD/SEC (O) (C) MODUK		1
MR LS SMITH BANK ENGLAND		1
MR WICKS HMT		1
EMERGENCY UNIT		1
RESIDENT CLERK		1
[..IF FUNCTIONAL/GEAGR HAS]		
[..BEEN ADDED TO MAIN THEN]		
[..CONSIDER IF IT SHOULD BE]		
[..ADDED TO THE ADVANCE]		
[..ANYTHING ON/ABOUT DIEGO]		

[..GARCIA HD/EAD MUST BE]
[..ADVANCED]
MAIN 229
IRAQ/KUWAIT 212
LIMITED 6
MED 11
[..ADD GEOGRAPHICAL/]
[..FUNCTIONAL AS NECESSARY]
ADDITIONAL 44
IRAQ/KUWAIT 44
(PASSED TO EMERGENCY UNIT)
[....MAFF TO BE ADDED IF]
[...DEALING WITH SANCTIONS]
[WHAYMAN]