

CONFIDENTIAL  
FM RIYADH  
TO DESKBY 171300Z FCO  
TELNO 1187  
OF 171243Z NOVEMBER 90  
INFO DESKBY 171300Z MODUK  
INFO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON, HQBFME, JHQ HIGH WYCOMBE

ADVANCE COPY

YOUR TELNO 817 (NOT TO ALL) AND MODUK U/N TEL OF 14 NOVEMBER:  
GULF CRISIS: CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS BY BRITISH FORCES IN SAUDI ARABIA

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*Ry*  
*12/12/16*

2. IN PRACTICE WE AND HQBFME ARE MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO ENSURE THAT OUR FORCES IN SAUDI ARABIA WILL BE ABLE TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS IN ENJOYABLE AND TRADITIONAL FASHION, TO THE EXTENT THAT MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS PERMIT. I HAVE ACCORDINGLY AGREED WITH HQBFME A POLICY STATEMENT ON CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS WHICH GIVES A WIDE MEASURE OF LATITUDE, AND WHICH THE HQ BELIEVES MEETS SERVICEMANS CONCERNS, GIVEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THEIR OPERATIONAL PRESENCE HERE. OUR GUIDELINES PROVIDE FOR:

A) WORSHIP AWAY FROM LOCALS:

B) THE DISCREET IMPORTATION OF CHRISTMAS TREES, BOTH NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL, BY THE RAF. (THE RELIGIOUS POLICE HERE REGARD THESE TREES, HOWEVER MISGUIDEDLY, AS A RELIGIOUS SYMBOL AND TRY EACH YEAR TO IMPEDE COMMERCIAL IMPORTATION, THOUGH SOME DO SLIP

THROUGH THE NET).

C) THE DISPLAY OF CHRISTMAS TREES AWAY FROM LOCAL PUBLIC VIEW, IE IN MILITARY CAMPS, LOCATIONS AND HOUSING TOGETHER WITH CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS:

D) THE PLAYING OF MUSIC:

E) FATHER CHRISTMAS ACTIVITIES, AGAIN IN UK CONTROLLED AREAS WHERE LOCAL NATIONALS DO NOT HAVE ACCESS, AND OF COURSE CHRISTMAS DINNER:

F) IN ADDITION THE CSE ARE PUTTING TOGETHER VISITS BY ENTERTAINERS FROM BRITAIN.

3. I BELIEVE THAT THIS RANGE OF ENTERTAINMENT, WHILE CARRYING SOME RISK OF MISCHIEVOUS EXPLOITATION BY UK PRESS, OR OF OCCASIONAL BUT CONTAINABLE LOCAL OFFENCE TO THE ISLAMIC PURITANS WHO FORM THE CORE OF SAUDI SOCIETY, IS NONETHELESS IN LINE WITH OUR UNDERSTANDING WITH PRINCE KHALID, AS WELL AS WITH THE LINE IT IS PROPOSED OUR MINISTERS SHOULD BE BRIEFED TO TAKE AT HOME, IE THAT OUR FORCES SHOULD BE ABLE TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS WHILE AVOIDING GIVING OFFENCE TO THE SAUDIS. I HAVE ASKED HOWEVER THAT THE PRESS, AND PARTICULARLY CAMERAMEN, SHOULD NOT HAVE DIRECT ACCESS TO THESE FESTIVITIES AND CELEBRATIONS. IN SHORT OUR FORCES FESTIVITIES CAN BE EXPECTED TO RUN CLOSER TO MR PICKWICK'S IDEA OF CHRISTMAS THAN THAT OF SCROOGE, AND ATTEMPTS BY CERTAIN SENSATIONALIST NEWSPAPERS TO PAINT A BLEAK PICTURE WILL I HOPE BE CONTAINED.

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- A) INEVITABLY PRODUCE SENSATIONALIST PRESS COPY:
- B) PROVIDE SERVICEMEN WITH A REAL TEMPTATION TO TRY TO SELL ALCOHOL ON THE BLACK MARKET (WHERE PRICES ARE ASTRONOMICAL). IT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED THAT BY NO MEANS ALL OUR TROOPS ARE ISOLATED IN THE DESERT, THERE IS A LARGE HEADQUARTERS IN RIYADH AND THE RAF ARE BASED IN DHAHRAN AND IN TABUK AS WELL AS 7TH ARMoured DIVISION NEAR THE ECHELONS IN JUBAIL.
- C) BY NO MEANS LEAST, IT WOULD CONFLICT WITH THE STRICT NO ALCOHOL RULE APPLIED BY THE AMERICANS, WITH WHOM OUR MILITARY PERSONNEL ARE WIDELY CO-LOCATED, INCLUDING IN THE DESERT. I BELIEVE THE AMERICAN COMMAND WOULD BE SERIOUSLY EMBARRASSED IF WE WERE TO GET OUT OF LINE, PARTICULARLY AS THEY NOW HAVE TACTICAL CONTROL OF 7TH ARMoured BRIGADE.
5. IT IS NOT ONLY OUR IMPORTANT BILATERAL RELATIONS (AL YAMAMA ET AL) WHICH WOULD BE JEOPARDISED HERE. AS WE HAVE REPORTED (MOST RECENTLY IN HOLLIS' TELELETTER OF 15 NOVEMBER) THE PRESENCE OF US AND OTHER NON-ISLAMIC FORCES HERE IS, WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME, STARTING TO AROUSE HOSTILITIES AMONG THE ISLAMIC MILITANTS, WHO FORM A LARGE ELEMENT IN SAUDI SOCIETY TODAY. THEY REPRESENT A FEATURE IN SAUDI POLITICAL LIFE OF WHICH THE SAUDI LEADERSHIP ARE WARY AND WITH WHICH THE AL SAUD FIND THEMSELVES OBLIGED TO COMPROMISE. THE AL SAUD'S PROBLEMS ON THIS FRONT ARE CURRENTLY INCREASING, AND THE POINT HAS BEEN MADE TO ME THAT THE UNITY OF PURPOSE VIS A VIS IRAQ WHICH SAUDI SOCIETY HAS SO FAR MANIFESTED, (AND WHICH WE HAVE NO INTEREST IN SEEING FRAGMENT) IS GOING TO COME UNDER STRAIN IF FOREIGN FORCES ARE SEEN TO BE TAKING UNDUE LIBERTIES WITH SAUDI TRADITIONS AND LAWS.
6. ON THE PLUS SIDE HERE, IN ORDER TO HELP OVER THIS PROBLEM, ARRANGEMENTS ARE BEING MADE FOR BRITISH FORCES IN SAUDI ARABIA TO HAVE R AND R SPELLS. WE ARE LOOKING AT SINAI RESORTS AS WELL, WHERE ALCOHOL IS AVAILABLE. I BELIEVE THIS OFFERS THE RIGHT WAY TO ALLOW THEM SOME ESCAPE FROM THE STRINGENCIES OF SAUDI ARABIA. GIVEN ALL THE FOREGOING CONSIDERATIONS, I EARNESTLY HOPE THAT WE WILL DROP THE IDEA OF TRYING TO PROVIDE OUR FORCES IN SAUDI ARABIA WITH ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES THIS CHRISTMAS. THERE IS TOO MUCH AT STAKE. IF OPPORTUNITY PERMITS I SHALL TRY TO HAVE A WORD WITH PRINCE SAUD, AND ALSO WITH PRINCE FAHD ABDULLAH, THE

SYMPATHETIC AND SENSIBLE ASSISTANT DEFENCE MINISTER, TO LET THE KNOW HOW WE PROPOSE TO PLAY THINGS.

7. IF THE ABOVE IS AGREED, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WE SHOULD FIRMLY TRY TO NAIL THIS STORY AND TELL THE PRESS NOW IN LONDON THAT THEY AND THEIR INFORMANTS HAVE THE WRONG END OF THE STICK. SUBJECT TO OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS TROOPS BEGIN UNDERLINING WILL CEASE UNDERLINING CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS PROPERLY. DISCRETION WILL BE OBSERVED IN ORDER TO AVOID OFFENDING SAUDI SENSITIVITIES BUT THIS WILL NOT PREVENT CELEBRATION. THE PRESS MAY OF COURSE SEEK TO DRAW US INTO SPECIFICS. I WOULD COUNSEL AGAINST THIS, NOT LEAST BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF PROVOKING A SAUDI RESPONSE. THE LINE THAT BEING MORE SPECIFIC WOULD CONFLICT WITH THE VERY DISCRETION NECESSARY FOR THE CELEBRATION TO GO AHEAD PROPERLY, MIGHT HELP DEFENSIVELY.

8. I UNDERSTAND THAT GENERAL DE LA BILLIERE, TO WHOM I HAVE SPOKEN, IS SENDING HIS OWN CAUTIONARY SIGNAL ON THIS SUBJECT.

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