

MIDDLE EAST: ADVANCE COPIES

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MR J C MOBERLY

NO 10 DOWNING STREET

~~CABINET OFFICE~~ ~~SIR J HODGKIN~~

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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 733 OF WTH DECEMBER 1979

REPEATED PRIORITY PARIS, BEIRUT.

THE BBC AND SAUDI ARABIA.

1. I WAS SUMMONED THIS AFTERNOON BY DR MANSURI, DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TO RECEIVE A SHARPLY WORDED PROTEST ABOUT A REPORT BROADCAST ON THE BBC ARABIC SERVICE, AT 1300 HOURS GMT YESTERDAY, 23 DECEMBER. ACCORDING TO MANSURI THE REPORT, WHICH WAS FROM BEIRUT, ACCUSED THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT OF HAVING ARRANGED THROUGH ITS AGENTS FOR THE KIDNAPPING (OR SOME OTHER METHOD OF DISPOSAL) OF NASIR SA'ID, THE SAUDI DISSIDENT LIVING IN EXILE IN BEIRUT. MANSURI SAID THAT OF COURSE THE STORY WAS RUBBISH; HIS GOVERNMENT ATTACHED NO IMPORTANCE TO SA'ID AND IN ANY CASE KIDNAPPING AND ALL SUCH METHODS WERE NOT THEIR STYLE.

2. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT BOTH THE BBC AND THE BRITISH PRESS HAD RECENTLY BEEN EXTREMELY HOSTILE



2. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT BOTH THE BBC AND THE BRITISH PRESS HAD RECENTLY BEEN EXTREMELY HOSTILE TO SAUDI ARABIA, PARTICULARLY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MECCA AFFAIR. INDEED, THERE SEEMED TO BE A WELL ORGANISED CAMPAIGN, NOT ONLY IN BRITAIN BUT IN OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES SUCH AS FRANCE, GERMANY AND THE US. HE LOOKE~~ISTO~~ HMG TO GET THE BBC TO PUBLISH A STATEMENT THAT THE REPORT WHICH THEY HAD BROADCAST WAS BASELESS. OTHERWISE THE AFFAIR WAS LIKELY TO CAUSE "DAMAGE TO ANGLO/SAUDI RELATIONS BOTH POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY".

3. I SAID THAT I WAS DISMAYED TO HEAR SUCH SHARP LANGUAGE FROM HIM. HE MUST SURELY KNOW THAT HMG HAD NO CONTROL OVER THE PRESS OR THE BBC. WITH SOME RELUCTANCE HE ADMITTED THAT THE PRESS MIGHT BE INDEPENDENT, BUT HE INSISTED THAT WE COULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE BBC. WE HAD QUITE A FIERCE ARGUMENT ON LINES WHICH I HAVE EXPERIENCED SEVERAL TIMES IN MY DIPLOMATIC CAREER. I SAID THAT WE COULD CERTAINLY SPEAK TO THE BBC, OFFER THEM ADVICE OR MAKE A REQUEST, BUT WE COULD IVE NO GUARANTEE THAT THEY WOULD RESPOND. IN THAT CASE, MANSURI REPLIED, HMG COULD THEMSELVES ISSUE A DENIAL OF THE REPORT.

4. I ASKED WHETHER HE WAS CALLING IN OTHER AMBASSADORS. HE SAID THE SAUDI AMBASSADOR IN PARIS WOULD BE SPEAKING TO THE FRENCH AND HE HIMSELF WOULD SPEAK TO OTHER AMBASSADORS HERE AS THE OPPORTUNITY AROSE. BUT HIS SUMMONS TO ME TODAY WAS BASED ON THE SPECIFIC BBC BROADCAST OF YESTERDAY.

5. I WAS SURPRISED THAT A MAN SO SOPHISTICATED AND EXPERIENCED COULD SPEAK AS HE DID AND CAN ONLY CONCLUDE THAT HE WAS FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS. I HOPE THAT THE BBC CAN BE APPROACHED. ALTHOUGH IT IS THE HOLIDAY SEASON, THE DEPARTMENT OR THE RESIDENT CLERK COULD REACH THE HEAD OF THE BBC ARABIC SERVICE AT HIS HOME IN A VILLAGE NEAR SEVENOAKS CALLED (I THINK) BESSELS GREEN. HIS NAME IS H F DUCKWORTH. IF HE DOES NOT COOPERATE, COULD PERHAPS A QUESTION BE ORGANISED AT THE NEXT FCO PRESS CONFERENCE WHICH WOULD ALLOW US TO SAY THAT WE HAVE SEEN NO EVIDENCE FOR THE REPORT AND DO NOT BELIEVE IT?

CCN PARA 3 LIBE 9 COULD GIVE NO GUARANTEE ETC

PARA 4 LAS/// PARA 5 LAST LINE AND DO NOT BELIEVE IT?