

CONFIDENTIAL



Mufaxed to Hequens

17.30

9.4.80.

PM Saw mufaxed
copy and

Saudi Arabia initialled it 9/4/80
dRB

14/4/80

Lg

Paul

Prime Minister

ANGLO-SAUDI RELATIONS

1. The present smooth state of Anglo-Saudi relations is likely to be disturbed by a documentary programme on Independent Television tonight. ATV are producing a two-hour reconstruction of the events leading up to the execution of a Saudi Princess and her lover in 1977. News of the original incident which broke early in 1978 caused considerable embarrassment to the Saudi Royal Family who disliked the attention given to what they considered to be their domestic affairs and the inevitably critical tone of press and public comment.

2. On 3 April the Saudi Foreign Minister summoned our Chargé, told him of concern 'at the highest level' about the film and warned of very serious consequences for our relations if it went ahead. Prince Saud asked that the Chargé return to London to impress on us the strength of their feeling. In the event we contacted our Ambassador, Mr Craig, who had just returned on leave and sent him back to Saudi Arabia with messages from the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and myself. The messages stressed that there was no possibility of the British Government trying to ban a programme of this nature and that to put pressure on ATV would simply give the programme more publicity than it would otherwise have attracted. We should not wish, we added, to see our close relations damaged by an event for which neither government was responsible. The Saudi Foreign Minister told our Ambassador that he was disappointed by this reply and that he could not see how King Khalid's proposed State Visit in June, which has still not been made public, could go ahead in the circumstances.

/3. Because

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3. Because the programme is offensive to the Saudi Royal Family I believe there may be further unfortunate repercussions beyond the State Visit. We may lose commercial orders and the Defence Secretary's proposed visit in late April may be cancelled. But these are risks that cannot be avoided. I have considered, but decided against, an approach to the Independent Broadcasting Authority on the grounds that it would almost certainly leak, would not succeed and would be condemned as inadmissible political interference with freedom of speech.

4. We would have been less vulnerable if a passage reflecting on the morals of the Saudi princesses had been deleted, and an introduction to the film inserted saying that it was a dramatisation and that the film demonstrated that the law in Saudi Arabia affected rich and poor alike. I therefore telephoned Lord Windlesham but he said that cuts were impossible, though an introduction was not. It seems however that the introduction will not be as helpful as we would have wished.

5. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will not comment on the programme itself, but if the Saudis react strongly and publicly or if the programme unexpectedly arouses significant public debate here (it may for example be linked with the Arnot affair), we shall clearly need to think again. The less the comment or fuss, however, the greater the chance that the film will be a 24 hour wonder.

6. I am sending copies of this minute to other Members of OD and to the Secretary of State for Energy.

1.49.

9 April 1980

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