



PRIME MINISTER

SAUDI ARABIA

Prince Amir

*The F.O. are drafting a message
for you to send to Prince Fahd.*

Handy on not

Amir

H.S. Amir

I was invited this afternoon to call on Dr Solaiman al-Sulaim, the Saudi Minister of Commerce, at his suite at the Savoy Hotel. Although Dr Solaiman is in London on a private visit, he told me that he had spoken to Prince Fahd before his departure from Riyadh, and it was clear that his invitation to me was associated with the present controversy about the showing of the ATV film "Death of a Princess".

Dr Solaiman said that he fully recognised that we had a free Press in this country but he did not believe that the British Government had taken the film seriously enough and had not properly considered the possibility of trying to stop it in view of the potential damage to Anglo-Saudi relations. He impressed on me the grave offence which had been caused to the Royal Family and made it clear that the dismissal of our Ambassador was only a first step. The cancellation of commercial contracts was likely to follow over the next three months, a crucial period since it covered the announcement of the next Saudi development plan. (I have already heard that a letter of intent to GEC for a turbine generator contract has today been cancelled.)

Dr Solaiman said that the Saudi Government was looking not for diplomatic expressions of regret but for some forthright condemnation of ATV. My own statement in Birmingham two weeks ago had been carried in all the Saudi newspapers but that was the only criticism of the film which he had seen until now.



He made two other suggestions. First, the BBC might send a television crew to Saudi Arabia to make a programme about the local reaction to the film. He undertook to ensure that there would be no problem about obtaining approval for this visit. Secondly, he felt that a personal message from you to Prince Fahd would carry considerable influence.

We must now consider urgently what can be done to meet these points. As a first step I have suggested that Cecil Parkinson should give an interview to the BBC World Service which can be translated into Arabic.

I am copying this minute to other members of OD, to Willie Whitelaw and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

J. N.
(dictated by the Secretary of
State and signed in his absence)

Department of Trade
24 April 1980



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