

Saudi Arabia



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

PRIME MINISTER'S  
PERSONAL MESSAGE  
SERIAL No. T 95/80

not copied to transcript.

Your Highness,

I am distressed and saddened by the unfortunate consequences which the recent television film has had for relations between Britain and Saudi Arabia. I understand and sympathise with the feelings of deep injury which are felt by the Royal Family and the people of Saudi Arabia. I endorse the expressions of regret which Lord Carrington and Sir Ian Gilmour conveyed to your Government before the programme was shown.

You will have seen from reports of the exchanges in Parliament on 24 April that the British Government's concern and regret is shared by Members of Parliament from all sides of the House.

Our Ambassador has I know explained our position on the freedom of the press and broadcasting under our own system. The Government has no power to intervene to prevent broadcasts or press articles even when these are likely to give offence to our friends, our own political leaders, or even our own Royal Family. Since its showing, this film has been strongly criticised in this country. It is widely recognised that, as the Lord Privy Seal said in the House of Commons, "there were undoubtedly incidents in the film that had virtually no factual basis at all and were based on rumour and innuendo". Both the Independent Broadcasting Authority and the British Broadcasting Corporation will have taken note of the adverse comments and unfortunate consequences which have followed this film.

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The growing tensions in the Middle East and the latest very serious turn of events in Iran underline the necessity for our two countries to keep in the closest touch. There is a most urgent need to restore relations to their normal friendly basis as soon as possible.

I recognise that it will not be possible for our Ambassador to remain in Saudi Arabia for the time being. But I am taking this opportunity before he leaves to convey to you my hope that your agreement to his return to Jedda and the despatch of your new Ambassador to London will not be long delayed. In particular I should be most grateful if Mr. Craig could bring back with him for discussion in London any ideas or proposals which you may have as to how we might put an end to the present misunderstanding and rebuild the longstanding friendship between our two countries.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Thatcher

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His Royal Highness Prince Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud



SUBJECT.

Saudi

ADVANCE COPY

LUX/FO 4/28

X-9

PS PERSONAL MESSAGE  
PS/LPS  
PS/MR. HARRIS  
T 95/80

OO JEDDA

IMMEDIATE

OO FCO

PS/PUS  
Sir D. Morrison  
Mr. J.L. Morrison

GR 500

RESTRICTED

HD. MED

FM LUXEMBOURG 280745Z APR 80

HD. O I D

TO IMMEDIATE JEDDA

HD. NEWS D

TELEGRAM NUMBER 1 OF 28 APRIL

PS. M. 10 tonight.

AND TO FCO.

FOLLOWING FROM PRIVATE SECRETARY TO S/S

(Deputy)

THE PRIME MINISTER HAS NOW APPROVED THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO PRINCE FAHD. PLEASE DELIVER THIS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

BEGINS:

YOUR HIGHNESS,

I AM DISTRESSED AND SADDENED BY THE UNFORTUNATE CONSEQUENCES WHICH THE RECENT TELEVISION FILM HAS HAD FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN BRITAIN AND SAUDI ARABIA. I UNDERSTAND AND SYMPATHISE WITH THE FEELINGS OF DEEP INJURY WHICH ARE FELT BY THE ROYAL FAMILY AND THE PEOPLE OF SAUDI ARABIA. I ENDORSE THE EXPRESSIONS OF REGRET WHICH LORD CARRINGTON AND SIR IAN GILMOUR CONVEYED TO YOUR GOVERNMENT BEFORE THE PROGRAMME WAS SHOWN.

YOU WILL HAVE SEEN FROM REPORTS OF THE EXCHANGES IN PARLIAMENT ON 24 APRIL THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN AND REGRET IS SHARED BY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT FROM ALL SIDES OF THE HOUSE.

OUR AMBASSADOR HAS I KNOW EXPLAINED OUR POSITION ON THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND BROADCASTING UNDER OUR OWN SYSTEM. THE GOVERNMENT HAS NO POWER TO INTERVENE TO PREVENT BROADCASTS OR PRESS ARTICLES EVEN WHEN THESE ARE LIKELY TO GIVE OFFENCE TO OUR FRIENDS, OUR OWN POLITICAL LEADERS, OR EVEN OUR OWN ROYAL FAMILY. SINCE ITS SHOWING, THIS FILM HAS BEEN STRONGLY CRITICISED IN THIS COUNTRY. IT IS WIDELY RECOGNISED THAT, AS THE LORD PRIVY SEAL SAID IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, "THERE WERE UNDOUBTEDLY INCIDENTS IN THE FILM THAT HAD VIRTUALLY NO FACTUAL BASIS AT ALL AND WERE BASED ON RUMOUR AND INNUENDO". BOTH THE INDEPENDENT BROADCASTING AUTHORITY AND THE BRITISH BROADCASTING



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VERY SERIOUS TURN OF EVENTS IN IRAN UNDERLINE THE NECESSITY  
FOR OUR TWO COUNTRIES TO KEEP IN THE CLOSEST TOUCH. THERE IS  
A MOST URGENT NEED TO RESTORE RELATIONS TO THEIR NORMAL FRIENDLY  
BASIS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

I RECOGNISE THAT IT WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE FOR OUR AMBASSADOR  
TO REMAIN IN SAUDI ARABIA FOR THE TIME BEING. BUT I AM TAKING  
THIS OPPORTUNITY BEFORE HE LEAVES TO CONVEY TO YOU MY HOPE  
THAT YOUR AGREEMENT TO HIS RETURN TO JEDDA AND THE DESPATCH  
OF YOUR NEW AMBASSADOR TO LONDON WILL NOT BE LONG DELAYED.  
IN PARTICULAR I SHOULD BE MOST GRATEFUL IF MR. CRAIG COULD  
BRING BACK WITH HIM FOR DISCUSSION IN LONDON ANY IDEAS OR  
PROPOSALS WHICH YOU MAY HAVE AS TO HOW WE MIGHT PUT AN END  
TO THE PRESENT MISUNDERSTANDING AND REBUILD THE LONGSTANDING  
FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES.

YOURS SINCERELY,  
MARGARET THATCHER

ENDS

THOMAS

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SENT AT 280820Z PB  
RCVD AT 280820Z IJC



## SAUDI ARABIA

Mr. Dalyell (*by private notice*) asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will make a statement on the return of our ambassador from Saudi Arabia.

**The Lord Privy Seal (Sir Ian Gilmour):** Our ambassador has been asked to leave by the Saudi authorities, as a direct result of the damage caused to the relationship between our two Governments by the film "Death of a Princess" which was shown by ATV on 9 April. It might be helpful to the House for me to set out the course of events which led to the Saudi request that our ambassador should return home.

On 3 April, the Saudi Foreign Minister summoned our charge d'affaires in Jeddah to tell him of his Government's concern about the film and to warn of the very serious consequences which could ensue for our relations. In the light of this message, I recalled our ambassador, Mr. James Craig, from leave, and he returned to Saudi Arabia with messages from my right hon. and noble Friend and myself. We stressed that the British Government would regret it deeply if our close relations with the kingdom were damaged by an event for which neither Government were responsible. I should like to take this opportunity to reiterate that expression of regret.

After the film was shown, there was considerable press comment and the Saudi embassy in London issued a statement which was highly critical of the film and ATV. There has been widespread protest from all over the Arab and Muslim world, and attention has focused on plans to show the film in other western countries. Yesterday, the Saudi Foreign Minister told our ambassador that his Government had re-evaluated Anglo-Saudi relations and decided that it was not proper to maintain them at their present level. They would therefore not proceed with the despatch of their ambassador designate to London and they would have to ask our ambassador to leave for the time being. The Saudi authorities have also made it clear that a visit by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which had been planned for 30 April, would no longer be appropriate, and other high level visits have been cancelled.

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I should like to stress once again that the Government attach very great importance to our relations with Saudi Arabia, and we regret that they should have been damaged in this way by an incident outside our control. We have a close political and economic relationship from which we both benefit. There is a community of about 30,000 British people working in Saudi Arabia. We share a common concern that the vital Gulf area should develop in stability and peace without interference from outside powers. In view of present external threats to the area, we should be drawing closer together, not drifting apart.

The Government hope and believe that with goodwill on both sides the present misunderstanding can be overcome and the normal course of relations resumed. The wide range of bilateral contacts will not be interrupted on our side and I hope that British citizens working in Saudi Arabia and British business visitors will not be deterred by these events. We wish to see the minimum disruption in our relations and a speedy return to the friendship which has characterised them in the past.

**Mr. Dalyell:** Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that in an oil complex area such as West Lothian many of the families of the 30,000 reside? What assurances can be given to those families?

**Sir I. Gilmour:** I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern, but we have no reason to believe that as a result of what has happened the presence of the hon. Gentleman's constituents and other British subjects is any less welcome than it was before this latest development. As he will be aware, this incident does not mean the end of diplomatic relations. We have recently increased the number of consular staff to serve the increasing expatriate community, and the departure of our ambassador will not affect the staffing of the embassy or the consular and commercial services which it has always been able to provide.

**Mr. Eldon Griffiths:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that this incident would be damaging enough in its own right but that, when seen against the background of the serious situations in Iran and Afghanistan, it is a matter of the gravest importance that our relations should now be damaged with the most important of



the Arab oil States? In those circumstances, will my right hon. Friend consider whether it would be wise for him personally to seek to visit Saudi Arabia for the purpose of discussing Anglo-Saudi relations with the Government of that country? Does he further agree that one of the conditions of freedom of the press, which we all support, is that there should be responsibility of the media, too?

**Sir I. Gilmour:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that this incident, which would have been regrettable at any time, is particularly regrettable in the light of events in Iran and Afghanistan. Obviously we shall do all on our side to try to make this interlude in our relations as short as possible. As at present advised, I do not think that it would be appropriate for me to go, but any other member of the Government and myself are at all times ready to do what we can to bring this disruption to an end.

I agree entirely that we have freedom of communications in this country with which the Government, like, I trust, other Governments, have been careful not to interfere. That must be balanced on the other side, I agree, by a degree of responsibility by those who make films that are shown abroad.

**Mr. Shore:** While endorsing the wish for continued close relations with Saudi Arabia, may I ask whether the Lord Privy Seal will take every opportunity to make plain to the Saudi Government that the press and television in this country are not subject to ministerial dictation? While we should, and do, respect the cultural traditions of their country, we expect an equal respect for our own, of which freedom of the press and opinion is a vital part.

**Sir I. Gilmour:** I agree with that. We have made clear to the Saudi Government from the word "go", and before the film was shown, that we do not control the media in this country and have no wish to do so.

**Mr. Robert C. Brown:** The knees of the right hon. Gentleman's trousers are worn out.

**Sir I. Gilmour:** The hon. Gentleman shows his characteristic ignorance.

While we all applaud the freedom of the press, the House will no doubt be

aware that this film is subject to considerable criticism. Those who saw it will be aware of that. Mrs. Penelope Mortimer, who cannot be accused of having prejudices reflecting those on the Government side of the House, wrote a letter to the *New Statesman* pointing out that the film is open to objection. The whole genre is something to which the IBA and the BBC should be giving considerable attention. The dressing up of alleged fact in fiction is not only objectionable to our foreign relations but strongly objectionable in films relating to this country.

**Several Hon. Members rose—**

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. This is an extension of Question Time. I shall call two more hon. Members from each side.

**Mr. Walters:** Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this regrettable episode—it is everyone's hope that, in British interests and in Arab interests, its effect will soon be overcome—will not interfere with the proposed British and European initiative in the Middle East that will do much to reassure countries there of our interest and friendship?

**Sir I. Gilmour:** This will not have a general effect on our foreign policy, although it would be idle to deny, as my hon. Friend will appreciate, that a lowering of relations between us and one of the most important countries in the Middle East is a setback. We shall try to see that it lasts for a short a time as possible.

**Mr. Faulds:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the irresponsibility and the self-interest of some of the bright boys of the media, both in television and in the public prints, who make political attacks under the guise of entertainment, frequently damage British interests and, indeed, Western interests?

**Sir I. Gilmour:** Like most hon. Members, I am not a television critic; I do not watch much of it. I did, however, make it my business to watch this film. I believe that the so-called dramatisation, or fictionalisation, of alleged fact and history is extremely dangerous and extremely misleading. It is a matter to which the broadcasting authorities must give close attention.



**Mr. Nicholas Winterford :** Is my hon. Friend aware that some of us on the Government Benches would wish to apologise to the Saudi Arabian Government and to the Saudi Arabian Royal Family for the insult and discourtesy shown to them in this film? Is he further aware that the producer of the film, Anthony Thomas, has a history of producing inaccurate and biased films? Will he make approaches to the Independent Broadcasting Authority to ensure that the Left wingers do not have the power to undermine the best interests of the United Kingdom?

**Sir I. Gilmour :** There were undoubtedly incidents in the film, as we know from Mrs. Penelope Mortimer, that had virtually no factual basis at all and were based on innuendo and rumour. They should not have been shown. On the other hand, I do not think that it is for the House to make an apology for something for which it has no responsibility. Nor do I think it right to make representations to the Independent Broadcasting Authority. I have no doubt that it will have taken note of what has happened arising from this incident.

**Mr. Whitehead :** Would not the Lord Privy Seal agree that most of the comment this afternoon has made a bad situation worse? Instead of indulging in the kind of character assassination heard from both sides of the House in the last few minutes, it might simply be pointed out to the Saudi authorities that legislation is going through the House at the moment that would allow an individual, including a Saudi, recourse to a tribunal of investigation if he claimed that a film had maligned him in any way?

**Sir I. Gilmour :** I am totally against character assassination. I think, however, that the Saudi Government at present would take limited comfort from that.

**Mr. Speaker :** Order. I remind the House that after the business Statement, there is to be another statement, and private business begins at 7 pm. In the scheduled three-hour debate on the cost of living, which will now last less than three hours, there are four Front-Bench speakers. We need to try to make business questions as short as possible.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Mr. James Callaghan :** Will the Leader of the House date the business for next week?

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Norman St. John-Stevas) :** The business for next week is as follows:

**MONDAY 28 APRIL AND TUESDAY 29 APRIL—**Debate on the statement on the Defence Estimates 1980, Cmnd. 7826. At the end on Tuesday, motion on the Census Order.

**WEDNESDAY 30 APRIL—**Completion of remaining stages of the Employment Bill. Consideration of Lords amendments to the British Aerospace Bill.

**THURSDAY 1 MAY—**Supply (16th Allocated Day): Debate on a motion to take note of the 1st to 6th reports from the Committee of Public Accounts in Session 1978-79 and the related Treasury minute, and of the First to Seventh and Tenth reports in this Session, and the related Treasury minutes and Northern Ireland Department memorandum.

**FRIDAY 2 MAY—**A debate on London, which will arise on a motion for the adjournment of the House.

**Mr. Callaghan :** Has the Leader of the House anything to say about a debate on the Brandt report and the prospect of a public expenditure debate before we reach the Finance Bill?

**Mr. St. John-Stevas :** In relation to the debate on the Brandt report, as I indicated last week, we should have a debate in Government time. I have noticed the important motion on the Order Paper in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Brocklebank-Fowler) and members of other parties. They want a debate before the summit in June. I shall use my best endeavours to see that the request is fulfilled.

*[That this House welcomes the publication of the report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, under the Chairmanship of Willy Brandt; values its assessment of*



P.A. Tape

23 4 80.

SAUDI'S BLAME 'MALICIOUS' CAMPAIGN

THE SAUDI ARABIAN EMBASSY IN LONDON HIT OUT TODAY AT THE 'FIERCE AND MALICIOUS' MEDIA CAMPAIGN IN THE UK WHICH HAD LED TO BRITAIN BEING ASKED TO WITHDRAW ITS AMBASSADOR.

BRITAIN WAS ASKED TO WITHDRAW HER AMBASSADOR IN RETALIATION FOR THE SHOWING OF A TV FILM ON THE PUBLIC EXECUTION OF A SAUDI PRINCESS AND HER LOVER FOR ADULTERY.

A STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES AT THE SAUDI ARABIAN EMBASSY SAID:

"THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES REGRETS THE DETERIORATION OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN SAUDI ARABIA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM AS A RESULT OF THE FIERCE AND MALICIOUS CAMPAIGN WHICH WAS DIRECTED AGAINST SAUDI ARABIA ON TELEVISION AND OTHER INFORMATION MEDIA IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND WHICH WAS AIMED AT ATTACKING THE ISLAMIC SHERIYA (ISLAIC LAW) AND THE VALUES AND TRADITIONS OF THE SAUDI PEOPLE.

"THIS, IN SPITE OF WHAT ALWAYS HAS BEEN KNOWN ABOUT SAUDI ARABIA'S GREAT RESPECT AND REGARD FOR THE VALUES AND TRADITIONS OF THE BRITISH PEOPLE AND ALL THE OTHER FRIENDLY PEOPLE AS WELL.

"THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES EXPRESSES HIS SINCERE HOPE FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES ON A MORE SOLID AND STRONG BASIS IN LIGHT OF OUR CONVICTION OF THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF THE MUTUAL INTERESTS WHICH BIND THE TWO COUNTRIES TOGETHER AND THE LONG-STANDING FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THEIR TWO PEOPLES."

A SPOKESMAN AT THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN JEDDAH COMMENTED BY PHONE TODAY: "WE HOPE THAT NORMAL RELATIONS WILL BE RESUMED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. I'VE NO MORE TO SAY THAN THAT FOR THE TIME BEING."

HE WOULD NOT COMMENT ABOUT THE REASON FOR THE REQUEST TO LEAVE OR WHEN AMBASSADOR JAMES CRAIG WOULD BE EXPECTED BACK IN BRITAIN.





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cc Mr Ingham.  
Saudi Arabia

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE  
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

16 April 1980

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister (2)

In Ingham to note.

H.A.

Paul

'DEATH OF A PRINCESS'

You asked me to find out whether IBA has seen the  
Saudi film before it was broadcast. \_\_\_\_\_

I am told that they did see it and did not query  
its transmission. \_\_\_\_\_

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A.M.

A.M.

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