

Amr
M.P. 8/1 v.

CALL ON THE SECRETARY OF STATE
BY ARAB LEAGUE AMBASSADORS: 1 MAY

Present:

HE M. Adnan Omran (Syria)
HE Shaikh Saud Nasir Al-Sabah
(Kuwait)
HE Mr Hisham Ibrahim Al-Shawi
(Iraq)

Secretary of State
Mr H D A C Miers
Mr P Lever

1. M. Omran said they had come on behalf of all Arab League Ambassadors in London to express their regret at recent developments in Anglo-Saudi relations. At the same time there was genuine concern at the bias against Arab states in broadcasting in this country and they hoped something could be done. Shaikh Saud stressed that they were not making a protest so much as seeking a way to prevent further deterioration in relations, and recommended better understanding with the media and perhaps a dialogue with authorities such as the IBA. Mr Shawi summed up by expressing solidarity, worry and hope: solidarity with the Saudis in the present case, worry that other cases may arise and relations worsen, hope that a way may be found to mend the present situation.
2. The Secretary of State emphasised that he considered the film Death of a Princess deeply offensive. The recent formula of using fiction masquerading as documentary was inexcusable, irresponsible and dangerous. He was sure the IBA and BBC had learnt a sharp lesson. Nevertheless our custom of free expression (with which the Ambassadors were familiar) was based on important principles - principles which enjoined us to permit, for example, the demonstration that morning outside the Iranian Embassy, against both our interests and our inclinations.
3. In the matter of other programmes, the Secretary of State said we had gone as far as we could. Advice against two further programmes would probably be successful, and he had even (for their own information) been in touch with Lady Plowden of the IBA. He hoped the Ambassadors would convey to their colleagues and particularly the Saudi Chargé his remarks on the film and the steps we had been able to take with the media. It was important in the present tense situation in the Middle East (over Iran, Afghanistan and particularly Arab/Israel), that relations should be close. The Americans were hamstrung by their elections and Camp David was unlikely to produce an adequate settlement. There was a role for the Europeans to play. We must do something positive and fair, but it would be more difficult if we were hampered by not having an Ambassador in Jedda.

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4. In response to a point made by M. Omran, the Secretary of State said that he was sure that the last six or seven years had seen a marked shift in the sympathies of the British public over the Arab/Israeli dispute.

5. M. Omran hoped they could contribute to an improvement in Anglo-Saudi relations, and said he would pass on the Secretary of State's views. Shaikh Saud and Mr Shawi agreed we should not let our relations be soured by small, petty incidents. The Secretary of State welcomed anything they could do to help patch things up.

2 May 1980

Middle East Department

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