



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

5 May 1981

MS
Prime Minister

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To note.

And s/s

Dear Michael,

British/Saudi Relations: Goose Pimples

You mentioned to the Department that the Prime Minister would like to be informed about action taken to deal with the problems arising from this play.

Lord Carrington decided that the substance of the play (which is in fact primarily a satire on contemporary British, rather than Arab, society) was less likely to damage Anglo/Saudi relations than publicity arising from attempts by officials to stop the staging of the play or significantly change its content. He concluded that nothing should be done which might prolong press interest in the issue, and in particular that officials should not take up the Management's earlier offer of tickets. Sir James Craig has been instructed to speak to the Saudis in appropriate terms, and we shall be speaking to the Saudi Ambassador here.

At the same time, Lord Carrington saw advantage in doing whatever we could do indirectly, without attracting press attention, to remove those features of the play most likely to offend Saudi susceptibilities. Following Lord Carrington's conversation with the Prime Minister on 28 April, we therefore encouraged the Chairman of BOTB's Committee for Middle East Trade (COMET), Lord Selsdon, to speak to those responsible for staging the play, and to represent to them the likely consequences of ill-judged references to Saudi Arabia. The text of the play and its programme will, we understand, not now identify the Arab character in the play specifically as a Saudi (or based on a Saudi).

The Prime Minister will also be aware of a recent problem following the death near Oxford on Monday of Prince Abdulaziz bin Faisal, a great nephew of King Khalid. For religious and family reasons both Prince Fahd and King Khalid himself urged their Embassy in London to hasten the return of the body without a postmortem (there is a possibility that drugs were involved).

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The Oxford Coroner, however, quite properly called for a postmortem to discover the cause of the Prince's unexpected death, subject only to establishing that he enjoyed no immunities. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office advised that he did not, but in view of Saudi concern asked for the post-mortem to be delayed to allow time to explain the position fully to the Saudi Ambassador, who returned on Tuesday night. At a meeting on Wednesday afternoon Mr Hurd explained that the FCO had examined the question carefully and sympathetically but that Ministers' conclusion was that the postmortem was unavoidable and should not be further delayed because damaging press interest and speculation were already mounting. The Ambassador subsequently informed the King and Prince Fahd that following a postmortem next morning the body could be flown back to Riyadh the same day, and that this was the best way to ensure its earliest return. The 'tests' would be the minimum required to establish the cause of death.

The postmortem was carried out by 12.15, and the body flown out at 6.00 pm, on Thursday. The inquest has been adjourned until 28 May pending tests. Jeddah have been kept fully informed so as to be able to handle any subsequent questions from senior princes. We must hope that the Saudi Royal Family will not now wish to pursue the matter further. FCO officials are in touch with the Home Office about the appropriate way of handling matters between now and the resumption of the inquest.

Yours sincerely,

Francis Richards

(F N Richards)
Private Secretary

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British/Saudi Relations: Goose Pimples

The Prime Minister has seen and taken note of your letter to me of 5 May on this subject.

MODBA

F.N. Richards, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

JH