

SUBJECT

cc Master
Ops



PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T154/83

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

18 October 1983

Your Majesty,

I was most grateful to Your Majesty for sending His Royal Highness Prince Turki al Faisal to London for discussions on 30 September.

I was concerned to learn that an inaccurate news item had been carried by the BBC on 6 September on its Arabic and Persian Services. This is regrettable. I and all my colleagues attach the highest importance to friendship and co-operation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and share Your Majesty's wish that nothing shall disturb this relationship.

I understand that the BBC followed the 6 September report with an immediate report of the Saudi Government's denial of its ~~in~~accuracy.

May I take this opportunity to express my admiration for Your Majesty's efforts to achieve peace and reconciliation in the region, not least in Lebanon, where we have much admired Prince Bandar's tireless attempts to work out a ceasefire agreement. This came as a great relief to us, and our MNF contingent is now playing its part in protecting the ceasefire committee's meetings.

I hope that I may soon have the honour of meeting Your Majesty again, and of benefiting from a frank exchange of views on all the major issues of the day.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

His Majesty King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud

16

Saudi Arabia
Relations
Nov 79



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

18 October 1983

N.b.
because of 2 mistakes in the letter,
now corrected, I have agreed with the
FCO that they should telegraph the correct
version and that no signed version should
be delivered. A.S.C. 19.

Message to King Fahd about the BBC

In your letter of 17 October about today's call on the Prime Minister by the Saudi Prime Minister you said that you had no objection to the draft reply to King Fahd which was enclosed with my letter of 17 October. The Prime Minister has now signed this reply and I enclose the signed version with this letter. I should be grateful if you would arrange for it to be delivered in the manner discussed earlier.

A. J. COLES

John Holmes Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Handwritten initials

5

Prime Minister



If you agree with the
you may care to approve
the attached telegram
and sign the attached
letter to King Fahd.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

14 October 1983

A. S. C. ^{14.}/₂

Dear John,

Saudi Complaint against the BBC

The letter is
concerned. Our
point is not
to say we are
disturbed at
his work
but

I enclose a draft, together with a draft telegram of instructions.

The BBC story about which King Fahd expressed concern was carried in the Arabic and Persian Services on 6 September. It quoted a Tehran Radio report about arrests of Iranian pilgrims during the annual pilgrimage. The BBC carried the Saudi denial of the report the same day. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jeddah and the Saudi Embassy in London both complained to us about the report, although neither seemed inclined to make a major issue of it. However, the Saudi Ministry of Information then issued an intemperate statement accusing the BBC of engaging in an 'escalating campaign against all Muslims', and threatening consequences for bilateral relations if this continued. This strident tone is probably explained by Saudi anxiety to convince Islamic opinion that the pilgrimage was not being marred by any untoward incidents. While there may in fact have been an incident involving a number of Iranian pilgrims in Medina, we have no direct evidence of arrests, as alleged in the Tehran Radio report. The reference to a BBC 'campaign against Muslims' may reflect more general Arab misconceptions about the role and sympathies of the new Chairman of the BBC. This concern has been voiced to us by Saudi officials, and in the Arab press. It was unfortunately reinforced by publication in the Arab press during September of a letter from the Director General of the BBC declining to meet the Arab League Representative in London. On instructions our Embassy in Jeddah made strong representations to the Saudis on 10 September about the absurdity of the allegations about Mr Young's sympathy with Zionism. But other Arabs have taken it up, and it seems likely to be raised in the Arab League. I should add that the BBC are very aware of the problem, even without the prompting from us that they have received, and have been active themselves in London with the Saudi Embassy and others in an attempt to repair the damage.

by the
misinterpret
Nov 1983
defence
reference
to exhibit
independent
to ask
for
letter

THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

The Joint

be delivered
discrepancy
we have checked
error.
MS



THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

The 'Joint Commission' referred to is the Saudi/British Joint Committee on Cultural Relations which was set up as a sop to Saudi feelings after the row about "Death of a Princess". After a dormant period, the Saudi Ambassador expressed renewed interest in it and called a meeting on 14 September (the date having been fixed before the contretemps over the BBC report developed). Sir Ian Gilmour was in the Chair and all the other three members of the Committee (our Ambassador at Jedda and the Saudi Ambassador and Minister of the Embassy in London) were present. The BBC question came up only briefly and the Saudi Ambassador agreed that there was nothing to be gained from the Saudis making any further fuss.

The reference to the possibility of a meeting between King Fahd and the Prime Minister at the end of the letter is not intended entirely as a matter of form. King Fahd has made no official visits outside the Arab world since his accession. We recently received a hint via Sir Maurice Laing that he might be happy to come to Britain. There is some doubt about the accuracy of that report, but there could be obvious political and defence sales advantages in a meeting if a 'private' or 'official' visit (rather than a State Visit) could be arranged. The Foreign Secretary does not wish to recommend that the Prime Minister issue an invitation if it will not be taken up. But equally we do not want to let an opportunity slip. Sir J Craig may be able to use the Prime Minister's message to test the ground with Prince Turki to find out whether the King is starting to turn his mind to a programme of visits abroad.

The Foreign Secretary agrees that the Prime Minister's message and the accompanying telegram of instructions should go. However, he considers that in view of their nature, the instructions would probably best be carried out by HM Ambassador, who knows Prince Turki well,

Yours ever
John Holmes

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

Telegram to be sent Priority on our friends' channels to
Jedda

SAUDI COMPLAINT ABOUT BBC

- [i.e. our friend]
1. The Prime Minister would be grateful if the Ambassador, accompanied by you, could pass the message from her to King Fahd in MIPT to Prince Turki al Faisal, in reply to the oral message from the King which he delivered on 30 September. Original follows by bag.
 2. In addition to the points in the message, please use this opportunity to emphasise to Prince Turki the absurdity of recent accusations about BBC bias, following the appointment of the new Chairman. Apart from anything else, the Chairman is not responsible for the day to day running of the BBC or for arranging programme content.
 3. The Ambassador may be able to use the reference in the Prime Minister's message to a possible meeting as a means of gauging Prince Turki's views of the chances of King Fahd's undertaking some visits to Europe during 1984; and, if so, to register that the UK would welcome a private or official visit, given adequate notice in the latter case.