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LEB NR 767/29

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CONFIDENTIAL

FM JEDDA 291050Z APR

TO IMMEDIATE FCO TELNO 349 OF 29 APR

MYTELNO 344: MESSAGE FOR PRINCE FAHD

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Read in full

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IMMEDIATE

1. HEAD OF CHANCERY DELIVERED PRIME MINISTER'S LETTER TO DEPUTY MINISTER MANSOURI AT MFA ON 29 APRIL. MANSOURI EXPLAINED THAT PRINCE SAUD HAD NOT FELT ABLE TO SEE ME AGAIN AFTER OUR LAST INTERVIEW: BUT THE FACT THAT I WAS STILL HERE WAS NOT A PROBLEM.
2. GRAY DREW ATTENTION TO THE LAST SENTENCE OF PM'S LETTER AND ASKED WHAT MESSAGE I COULD TAKE BACK FOR DISCUSSION IN LONDON. WE WERE ANXIOUS TO RESTORE RELATIONS TO NORMAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE: WHAT COULD WE DO TO EFFECT THIS? MANSOURI SAID THE ANSWER LAY IN ANOTHER QUESTION, NAMELY, WHAT COULD WE DO TO CONTROL OUR MEDIA? HE SAID THAT SAUDI ARABIA WAS CONVINCED THAT ITS ENEMIES PARTICULARLY THE COMMUNISTS, BUT ALSO ZIONISTS, WERE EXPLOITING THE FREEDOM ALLOWED TO THE PRESS IN THE UK TO MOUNT A CAMPAIGN AGAINST SAUDI ARABIA AND ITS RELATIONS WITH THE WEST. THE OBJECT FOR THE SOVIET UNION WAS NOT TO OBTAIN OIL SUPPLIES FOR ITSELF, BUT THE MORE AMBITIOUS ONE OF BEING ABLE TO DENY GULF OIL TO EUROPE. THEY WOULD DO THIS BY UNDERMINING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ARABS AND THE WEST, AND BY SUBVERTING THE EXISTING REGIMES IN THE GULF. PRESS CAMPAIGNS IN THE WEST HAD A SIGNIFICANT ROLE TO PLAY IN THEIR TACTICS.
3. STRESSING THAT HE WAS SPEAKING PERSONALLY BUT THAT HIS VIEWS WERE NEVERTHELESS AUTHORITATIVE ('I AM ALSO SPEAKING AS A DEPUTY MINISTER AND I WILL GET THESE VIEWS OFFICIALISED IF YOU WISH'), MANSOURI SAID THAT WHAT THE SAUDIS NOW WANTED WAS SOME INDICATION THAT HMG WERE PREPARED PUBLICALLY TO DEFEND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH SAUDI ARABIA AGAINST THIS CAMPAIGN. GRAY SAID THAT, SPEAKING PERSONALLY ALSO, HE THOUGHT IT WAS NECESSARY TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN CENSORSHIP AND DIALOGUE. THERE WAS NO LIKELIHOOD, NOW OR IN THE FUTURE, THAT HMG WOULD

WAS NECESSARY TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN CENSORSHIP AND DIALOGUE. THERE WAS NO LIKELIHOOD, NOW OR IN THE FUTURE, THAT HMG WOULD INSTITUTE MEDIA CENSORSHIP. BUT IT MP

HT BE THAT IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS HMG COULD NOW CONSIDER ESTABLISHING A MORE INTENSIVE DIALOGUE WITH THE MEDIA ON BRITISH-SAUDI RELATIONS. EG INFORMATION ON OUR COMMERCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RELATIONS, GUIDANCE ON THE RESPONSE OF THE SAUDI AUTHORITIES TO MEDIA MATERIAL, AND CRITICISM OF SUCH MATERIAL WHEN IT WAS TENDENTIOUS, MISINFORMED OR HOSTILE TO BRITISH INTERESTS. BUT, GRAY EMPHASISED, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO MAKE MUCH HEADWAY IN SUCH A POLICY WHILE THE ATMOSPHERE REMAINED CLOUDED BY THE ABSENCE OF AMBASSADORS AND RUMOURS OF OTHER POSSIBLE SAUDI RETALIATORY ACTIONS, NOTABLY IN TRADING RELATIONS. INDEED, THE WHOLE BUSINESS MIGHT HAVE BEEN FAR LESS DAMAGING TO BRITISH - SAUDI RELATIONS, AND BY EXTUYSION TO THE STABILITY OF THE KINGDOM, IF THE SAUDI AUTHORITIES HAD PLAYED THINGS COOL.

4. MANSOURI SAID THAT THE FILM HAD BEEN THE LAST IN A LONG SERIES OF MEDIA PROVOCATIONS. HE ACCEPTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE SAUDIS MIGHT DO WELL TO BE ADVISED BY US ON HOW TO HANDLE THE BRITISH MEDIA, AND HE HOPED WE COULD COOPERATE ON THAT. ON COMMERCIAL RELATIONS, HE SAID THAT NO FINAL DECISIONS HAD BEEN TAKEN: STUDIES WERE UNDERWAY TO ASSESS THE POSITION OF BRITISH FIRMS AND EQUIPMENT IN THE KINGDOM, AND TO SEE HOW EASILY THEY COULD BE REPLACED. DECISIONS WOULD DEPEND ON HOW HMG REACTED MEANWHILE: THE SOONER WE DID SOMETHING POSITIVE TO ASSUAGE SAUDI FEELINGS THE LESS LIKELY THAT ANY LASTING ECONOMIC DAMAGE WOULD BE DONE. THE SAUDI AUTHORITIES RECOGNISED THAT THE UK WAS ONE OF FIVE WESTERN COUNTRIES ON WHICH THE KINGDOM DEPENDED FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT; AND THEY USED THIS ARGUMENT AGAINST THOSE OF THEIR COMPATRIOTS WHO WISHED TO REDUCE OIL PRODUCTION. THEY WERE DOING THEIR BIT ON THE SAUDI INFORMATION SCENE: HMG SHOULD DO THE SAME IN THE UK. THE DUTCH, THE FRENCH, THE SWEDES, THE GERMANS, EVEN THE US HAD DONE MORE THAN US, AND EVEN THOUGH THEY HAD NOT ALL BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN KEEPING THE FILM OFF THE SCREEN, THEIR ACTIVITY HAD BEEN NOTED AND APPROVED.

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