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*Mr. Heseltine seeks colleagues views on whether the Army should train 20 Saudi instructors in riot control, in order that SDS may obtain a £38 million contract for anti-riot equipment. This would be a departure from established policy (see para. 2).*

*You may want to await colleagues' views before commenting.*

*A. J. C. 23/5*

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY

ANTI-RIOT TRAINING FOR THE SAUDI NATIONAL GUARD

For some time now the Saudi National Guard have been showing an interest in the improvement of their anti-riot capability. They have asked International Military Services Ltd (IMS) to quote for an equipment and training package to equip and train up to two battalions for anti-riot duties by the end of August with a total of four battalions to be trained and equipped in time for the 1984 Mecca pilgrimage. It was made clear that the equipment purchase is dependent upon the provision of the training - which the Saudis see taking the form of a training course in the UK for some 20 Saudi instructors and the subsequent attachment of an advisory/training team to oversee the training of the four battalions. They have asked for this training to be provided by the Army.

2. As you know, it has long been our policy that the Army should not provide training in riot control for foreign forces - because of the considerable domestic political sensitivity attached to any overt Army involvement in the maintenance of law and order. In recent years this political sensitivity has been reinforced by the desire not to draw attention gratuitously to the Army's role in Northern Ireland.

3. Further difficulties also arise out of some of the items of equipment which the National Guard propose to purchase. These include water cannon and the Arwen baton round gun which are not used by the British Army, and CS smoke. In the case of the water



cannon there is no Army expertise in either the particular design required by the Saudis or in the tactics for the use of water cannon generally. In the case of Arwen there is no expertise in the technicalities of the weapon, although the Army's general expertise in the use of baton rounds may be relevant. Also neither of these devices are in UK service and they have not been subject to the stringent testing, including consideration by an independent medical committee, which is applied to Service equipment of this sort. In the absence of such testing and in the event that the devices required by the National Guard proved to be unsafe we could be held responsible by the Saudis and by public opinion here and the risk of this would be much greater if the Army is associated with the training needed to bring the equipment into service than if IMS simply sell the equipment to the National Guard. Supply of CS smoke is also politically sensitive - and the Army have little experience of it in the climatic conditions found in Saudi Arabia.

4. These factors point to a decision not to provide the training sought by the National Guard. It is, however, clear that the Saudis will not proceed with the equipment package, worth £38M over 2 years, without the training. More important there are implications for our broader sales relationship with the National Guard and their view of the British Military Mission. The National Guard is our largest single customer for defence sales in Saudi Arabia and other substantial business could be affected by our decision. This includes a government to government communications project, worth £200M in the current two year phase, and a similar government to government medical project, the renewal of which is now being negotiated and which could be worth a further £200M over the next two years. Although there is no direct link between these projects and the current request, HMG's credibility as a source of equipment and training could be brought into question if we appear unwilling to meet the National Guard's request for assistance. Our efforts to promote further defence equipment sales (and we are currently pursuing prospects for Blowpipe, Rapier and Challenger in the National Guard) for which MOD training support would also be



required, could also be put at risk.

5. A solution to this problem would be a commercial training package. However, although IMS consider that they could put together a training package to cover the in-country requirements of the National Guard, they cannot cover the UK training of Saudi instructors. The instructors cannot be trained in Saudi Arabia because the equipment will not be delivered there in time for training to take place before the 1983 pilgrimage.

6. Therefore, even if the National Guard could be persuaded to accept a commercial training package, it would still be necessary for the Army to provide some of the training. If this were kept to the minimum necessary to bridge the gap between the requirement and what IMS can provide, it would involve a course in the UK for some 20 Saudi instructors. Such an approach would not avoid the risk of drawing attention to the Army's involvement in riot control, but it would keep this risk at a relatively low level and would avoid the problem of association with equipment that is not approved for Service use. Any offer along these lines would have to make it clear that the British Army instruction would cover the basics of UK riot control philosophy and techniques and that any special purpose equipment covered by the course would be that equipment in UK service rather than that to be purchased by the National Guard.

7. HMA Jeddah considers that a proposal along these lines might well be acceptable to the National Guard. Before I take a final view I should welcome your views and those of OD colleagues and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to whom I am copying this minute. HMA has asked for guidance in time to meet the National Guard deadline of 15th May - this is clearly impossible in view of the short notice and the pressure of other commitments but I should be grateful for your comments as soon as possible.

*Wm*  
Ministry of Defence  
12th May 1983

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