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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

I enclose a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister from Lord Bridge of Harwich submitting the Security Commission's report in the case of Miss Rhona Ritchie. I have sent an acknowledgment saying that I will lay Lord Bridge's letter and report before the Prime Minister.

I should be grateful if you would advise me on the handling of this report. I am not enclosing a copy of the report, on the assumption that you already have one.

E. E. R. BUTLER

29 June 1983

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29 June 1983

I am writing on the Prime Minister's behalf to thank you for your letter of 28 June covering the Security Commission's report in the case of Miss Rhona Ritchie. I will lay this before the Prime Minister.

E. E. R. BUTLER

The Right Honourable The Lord Bridge of Harwich



The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
10 Downing Street
London SW1

28 June 1983

Dear Prime Minister,

I now have pleasure in submitting the Security Commission's report in the case of Miss Rhona Ritchie.

Yours sincerely
Bridge of Harwich

LORD BRIDGE OF HARWICH

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COPY NO 01

**REPORT OF THE
SECURITY COMMISSION**

June 1983

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PRIME MINISTER

REPORT OF THE SECURITY COMMISSION
ON THE CASE OF MISS RHONA RITCHIE

INTRODUCTION

1. On 29 November 1982 Rhona Jane McIntyre Ritchie pleaded guilty at the Central Criminal Court to one offence of wrongful communication of information under section 2(1)(a) of the Official Secrets Act 1911. That is the provision which makes it an offence for a person who holds office under Her Majesty, and who has obtained information owing to that position, to communicate that information to another person otherwise than in accordance with an authority or duty so to do. The maximum penalty for the offence is 2 years imprisonment or a fine or both. Miss Ritchie was sentenced to 9 months imprisonment suspended for 12 months.

2. On 23 December 1982 you asked the Security Commission to investigate and report on the case with the following terms of reference:

"To investigate the circumstances in which breaches of security have, or may have, occurred arising out of the case of Rhona Jane Ritchie, who was convicted on 29 November 1982 of an offence under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911; and to advise in the light of that investigation whether any change in security arrangements is necessary or desirable."

CONDUCT OF THE INQUIRY

3. In the course of our investigation we have met on 12 occasions. We have considered the following written material:

- (a) transcript of the trial;
- (b) brief for the prosecution and relevant enclosures;

(c) memoranda from the Security Service and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO);

(d) all papers relating to Miss Ritchie's Positive Vetting (PV);

(e) letter from Mr M E Pike, Head of Chancery at the British Embassy in Tel Aviv from September 1978 to mid January 1982.

We received oral evidence from the witnesses named in Appendix A.

4. We repeat what we said in paragraph 2.6 of Cmnd 8876 in appreciation of all the help we have had from Mr Rex Davie and Mrs Sally Sutton in this case, as in the case of Prime. The delay in submitting this Report, which we regret, has been caused partly by the priority we gave to the case of Prime, partly by the difficulty of finding convenient dates to take oral evidence from witnesses still serving in the British Embassy in Tel Aviv, partly by the subsequent absence abroad of one of our members.

HISTORY OF EVENTS

5. Miss Ritchie was born on 15 June 1952. She is the daughter of Scottish medical practitioners. She graduated from Glasgow University in 1973 with an honours degree in law. She spent a few months as a research assistant with the Scottish Law Commission in Edinburgh and then studied at the Faculty of Law at Aix-en-Provence University before returning to Glasgow in 1974 as a temporary lecturer in jurisprudence (1974-75) and thereafter a lecturer in European law (1975-79). She was also an assistant warden (1976-78) and deputy warden (1978-79) at halls of residence.

6. On 3 December 1978 Miss Ritchie applied to join the Diplomatic Service. She was granted PV clearance on 8 August 1979.

a ground for refusal of PV clearance.

7. Miss Ritchie joined the FCO on 3 September 1979 and first worked in London in the Hong Kong and General Department. In March 1980 the FCO wrote to the British Embassy in Tel Aviv about her, proposing that she should in due course replace Dr W G Harris, who was then First Secretary in Chancery. The Ambassador at that time, Sir John Robinson, was happy to accept her. She was posted to Israel in August 1980, but did not join the Embassy until July 1981. She spent the intervening period studying the Hebrew language, first in a kibbutz near Tel Aviv, then at a language school in Haifa. During this period her principal contact with the Embassy was through Dr Harris. In July 1981 she replaced Dr Harris at the Embassy, initially in the rank of Second Secretary. Shortly before her recall to England in March 1982 she was promoted to First Secretary. Throughout her service at the Embassy she was, as Dr Harris had been, the senior Chancery member of the staff directly responsible to the Head of Chancery.

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9. Miss Ritchie was recalled to London. She returned on 14 March 1982. She did not know the true purpose of the recall. Immediately on return she was interviewed by the Security Service. She admitted her affair with Ansari and that she had disclosed classified information to him. When it had become apparent that she had committed an offence under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911, the case was handed over to the Metropolitan Police.

10. The details of the prosecution of Miss Ritchie are on record. It would serve no purpose to examine them at length in this Report. A summary of the principal features of the case will suffice. The single count in the indictment to which Miss Ritchie pleaded guilty was a "specimen charge". The prosecution was presented on the basis, accepted by the defence, that Miss Ritchie had disclosed to Ansari the contents of six telegrams all classified CONFIDENTIAL. The case for the prosecution depended entirely on Miss Ritchie's own admissions. Her conduct was, in our opinion, accurately described by the Attorney General as "more foolish than wicked". The Attorney General, in his opening, also summarised fairly and accurately the nature of the damage caused by the disclosures, as follows:

"The damage to our country's interests was not, in the event, great. Egypt is a friendly power and most of the information she has admitted conveying would have become public knowledge in due course anyway. The mischief lay in the very fact of the breach of confidentiality and the inevitable doubts about our trustworthiness and security which the discovery of her conduct must have given rise to in the minds of other interested parties. Those Governments with whom we enjoy harmonious relationships have a right to expect that confidential exchanges will remain confidential."

SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

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12. In our view, the only security significance of this case is in the difficult area of sexual relationships between members of the staff of British Missions overseas and foreign nationals. We set out in Appendix B relevant extracts from Diplomatic Service Procedure instructions which were in force at the material time. We set out at Appendix C relevant extracts from a letter dated 17 September 1982 under the heading "Personnel Security" from Sir Antony Acland, as Permanent Under Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

13. We have explored the aspect of the case referred to in the foregoing paragraph very fully with all the FCO witnesses. Had he been in England, we should also have wished to see Mr Pike. As he is now British Ambassador in Hanoi, we first wrote to him inviting answers to a number of specific and detailed questions. He replied indicating that he would have preferred to give evidence to us orally, but nevertheless answering all our questions very fully and helpfully. Since we had no ground whatever to question the account given in Mr Pike's letter, we judged that it would not be justifiable to ask that he return to England to give evidence to us orally.

14. During the period of her stay in Israel before she joined

the Embassy, Miss Ritchie had a number of lovers.

an Israeli
Government official with whom she had a brief affair.
Shortly after she joined the Embassy she became Ansari's
mistress. This became, on her side, a serious emotional
involvement. Ansari was a jealous lover who demanded that
she should not go out with any other man. She accepted this
demand. Ansari was in fact married, but represented to
Miss Ritchie that he was separated from his wife. Her
affair with Ansari continued until her recall to England.

15. In examining what was known to members of the staff of
the Embassy regarding Miss Ritchie's sexual relationships,
it is appropriate to approach separately the period before
and the period after she joined the Embassy, to which, for
obvious reasons, very different considerations apply from
the security point of view.

16. During the period before Miss Ritchie joined the Embassy,
it became known to Dr Harris that she had a number of lovers,
of which she made no secret from Dr Harris and his wife.

He said in
evidence:

"I did not see her as a security risk. You have to
remember too that she was a very ambitious, career-
minded girl, very intelligent, very capable, and I
thought perfectly capable of handling a discreet
private life according to her own judgements and not
allowing it to impinge on her professional life."

He made no report to Mr Pike, as Head of Chancery, about these

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matters. As regards the Israeli official, however, Miss Ritchie sought Dr Harris' advice as to whether it would be acceptable if a relationship developed between them. He advised her against it. He reported this conversation to Mr Pike, who agreed with the advice given. Mr Pike and Dr Harris both assumed that Miss Ritchie had accepted this advice. We know only from Miss Ritchie herself that she had a brief affair with the Israeli official. Mr Pike has assured us, and we accept, that he knew nothing of Miss Ritchie's sexual relationships in Israel before she joined the Embassy.

17. Turning to the period after Miss Ritchie joined the Embassy and her affair with Ansari, it is essential to a fair judgement to appreciate the professional and diplomatic background to their relationship. We cannot do better than to describe this in the language of Mr Pike's letter to us, which we quote:

"Miss Ritchie took over the contact with Ansari from Dr Harris in July, 1981, shortly after her move to the Embassy in Tel Aviv. (Dr Harris had been in close touch with Ansari since shortly after the latter's arrival). Ansari, who had previously served in London, spoke excellent English and was intelligent and forthcoming. Dr Harris had found the relationship professionally fruitful and it was very much in the Embassy's, and HMG's, interests, to maintain contact with Ansari at a time when complex and sustained negotiations were continuing between the Israelis, Egyptians and Americans on the implementation of the Camp David Agreement and, in particular, on the normalisation of relations between Israel and Egypt. Dr Harris' relationship - and later Miss Ritchie's - reflected the excellent relations between Britain and

Egypt at the time: Egypt was regarded as a friendly country, whose views on many aspects of the Arab/Israel problem paralleled our own. Contact was maintained at all levels in Cairo, London and elsewhere including, of course, Tel Aviv.

"Against this background, it was perfectly natural and desirable that Miss Ritchie should take over Dr Harris' responsibility. She did so with my own, and the Ambassador's full approval On the evidence available at the time their relationship seemed perfectly normal. They saw each other for meals occasionally and Miss Ritchie reported regularly, and in detail, on her contacts. She and Ansari were also members of the junior diplomats' club which was confined to diplomats of the rank of First Secretary and below. It sponsored talks by Israeli, and other, speakers on subjects of current political and economic interests and arranged social events at local hotels."

18. We are satisfied that the sexual relationship between Miss Ritchie and Ansari was not in fact known to or suspected by Mr Pike at any time before he left Tel Aviv at the end of January 1982, or Mr Moberly, who took over as Ambassador in Tel Aviv in the same month as Miss Ritchie joined the Embassy. at any time before

We have not considered that it would be profitable to investigate in detail how far the relationship was known to or suspected by more junior members of the Embassy staff. We consider in the next paragraph the evidence of Colonel Boucher, the Defence and Military Attache, and Mr Prendergast, who succeeded Mr Pike as Head of Chancery on 1 February 1982.

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19. Some time after Miss Ritchie joined the Embassy Colonel Boucher heard gossip

which he considered unreliable, that she was having an affair with Ansari. Later, at a party where he saw Miss Ritchie and Ansari together, he could see that they were good friends but saw nothing to suggest that they were lovers. About the third week in February Mr Prendergast and Colonel Boucher had a long, informal conversation, in which Mr Prendergast questioned Colonel Boucher about a number of members of the Embassy staff, including Miss Ritchie. Colonel Boucher repeated to Mr Prendergast the substance of the gossip he had heard, save that, according to Mr Prendergast's recollection, which we accept, he did not name Ansari but mentioned "a young Egyptian diplomat". Mr Prendergast soon appreciated, from his own discussion of professional matters with Miss Ritchie, that Ansari must have been the man to whom Colonel Boucher intended to refer. Mr Prendergast, however, did not at this time feel that he had any sufficient ground either to question Miss Ritchie directly regarding her relationship with Ansari or to report what he had been told to the Ambassador. Miss Ritchie was herself planning to give a party early in March to welcome Mr Prendergast as a new arrival, which, as Mr Prendergast knew, was also to be attended by Ansari. He decided that there was no need, as he put it, "to take urgent action" until he had the opportunity to meet Ansari in Miss Ritchie's company. In the event, the report received before the party took place.

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CONCLUSIONS

20. In a case such as this it would be extremely easy to be wise after the event and to say that the responsible staff at the British Embassy should have been alert to the possible security implications of Miss Ritchie's attitude to sexual matters in general and of her relationship with Ansari in particular, and should have taken some step to forestall her unauthorised disclosures of classified information. On mature consideration we are satisfied that such a general criticism would be both unfair and unhelpful. We have fully explored with all the Embassy witnesses who gave oral evidence to us, and with Mr Pike in our exchange of correspondence, the areas in which they, as individuals, were open to potential criticism, and we are satisfied with their explanations.

21. The precepts prescribed for Heads of Mission in Appendix C are, in our view, wholly admirable and, we trust, will always be brought personally to the attention of all Heads of Missions on first appointment. The difficulty of applying those precepts in the infinite variety of situations which may arise in the course of diplomatic life and, more particularly, the difficulty of distinguishing the sexual liaison with security implications from that which can be regarded as a purely private affair present problems which no recommendation can help to resolve.

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CHAIRMAN

Bridge of Harwich

Hugh Griffiths

Allen of Abingdon

Hugh Beach

28 June 1983

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BRIDGE OF HARWICH

(The Rt Hon the Lord Bridge of Harwich)

(Chairman)

HUGH GRIFFITHS

(The Rt Hon Lord Justice Griffiths MC)

ALLEN OF ABBEYDALE

(The Lord Allen of Abbeydale GCB)

HUGH BEACH

(General Sir Hugh Beach GBE KCB MC)

28 June 1983

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LIST OF WITNESSES

- Sir Antony Acland KCMG KCVO : Permanent Under-Secretary of State
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
and Head of the Diplomatic Service
- Mr J K E Broadley : Head of Security Department,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- Mr P H Moberly CMG : HM Ambassador, Tel Aviv, from
July 1981
- Mr W K Prendergast : Head of Chancery, Tel Aviv, from
February 1982
- Colonel W S H Boucher : Defence and Military Attache, Tel
Aviv, from June 1980 to February 1983
- Dr W G Harris : First Secretary, Tel Aviv, from
March 1978 to September 1981
- Sir John Jones KCB CMG : Director-General Security Service
- Mr C O Shipp OBE : Deputy Director-General Security
Service
- Miss R J M Ritchie

EXTRACTS FROM "DIPLOMATIC SERVICE PROCEDURE"
INSTRUCTIONS IN FORCE DURING MISS RITCHIE'S SERVICE IN TEL AVIV

THE ANNUAL PERSONNEL SECURITY CERTIFICATE AND DEFECTS OF CHARACTER

...

3. Heads of Mission should therefore ensure that they and the senior members of their staff know the whole Mission, including UK-based officers on loan or attached from other Government Departments and local staff, well enough to spot in good time such danger signals as heavy drinking, undue extravagance, unexplained overstrain or nervous trouble and sexual irregularities. This may call for remedial action at the Post without reference to London, but the possible security implications should be borne in mind.

...

SECURITY DUTIES OF A HEAD OF CHANCERY

7. Morale and Security

...

7.3 A distinction should be made between behaviour that may be considered undesirable on social or moral grounds and behaviour which may be dangerous on security grounds. For example, sexual relations between single people do not normally expose them to blackmail, although they may suggest to a hostile intelligence officer that one or both of those concerned is a likely target for sexual compromise. (No sex with a communist national is safe, however.) The adulterer, on the other hand, may easily be subject to blackmail if one or both of the parties wish the affair to remain unknown. All sexual deviation, whether by men or women, raises an immediate presumption of vulnerability to hostile intelligence operation. And what may pass as acceptable behaviour in London may attract unfriendly attention at Posts abroad. The

security implications of an irregular private life are explained to officers when they first join the Service and they are reminded of these at intervals thereafter. However, it is a very effective reinforcement of security awareness (and often a personal kindness) if new arrivals, and particularly young single people coming to their first Post, are given friendly guidance about unfamiliar attitudes or problems they could encounter in local society.

...

7.6 Very often suspicions about individual behaviour are shadowy and inconclusive. However, in the public interest, they cannot be ignored, and a Head of Chancery should not hesitate to write to Security Department if he has unresolved doubts about an individual. Such letters are handled exclusively in Security Department, and doubts which in the event turn out to be unfounded or without security significance will have no effect on someone's career.

EXTRACTS FROM SIR ANTONY ACLAND'S LETTER OF 17 SEPTEMBER 1982
TO ALL HEADS OF MISSIONS

EMOTIONAL LIAISONS

...

6. The Annex is a reminder of the need to be especially alert to the possible security implications of emotional relationships between our staff, whether married or not, and foreign nationals, whether diplomats or not. This is a difficult area. Emotional liaisons with nationals from friendly countries, such as those in NATO and the EEC, are unlikely to be a security concern. But, whatever the nationality of the other partner, if you have any doubts in a particular case, it is not good enough to hope that the problem will go away; the personal particulars of the partner should be sent to Security Department for checks to be made. If staff consider that this represents an unacceptable intrusion into their private life, you should explain that it is better to be safe than sorry and that there have been too many cases in which the emotions of staff have been exploited ruthlessly by hostile intelligence services.

...

8. We are not concerned primarily with the morality of liaisons, whether heterosexual or homosexual, but with their security implications. Indiscriminate and promiscuous sexual activity is of special concern, because it is more likely than a more stable relationship to come to the attention of hostile intelligence agencies and to be exploited, whether the officer is married or single. (In addition, of course, it can bring discredit on the Service and on that ground alone cannot be condoned.)

THE NEED TO TAKE SPECIAL CARE OF THOSE ON THEIR FIRST POSTING

9. Finally, I should like you to pay particular attention to

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staff on their first posting overseas. Even though they have have lived overseas and travelled widely before joining the Service, their first exposure to the life of a Mission, with its privileges and temptations as well as its hardships, can sometimes lead to a breakdown in self-discipline. Staff on their first posting should be welcomed and made to feel at home, without of course being nannied. Where they have diplomatic and representational responsibility, they should also be quite clear about the rules for passing on classified information to diplomatic colleagues and officials of the government to which you are accredited. The general principles are laid down in DSR 12, but these will need to be expanded to take account of your local situation. Please make sure that your Post Security Regulations deal comprehensively with this point, and that all staff are briefed to consult their superior officers if they are in doubt.

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