

Ref. A083/2225

MR BUTLER

Security Commission: Miss Rhona Ritchie

Thank you for your minute dated 25 June 1983. I have not taken a month to reply.

2. I am advised that the Security Commission's report does not need to be shortened in order to make it acceptable for publication as an annex to a Written Answer. The Editor of the Official Report has been consulted, and would be content to publish the full text in that way. Lord Bridge has been consulted, and would also be content with that procedure, provided that the text (as amended) was published in full: he would not wish it to be shortened.

3. I do not think that we should press him to shorten it. If the Prime Minister announced that the report had been summarised for publication, that could give rise to suspicions that that had been done for some sinister reason to cover up some awkward finding or conclusion. There is no need to run that risk.

--- 4. I attach a revised and shortened version of the Prime Minister's Written Answer, which would be suitable if the report itself were being published as an annex in the Official Report.

--- 5. I understand that the Prime Minister would like to consult the Leader of the Opposition before finally deciding whether to make an oral statement (and publish the report as a White Paper) or to make a Written Answer. I attach a draft letter for her to send to the Leader of the Opposition.

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ROBERT ARMSTRONG

26 July 1983

To ask the Prime Minister, whether she has received the Security Commission's report on the case of Miss Rhona Ritchie.

I have now received the Commission's report, which I will with permission circulate ~~in~~ in the Official Report as an annex to this Answer. The published text of the Commission's report has been slightly amended at certain points to protect particular areas of security: but nothing substantive has been omitted.

2. Miss Ritchie was a First Secretary in the British Embassy at Tel Aviv, who was discovered to have passed the substance of classified documents to an Egyptian diplomat in Tel Aviv with whom she was having an affair. The Security Commission have confirmed the assessment made by my Rt Hon and Learned Friend the Attorney General at her trial, that the damage to the country's interests resulting from her disclosures was not great, and lay in the breach of confidence and trustworthiness that they implied rather than in the nature of the disclosures themselves. The material which she admitted to having disclosed was graded no higher than confidential, and its disclosure would have been prejudicial to the conduct of international relations rather than damaging to security. There is no evidence that she made any disclosure of material more highly graded than confidential. My Rt Hon and Learned Friend described her as "more foolish than wicked".

3. The Commission consider that any general criticism of the Embassy's failure to be alert to the possible security implications of Miss Ritchie's attitude to sexual matters in general and her relationship to the Egyptian diplomat in particular would be both unfair and unhelpful. They have fully explored with all the Embassy witnesses concerned the areas in which they, as individuals, were open to potential criticism, and are satisfied with their explanations.

4. Even if the damage to the country's interests from this affair has not been great, it illustrates the fact that people in the public services who allow themselves to enter upon such relationships as that between Miss Ritchie and the Egyptian diplomat need to be aware of the dangers and pressures to which the relationships may make them vulnerable, and should not be surprised if such relationships become a matter of concern to ~~their superior~~ <sup>their superior</sup> management. Those responsible for the maintenance of security cannot afford to ignore or leave unresolved significant suspicions about individual behaviour. This fact lay behind the Security Commission's recommendation, in its report on the Prime case, that more emphasis should be placed on the responsibility of line managers for security supervision. I endorse the Commission's welcome in its present report for the strengthened statement of the precepts governing these matters which the Head of the Diplomatic Service issued to all Heads of Divisions on 17 September 1982.

DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO  
THE RT HON MICHAEL FOOT MP, HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Security Commission have now submitted their report on the case of Miss Rhona Ritchie, which was remitted to them on 21 December 1982. I should like to publish this report before Parliament rises for the Recess.

I am enclosing with this letter, for the present on Privy Counsellor terms, a copy of the text of the report as prepared for publication. It is as submitted by the Security Commission, save for six minor drafting amendments to protect particular aspects of security (mainly the source of the reports about Miss Ritchie which reached the Security Service). Nothing substantive has been omitted. If you thought it was important to know exactly what the amendments are, the Secretary of the Cabinet would ~~be perfectly content to~~ come and show them to you.

As you will see, the report does not contain any ~~startling~~ <sup>major</sup> conclusions or recommendations for changes of security procedure. Given that, I should be inclined to announce publication of the report by way of a Written Answer to a Parliamentary Question, to which the text of the report could be annexed in Hansard. ~~The alternative would be for me to make an oral statement and publish the report as a White Paper; but I really~~ <sup>doubt</sup> ~~wonder~~ whether either the length <sup>or</sup> ~~and~~ the substance of ~~report would justify that.~~ <sup>justify</sup>

If you agree, I should be grateful if you would  
~~I should be grateful if you could let me know~~  
~~whether you are content for me to proceed by way of~~  
~~a Written Answer. If so, I hope that you would agree~~  
~~to put the question down to me,~~ <sup>a</sup> <sup>tomorrow</sup> on the following  
lines, <sup>for written answer on Thursday 28 July:</sup>

To ask the Prime Minister, whether she has  
received the Security Commission's report on  
the case of Miss Rhona Ritchie.

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FILE SH



10 DOWNING STREET

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B/C B. Ingham

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

The Prime Minister has seen your submission of 22 July (AO83/2194) attaching the report of the Security Commission on the case of Miss Rhona Ritchie. She has commented "A White Paper seems a bit much for this report. If the Commission agreed, it could be substantially shorter without losing any of the material facts and could then be given as a written reply. In any event, I would much prefer that".

Could you please see whether the report of the Security Commission could be sufficiently shortened, for example, by omitting the formal introductory paragraphs, to make it possible to publish it either in a written reply or in the Official Report pursuant to a written reply.

B/E

The Prime Minister's written statement could then also be very much shorter, since it would not be necessary to summarise in it the factual material in the Security Commission's report.

As regards the date of publication, the Prime Minister is inclined to prefer Friday, in reply to an arranged Parliamentary Questions put down on Thursday: perhaps you would let me know whether you see any objection to that.

I am copying this minute to Mr. Fall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Mr. Rawsthorne (Home Office) and Mr. Steel (Law Officers' Department).

BER BUTLER

July  
25 June, 1983

SECRET

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