


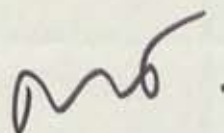
PRIME MINISTER

B.B.C. - EXTERNAL SERVICES

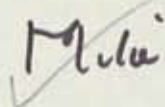
1. Herewith letter dated 16th August from Ray Whitney, together with its enclosure, and carbon copy of my reply.
2. Whitney is a good man.

24th August, 1979

  
Ian Gow



Action being  
taken see  
off filing 28/8/79



- can we have breakdown  
of how the BBC External  
Services money is spent? I suspect  
a lot of it is on musical programmes  
etc. not on education or  
information programmes etc etc

24th August, 1979

Many thanks for your letter of 16th August, with which you enclosed a copy of a letter dated 14th August, which you had sent to Ian Gilmour.

As you would expect, I agree, very much, with the first sentence of the second paragraph of your letter.

I do not know enough about the External Services of the B.B.C. to comment, with any authority, on the main point which you make.

However, I will ensure that your letter is seen by the Prime Minister.

Ray Whitney, Esq. O.B.E., M.P.  
House of Commons,  
Westminster, London SW1

RAY WHITNEY, O.B.E., M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

16 August 1979

I Gow Esq MP  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

My dear Ian,

I hope I am one of the most enthusiastic "economisers" in the Party but I really believe it would be misguided to try to save £4 million on the BBC External Services. Their role in the Third World is particularly important.

I enclose a note I have written to the Lord Privy Seal in case it may be of interest;

I hope you are getting a  
decent holiday.

Yours ever,  
Ray.





HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

14 August 1979

Rt Hon Sir I Gilmour MP  
Lord Privy Seal  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
London SW1

Dear Sir,

I am reluctant to enter into the public debate on the issue of the proposed cuts in the external services of the BBC but cannot forbear to add my small voice to the chorus of protest which I have no doubt you and your colleagues are receiving.

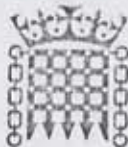
Most of us agree on the need to stabilise and, as soon as it can be managed, to cut public expenditure in real terms and I would count myself as one of the most dedicated of the economisers. The Party has, however, also accepted that the defence of our national security - from external and internal threat - called for the expenditure of more resources. I believe the same arguments apply to the external services.

Whether we like it or not, we are caught up in a ceaseless campaign of ideological warfare and any withdrawal we make from that battlefield is a victory of those hostile to our interests and values. Moreover, for reasons you will well appreciate, any ground which is surrendered now would be very difficult indeed to recapture - should there come a time when the folly of constant retreat is understood.

I should be very surprised indeed if, after all the cuts and reviews of the last decade or so, there is still any fat left to remove from the external services. Reductions are bound to do real harm to our interests, particularly coming when our antagonists are increasing their own efforts.

At the risk of sounding disloyal to my former colleagues, I have to say that my own experience has left me with the conviction that when economy drives are under way, the FCO has a marked tendency to look for savings in the BBC external services budget. To do so is less painful than to inflict cuts on the more immediate FCO family and there is always the feeling that, at the end of the day, the powerful "Bush House lobby" may be effective in gaining an eleventh-hour reprieve. In any case, there can be an element of schadenfreude in the FCO reaction to reductions in the external services. Their broadcasts so often ruffle feathers in foreign capitals and lead to uncomfortable interviews for our High Commissioners and Ambassadors!

/cont ...



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

- 2 -

Rt Hon Sir Ian Gilmour MP

14 August 1979

The £4 million involved seems to be a trifling sum for what is at stake and I am sure that far less damaging savings could be found in other areas, whether on the Diplomatic Service Vote or elsewhere. As an example, I remember being involved some years ago in a study of our effort in Somalia. It then seemed very clear that the very small amount we spent on the Somali service (was it £30,000?) was far more effective than maintaining five or six UK-based diplomats in what was, at that time, a hostile environment.

There is no doubt that the external services still have a very important international audience. In my experience, for instance, the majority of Soviet bloc diplomats are regular listeners when they are serving in third countries.

I hope very much that a solution can be found.

I am copying this letter to Ian Gow in case it may be of interest.

Yours ever,  
Ray.