



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Iraq Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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16 November 2015

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0260-15

Thank you for your request for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000 which we received on 6 March. You asked:

1. The total costs spent/incurred by the FCO on London Mayor Boris Johnson's January 2015 visit to the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

The Mayor's Office (GLA) advises that Mayor Johnson, Sir Edward Lister, and Mr. Will Walden all travelled to Iraq under the FCO's duty of care. Please include all costs related to this care, including the cost of housing Johnson, Lister and Walden and any other British representatives travelling with Mayor Johnson in Consulate General accommodation, as well as the cost of providing Consular General security for the representatives.

Please also include any additional costs incurred by Mr. Angus McKee, who accompanied the Mayor and his entourage while in Iraq. These may include travel and security costs.

2: Please send all internal and external communications and correspondence regarding Mayor Johnson's office regarding Mayor Boris Johnson's January 2015 visit to the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

I define correspondence and communications as including:

- Reports*
- Memos*
- Letters*
- Emails*
- Notes taken during telephone conversations*
- Press clippings*
- Text messages*

On 19 March you wrote:

I am looking for all documents related to the visit

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information which you requested. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

The Mayor of London visited Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq from 21-23 January. The visit came in response to a formal invitation from the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and was an excellent opportunity to strengthen further the links between the UK and the KRG and primarily to promote London as an investment destination for the Kurdistan Region, a rapidly growing regional economy.

Most costs of the visit were covered by the KRG (air travel, hospitality). The Mayor, two members of the Mayor of London's Office, and Nadhim Zahawi MP were brought under the FCO's duty of care whilst in country. This included staying in Consulate General accommodation and being looked after by the Consulate General's security team. Both accommodation and security costs for HMG's staff in Erbil are fixed, so the only additional costs for HMG were: breakfast, snacks, water and vehicle fuel. As the Mayor's visit contributed to the Consulate General's commercial objectives, the FCO covered these costs. Therefore the costs covered from FCO funds for the trip as you requested are:

Accommodation: Nil

Travel in country: £10.59

Other Expenses (meals, telephone, tea and coffee): £136.83

However, for the second section of your request some of the information you have requested is being withheld under Section 21 of the Act, Section 27 International relations, Section 35 Formulation of Government Policy, Section 43 Commercial Interests and Section 40 Personal information, of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The information falling under these exemptions has been redacted.

Under section 21 of the Act, we are not required to provide information in response to a request if it is already reasonably accessible to you. Some of the information relevant to your request can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/jan/22/boris-johnson-london-mayor-isis-kurdistan-trade>

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/politics/6286942/Boris-battles-IS.html>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/11368832/The-Kurds-cause-is-ours-lets-help-them-fight-the-barbarians.html>

Some of the withheld information is personal data relating to third parties. It is our view that disclosure of this information would breach the first data protection principle, which states that personal data should be processed fairly and lawfully. **Section 40(2) and (3)** of the FOIA therefore apply. It is the fairness aspect of this principle which we think would be breached by disclosure in this case. In such circumstances section 40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. We do not therefore have to apply the public interest test.

The application of **Section 27(1) (a)** requires us to consider the public interest test arguments in favour of releasing and withholding the information. We acknowledge that releasing information on this issue would increase public knowledge about our relations with Iraq and the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. But section 27(1) (a) recognises that the effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between governments. If the UK does not maintain this trust and confidence, its ability to protect and promote UK interests through international relations will be hampered, which will not be in the public interest. The disclosure of information detailing our relationship with the governments of these countries could potentially damage the bilateral relationship. This would reduce the UK Government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its relations with those states, which would not be in the public interest. For these reasons we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing this information.

Some information has been withheld under **Section 35** as it relates to the formulation of government policy. This exemption requires the application of a public interest test. There is public interest in protecting policy-making processes and ensuring this process remains able to deliver effective government. This is considered against the public interest in making publicly available information about policy-making processes. We consider that the balance of the public interest lies in favour of withholding certain information in relation to your request because it relates to the operation of our consulate and offices in London, which are necessary to develop and deliver government policy.

Information is specifically being held under **Section 38 (1) (a) and (b)** of the Act. In applying the public interest test we took into consideration the factors in favour of disclosure; in this case that releasing such information would demonstrate openness and public accountability towards the security arrangements for the personnel at the British Consulate General in Erbil. But disclosing specific details of security arrangements would pose a significant risk to the personal safety of the staff. I concluded that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

Finally, some of the information is exempt under **Section 43 (2)** of the Act, which relates to commercial interests. The use of this exemption was carefully considered. The factors in favour of disclosure of this information, including the general public interest and greater transparency and accountability, were carefully weighed against the need to allow business-people and commercial organisations the space to conduct their lawful business competitively and without fear of disclosure of sensitive commercial information. We consider that this transparency also poses risks to the protection of commercially confidential information. Failure to protect such commercially sensitive information would limit the sources of information and interlocutors available to the FCO and limit the FCO's ability to promote the British economy and lobby for the interests of British businesses overseas. In this case after such consideration we believe that the public interest in withholding the redacted information outweighs the public interest in its release.

Once an FOI request is answered, it is considered to be in the public domain. To promote transparency, we may now publish the response and any material released on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) in the [FOI releases](#) section. All personal information in the letter will be removed before publishing.

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Yours sincerely,

Iraq Team



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