



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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Counter Terrorism Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 - REQUEST REF: 0665-16

Thank you for your email of 11 July 2016, which has been treated as a request for information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). You asked:

"On April 7, 2016, an FCO spokesperson told VICE News in relation to counter-terrorism efforts in Yemen:

"We have previously provided counter-terrorism capacity building support to the Yemeni Security Services to increase their ability to disrupt, detain, and prosecute suspected terrorists in line with Yemeni rule of law and international human rights standards. Following the closure of the embassy in Sanaa in February 2015 we suspended this activity. We continue to work with regional and international partners to tackle the threat posed by terrorist organizations including AQAP and Daesh-Yemen and to build regional capacity on counter terrorism."

I would like to ask:

- a) was any of that support provided to Yemen's National Security Bureau and/or the Central Security Forces [aka. Special Security Forces]? If no please specify which Yemeni agencies
- b) please detail what support was provided to the agencies in question
- c) which FCO unit/body delivered the capacity building support? And what was the expertise of its personnel?
- d) Were any personnel seconded from the MOD to the FCO among the team who delivered the support?
- e) during which dates was the support provided?
- f) from which FCO budget line was the support paid for?"

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) holds some information relevant to your request.

Of the information that is held, some is exempt under section 21 of the Act. Under that section, a public authority is not required to provide information in response to a request if it is already reasonably accessible. Some information relevant to your request is accessible in the form of the Government's written evidence submitted to the Home Affairs Select Committee's inquiry into International Terrorism and Crime in 2013. The link provides relevant information around the disclosure of capacity building support overseas which we judge is applicable to your request.

<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/home-affairs/CT-Written-Evidence.pdf>

I also refer you to the Report on CONTEST (The Government's Strategy for Countering Terrorism) laid before Parliament on 21 July 2016. Countering Terrorism Written Statement HCWS116:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-07-21/HCWS116/>

The report contains information regarding the UK Government's strategy to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas. CONTEST deals with all forms of terrorism and continues to be based around four strands: Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare. The Report states that "our Pursue effort has continued to involve work with a range of countries across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East where the terrorist threat to our people and interests is greatest. Where possible, we have provided training, advice and mentoring to build their counter-terrorism capacity, increasing their ability to conduct effective evidence based counter-terrorism investigations and to disrupt attack planning in line with the rule of law. In Pakistan and Nigeria for example, we have well-established programmes to strengthen investigatory and judicial frameworks for dealing with terrorism, underpinned by clear human rights principles". CONTEST Annual Report 2015:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/539683/55469_Cm_9310_Web_Accessible_v0.11.pdf

Some information is exempt under **Section 24(1) (National Security)** of the FOIA. Section 24(1) is a qualified exemption, which means that it is subject to a public interest test. We acknowledge the public interest in openness and transparency, but consider that there is also a public interest in the FCO protecting national security. We remain concerned by the terrorist threat in Yemen, including the presence of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Daesh-Yemen. Long term instability may increase the risk that AQAP and Daesh-Yemen are able to consolidate their support base and capabilities. Countering such terrorist threats remains a priority. As the FCO spokesperson statement on 7 April 2016 says, we continue to work with regional and international partners to tackle the threat posed by terrorist organisations including AQAP and Daesh-Yemen. For operational reasons we cannot comment in detail on this activity. On this basis we assess that the decision to withhold information outweighs the public interest test to disclose.

Section 27(1)(a) of the FOIA recognises the need to protect information that would be likely to prejudice relations between the United Kingdom and other states if it was disclosed. The application of s.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 how we work with international partners to address terrorist threats. But having reviewed the requested information, we are concerned that its release would impact on the UK's cooperation with international partners. If the United Kingdom 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 FCO can neither confirm nor deny whether the above information represents all the information held that would meet the terms of your request.

Confirmation or denial of any further details would involve revealing exempt information, including information which would damage national security. We remain concerned by the terrorist threat in Yemen; confirmation or denial of the existence of or disclosure of any further information held would undermine the United Kingdom's ability to identify and respond to terrorist threats overseas (which, in turn, generates national security risks within the United Kingdom), would reveal where these activities may or may not be focused, and would thereby compromise the nature and extent of any tools at the United Kingdom's disposal to address such threats.

Yours sincerely,

Counter-Terrorism Department



We keep and use information in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. We may release this personal information to other UK government departments and public authorities.