



# Ministry of Defence

Air Command Secretariat  
Spitfire Block  
Headquarters Air Command  
Royal Air Force  
High Wycombe  
Buckinghamshire  
HP14 4UE

Ref. 2016/09544 and 2016/09703

[REDACTED]

19 October 2016

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your emails of 13 and 18 October 2016 requesting the following information:

1. *"On Wednesday (12/10/16) night at around 23:35 was there a QRA scramble from Lossiemouth with Voyager tanker support from Brize Norton? Any information on this would be greatly appreciated."*
2. *"On Monday (16/10/16) night at around 21:20 was there a QRA scramble from Lossiemouth with Voyager tanker support from Brize Norton? Any information on this would be greatly appreciated."*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). We have now completed a search of our paper and electronic records for the information you requested and I can confirm that information within the scope of your request is held.

Under Section 16 (Advice and Assistance) of the Act we can confirm that on Wednesday 12 and Sunday 16 October 2016 quick reaction alert Typhoon aircraft from Lossiemouth intercepted Russian Military Aircraft and escorted them while they were in the UK area of interest. At no point did the Russian aircraft enter UK territorial airspace.

Air-to-air Refuelling support is often provided by a Voyager aircraft from RAF Brize Norton.

In terms of more detailed information on the number and nature of Quick Reaction incidents. Section 26(1)a of the FOI Act provides that we should withhold information which would be likely to prejudice the defence of the British Isles or any Colony. Section 26(1)b of the Act provides that we should withhold information which would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of relevant forces. The Act requires that we have to carry out a public interest (PIT) in this respect to show that the reasons for withholding the information outweigh the reasons for releasing the information.

Public Interest factors in favour of disclosing the information requested:

- The public interest in ensuring that the UK is protected from airborne threats and that the resources invested in Quick Reaction Alerts (QRA) is properly employed.

- To provide a detailed measure of the level of activity in the air policing area for which we have responsibility.
- To promote an understanding of the RAF's ability to respond efficiently, effectively and appropriately to potential threats in UK airspace.

Public Interest factors against disclosing the information requested:

- If precise or comprehensive information on the nature of launches were released, any potential aggressor or terrorist organisation wishing to use aircraft as a means to attack the UK could extrapolate this information if they were probing our defences. It would consequently provide details of which probing flights triggered a QRA reaction.
- This in turn could give the criteria that provoke QRA and indicate the effectiveness of our QRA capability.

Because deterrence is a principal function of QRA and QRA is in turn an integral part of the air defence of the UK, the disclosure of information that might compromise the QRA deterrent capability, which is an ongoing armed operational capability, would also be a disclosure prejudicial to the defence of the UK. There remains a very strong public interest in preserving the RAF's ability to defend the UK through the effectiveness of its air defences and to maintain its full deterrence value.

I conclude that the balance of the public interest for providing detailed information about a QRA Scramble is in favour of maintaining the exemption under S.26(1)a & b and thus withhold the information.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 2nd Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.gov.uk>.

Yours sincerely

  
Air Command