



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
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13 September 2016

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0795-16**

Thank you for your email of 23 August asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

*Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 I would like to request the following information regarding the 7th meeting of the UK-Bahrain Joint Working Group, which was held on Thursday 7 June 2016.*

- *Copies of minutes, notes, memos, correspondence, or any other recorded data from the meeting.*

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does hold some information falling within the terms of your request.

The 7th meeting of the UK-Bahrain Joint Working Group took place on 2 June between the Bahraini Minister of Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa and Foreign Office Minister Tobias Ellwood. They discussed a broad range of issues including:

- Bilateral and Diplomatic Relations
- Regional Issues including; Counter-Daesh, Iraq/Syria, Iran, Yemen, Lebanon and Libya
- Reform and Assistance
- Human Rights
- Security and Counter-Terrorism/Extremism Support
- Education
- Economy, Trade and Investment

After careful consideration, we have decided to withhold material related to this meeting as the information is exempt from disclosure under section 27 (1) (a) and (c) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 27(1)(a) and (c) of the FOIA recognises the need to protect

information that would be likely to prejudice relations between the United Kingdom and other states and the interests of the UK abroad if it was disclosed. The application of s.27 (1) (a) and (c) requires us to consider the public interest test arguments in favour of releasing and withholding the information. We acknowledge that disclosure could meet the public interest in transparency and accountability. Indeed, we are transparent about the UK government's support to Bahrain's reform programme – it is detailed in the FCO's human rights report, which is updated annually, and through public correspondence and parliamentary questions.

However, 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 interest through intentional relations will be hampered, which will not be in the public interest. The disclosure of any information from what was a private meeting could potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and Bahrain. This would reduce the UK government's ability to protect and promote UK interests, 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 it.

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Yours sincerely,

Head of Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department

