



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Iraq Inquiry Unit
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH
Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

22 December 2016

Subject: Freedom of Information Request: FOIA 0780-16

1. In an e-mail message which was received in FCO on 19 August 2016, you requested the following information;

“1. Cables concerning the UK/US crisis with Iraq, including information about Emirati attitudes towards the crisis and any information about likely Iraqi responses.

2. Cables concerning political conditions within Iraq.”

2. I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does hold information falling within the terms of your request and has identified the following Telegrams from Abu Dhabi to FCO in London. Please find enclosed with this letter the information we can release to you from the documents listed below;

Abu Dhabi Telegram 134 to FCO ‘UAE: Iraq: Reaction To UNSCR 1441’ (17 November 2002)

Abu Dhabi Telegram 143 to FCO ‘UAE: Iraq: Human Rights Dossier’ (8 December 2002)

Abu Dhabi Telegram 144 to FCO ‘United Arab Emirates: Annual Review 2002’ (11 December 2002)

Abu Dhabi Telegram 5 to FCO 'UAE: Iraq And MEPP 1441' (20 January 2003)

Abu Dhabi Telegram 10 to FCO 'Iraq Contingency Planning' (5 February 2003)

Abu Dhabi Telegram 20 to FCO 'Iraq Contingency Planning: Phase IV Assistance' (2 March 2003)

Abu Dhabi Telegram 26 to FCO 'Iraq – Pressure On Saddam From Other Arab Governments' (12 March 2003)

Abu Dhabi Telegram 27 to FCO 'Iraq – Pressure On Saddam From Other Arab Governments' (15 March 2003)

Abu Dhabi Telegram 28 to FCO 'Iraq: Azores Summit: Lobbying' (17 March 2003)

Abu Dhabi Telegram 30 to FCO 'UAE/Iraq: Internal Security' (22 March 2003)

Abu Dhabi Telegram 32 to FCO 'UAE: Iraq Sitrep' (26 March 2003)

4. Some of the information in these documents is withheld under Section 27 (1) (a), (c), (d) and 27 (3) of the Act (International Relations). In considering where the balance of the public interest lies, I have taken into account where the public interest lies in the release of information as part of the public debate on foreign policy, in particular on Iraq, and the concept of accountable and more transparent government. Some of the information withheld under Section 27 (3) relates to confidential Government to Government discussion with other States. Releasing such information which was shared with the UK on a confidential basis could undermine the UK's role in the Middle East region and elsewhere. If we want to continue to play an influencing role, then our bilateral relationships need to be protected.

5. The effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between Governments. This relationship of trust allows for the free and frank exchange of information on the understanding that it will be treated in confidence. If the United Kingdom does not respect such confidences, our ability to protect and promote UK interests through international relations will be hampered. Other Governments may be reluctant to share sensitive information with the UK in future and may in turn be less

likely to respect the confidentiality of information supplied by the UK Government to them, to the detriment of UK interests.

6. I recognise that there is a public interest in this particular subject, but for all reasons mentioned above, I consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

7. Some of the information has been withheld under Section 35 as it relates to the formulation of government policy. Section 35 (1) (a) is a qualified exemption and I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours our release of this material. There is a general public interest in disclosure of information and I recognise that openness in government may increase public trust in and engagement with the government. I recognise that there is a public interest in the deliberations and consultations between officials and Ministers being transparent. These public interests have to be weighed against a strong public interest that officials should be able to discuss policy freely and frankly, exchange views on available options and understand their possible implications. The candour of all involved would be affected by their assessment of whether the content of the discussions will be disclosed prematurely. Taking into account all the circumstances of this case, I have concluded that the balance of the public interest favours withholding this information.

3. Finally, all of the documents requested contain personal data relating to third parties, the disclosure of which would contravene one of the data protection principles. In this case, our view is that disclosure would breach the first data protection principle. This states that personal data should be processed fairly and lawfully. Section 40(2) and (3) of the Freedom of Information Act therefore apply. It is the fairness aspect of this principle which, in our view would be breached by disclosure. In such circumstances Section 40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is therefore no public interest test to apply.

Please contact me if you have any queries about this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Iraq Inquiry Unit