



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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7 March 2016

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 - REQUEST REF: 1005-15

Thank you for your email of 19 October asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked for:

“Under the Freedom of Information act, I am requesting the following information:

All correspondence and reports from August 2015 to today related to Tony Blair's visit to Egypt in August 2015. This should include material prepared in Cairo and London by the FCO as well as communication from other government departments or entities (such as Tony Blair Associates).”

I can confirm that the FCO holds information relevant to your request. Please find attached a digest of the relevant documents.

Section 24:

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) holds some information relevant to your request. However, this information is exempt under Section 24 (1) (National Security) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 24(1) provides that information is exempt if exemption from section 1(1)(b) is required for the purposes of safeguarding national security.

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 we consider that there is also a public interest in the FCO protecting national security. Having reviewed the requested material, we are concerned that disclosure of security arrangements at overseas posts could contribute to the compromising of visitor and staff security and consequently adversely impact on the UK's security. We have therefore concluded that the exemption applies and that withholding the material serves the public interest better than release in this instance.

Section 27:

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. In this case, the release of information relating to foreign officials could harm our relations with Egypt.

Section 27(1)(a) is a qualified exemption and as such we have considered where the greater public interest lies. Disclosure could meet the public interest in transparency and accountability. 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 interests through international relations will be hampered, which will not be in the public interest. The disclosure of information setting out the thoughts of an official on our relationship with various states could potentially damage the relationship between the UK and those states. The relationships are on-going and comments - even dating back some time - could be taken into account by those states. This could 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 disclosure.

Section 31:

Section 31 states that "*Information... is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to prejudice - the prevention and detection of crime*". The associated risks of providing information in relation to security arrangements would have a detrimental effect on policing resources.

The release of this information could be used to gain an understanding of how much security is afforded to certain individuals. Those with the necessary criminal intent and capacity could go on to use this information to map policing arrangements across forces. This would then provide them with an operational advantage, and disclosure would also have a negative effect on the safety of the person concerned if the same arrangements are still in force today.

It remains the case that the publication of any information relating to an individual or a group of individuals who may or may not receive protection could potentially lead to harm to that individual or group, particularly if that information relates to the security arrangements for that individual(s) or formed any part of a protection package that may or may not be provided. We therefore judge that preventing crime serves the public interest better than release in this instance.

Section 38:

Some of the information that you have requested has been withheld under Section 38 (1) – information that would endanger the physical or mental health of any individual. Section 38 is a qualified exemption and as such a public interest test had to be applied. In applying the public interest test I again took into consideration the factors in favour of disclosure; in this case that releasing such information would demonstrate openness and public accountability towards the arrangements for Mr Blair and his delegation, consistent with other documentation to be released.

I balanced these against the grounds for non-disclosure, which rested on the fact that this and previous visits by former Prime Ministers and former ministers may draw attention due to a significant public profile. Disclosing specific details of visit arrangements such policies relating to the security and transportation of VIPs might be used by demonstrators to pose a significant risk to the visitors' personal safety. On balance I concluded that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

Section 40:

Some of the information you have requested, is personal data relating to third parties, the disclosure of which would contravene one of the data protection principles. In such circumstances sections 40(2) and (3) of the Freedom of Information Act apply. 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. It is the fairness aspect of this principle, which, in our view, would be breached by disclosure. In such circumstances, s.40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is, therefore, no public interest test to apply.

Section 41:

Some information has been withheld under Section 41(1)(b), as it is information that was provided in confidence. It is our view that disclosure of this information would constitute an actionable breach of confidence and so disclosure would also be unlawful under the Act. In these circumstances, Section 41 of the Freedom of Information Act confers an absolute exemption on disclosure and there is no public interest test to apply.

Section 23:

Finally the FCO can neither confirm nor deny whether the information disclosed represents all the information held that would meet the terms of your request, as the duty to comply with section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not apply by virtue of section 23(5).

Additional:

Revised guidance has been issued to overseas posts on assistance provided to former Prime Ministers and former ministers. As a result, posts will no longer facilitate programmes for visits, including the setting up of meetings with Government figures, *unless such visits support UK government objectives*. This is to avoid the inappropriate use of HMG staff and resources and to avoid the perception that former Ministers and Prime Ministers are representing HMG, rather than a commercial interest.

Former Prime Ministers and former ministers who seek logistical support as representatives of UK business must now submit requests through official UKTI channels to ensure equal support is provided to UK companies.

Further Information:

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 in the FOI releases section. All personal information in the letter will be removed before publishing.

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Yours sincerely,

North Africa Department



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