



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Middle East and North Africa Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London

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

06 October 2016

Your Freedom Of Information Request: 1222-15

Further to our previous letters in response to your request for information which we received on 21 December 2015. In your request you asked for;

*'If I narrowed it down to: **Doha, Qatar: Qatar/UK political, from 2000-2009.***

*On the topic/subject area of the **arms trade**, would that be better?'*

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does hold information falling within the terms of your request. Please find attached the information that the FCO can release to you, the exemptions used to redact the information are: Section 27 – international relations, Section 43, which relates to commercial interests and Section 40 – Personal information.

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 political matters could harm our relations with Qatar. 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 our relations with Qatar. However, s.27 (1) (a) recognises that the effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between governments. 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 disclosure of information detailing our relationship with the Qatar Government could potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and Qatar. This would reduce the UK government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its relations with Qatar, 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.

Some of the information is exempt under Section 43 (2) of the Act, which relates to commercial interests. The use of this exemption was carefully considered. The factors in favour of disclosure of this information, including the general public interest and greater transparency and accountability, were carefully weighed against the need to allow business-people and commercial organisations the space to conduct their lawful business

competitively and without fear of disclosure of sensitive commercial information. We consider that this transparency also poses risks to the protection of commercially confidential information. Failure to protect such commercially sensitive information would limit the sources of information and interlocutors available to the FCO and limit the FCO's ability to promote the British economy and lobby for the interests of British businesses overseas. In this case after such consideration we believe that the public interest in withholding the redacted information outweighs the public interest in its release.

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.

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.

The copies of information being supplied to you continue to be protected by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. You are free to use it for your own purposes, including any non-commercial research you are doing and for the purposes of news reporting. Any other re-use, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder. Most documents supplied by the FCO will have been produced by government officials and will be protected by Crown Copyright. To re-use Crown Copyright documents please consult the [Open Government Licence v3](#) on the National Archives website.

Information you receive which is not subject to Crown Copyright continues to be protected by the copyright of the person, or organisation, from which the information originated. You must ensure that you gain their permission before reproducing any third party (non-Crown Copyright) information.

Yours sincerely,

Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department

