

Digest of material for disclosure for FCO FOI reference 0511-17

E-mail sent: 10 June 2016 19:24

From: Neil Crompton

To: Gareth Bayley

Cc: Tim Barrow; Christian Turner; Michael Howells; Mark Lyall-Grant; [FCO name redacted]
Richard Moore Kim Darroch; Simon Collis; Edward Oakden

Subject: Syria - Ayman Asfari

Gareth

1. [FCO Name redacted] and I saw Ayman Asfari – Syrian Businessman [Text Redacted - Section 40] – for a catch up today.

2. I took him through where we were on different tracks. [Text redacted – section 27] There was an intense debate going on about how to deal with Nusra, which had not yet been resolved. There was little sign of progress on the political track [Text Redacted - Section 27]. On the multilateral track, there were some signs that the ISSG threat of airdrops was paying dividends, with the regime now indicating it would accept the UN plan and allow land access to besieged areas. We would keep up the pressure. But it was difficult to see the opposition re-engaging in serious talks until the enabling environment had improved. We had not given up on 1 August as a target date for an agreement, but increasingly it looked like the challenge would be how to use the second half of the year to embed the cessation of hostilities and improved humanitarian access [Text Redacted - Section 27].

3. [Text Redacted – Section 41]

4. [Text Redacted – Section 41]

5. [Text Redacted – Section 41]

6. We talked through various options for launching the plan and I said I would seek your advice. My instinct was that it was better to do this in a tour of key capitals, Washington, London, Paris and Berlin than perhaps Geneva. But I could also see the case for doing this in New York, and then sending the plan to the Security Council. The HNC might launch it publically at a major Washington think tank, [text redacted – section 41], who would be able to drag in all the foreign correspondents. The HNC would need a good team [Text Redacted – Section 27]. I said we would consult and revert to him with collective advice. Views welcome please.

7. [Text Redacted – Section 27]

8 [Text Redacted – Sections 27 & 41]

9 [Text Redacted – Section 41]

10. Food for thought, both on the HNC plan and a European initiative / plan, perhaps during the Autumn. We would welcome your views on a) the form of the HNC plan and b) how best to launch it. Near East Department will be working on some ideas on what an E3 vision might look like [Text Redacted – Section 41]

11. [Text Redacted – Section 27]

Neil Crompton

E-mail sent: 15 June 2016 14:23

From: [FCO names redacted]

To: SOSFA ACTION;

Cc: Neil Crompton; Gareth Bayley; Michael Howells; [FCO names redacted]

Subject: 160614 Brief for SOSFA Meeting with Ayman Asfari on 16 June

Dear PS / SOSFA

Please find attached briefing and a clutch card, cleared by Michael Howells -Head of Near East Department, for the Foreign Secretary's meeting at 13.30 tomorrow (Thursday 16 June) with Syrian businessmen, Mr Ayman Asfari.

Please be advised that for additional background, I have sent on the conf tier, a readout of the meeting Neil Crompton, Director MENAD had with Mr Asfari on Friday 10 June.

Please advise whether Syria Unit will be called upon to supply a note taker during this meeting.

Kind Regards

[name redacted]

E-mail sent: 16 June 2016 10:43

From: [FCO names redacted]

To: SOSFA ACTION;

Cc: Neil Crompton; Gareth Bayley; Michael Howells; [FCO names redacted]

Subject: 160614 Brief for SOSFA Meeting with Ayman Asfari on 16 June

Dear PS / SOSFA

The idea has been mooted that the HNC's Transition Plan be launched in London. Hence if permissible we have added by track change a question in the brief for the Foreign Secretary, which might than also be a possible talking point in the meeting.

Kind Regards

[name redacted]

Briefing Date: 16 June 2016

MEETING WITH AYMAN ASFARI, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF PETROFAC [Text Redacted – Section 41], MONDAY 16 June, 13.30

STEER

[Text Redacted - Section 41] producing a workable 'Transition Plan' in late Summer that will grab the attention of the international community. If successful, this would help cement the moderate opposition's reputation as credible actors interested in resolving the conflict through diplomatic means. It would be a useful contribution to the Syria diplomacy and hard for Russia to ignore.

OBJECTIVES

- Express appreciation for Asfari's advice to HMG [Text Redacted – Section 41]
- [Text Redacted – Section 41] Ask how the UK and its international partners can best support, particularly in ensuring a successful launch, and his thoughts on location and timing. Could we host this in London?
- [Text Redacted - Section 27]
- [Text Redacted - Section 27]

BACKGROUND

1. [Text Redacted – Sections 40 & 41]
2. Asfari has recently met with MENA Director Neil Crompton to discuss where we are on various tracks, including consolidating the cessation of hostilities and improving humanitarian access. [Text Redacted – Sections 27 & 41].
3. [Text Redacted - Section 27] The transition plan is therefore intended to grab the attention [Text Redacted – Sections 27 & 41].
4. [Text Redacted – Sections 27]
5. [Text Redacted – Sections 27 & 41]

E-mail sent: 17 June 2016 09:18

From: Neil Crompton

To: [FCO name redacted]

Cc: Martin Reynolds; PUS Action; Tim Barrow; Christian Turner; Simon Collis; Gareth Bayley; Samantha Job; [FCO names redacted]; Michael Howells; Edward Oakden; Richard Moore, [FCO names redacted]

Subject: Foreign Secretary Meeting with Ayman Asfari

[FCO name redacted]

I attach a note on the Foreign Secretary's meeting with Ayman Afsari and the requested advice on how we might support HNC plans to launch a future vision plan.

[Text Redacted – Sections 27]

Neil Crompton

Letter / Meeting Note - 17 June

Private Secretary

SYRIA: FOREIGN SECRETARY AYMAN ASFARI

1. The Foreign Secretary saw Syrian businessman [Text Redacted – Sections 40] Ayman Asfari on 16 June. They had a long discussion about [Text Redacted – Sections 27] Opposition views and our own thinking. [Text Redacted – Section 41]
2. [Text Redacted – Sections 27 & 41]
3. On launching an opposition vision along these lines the Foreign Secretary told Asfari that he thought this would be a good move tactically, [Text Redacted – Section 27]. The Foreign Secretary asked for a short note on how we might support this. There are two broad options:
 - a. **Autumn Launch.** [Text Redacted – Sections 27, 35 & 41]
 - b. **Go Early.** We encourage the Opposition to work to a faster timetable and launch their vision in early July. Early launch would not resolve the fundamental problem, but it would give us something to work with ahead of the proposed ISSG in mid-July and 1 August deadline for a US/Russia agreement on a transition plan. [Text Redacted – Section 27]
5. We've discussed with Gareth Bayley and Washington and favour the Go Early option. [Text Redacted – Sections 27 & 35]
7. [Text Redacted – Sections 27] We would have plenty of time to work out the elements, but in sketch form this might entail: [Text Redacted – Sections 27 & 35]
8. [Text Redacted – Sections 27 & 35]

Neil Crompton
Director MENA