



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Near East Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

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

30 March 2015

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0122-15

Thank you for your request for information on 9 February 2015. In your request you asked for:

Correspondence between FCO and the British Consulate General in Jerusalem on Gazan gas.

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information which you have requested. I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information relevant to your request.

The following information is exempt from disclosure under Section 21 (1) (Information accessible to the applicant by other means) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 as it is already reasonably accessible to you through the following links:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-questions-answers/?page=1&max=20&questiontype=AllQuestions&house=commons%2clouds&member=200&keywords=Gazza%27s%2cgas>

<https://mees.com/docs/public/Palestinian-Natural-Gas-Ambitions.pdf>

However, the following information has been withheld under the following exemptions:

Section 27

Some of the information you requested has been withheld under Section 27 (1) (a), (c) and (d). Section 27 exists to protect the UK's (a) relations between the UK and any other state, (c) the interests of the UK abroad and (d) the promotion or protection by the UK of its interests abroad.

In applying this exemption, we have had to consider the public interest test arguments in favour of releasing and withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing it.

Factors in favour of disclosure include the strong public interest in transparency and accountability. There is also a clear public interest in raising awareness and understanding of how the UK government works at a country level and in how we aim to engage with partner governments and international organisations.

But Section 27 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 Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority (PA) could potentially damage our bilateral relations. This would reduce the UK's government's ability to protect and promote UK interests through its relations with Israel and the PA, 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.

Section 35

Section 35 (1) (a) of the Act is related to the formulation or development of government policy which also requires the application of a public interest test. It is recognised that there is public interest in the greater transparency in the decision making process to ensure accountability within public authorities. However, officials need to be able to conduct rigorous and candid risk assessments of their premature disclosure which might close off better options and inhibit the free and frank discussion of all policy options. For these reasons we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

Section 41

Some of the information that you requested has been withheld under Section 41 (1) – information provided in confidence. This allows for information to be exempt if it was obtained by the public authority from any other person and the disclosure of the information to the public (otherwise than under this Act) by the public authority holding it would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that or any other person. Section 41 also confers an absolute exemption on disclosure, and therefore a public interest test is not required.

Section 43

Some of the information also falls under Section 43 (2) of the Freedom of Information Act, which relates to commercial interests. In applying this exemption, we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosure.

There is a public interest in the disclosure of commercial information to ensure effective, open and honest use of public money and the scrutiny of government action and to provide an environment where business can better respond to government opportunities.

However, we consider that this transparency also poses risks in that companies and individuals would, if this information were disclosed, be much less likely to provide the FCO with commercially sensitive information. This would limit the sources of information and interlocutors available to the FCO. In doing so, it would seriously impair our ability to work for UK interests.

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.

Yours sincerely,

Near East Department



We keep and use information in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. We may release this personal information to other UK government departments and public authorities.