



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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

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

22 June 2017

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0511-17

Thank you for your email of 24 May asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

I would like to see any available emails, notes or similar documents relating to Philip Hammond's meeting with Petrofac's Ayman Asfari on June 16th 2016 "To discuss events in Syria". I imagine there would be emails to set up the meeting, and perhaps follow up or "thank you" emails. There may be a brief prepared for the meeting or minutes of the meeting. I would also like if possible to know who attended the meeting and where it took place. The meeting is listed on this transparency return https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/566981/Ministerial_Return_April_-_June_2016_-_Meetings.csv/preview

I can confirm that this meeting took place on Thursday 16 June 2016 August at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London. Mr Asfari was unaccompanied whilst the Foreign Secretary was joined by FCO officials. I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does hold information relevant to your request. Please find attached the information that can be released to you. This comprises four partial disclosure emails, a partial disclosure briefing and a partial disclosure note.

However, we are withholding some information under the following exemptions:
Section 27(1) and (2) - International relations
Section 35 - Formation of government policy
Section 40(2) and (3) - Personal information
Section 41(1)(b) - Information provided in confidence.

The disclosure of some documents which you have sought would be likely to prejudice the interests of the UK abroad. In such circumstances Section 27(1)(c) applies since 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/individuals could potentially damage the

relationship between the UK and those states/individuals. 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.

Some information is being withheld under section 35 of the Act as it relates to the formulation of government policy. This is considered against the public interest in making publicly available information about policy-making processes. In applying the required public interest test I recognised that there is public interest in transparency in the formulation and implementation of Government policy. However, I also recognise that Ministers and officials need to be protected from such transparency to be able discuss and debate policy free from the pressures of public political debate. There is a strong public interest in ensuring high-quality policy-making and implementation. For Government to succeed in upholding the public interest, Ministers and officials need to be able to consider, debate and understand implications of the policy and how it is presented. Their candour in doing so will be affected by their assessment of whether the content of such discussions will be disclosed in the near future.

Furthermore some of the material you 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, Section 40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is, therefore, no public interest test to apply.

Lastly some of the information that we considered for your request has been withheld under Section 41(1)(b) of the Freedom of Information Act – Information provided in Confidence. The successful working of British diplomacy depends upon those we speak to being able to speak in confidence without fear that this will be made public. Disclosure would be a breach of that confidence. This is an absolute exemption and so the public interest test does not apply. This applies when information has been passed to the FCO in good faith, and when the disclosure of it would be likely to be considered an actionable breach of confidence.

Yours sincerely,

Near East Department

