



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Arabian Peninsula & Iran Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

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

02 August 2017

SUBJECT: FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST: 1161-16

Thank you for your e-mail of 20 December, in which you asked for the following information under the FOI Act (FOIA). My apologies for the delay of this response.

I would like a list of meetings between Foreign Office ministers and either ministers or officials representing Saudi Arabia. I would like to know who was at the meeting, (including both British and Saudi officials and business representatives) to the extent that is compliant with rules in the FOI Act, and if British defence contracts and potential arms sales to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were discussed at each meeting. If this is over the spending limit, please give me a list of meetings in reverse chronological order (starting with the most recent). I would like the information in a machine-readable spreadsheet format if possible.

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information relevant to your request. We have completed a search of the electronic diaries and meeting records that we hold. You should be aware that we do not hold records of every meeting or encounter and therefore this list may not be exhaustive. The relevant information that we do hold is attached is listed below.

There have not been any direct conversations by Foreign Office Ministers regarding defence contracts and/or potential arms sales. However, a number of the engagements have discussed issues related to International Humanitarian Law in the context of export licenses.

The Foreign Secretary had the following meetings, which also included phone calls, with:

Saudi Foreign Minister Al Jubeir: 10 meetings in 2016 and 7 meetings in 2015.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal: 7 meetings in 2015.

Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman: 3 meetings in 2016 and 2 meetings in 2015.

Deputy Crown Prince HRH Mohammed Bin Naif: 2 meetings in 2016 and 6 meetings in 2015.

HM King Salman: 2 meetings in 2016 and 2 meetings in 2015.

HRH Prince Miteb, Commander of the National Guard and Foreign Minister: 2 meetings in 2015.

Deputy Foreign Minister Dr Prince Turki Al Saud: 1 meeting in 2015.

Minister Ellwood had the following meetings, which also include phone calls, with:

Saudi Arabian MOD Spokesman General Assiri: 1 meeting in 2016.

Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Al Jubeir: 2 meetings in 2016. Minister Ellwood also hosted the Saudi Foreign Minister in Parliament in 2016.

Saudi Ambassador to London: 4 meetings in 2016 and 1 meeting in 2015. He also met with the Saudi Ambassador in the margins of the Syria Conference in February 2016, and hosted a lunch at Lancaster House in August 2016 with The Council of Arab Ambassadors, which included the Saudi Ambassador to London.

Deputy Foreign Minister Dr Prince Turki Al Saud: 2 meetings in 2016 and 1 meeting in 2015.

Saudi Deputy High Commissioner HM Dr Al Wasil: 1 meeting in 2015.

In regards the digest, some information has been withheld under section 27 – International relations and 40- personal information of the FOIA.

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 meetings held between Foreign Office Ministers and Saudi Arabia Ministers or officials could harm our relations with Saudi Arabia.

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 Saudi Arabia.

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 meetings with Foreign Office Ministers and Saudi Arabian Ministers and between respective officials could potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and Government of Saudi Arabia. This would reduce the UK Government's ability to protect and promote UK interests. This 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.

I also wish to advise that some of the information you requested has been withheld as it falls under Section 40 – Personal information of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The nature of your request means that the information found contains personal data relating to living 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 of the Act confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is therefore no public interest test to apply.

Yours sincerely,

Head of Arabian Peninsula & Iran 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.