



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Arabian Peninsula & Iran Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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01 August 2017

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST: Ref 0162-17

Thank you for your email of 13 February requesting information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked for:

I would like to request a list of meetings that the British ambassador in Saudi Arabia attended from 12/02/2016 to 12/02/2017. I would like the list to cover all meeting that involved people who are not part of the British Embassy in Saudi Arabia and for the list to include: the date and location of each meeting; a list of those present (with names and positions for politicians and senior officials, and positions for those to whom Section 40 exemptions are applied); and the purpose of the meeting. I would like this to include meetings in both Saudi Arabia and other countries.

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information relevant to your request. I apologise for the length of time it has taken to complete 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 as a digest. One of your requests was to provide the purpose of the meetings listed however this has fallen under the exemptions below and so has not been provided.

Some of the information you requested has been withheld under Section 27(1)(a), (c) and (d). The application of these exemptions 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 and other states and organisations. However, sections 27 (1)(a), (c) and (d) recognise the effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between governments. This relationship of trust allows for the free and frank exchange of information on the understanding that it will be treated in confidence. If the UK does not maintain this trust and confidence, its ability to protect and promote UK interests overseas will be hampered. Countries may be more reluctant to share sensitive information with the UK Government in future and may be less likely to respect the confidentiality of information supplied by the UK Government, to the detriment of UK interests. For all these reasons, we consider that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in

maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information covered by section 27.

Some of the information you requested has been withheld as it falls under Section 38 (1) (a) and (b) – information that would endanger the physical or mental health of any individual or endanger the safety of any individual. Section 38 is a qualified exemption and as such a public interest test had to be applied.

We recognise that there is a public interest in transparent and open government, and releasing information that would inform public debate on our work and demonstrate openness in the FCO's dealings with Bahraini organisations. We understand that it is often felt that we should not protect the names of our officers acting in an official capacity. However, we have to balance this with the need to ensure that our staff are able to carry out their jobs without fear of undue repercussions and, as their employer, we have a duty of care to ensure that they are not individually targeted for protecting and promoting UK interests in Bahrain. Disclosure of the specific details of the location of meetings might expose the participants to significant risk to their personal safety.

In this case we believe that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in release.

Under section 43 of the FOIA, which relates to commercial interests the factors considered in favour of disclosure of this information, included again, the general public interest and greater transparency and also accountability. These 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. In this case after such consideration we believe that the public interest in withholding the redacted information outweighs the public interest in its release.

I also wish to advise that some of the information you requested has been withheld as it falls under Section 40 of FOIA – personal information. 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.

Additionally, some of the information that you requested has been withheld under Section 41 (1) of the Freedom of Information Act – 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.

Yours sincerely,

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.