



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

**Arabian Peninsula & Iran Department**  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
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London SW1A 2AH

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

01 August 2017

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST: Ref 0039-17**

Thank you for your email of 11 January requesting information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked for:

*I would like the full diary/itinerary/agenda of Boris Johnson's trip to Saudi Arabia in mid-December 2016. I would like this to include names of those he met. I would like a list of ministers, officials and business people who accompanied the trip, to the extent that is compliant with rules in the FOI Act. As long as it does not take the request over the spending limit, I would like all FCO documents (preparatory briefings etc.) and correspondence relating to the trip.*

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 is taking to complete your request.

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. 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.

Section 35(1)(a) formulation of government policy has also been considered, it is recognised that there is public interest in 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 policies and programmes including considerations of pros and cons without there being a risk of 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 disclosure.

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.