



Ministry
of Defence

Air Command Secretariat
Spitfire Block
Headquarters Air Command
Royal Air Force
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP14 4UE

Ref. 2020/02069

[REDACTED]

9 March 2020

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your e-mail of 12 February 2020 asking for information about RAF Quick Reaction Alert flights. Specifically, you requested the following information:

"Could you please confirm the amount of Quick Reaction Alert Flights conducted in the last 5 years, from the following Air Stations?"

- RAF Lossiemouth
- RAF Coningsby
- RAF Mount Pleasant

If possible, broken into those of civilian or military Russian/Argentine origin."

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. I can confirm that some information within the scope of your request is held.

We do hold recorded information on the number and nature of incidents when RAF Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) aircraft launched against aircraft approaching the UK in the last five years. However, similar information for the aircraft approaching the Falkland Islands is only held centrally for 2017-19 inclusive.

Section 26(1)a of the FOI Act provides that we should withhold information which would be likely to prejudice the defence of the British Isles or any Colony. Section 26(1) b of the Act provides that we should withhold information which would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of relevant forces. Section 24(1) of the FOI provides that we should withhold information for the purposes of safeguarding national security. The Act requires that we have to carry out a public interest (PIT) in this respect to show that the reasons for withholding the information outweigh the reasons for releasing the information.

Because deterrence is a principal function of QRA and QRA is in turn an integral part of the air defence of the UK and overseas UK territory, the disclosure of information that might compromise the QRA deterrent capability, which is an ongoing armed operational capability, would also be a disclosure prejudicial to the defence of the UK and national security. The release of details such as the exact number and nature of launches including the station aircraft launched from in the UK, could allow a potential aggressor to extrapolate details of which probing flights triggered a QRA response. A limited disclosure of the requirement to launch Quick Reaction Alert would provide a reasonable level of overall understanding of the level of QRA activity. As a limited amount of information has been released for some incidents as examples of how the RAF is able to respond to this kind of incident, the public interest in further disclosure of detailed incident details is therefore limited. There remains a very strong public interest in preserving the RAF's ability to defend the UK and its territory and interests overseas through the effectiveness of its air defences and to maintain its full deterrence value.

I conclude that the balance of the public interest for providing full details of the number of QRA launches is firmly in favour of maintaining the exemptions under S.26(1)(a)&(b) and S.24(1) and thus of withholding the information, with the level of prejudice set at the higher level of 'would'.

However, whilst we would not wish to reveal the exact number of QRA launches and interceptions for the reasons given above, under Section 16 of the Act (Advice and Assistance) you may wish to note the number of days on which RAF Quick Reaction Alert aircraft were launched to intercept aircraft approaching the UK for calendar years 2015-2019 is given in the table below:

Year	Total number of days on which RAF QRA launched	Number of days on which RAF QRA launched against Russian military aircraft	Number of days on which RAF QRA launched against others
2015	12	8	4
2016	12	5	7
2017	6	3	3
2018	9 ¹	7	3
2019	14	8	6

1. On one day launched against both Russian military and Others

The number of days on which RAF Quick Reaction Alert aircraft were launched to intercept aircraft approaching the Falkland Islands for calendar years 2017-19 is given in the table below:

Year	Total number of days on which RAF QRA launched	Number of days on which RAF QRA launched against Argentine military aircraft	Number of days on which RAF QRA launched against others
2017	2	2	0
2018	0	0	0
2019	1	0	1

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely



Secretariat 3a1
Air Command

