Richard Taylor
request-296427-bd031a4a@whatdotheyknow.com

FOI Reference: FOI321872
28/10/2015

Dear Richard Taylor

I refer to your request where you asked:

“Please release the identities of those who have, since January 2010, been given the authority to make political decisions about using atomic weapons in the event of the unavailability of the Prime Minister.”

Please release the dates each individual held the position for and their precedence among the deputies (if they were designated first deputy, second deputy etc.)."

I can confirm that the Cabinet Office, which for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act includes the Prime Minister’s Office, has, following a search of our paper and electronic records, established that the information you requested is held by the Cabinet Office. I can also confirm that certain exemptions apply to the information held, namely Sections 24(1) and 26(1)(a).

Section 24(1) is engaged because the information relates to the identity or role of those involved in the decision making with regard to the United Kingdom’s national security (including the use of the nuclear deterrent) and release of any such information would harm national security. Section 24 is a qualified exemption, meaning that I must consider whether the balance of public interest lies in favour of withholding or releasing the information. While there is a general public interest in the transparency of Government operation and in Government decision making, there is also an overriding public interest in maintaining the ability of the Government to safeguard national security. Taking into the account all the circumstances of this case, I have concluded that the balance of public interest favours withholding the information.

Section 26(1)(a) is engaged because the information relates to the defence and security of the UK, including the United Kingdom’s independent nuclear deterrent, and disclosure of the information would, or would likely to, prejudice the defence of the British Isles or of any colony. Section 26 is also a qualified exemption. In favour of disclosure I recognise that there is a public interest in openness and transparency, particularly in the context of the defence and security of the UK. However, against this there is a significant public interest in not disclosing information which would harm the defence and security of the UK, particularly where this relates to the United Kingdom’s independent nuclear deterrent. In the absence of a compelling and overriding public interest in disclosure, and taking into account all the circumstances of the case, I have again concluded that the balance of public interest lies in favour of maintaining the exemption.
If you have any queries about this letter, please contact the FOI team. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request or wish to request an internal review, you should write to:

Roger Smethurst  
Head of Knowledge and Information Management  
Cabinet Office  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
SW1A 2HQ

email: foi-team@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

You should note that the Cabinet Office will not normally accept an application for internal review if it is received more than two months after the date that the reply was issued.

If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by Cabinet Office. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

The Information Commissioner’s Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely

FOI Team  
Cabinet Office