



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Central FOI Unit
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

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

Emmy Butlin

By Email: request-530019-390ece66@whatdotheyknow.com

09 July 2019

Dear Ms Butlin,

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 1201-18

Thank you for your email of 5 November 2018 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

Please provide copy of Note no A295/17 dated 21 December 2017 and all related communications on the subject.

The document is already made public (albeit hardly legible) by Mr Rafael Satter of the Associated Press on 17 October 2018 , at URL

<https://www.apnews.com/3728e1631d57454a9502dd51d1bf441b>

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information which you requested. I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information relevant to your request. However, the information is being withheld under the following FOIA exemptions;

Section 27 – International relations

Section 35 – formulation of policy

Section 27

The information within the scope of your request has been withheld using section 27 – international relations. Sections 27 (1) (a) and 27(2) 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, and information received in confidence. In this case, the release of the information requested could harm international relations. The application of

Section 27 (1) (a) and 27(2) requires us to consider the public interest test arguments in favour of releasing and withholding the information. Section 27 (1) (a) and 27(2) 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. We acknowledge that releasing information on this issue would increase public knowledge about our relations with other governments. However, the disclosure of the requested information could potentially damage international relations. This would reduce the government's ability to protect and promote UK interests. For these reasons, we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

Section 35 (1) (a) (Formulation of government policy, etc.)

Section 35 (1) (a) of the Freedom of Information Act relates to the formulation or development of Government policy. This exemption requires the application of a public interest test. It is recognised that there is a public interest in the 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 the pros and cons without there being premature disclosure which might close off better options and inhibit the free and frank discussion of all policy options. It is our view that disclosure of information on this issue would mean that we would risk undermining future decision making and discussion on this subject in future. For these reasons we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure of the information.

If you wish to make a complaint or if you would like a review of our decision, please write to the Central FOI Unit, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Room WH 2.177, King Charles Street, London, SW1A 2AH. E-mail: foi-dpa.pmcs@fco.gov.uk. You have 40 working days to do so from the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint, you may then apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the FCO. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely,

Central FOI Unit

Parliamentary, Ministerial and Central Services



For information about how the FCO handles personal information please see our [Personal Information Charter](#).