



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA
020 7930 4433

From the Private Secretary

22 December 2005

Dear Mr Wood

Thank you for your e-mail of 24 November in which you request a copy of any memos or notes that record President Bush's discussions with the Prime Minister about the bombing of the al-Jazeera television station in Qatar. Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

I can confirm that the Cabinet Office holds information which is relevant to your request.

The information held comes under section 27 of the Act (international relations). Section 27(1)(a) applies where disclosure of the information would, or would be likely to, prejudice relations between the United Kingdom and any other State. Section 27 is a qualified exemption. In applying this exemption we have had to consider the public interest in maintaining the exemption against the public interest in disclosing the information.

The Cabinet Office accepts that there is a general public interest in greater transparency in how Government operates particularly in relation to an issue on which there has been public debate.

However, there are strong countervailing public interest factors. It would not be in the public interest to release information which would harm international relations. It is important that information pertaining to our discussions or relations with other states is protected. 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 United Kingdom does not respect such confidences, its ability to protect and promote UK interests through international relations will be hampered. The states concerned may be more reluctant to share sensitive information with the United Kingdom

Government in future and may be less likely to respect the confidentiality of information supplied by the United Kingdom Government to them, to the detriment of UK interests. This could have the effect of prejudicing the UK's relations with other states and thus its ability to protect its interests and its citizens effectively.

This information is therefore being withheld.

I attach at Annex A the exemption in full.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nikhil Rathi".

NIKHIL RATHI

Mr Steve Wood

Annex A

27 – International Relations

(1) Information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice

- (a) relations between the United Kingdom and any other State
- (b) relations between the United Kingdom and any international organisation or international court
- (c) the interests of the United Kingdom abroad, or
- (d) the promotion or protection by the United Kingdom of its interests abroad

(2) Information is also exempt information if it is confidential information obtained from a State other than the United Kingdom or from an international organisation or international court.

(3) For the purposes of this section, any information obtained from a State, organisation or court is confidential at any time while the terms on which it was obtained require it to be held in confidence or while the circumstances in which it was obtained make it reasonable for the State, organisation or court to expect that it will be so held.

(4) The duty to confirm or deny does not arise if, or to the extent that, compliance with section 1(1)(a)-

- (a) would, or would be likely to, prejudice any of the matters mentioned in subsection (1), or
- (b) would involve the disclosure of any information (whether or not already recorded) which is confidential information obtained from a State other than the United Kingdom or from an international organisation or international court.

(5) In this section-

"international court" means any international court which is not an international organisation and which is established-

- (a) by a resolution of an international organisation of which the United Kingdom is a member, or
- (b) by an international agreement to which the United Kingdom is a party;

"international organisation" means any international organisation whose members include any two or more States, or any organ of such an organisation;

"State" includes the government of any State and any organ of its government, and references to a State other than the United Kingdom include references to any territory outside the United Kingdom.



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If you are unhappy with the level of service you have received from this office in relation to your request, you may ask for an internal review.

You should contact the Managing Director:

Colin Balmer
Managing Director
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

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