



Home Office

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Mr Chris Jones
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FOI Ref: 33638
Date: 22 December 2014

Dear Mr Jones,

Thank you for your e-mail of 25 November 2014, in which you ask about the US-UK Joint Contact Group (JCG), and specifically for information since 1 January 2009 on:

- 1. agendas of JCG meetings;**
- 2. minutes of JCG meetings; and**
- 3. lists of participants at JCG meetings (if not included in the agendas)**

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act).

We do not hold records for more than two years [data retention], and there were no meetings of the JCG in 2013, but we can provide information on the two meetings that took place in 2014.

1. Agendas

Please see **Annex A** for the agendas from the two meetings in 2014. However, these documents have been redacted under section 24(1) of the Act.

Section 24(1) provides that information can be withheld for the purposes of safeguarding national security and the public interest falls in favour of applying the exemption. Arguments for and against disclosure in terms of the public interest, with the reasons for our conclusion, are set out in the attached **Annex B** to this letter.

2. Minutes

I can confirm that the Home Office holds the information that you requested. However, after careful consideration we have decided that the information is exempt from disclosure under section 23(1) of the Act.

Section 23(1) provides that information can be withheld where the information is supplied by, or relates to, bodies dealing with security matters and national security. Section 23(1) is an absolute provision and consequently there is no further consideration required.

3. Participants

In 2014 the two JCG meetings were jointly chaired by Home Office Permanent Secretary Mark Sedwill and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Deputy Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. The following senior officials also attended one or both of the meetings:

UK	US
Charles Farr, Director-General of the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (Home Office)	R. Gil Kerlikowske, Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Sir Charles Montgomery, DG Border Force	Rob Silvers, Senior Counselor to the Deputy Secretary
Bernard Silverman, Chief Scientific Advisor, Home Office	Mark Koumans, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Affairs (DHS)
Mike Anderson, DG International Directorate, Home Office	David Gersten, Countering Violent Extremism Coordinator (DHS)
Jonathan Emmett, Director Strategy, Planning and International (OSCT, Home Office)	Robert Paschall, DHS Attaché in London
Paul Lincoln, Director National Security Directorate (OSCT, Home Office)	Pat Barry, Counsellor to the Secretary for Counterterrorism and Intelligence (DHS)
Phil Luxford, Director Protect, Prepare and CT Science (OSCT, Home Office)	
Christophe Prince, Director Prevent (OSCT, Home Office)	

There were also official-level representatives from the Home Office and DHS at both meetings, but we are not required to provide the names of anyone below Director.

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting a complaint within two months to the address below, quoting reference 33638. If you ask for an internal review, it would be helpful if you could say why you are dissatisfied with the response.

Information Access Team
Home Office
Ground Floor, Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
e-mail: info.access@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

As part of any internal review the Department's handling of your information request will be reassessed by staff who were not involved in providing you with this response. If you remain dissatisfied after this internal review, you would have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act.

Yours sincerely

FOI Team

Annex A – JCG Agendas (2014)

2nd April – 09:00 – 16:45

Item	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS 	09:00 – 09:05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THREAT BRIEFINGS 	09:05 – 09:45
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRIORITIES UPDATE 	09:45 – 11:00
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BREAK 	11:00 – 11:15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SYRIA: FOREIGN FIGHTERS 	11:15 – 12:30
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LUNCH: FIVE COUNTRY MINISTERIAL 	12:30 – 13:30
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SYRIA: REFUGEES 	13:30 – 14:15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REDACTED 	14:15 – 14:45
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BREAK 	14:45 – 15:00
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REDACTED 	15:00 – 15:30
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EXIT CHECKS 	15:30 – 16:00
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QUADRENNIAL HOMELAND SECURITY REVIEW (QHSR) OVERVIEW 	16:00 – 16:45

4TH November – 14:30 – 17:30

Item	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WELCOME COFFEE & INTRODUCTION 	14:30 – 14:45
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • G6 DISCUSSION 	14:45 – 15:00
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PREVENT 	15:00 – 16:30

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DETAIL REDACTED 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AVSEC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DETAIL REDACTED 	16:30 – 17:15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLOSING REMARKS 	17:15 – 17:30
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RECEPTION AT DHM RESIDENCE 	18:30 – 20:00

5TH November – 08:30 – 12:00

Item	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WELCOME & COFFEE 	08:30 – 08:45
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SYRIA/IRAQ & FOREIGN FIGHTERS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DETAIL REDACTED 	08:45 – 10:05
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BREAK 	10:05 – 10:20
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EBOLA CRISIS 	10:20 – 11:00
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY COLLABORATION 	11:00 – 11:20
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JOINT HOME OFFICE/DHS BUSINESS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DETAIL REDACTED 	11.20 – 11:50
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLOSING REMARKS 	11:50 – 12:00

Public Interest Considerations

Question 1 : You have requested the full disclosure of the agendas of the Joint Contact Group (JCG) from 1 January 2009 to present. Some of this information has been redacted under section 24(1) in the interests of national security.

Section 24(1) of the Freedom of Information Act states:

24(1) Information which does not fall within subsection 23(1) is exempt information if exemption from section 1(1)(b) is required for the purpose of safeguarding national security.

Section 24(1) is a 'qualified exemption', and is subject to a public interest test (PIT).

Section 24(1) Considerations in favour of disclosing the information

The Joint Contact Group (JCG) is not a secret body, and the issues discussed at the meetings in 2014 are of significant public interest. Increased openness and transparency with regard to this subject would increase public understanding and inform public debate.

Section 24(1) Considerations in favour of withholding the information

While the broad agendas should be shared, some of the items discussed as well as some detailed headings under several of the items are highly sensitive. They concern information relating to national security. Disclosing this information in particular that which has been redacted would reveal how Government prioritises and deals with current threats and information about the tactics, strategies and operational capabilities of the police and security agencies. Providing information of this nature would render national security measures less effective by providing individuals who may pose a threat to national security with knowledge and insight. Anything that could allow individuals to counter measures that may be in place to safeguard national security is clearly not in the public interest.

We conclude that the balance of the public interest lies in redacting the sensitive information.

Question 2: You have requested the minutes of the JCG meetings. This information is exempt under section 23 (1) of the Freedom of Information Act.

Section 23(1) of the Freedom of Information Act states:

'23(1) Information held by a public authority is exempt information if it was directly or indirectly supplied to the public authority by, or relates to, any of the bodies specified in subsection (3).

Section 23(1) is an absolute provision and consequently there is no further consideration required.