



Ministry of Defence

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Ref: FOI 2019/01625

Your Ref: 06/19

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

6 March 2019

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 6 February 2019 requesting the following information:

- 1. Which UK military communications systems have been used to communicate between RAF 39 Squadron (Creech AFB), RAF XIII Squadron (RAF Waddington), and RAF Reaper drones deployed on operations in the Middle East?*
- 2. Which US military communications systems have been used to communicate between RAF 39 Squadron (Creech AFB), RAF XIII Squadron (RAF Waddington), and RAF Reaper drones deployed on operations in the Middle East?*
- 3. Which NATO communications systems have been used to communicate between RAF 39 Squadron (Creech AFB), RAF XIII Squadron (RAF Waddington), and RAF Reaper drones deployed on operations in the Middle East?*
- 4. Which commercial communications systems have been used to communicate between RAF 39 Squadron (Creech AFB), RAF XIII Squadron (RAF Waddington), and RAF Reaper drones deployed on operations in the Middle East?*
- 5. Which UK communications systems have been used to allow communication between US Reaper drone operators and US owned Reaper drones deployed on operations in the Middle East.*
- 6. Under the requirements of section 16 (advice and assistance) of the Freedom of Information Act I should be grateful if you would explain to me how data is transmitted between Reaper aircraft, Reaper crews, and operations commanders at the satellite, combat, and (if relevant) terrestrial trunk relay levels.*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). I can confirm that the RAF does hold the information requested.

Under Section 16 (Advice and Assistance), you may wish to note that I am able to tell you that for questions 1 to 5, the RAF use a combination of Ku-band satellite links, line of sight Radio Frequency communications and telephone networks. These are used across UK, US and NATO military systems, dependent on requirement, the area of operations and the specific task.

Sections 26(1)(b) and 2(a) and (b); Section 27(1)(a) are qualified exemptions and therefore subject to a Public Interest Test.

- Section 26(1)(b) and (2)(a) and (b) is engaged because although it would provide an understanding of how the Reaper force works, releasing such information would provide details of military communications systems which could enable the enemy to extrapolate and develop an understanding of key communication nodes used within systems and would allow any potential aggressor to develop potential countermeasures. This in turn would have a detrimental effect on Reaper's ability to successfully complete its missions.
- Section 27(1)(a) is engaged because although it would provide further public understanding of how the UK operates Reaper communication systems in conjunction with the US and other allies, releasing such information could have a detrimental effect on their nations operating capabilities and breach their security regulations. It would also jeopardise our relations with our allies.

A Public Interest Test has been conducted which has considered these exemptions and whilst there is a presumption of disclosure under FOI, the Public Interest Test determined that the balance of public interest lay in withholding the information requested.

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

[Original signed]

Elaine Kerr
Air DRes Sec 3