



Ministry
of Defence

Air Command Secretariat
Spitfire Block
Headquarters Air Command
Royal Air Force
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP14 4UE

Ref. 2019/00501

[REDACTED]

5 February 2019

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your e-mail of 11 January 2019 asking for information about the RAF and Royal Navy intercepting Russian aircraft or ships. Specifically, you requested the following information:

- We are looking for the dataset relating to 2018 data for how many times QRA fighters were launched in response to Russian aircraft, and how many times Royal Navy ships were activated in response to Russian Navy vessels. This is a follow up to the data released previously to and published by the Press Association in 2017, so please release the data with the same parameters as used in this previous data for 2018.*
- How many times - through means other than the QRA System - did the RAF, Royal Navy and Army find that Russian planes had entered UK airspace and had attempted to make an incursion? Please release the relevant data-set for the following years: 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18.*
- How many times - through means other than the QRA System - did the RAF, Royal Navy and Army find that planes deployed by other countries had entered UK airspace and had attempted to make an incursion? Please release the relevant data-set for the following years: 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 and where appropriate, please specify the countries relating to each incursion.*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. I can confirm that information within the scope of your request is held.

Firstly, I can confirm that there have been no unauthorised incursions by any foreign military aircraft into sovereign UK airspace around the UK, which projects 12 miles off shore or to mutually agreed mid points between adjacent nations over narrow straits such as the Straits of Dover.

Figures for the number of occasions between 2013 to 2018 on which RN ships were activated in response to Russian ships approaching UK territorial waters are given in the table below.

However, Section 26(1)a of the FOI Act provides that we should withhold information which would be likely to prejudice the defence of the British Isles or any Colony. Section 26(1) b of the Act provides that we should withhold information which would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of relevant forces. The Act requires that we have to carry out a public interest (PIT) in this respect to show that the reasons for withholding the information outweigh the reasons for releasing the information.

Because deterrence is a principal function of QRA and QRA is in turn an integral part of the air defence of the UK, the disclosure of information that might compromise the QRA deterrent capability, which is an ongoing armed operational capability, would also be a disclosure prejudicial to the defence of the UK. A limited disclosure of the requirement to launch QRA aircraft would provide a reasonable level of overall understanding of the level of defence activity. As a limited amount of information has been released for some incidents as examples of how the RAF is able to respond to this kind of incident, the public interest in further disclosure of detailed incident details is therefore limited. There remains a very strong public interest in preserving the RAF's ability to defend the UK through the effectiveness of its air defences and to maintain its full deterrence value.

I conclude that the balance of the public interest for providing full details of the number of QRA launches is firmly in favour of maintaining the exemption under S.26(1)(a)&(b) and thus of withholding the information.

However, under Section 16 of the Act (Advice and Assistance) you may wish to note the number of days on which RAF Quick Reaction Alert aircraft were launched to intercept Russian military aircraft approaching the UK is also given in the table below:

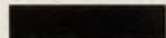
Year	Number of occasions RN Ships were Activated in Response to Russian navy ships approaching UK territorial waters	Number of days on which RAF aircraft launched
2013	12	8
2014	11	8
2015	14	8
2016	20	5
2017	33	3
2018	31	7

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



Secretariat 3a1
Air Command