

1 November 2016

Our reference: MIN/102767/2016

The Rt Hon George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Thank you for your email of 17 October to the Defence Secretary, on behalf of a number of your constituents, about UK relations with the Gulf countries. I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East.

The UK has strong ties with the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, based on historic maritime, trading and people-to-people links.

The Government's Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2015 aims for a secure and prosperous UK, with global reach and influence, including developing our military, security and prosperity partnerships in the Gulf. The Gulf Strategy aims to do this through regular Ministerial and official engagement, broadening cooperation to improve GCC capacity in a wide range of areas which support their security and resilience, and ours, and increases engagement in areas of prosperity. These include governance, the civil service, criminal justice and the rule of law, economic diversification, education, healthcare, science and innovation and infrastructure.

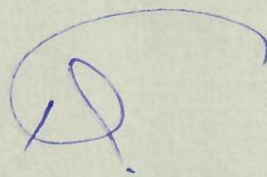
The UK Government takes its arms export responsibilities very seriously and we continue to assess each licence application carefully on a case-by-basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. Risks around violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are a key part of our assessment against the Consolidated Criteria for licensing of arms exports. The situation is kept under careful and continual review.

The Government takes great care to ensure that our assistance programmes overseas do not inadvertently result in any human rights violations. In order to manage that risk, the Government has a clear and robust framework - the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance Guidance - that all government departments must adhere to. This enables the UK Government to assess, comprehensively and in a structured way, the risk attached to our international activity. As an additional safeguard, both the Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary are required to authorise certain activities - this enables further scrutiny and oversight of international engagement.

We should assist countries with weak justice systems that do not meet human rights standards. If we abandon countries grappling with serious problems, we cannot be surprised if they adopt harsh and authoritarian solutions. By sharing best practice in the conduct of a human rights compliant justice system, we maximise the prospects of the reforms that we all want to see.

The Gulf Strategy Integrated Delivery Team was established in 2015. Its remit is to coordinate the Government's strategic approach to UK engagement with the Gulf States as set out in the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'T' and 'E' with a flourish above the 'E'.

TOBIAS ELLWOOD
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State