Thank you for your email of 4 November where you requested information:

"... a list of the dates on which official UK government invitations to the Defence and Security Equipment International exhibition were issued to each country not named in a parliamentary answer of 7th June."

UK Trade & Investment Defence & Security Organisation (UKTI DSO) has now conducted a review and the decision conveyed to you in a letter from [redacted] dated 13 October is upheld in part for the reasons I shall explain below.

I am unable to provide you with all the information you asked for as I consider the specific information on when each invitation was sent is exempt under Section 27 'International Relations' of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This exemption states that information is exempt if its disclosure under the Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice-relations between the United Kingdom and any other State.

This exemption is a qualified exemption and requires the public interest test to be applied. We recognise that there is a public interest in the attendees of defence exhibitions and in their reasons for attendance. We
recognise also that there is a justified interest in the process that is conducted by the Government in issuing official invitations to overseas guests to events such as the Defence and Security International Exhibition. Releasing information supports transparency and keeps the public informed.

There is also however public interest in withholding information which concerns another state, where relations with that state might be harmed by its release. The effective conduct of the UK’s international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence with other governments overseas. If the UK does not maintain these qualities, its ability to act as a significant influence in the international arena, and protect and promote UK interests through international relations, will be hampered.

With this public interest in mind I would like to confirm the detail of the process followed to issue invitations to overseas governments to send delegations to DSEi 2011 as official guests of the UK government. UKTI DSO assembles an initial list of countries to invite to DSEi. FCO officials consider those lists and submit recommendations for clearance of individual countries to the appropriate Minister. The FCO Minister’s response is subsequently communicated to DSO for inclusion in a submission to a BIS Minister. The process of clearance in 2011 fully took into account events in the Middle East and North Africa earlier that year.

At the time the PQ was answered, this Organisation was still issuing invitations. The list you saw represented those countries which had been invited but was not the full list of countries we would eventually invite. Issuing invitations takes place over some months. In some cases we need to consider current events in some of the countries, as well as our own plans. There are therefore several reasons why we do not consider we can release actual dates as that information has the potential to be misinterpreted and prove sensitive to international relations (Section 27). As a result we consider that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

While I do not consider it is in the public interest to give you a detailed list as I have explained, I am able to tell you that the additional 26 countries included on the website list were invited by UKTI DSO: 8 in June, 10 in July and 8 in August.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner’s Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

[Signature]