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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
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Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 14 June to the Home Secretary on behalf of a number of your constituents regarding the National Security Bill, which was introduced into Parliament on 11 May. I am replying as the Minister of State for Security and Borders.

The Government is clear that journalists have a vital role to play in holding Government to account in our democratic society and has always taken a strong leadership role in the fight for global media freedom and the protection of the important values we hold dear, including freedom of expression.

Specifically, your constituents raise concerns over the disclosure of official information with the aim of opposing government policy where this is done by an individual who is associated with an organisation that has received money from an overseas entity.

The offences within Part 1 of the National Security Bill are designed to counter espionage (reforming existing offences in the Official Secrets Act 1911) and other related state threats activity and would not be triggered merely by an individual being employed by a company which has foreign ownership, funding or which is in partnership with overseas companies.

In order for a person to commit an offence under the Bill, they must have acted in a way that falls within the relevant conditions of the offence, for example under the offence of obtaining or disclosing protected information, they would know or reasonably ought to know that their conduct is prejudicial to the safety or interests of the UK and the offence is only committed if the person is acting for, on behalf of or with the intention to benefit a foreign power. The definition of a foreign power, which is a condition of a number of the offences, is contained at Clause 25 in the Bill and is focused on the governing authorities of another state. In this way, alongside other relevant safeguards, the offences have been designed to protect the UK from harmful activity without prosecuting individuals who are engaged in legitimate activity.

Finally, I would like to clarify that the unauthorised disclosure of sensitive government information (including that relating to security, intelligence, defence and international relations) is principally governed by the Official Secrets Act 1989, reform of which is not included in the National Security Bill.

We are clear that the National Security Bill will protect our freedoms and democracy and keep us safe by making the UK a harder target for states to conduct hostile activity in or against. I hope this will reassure your constituents.

Yours sincerely



Damian Hinds
Security Minister