



By: TA | AP Brief

# Thousands of Afghans have been secretly resettled in the U.K.



Thousands of Afghans, including many who worked with British forces, have been secretly resettled in the U.K. after a leak of data on their identities raised fears that the Taliban could target them, the British government revealed Tuesday.

The government said it is closing the program, which a rare court order had barred the media from disclosing.

“To all those whose information was compromised, I offer a sincere apology today,” Defense Secretary John Healey said in the House of Commons. He said he regretted the secrecy and “have felt deeply concerned about the lack of transparency to Parliament and the public.”

Healey told lawmakers that a spreadsheet containing the personal information of nearly 19,000 people who had applied to come to Britain after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan was accidentally released in 2022 because of a defense official’s email error.

The government only became aware of the leak when some of the data was published on Facebook 18 months later.

The then-Conservative government sought a court order barring disclosure of the leak, in an attempt to prevent the personal information being made public any further. The High Court issued an order known as a super injunction that barred anyone from revealing its existence.

The government then set up a secret program to resettle the Afghans judged to be at greatest threat from the country’s Taliban rulers.

The injunction was lifted on Tuesday in conjunction with a decision by Britain’s current Labour Party government to make the program public.

It said an independent review had found little evidence that the leaked data would expose Afghans to a greater risk of retribution from the Taliban. The review said the Taliban had other sources of information on those who

had worked with the previous Afghan government and international forces, and in any case was more concerned with current threats to its authority.

Some 4,500 Afghans — 900 applicants and approximately 3,600 family members — have been brought to Britain under the program, and about 6,900 people are expected to be relocated by the time it closes, at a total cost of about 850 million pounds (\$1.1 billion).

Around 36,000 Afghans have been relocated to the U.K. under other resettlement routes since 2021.

## Super injunctions bar reporting that they were even ordered

Critics say that still leaves thousands of people who helped British troops as interpreters or in other roles at risk of torture, imprisonment or death.

Sean Humber, a lawyer at the firm Leigh Day, which has represented many Afghan claimants, said the “catastrophic” data breach had caused “anxiety, fear and distress” to those affected.

Nooralhaq Nasimi, founder of the U.K.’s Afghanistan and Central Asian Association, said “thousands of Afghans who supported the U.K. mission — many of whom placed their trust in this country — have had that trust gravely betrayed.” He urged the government to “offer meaningful compensation, and take urgent steps to protect those still at risk.”

British soldiers were sent to Afghanistan as part of an international deployment against al-Qaida and Taliban forces in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. At the peak of the operation, there were almost 10,000 U.K. troops in the country, mostly in Helmand province in the south.

**This is the first known case of a super injunction being granted to the government**

Britain ended combat operations in 2014, and its remaining troops left Afghanistan in 2021 as the Taliban swept back to power, two decades after they were ousted. The Taliban's return triggered chaotic scenes as Western nations rushed to evacuate citizens and Afghan employees.

Super injunctions are relatively rare, and their use is controversial. Unlike regular court injunctions, super injunctions bar reporting that they were even ordered.

The handful of cases in which they have come to light involved celebrities trying to prevent disclosures about their private lives.

This is the first known case of a super injunction being granted to the government. Healey said he was not aware of any others.

Judge Martin Chamberlain, who ruled that the injunction should be lifted, said Tuesday at the High Court that the gag order had "given rise to serious free speech concerns."

"The super injunction had the effect of completely shutting down the ordinary mechanisms of accountability, which operate in a democracy," he said. "This led to what I describe as a 'scrutiny vacuum.'"