

Sordid scandal erupts in the UK over cover-up of military leak of Afghan names

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The Starmer Labour government and the Conservative opposition are rolling around in the mud over revelations of a military data leak potentially endangering thousands of Afghans, and a close to two-year-long superinjunction preventing the media from reporting the story in any way.

In February 2022, six months after the imperialist withdrawal from Afghanistan, a British soldier was asked to pass on 150 names of Afghans applying for asylum in the UK after the Taliban's takeover to several contacts for verification. He mistakenly sent the entire database of 18,000 names. The list subsequently made its way to people in Afghanistan.

It was only over a year later in August 2023—when an Afghan with access to the list who had their asylum claim refused threatened to post the database online—that the British government even discovered the leak. The individual was contacted by the security services, had their asylum refusal reversed and is now in the UK.

The Taliban have said they secured the list in 2022, with a senior official telling the *Telegraph*, “We got the list from the internet during the very first days when it was leaked,” meaning the horse had already bolted as far as preventing any possible retribution.

But the then Conservative government nonetheless applied for an injunction to prevent press reporting of the story, claiming an ongoing threat of harm to those named in the list as an excuse for covering up the leak. Judge Robin Knowles granted a superinjunction, meaning even the existence of the injunction could not be reported—the first such gagging order secured, or at least known to have been secured, by a UK government.

Breaching an injunction is contempt of court and carries a maximum sentence of two years or an

unlimited fine.

Labour's then Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey was informed of the situation in December 2023, with Keir Starmer apparently informed only upon taking office as prime minister in July last year.

From April 2024, the Conservative government began relocating some Afghans from the list to the UK under a top-secret Afghanistan Response Route. Nearly 4,500 people were brought to the UK this way by July 2025. They are still to be joined by another 2,500, with an expected cost of around £800 million in total.

Roughly 16,000 others affected by the leak have been resettled via publicly known schemes, which have brought just over 35,000 Afghans to the UK so far—at a cost of roughly £7 billion.

The superinjunction was repeatedly extended by Mr. Justice Chamberlain on application from both the Tory and then the Labour government.

In January 2025, the Labour government commissioned a review into the secret asylum scheme. The report was filed in June, finding that the risks of the data leak were likely overstated and that the existence of the gagging order had possibly made matters worse by raising the cache of the named individuals in the eyes of the Taliban.

Chamberlain lifted the superinjunction, meant to last three months, on July 15 after 683 days. As late as July 7, the Starmer government was seeking to secure continuing restrictions on detailed reporting.

Both sides of the House of Commons launched into solemn disquisitions on “mistakes made” and attacks on the other side's incompetence, hypocrisy, lack of patriotism, etc. Meanwhile the media has lamented variously—depending on political persuasion—the betrayal of the UK's Afghan allies, or of the British taxpayers lumbered with the cost of housing more

asylum seekers.

Unacknowledged by all concerned is the fact that any harm resulting from the leak would have been only the latest blood spilled in a war jointly pursued by Labour and Tory governments, at the cost of up to 250,000 lives lost directly as result of the fighting, and countless more indirectly.

Labour are making the most of the fact that the leak happened on the Tory government's watch, but it was Tony Blair's Labour government which in 2001 launched the war together with US President George W. Bush and their NATO allies—justified with the lie that dismantling al-Qaeda and its host, the Taliban, would advance the cause of “democracy” and “human rights”.

Two decades and trillions of dollars later, the “War on Terror” left Afghanistan as one of the poorest countries in the world. It was handed back to the Taliban as the corrupt and reviled puppet government of Ashraf Ghani collapsed.

The occupation was such a debacle for the imperialist powers that the agreement to withdraw US and allied forces—initially proposed by Donald Trump but initiated by President Biden in May 2021—left thousands of their former allies to their fate.

In his response to the latest revelations, Healey plumbed new depths of hypocrisy by simultaneously touting promises kept while pledging to put a stop the secret resettlement scheme: “From today, there will be no new ARR [Afghanistan Response Route] offers of relocation to Britain. From today, the route is closed.”

Thanks to Labour's “policy decisions that we have taken compared with simply continuing the policy and schemes that we inherited, the taxpayer will pay £1.2 billion less over the period, about 9,500 fewer Afghans will come to this country”.

This is the savagery of the imperialist ruling class at its most brazen; even their military collaborators fall foul of the government's vicious anti-migrant and cost-cutting campaigns.

The decision follows the exposure of repeated interventions by the UK's special forces to deny thousands of asylum applications from members of the Afghan special forces, for fear of what they could reveal about British war crimes committed in Afghanistan.

Similar concerns also motivated the superinjunction,

which prevented even the Afghans on the list from being informed of the leak. Also named were more than 100 British citizens, including MI6 agents and members of the UK special forces—among them, according to the *Telegraph*, a major-general and a brigadier.

To protect these assets, and spare the government's blushes, the public were kept in the dark utilising draconian legal restrictions. The anti-democratic precedent is obvious. No one knows whether other superinjunctions are presently in force, nor will they know whether another is implemented in future. And once again the courts were the enforcers of this blanket censorship, not guardians against it.

When he finally lifted the injunction, Chamberlain said it was “fundamentally objectionable for decisions that affect the lives and safety of thousands of human beings, and involve the commitment of billions of pounds of public money, to be taken in circumstances where they are completely insulated from public debate.”

But that was just as true nearly two years ago as it was this Tuesday.



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