

## Top Mod Civil Servant to Step Down Following Afghan Data Breach

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The Ministry of Defence's most senior civil servant is set to leave his post following intense scrutiny over a major data breach that exposed the identities of tens of thousands of Afghans and British personnel involved in UK military operations.

David Williams, the MoD's permanent secretary, has informed colleagues of his decision to step down later this year. While officials close to him say the move aligns with planned leadership changes, the timing follows Defence Secretary John Healey's view that a change was necessary.

The breach, which occurred in February 2022, involved a soldier mistakenly sharing a spreadsheet containing personal details of Afghan nationals who supported British forces under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy. Also exposed were names of serving UK military officers, MI6 agents, and special forces personnel.

Though the breach occurred more than two years ago, it remained under a strict super-injunction that barred public or parliamentary discussion until July 2025. The information was feared to have reached hostile actors, including the Taliban, prompting the government to launch a covert evacuation scheme known as the Afghanistan Response Route. The operation has already cost the government hundreds of millions of pounds.

Criticism has been levelled not only at the breach itself but also at the secrecy surrounding it. Several MPs have argued the injunction delayed proper scrutiny and accountability, and they are now calling for further investigation, even after Williams departs. Labour members have said that stepping down should not exempt senior officials from being held accountable.

In response to the scandal, the Defence Secretary has introduced a new governance model within the MoD, including a four-person executive leadership team to improve oversight and institutional resilience. Recruitment for Williams's replacement is already underway, and the

restructuring is seen as part of a broader shake-up of the department's senior leadership.

The breach has renewed concerns over data handling and crisis management within Whitehall. As the government continues to face questions over how such a sensitive failure was kept from public view for so long, the departure of the MoD's most senior official marks a significant moment in the ongoing fallout from one of the UK's most serious national security lapses in recent memory.