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# UK Overhaul After Afghan Data Breach as Members of Parliament Demand Answers Over Secret Handling

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The UK's Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC), chaired by Lord Beamish, has launched a formal investigation into the handling of a major 2022 Afghan data breach that exposed personal details of nearly 18,700 Afghan applicants under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy

(ARAP). The breach has prompted concerns over parliamentary oversight, national security, and institutional accountability.

In early 2022, a spreadsheet was mistakenly emailed containing sensitive data on up to 18,714 Afghans, and potentially thousands of family members, marking what is widely regarded as one of the most significant security lapses in recent UK history. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) sought a super-injunction to keep the breach secret until mid-2025, shielding both the incident and the subsequent government actions from public and parliamentary scrutiny.

The ISC, which holds statutory powers to access classified material, has criticised the MoD for withholding defence intelligence assessments from MPs. Committee members were denied access to critical information, including the risks posed to those named in the leak and the subsequent steps taken to relocate them. This lack of transparency has fuelled calls for deeper scrutiny of Whitehall's security protocols.

A government-commissioned review led by Paul Rimmer concluded that the actual risk to individuals identified in the spreadsheet was "highly unlikely", a judgment that helped lift the legal gag order. However, critics argue that the decision to keep the matter concealed for years prevented essential democratic scrutiny.

Defence Secretary John Healey has since apologised in Parliament, rescinded the injunction, and formally closed the Afghanistan Response Route (ARR), a covert relocation programme that successfully resettled around 6,900 Afghans and family members. The operation is estimated to have cost the UK taxpayer £850 million. Healey acknowledged the

serious error and committed to improving transparency and oversight going forward.

Labour Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has demanded accountability from former Conservative ministers, accusing them of overseeing a cover-up that undermined public trust and parliamentary authority.

From a centre-right perspective, the episode highlights two key challenges: the need to protect individuals who supported UK forces in conflict zones, and the obligation to ensure robust parliamentary oversight in matters of national security. The secrecy surrounding the breach and the handling of its aftermath exposed systemic weaknesses that must now be addressed.

The ISC's inquiry, with full access to previously withheld documents, is expected to play a crucial role in identifying failings and shaping future protocols. Structural reform in data security, intelligence transparency, and ministerial accountability is now essential to restore public confidence and maintain operational credibility.