

## Healey Aware of Afghan Review's Outcome Months Before Gag Order Lifted

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Defence Secretary John Healey was reportedly aware as early as April of the likely conclusions of a Ministry of Defence (MoD) review into the classified Afghan airlift, well before the court lifted its gag order in July. The review, which found the continuing secrecy was no longer necessary, raised serious questions about transparency and government

accountability during a period when vital parliamentary oversight was effectively suspended.

The covert airlift operation began after a serious breach in 2021, when the MoD accidentally exposed a database containing the personal information of over 100,000 Afghans who had applied for sanctuary in the United Kingdom. This error placed many lives at risk, particularly those linked to British operations in Afghanistan, including individuals with ties to the British Armed Forces and intelligence services. The government later moved to carry out a secret airlift operation to protect those at risk, but public discussion and media coverage were blocked by a court-imposed super-injunction, a rare legal measure preventing even the mention of the case's existence.

The internal review was led by civil servant Paul Rimmer, who was tasked with reassessing the level of ongoing threat to the named Afghans. According to sources close to the process, Defence Secretary Healey received regular updates and had a clear understanding by April that the initial justification for secrecy no longer held. Nevertheless, the super-injunction remained in place until July, sparking judicial concern over the delay.

Mr. Justice Chamberlain, who presided over the case at the Royal Courts of Justice, criticised the Ministry of Defence for its sluggish pace. In his ruling, the judge noted that the review's conclusions were "very different" from those originally used to justify the secrecy order, adding that key details should have been brought to the court's attention much earlier. "Further steps are going to have to be taken to discover why some of the details contained in that report were not made known before now," the judge remarked.

Journalists, including those from The Mail on Sunday, fought a two-year legal battle through closed court sessions to overturn the injunction, warning the court of the looming summer recess in Parliament and the urgent need for open scrutiny. Their arguments were eventually upheld, leading to the lifting of the blackout last Tuesday.

In Parliament, following the ruling, Secretary Healey admitted his concern over the lack of transparency, stating: "I have felt deeply concerned about the lack of transparency to Parliament and the public." He further clarified that an internal review had been commissioned earlier in the year to reassess whether Afghans remained under immediate threat.

Despite reassurances to the House of Commons that no serving British Armed Forces personnel were compromised, it was later reported that members of the Special Air Service (SAS) and the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) were named in the breach. When questioned by *Sky News* about the prolonged secrecy, Healey claimed the super-injunction was a decision for the courts, distancing the MoD from the responsibility for the delay.

Downing Street has since backed Healey's statements, insisting they were accurate to the best of his knowledge. However, the delayed disclosure and the high-profile use of taxpayer funds to retain leading legal counsel, including King's Counsel (KC) Sir James Eadie, have fueled criticism about the balance between national security and public accountability.

The Ministry of Defence has not commented on the reports regarding Healey's early awareness of the review's findings.