

British Spies and Special Air Service (SAS) Named in Afghan Data Breach

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A serious Ministry of Defence data breach has exposed the identities of more than 100 British nationals, including MI6 intelligence officers and members of the Special Air Service (SAS), prompting a covert evacuation effort to shield those affected from potential Taliban retaliation.

The breach occurred in February 2022 when a Ministry of Defence official mistakenly included a spreadsheet in an email relating to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) programme. The document, which was sent to thousands of individuals, contained details of approximately 18,700 Afghan applicants, alongside fields revealing their British sponsors, including intelligence officers, special forces, military officials, Members of Parliament, and government ministers.

While the error was initially kept under wraps, the data began circulating on social media in August 2023, leading to widespread alarm. In response, the government activated a discreet and urgent relocation programme to protect the compromised individuals and their families.

To contain the fallout, officials imposed a superinjunction, banning the media from reporting on the existence of the breach. This legal restriction was partially lifted by a High Court judge on 15 July 2025, allowing limited disclosure of the incident and its consequences.

Defence Secretary John Healey formally acknowledged the error in Parliament, describing it as a “serious departmental mistake”. He confirmed that the compromised list included names and contact details of British personnel linked to the ARAP process. Since the breach, over 6,900 Afghan applicants and their dependents have been relocated under emergency measures, at a cost estimated between £850 million and £2 billion. Legal challenges could see that figure rise to £7 billion.

Security experts have criticised the Ministry of Defence for failing to implement sufficient data controls to prevent such a leak, particularly given the involvement of high-risk personnel. While the MoD continues to adhere to its policy of neither confirming nor denying special forces

activity, analysts argue that this incident reveals critical flaws in how sensitive information is handled within government systems.

There is also growing concern for the Afghan nationals who were named in the list. Reports suggest some have faced harassment, detention, or worse following the exposure of their identities.

From a centre-right viewpoint, the breach is not just an administrative blunder, it is a stark warning about the state of digital security within critical national departments. Urgent reforms are needed to restore public confidence and ensure that the UK's armed forces, allies, and intelligence community are never again left so vulnerable by bureaucratic oversight.