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## RFE/RL – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (Author)

### UK Data Leak Spurs Costly Afghan Resettlement And Security Fears

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Mirwais and his family have left their home in Kabul and have been constantly changing their location since 2022, when a group of armed men shot dead his elder brother, a British-trained police officer.

Mirwais, whose name has been changed for security reasons, claims that his brother's killers were Taliban fighters, who punished him for fighting against them alongside Western troops.

"We were at home one night, when about 20 or 30 Taliban fighters knocked on our door and dragged my brother out," Mirwais told RFE/RL.

"My parents were crying and begging them to release my brother, but they killed him in front of our eyes," said Mirwais who wants Britain to help his family to find protection from any Taliban revenge killing.

Thousands of Afghans are demanding relocation to Britain fearing Taliban retribution after an accidental data leak revealed personal details of some 25,000 people who were applying for asylum in 2022, claiming they have worked with the British military.

Among them are people who directly worked with the British Army in both a military and civilian capacity, as well as members of special Afghan police forces who were trained, mentored, and funded by Britain, according to two high-ranked former Afghan security officers who spoke to RFE/RL.

## ' The Taliban Killed My Brother, Threatened My Family'

Britain's The Telegraph newspaper, which first reported on July 15 on the fallout from the British **data breach**, stated that more than 200 Afghan soldiers and police officers have been murdered by the Taliban since the data was inadvertently leaked by a British official in February 2022.

The names and details of the slain Afghans, including at least one female officer, were compiled by independent caseworkers highlighting the plight of Afghans who worked with UK and other, US-led, forces, The Telegraph reported.

Among them was Muhammad Qasim Qaem, a former high-ranking police officer, who was detained and killed by the Taliban in April 2022. Qaem's family said his body bore signs of torture when they received it from the Taliban.

"The Taliban told us that if you want to stay alive, you must not try to investigate this matter," Qaem's brother Noor-alam told RFE/RL on July 21.

## Data Breach And Afghan Relocations May Cost More Than \$9 Billion

The data leak happened in February 2022 when an unnamed British official sent an e-mail to recipients outside the government and mistakenly attached a spreadsheet containing the personal details of nearly 25,000 Afghans who had applied for asylum in the United Kingdom.

The applicants claimed they fought alongside the British Army or are related to someone who had.

The leak came to the attention of British authorities in August 2022 when an anonymous Facebook user posted nine names from the list and indicated that they could release the rest of the names. The post was deleted within three days after Britain contacted Facebook's owner, Meta.

The database, which was dubbed a "kill list" for the Taliban, prompted the UK government to secretly offer asylum to the Afghans whose names were exposed.

Some 4,500 of them have since been evacuated to Britain, reportedly without any security clearance and verification of their claims and eligibility. A further 2,400 people are expected to arrive in Britain in the foreseeable future, while others remain in Afghanistan or third countries.

The Afghan resettlement will reportedly cost British taxpayers up to \$9.4 billion.

The unprecedented and costly data breach and the relocations were kept secret until July 15, when Britain's High Court lifted an injunction obtained by the government.

## The Taliban Says It's Pardoned Afghans Who Worked For The West

Two Taliban officials told RFE/RL that their government "has not monitored, persecuted, or harmed anyone" involved in the British data leak.

Hamdullah Fitrat, a deputy spokesman for the Taliban-led government, and Abdul Mateen Qani, a spokesman for the Taliban's interior ministry, reiterated that Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada had issued an amnesty for all Afghans who fought against the Taliban alongside NATO forces, including the British military.

The officials claimed that they have seen the list, but said it was not news for them because the defense and interior ministries of the former government left "all their documents" behind.

"The rumors are being spread to scare these individuals and their families. We reject these rumors," Fitrat told RFE/RL. "We don't seek revenge."

Many Afghans, however, are skeptical, citing numerous documented cases of murder, arrests, and forced disappearances of soldiers and government officials since the Taliban came to power.

## 'Protection Does Not Necessarily Mean Relocating Everyone'

General Ajmal Omer Shinwari, who served as a spokesman for the former Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, told RFE/RL that, even if the top Taliban leadership has offered an amnesty, it cannot stop the group's lower-level officials and fighters from committing revenge killings of their former foes.

"The Taliban leadership does not have full control over them," Shinwari told RFE/RL on July 22.

Shinwari said "the threats to the lives of those exposed on the British data leak is real" and "Britain has a responsibility to protect the Afghans who supported its mission for two decades."

But Shinwari stressed that "protection does not necessarily mean relocating everyone to Britain."

“NATO and the Western governments should work out a strategy to ensure the safety of the former Afghan soldiers living in Afghanistan and implement its strategy through international organizations, particularly the United Nations,” Shinwari said.

The Taliban-led government has not been officially recognized by any country besides Russia. Shinwari, however, believes that the West has leverage over the government in Kabul, which is acutely aware of “its lack of legitimacy” and wants to engage with the international community.

British media have reported that more than 36,000 Afghans have moved to the UK since NATO-led troops withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021.

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