

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Afghan Data Breach and Resettlement Schemes, HC 1304

Tuesday 20 January 2026

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Members present: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Chair); Mr Calvin Bailey; Lincoln Jopp; Emma Lewell; Mike Martin; Ian Roome; Fred Thomas; Derek Twigg.

Questions 226 to 349

Witnesses

[I](#): Rt Hon Sir Ben Wallace, former Secretary of State for Defence.

[II](#): Rt Hon James Heappey, former Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

[III](#): Rt Hon Sir Grant Shapps, former Secretary of State for Defence.

Examination of witness

Witness: Sir Grant Shapps.

Chair: We resume our meeting inquiring into the Afghan data breach and resettlement schemes. It is a pleasure to welcome former Secretary of State for Defence Sir Grant Shapps. Thank you, Sir Grant, for agreeing to give evidence and appear before our Committee. Without further ado, I will go to Derek Twigg to start the questions.

Q308 **Derek Twigg:** The first question is obvious: when and how did you hear about the breach?

Sir Grant Shapps: The day after I became Secretary of State.

Q309 **Derek Twigg:** You knew nothing before then?

Sir Grant Shapps: No. I was told that there was a serious matter that I needed to know all about and come up to speed on. It was immediately from that point. I was appointed at the end of August, and that must have been 1 September.

Q310 **Derek Twigg:** Are you aware of any Afghans arriving in the UK under the secret Afghan resettlement route during your time as Secretary of State? If so, roughly how many? It is unclear whether any arrived before the election. The first invitations were issued in April 2024.

Sir Grant Shapps: Sorry, I missed the first part of your question.

Derek Twigg: Are you aware of any Afghans arriving in the UK under the secret Afghan resettlement route during your time as Secretary of State?

Sir Grant Shapps: Am I aware of any who did? Well, the numbers showed that they did.

Derek Twigg: How many?

Sir Grant Shapps: I do not know the exact numbers.

Derek Twigg: You don't know how many.

Sir Grant Shapps: Not exact numbers, no. James was the on-point Minister.

Q311 **Derek Twigg:** Did they arrive before you left office?

Sir Grant Shapps: Certainly, people were coming to the country, absolutely yes, but there was throttle speed for the number of people we could get out, for the reasons you have heard and that I won't repeat. You couldn't get more than a limited number of people out in any given period of time. Because of that throttle speed, the numbers remained in the low dozens and hundreds over a period of time, because you just couldn't pull people out fast.

Chair: Before I come to Calvin Bailey, Lincoln Jopp has a quick supplementary.



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Q312 **Lincoln Jopp:** You gave a very clear answer to Mr Twigg's question about when you found out. You turn up at a new job, and on the first day in work, they say, "There is this massive secret we have been keeping from the country."

Sir Grant Shapps: Yes.

Lincoln Jopp: They say, "It's enormous and is going to cost billions of quid." What was your reaction?

Sir Grant Shapps: By then, it was the sixth Department that I had become Secretary of State of, so I was used to walking into Departments with big problems. I had been at the Home Office briefly and knew about big problems landing on your desk from day one. My immediate response was that I needed all the facts. First, when did this happen? It turned out it was 2022. When did we know about this leak? It turned out that halfway through the previous month, this Facebook post had gone up and then been redacted and removed by Facebook.

Next question: okay, what is the overall impact of this? Well, the Taliban could now be targeting from a list if they have noticed it there. We need to get those people moved pretty bloody quickly. As with every Department I went to, it was a matter of find the facts, identify the problems and determine the solutions that need to be put in place. It was exactly that process.

Q313 **Mr Bailey:** Can you give us an insight into why decision making within Government, under the cover of the injunction, took as long as it did?

Sir Grant Shapps: I think the decisions were being made pretty rapidly. The problem goes back to Mr Twigg's question. There was a throttle on the speed at which you could remove people from the country, because, bluntly, you had to get them out of Afghanistan via illicit routes with fake information. That is how you got them across the border.

You are smuggling people out of the country, and that is not an easy task. As Mr Heappey just said, the routes would become known by the Taliban, which put people's lives at risk and so forth. Then you need to get people relocated from Pakistan, which was the route into the UK that required the relocation package.

I think the often criticised institution of the state was actually pretty quick. The frustration was that even if you threw every single possible institution of the state at the problem, you could not move people faster than we were moving them. Believe me, we tried. Could somebody else remove people from their country? Was there another organisation that could achieve that? No and no. I don't think the state wasn't acting quickly; I think the state found it had very few options.

Q314 **Mr Bailey:** We have just heard from Mr Heappey that you struggled, or the Department struggled, to get adequate responses and information from within your own Department, so why should we be as accepting of that response? It took three months for you to agree on the initial cohort of 150 people.



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Sir Grant Shapps: As ever, when you can look back on these things, you get 20:20 hindsight on them, but if you think about how this came about in the first place, there was that unexpected pull-out of Afghanistan—

Mr Bailey: Which was a failure of Government.

Sir Grant Shapps: Yes, but in particular by the Biden Administration.

Mr Bailey: It was a failure of our Government. The Foreign Office failed to predict something that I was intimately involved in. I helped evacuate 14,000 people, and there was an initial assessment by the Department of 7,500 people, so the Department had its figures wrong initially.

Sir Grant Shapps: Well, this is now before my time, so I was an observer of this, but it seems to me that no one was expecting Biden to pull out of Afghanistan as quickly as he did. And then when he did—

Mr Bailey: But that is the job of Government.

Sir Grant Shapps: Fair enough. I am not here to defend something that wasn't in my period. I am just commenting on it, because I think it is important in context. And when he did, no one expected the Taliban to take over quite as fast as it did. Or perhaps you did and others did foresee that. But that is the reality of what happened. People will remember, imprinted on their minds, the chaotic scenes of people hanging on to the undercarriages of aircraft leaving—

Q315 **Mr Bailey:** I do, very clearly and very personally, but the point I am making is that in your analysis you accept that we failed to pre-empt the situation. It is the Government's job to balance risk and make sure that things are put in place such that those risks can be managed appropriately. That is what the military is for. It is an instrument for the state to balance risk. Mr Heappey was quite clear that you were unable to draw from your Department information that he felt necessary to make decisions. On why your Department was so slow to respond, I would like to know why, per Mr Heappey's premise, the Department was failing under your leadership to provide that information in a timely fashion.

Sir Grant Shapps: Because I think that the detail required under what were, as you described, the chaotic circumstances that preceded this were such that no one was ready for a data leak that then caused the necessity to lift a number of people out of the country, which in the end looked like turning into a large number of people to be got out of the country. I am not sure that I entirely agree with Mr Heappey's interpretation that it was anything other than— In fact, I sat here and I just heard him say it. It was very, very difficult to sift through those who were, "Let's have a go and apply to a scheme that looks like it can give you resettlement in the UK" and were genuine cases, and those who were just filling in a form that had been copied around with blank spaces to fill it in. That is the thing that was causing the problem, and just trying to disaggregate the real applications from the others. Mr Heappey would have been very close to the detail on that. That was not the way it felt to me. It felt to me that this was just a very complex, messy situation that I came in as Secretary of State to try and resolve.



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Q316 Mr Bailey: The point I am trying to make is that if there is appropriate political will to reach in and see these things through, these things can happen quickly. We have heard about the mess and the challenges that the Departments faced with each other about where you were going to relocate these people. So my question is about political will. Was it at the wrong level? Clearly there were problems inside your Department.

Sir Grant Shapps: No. To reassure you, Mr Bailey, this had my absolute attention. As the records show—I think you have had all the paperwork—it occupied a great deal of my time and was a constant pressure to resolve. I recognised, more than anything else—as you or anyone else would have done if you were sat in the Secretary of State for Defence’s chair—that people’s lives were on the line and we had to make the machine move as fast as humanly possible.

It is true that there were all the various different tensions about where to relocate people to. Again, as I just heard Mr Heappey say, it is perfectly right that the Housing Minister is concerned with housing, and so on and so forth with other Ministers. That is a necessary tension; it was not the heart of the problem. The heart of the problem, which I faced every single day, was how to increase the throttle speed of getting people out of the country. That was the real problem.

Q317 Mr Bailey: I assert that that was done in the comfort of your office, and in the absence of parliamentary scrutiny and the public pressure that you would have been feeling had this been out and exposed to parliamentary scrutiny. There is an amount of pressure that would have come about as a result of direct parliamentary scrutiny, which would have meant that you would have been able to place your hands on some levers in other Government Departments, perhaps through a Cobra, because this should have been managed through a centralised Government process.

Sir Grant Shapps: No, you are mischaracterising it, I’m afraid. First, I wish that we could have briefed Parliament better. We briefed Mr Twigg and others, but it was a fundamental problem that the need to protect lives, including, as it turns out, British lives, meant that knowledge of the list—even the fact that there was a list, let alone the people on the list—could have put those lives at risk. Nobody in my seat would have made a different decision.

Secondly, it is a mischaracterisation to say that we were not feeling the pressure every single day to solve this. We were feeling the pressure because, apart from anything else, the judges were making it very clear that unless we worked every single day to resolve it, they would not be able to sustain the injunction, so the pressure was coming in a different way—not the most preferable way, as you say, but for good reason.

Q318 Mr Bailey: That is not a mischaracterisation, then, is it? What I am saying is that you were not under parliamentary scrutiny.

Sir Grant Shapps: No, but we were under that of the court.

Q319 Mr Bailey: They are different things. They cannot be the same, because



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otherwise our Parliament is not effective. The point that I am making is that there is a balance between exposing an amount of information or a problem, and using that to coalesce pressure across Government and maybe elevating it up to the Prime Minister. You did not know about this—you said that yourself. You were in six other Departments, all of which, you said, were failing. You arrived—

Sir Grant Shapps: No, sorry—

Mr Bailey: You were used to coming into Departments with challenges, which is what you said at the beginning.

Sir Grant Shapps: That is not the same as what I was saying.

Q320 **Mr Bailey:** You arrived in a Department where a big problem was presented to you, which means that you did not know about it before arriving, so it cannot be the case that there was a cross-Government approach to the problem, or knowledge had leaked beyond the purview of the legal protections that you were asking for. You were doing this in the absence of the pressure that public scrutiny would have applied to you, and you were doing it, therefore, without the support that would have given you to reach across other Government Departments.

Sir Grant Shapps: First, I mentioned that I was in other Departments, and every Department has its problems. I did not say that every Department was failing. Secondly, it is of course true that I was doing it without the pressure of parliamentary scrutiny, as you say. Obviously, that was the case because it was not in Parliament, but there was a different type of pressure, which unless you have been under it, you may not fully appreciate: that was the pressure from the law courts. In this particular case, they were being very strict about what they felt needed to be done, both in terms of briefing, and providing opportunities for briefings, to the Speakers of both Houses, and to the Leader of the Opposition, who certainly at one point did not take up that briefing, but the shadow Defence Secretary and Foreign Secretary did.

It was not that there was no coverage, but of course you are right to say that there was not that scrutiny. However, you are then saying, "And therefore, somehow, you weren't using all the arms of the state. You weren't pressurising others. There wasn't a co-ordinating function through Cobra or other committees that resulted in the same thing." That is not true; all those things were there, and the records very clearly show that those cross-departmental meetings took place on a very, very regular basis.

Q321 **Emma Lewell:** On the day before the general election, you decided to appeal the High Court's decision to lift the injunction. Can you tell us why that was?

Sir Grant Shapps: Yes. There was a concern, essentially, that the risk to life—both Afghan and British lives—was, from the moment of the breach being known, on a sliding scale down. I accept and believe that, over time, as we got more people out of the country and as time passed and other



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people would have just died through natural causes, moved elsewhere or what have you, that risk does decrease. I always thought that it would be a matter of judgment as to when the risks to life, both British and Afghan, and the disadvantage of keeping an injunction in place would cross over, and I thought that that time was probably going to be around the autumn of 2024.

Q322 **Emma Lewell:** Why?

Sir Grant Shapps: Because of that sliding scale—the further away you get from the moment that the breach is known, and the more people you have got out of the country—and for two other reasons. Like the rest of the Committee—Mr Bailey and others—I do believe that we should have parliamentary scrutiny, and it troubled me that we weren't able to, matched against the idea that we must save lives. So at some point you get the crossover where it has been long enough.

Q323 **Emma Lewell:** Sorry, but I am just trying to get my head around this. Obviously that was July, and you are saying that you think things would have changed by the autumn.

Sir Grant Shapps: I thought that was probably the last time to renew it, and it was coming up regularly as a—

Q324 **Emma Lewell:** On what basis, though? What advice were you getting that, in that short space of time, the situation would have changed?

Sir Grant Shapps: Well, probably in two or three months. As I described, there is a sliding scale. The problem that you are really putting your finger on here was that no one could tell you. Believe me: I asked dozens of times. No one could tell you, with any level of certainty, whether the Taliban had this list, so part of me was thinking, "For all we know, the Taliban have this list; they have had it all along and they have been going around executing people. So you could lift the injunction and it wouldn't make the blindest bit of difference, because it doesn't give them anything new." But was I certain that that was the case? No, I wasn't certain.

Each time that it was renewed, I had to think there was a more than 50% likelihood that they did not have the list, and this would risk lives, but over a period of time, either they were more likely to have the list or more people had moved and what have you. I felt like we were getting towards 50:50, but were not quite there. By the way, interestingly, my successor decided to then keep it in place for a whole other year. So my successor's judgment was that we were not anywhere near the 50:50 point, clearly.

Q325 **Emma Lewell:** So that would be how you would reconcile—I know you told the "Today" programme in July this year that you do not think the injunction should have carried on as long as it did, but what you are saying is that you were making that judgment, which your successor did as well. I am just trying to pin you down on—

Sir Grant Shapps: My successor carried it on for a whole other year, so longer than I had it in place for.



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Q326 **Emma Lewell:** But they could have been doing that, presumably, on the premise of what you have just said: the 50%.

Sir Grant Shapps: Oh, I see. If you take the same sliding scale, he will have been taking his own advice. I am afraid that actually, in the end, you could take all the advice you wanted, but the whole thing came down to judgment. You would read the secret intelligence and try to make a judgment: how likely is it? This is the simple calculation; it is really black and white. How likely was it, if the injunction was lifted, that people would die? That was the calculation, and in my judgment we were getting towards the crossover point where the chances were that the Taliban probably already had this information and that therefore this injunction could be lifted.

I have tried, largely through open sources, to monitor the situation since the injunction has been lifted. We are now winding forward another year, and I have seen nothing that indicates that there has been an increased number of Taliban attacks on the individuals. So I think that it was probably kept in place for too long. I think it was coming towards its end, but I thought that the autumn was probably going to be about the right time. That was what was in my mind. My mental model was that we would probably stop seeking to renew it in the autumn of 2024.

Q327 **Chair:** Sir Grant, I just want to confirm something. There was a complete lack of democratic accountability and transparency, as has already been pointed out. Why did you initially resist your officials' advice to brief the shadow Secretary of State for Defence on Privy Council terms?

Sir Grant Shapps: It was only for a short period of time. First of all, we needed to establish all the facts. Given that we provided multiple briefings to the shadow Secretary of State, to the Opposition leader, when he wanted them, and indeed to the Speakers of the Houses, it was not a desire not to include them; it was merely a desire to establish facts before we started to spread this further.

Q328 **Chair:** How long was it?

Sir Grant Shapps: It will be in the file there. I can write back to you. It was not a particularly long period of time.

Chair: About a month?

Sir Grant Shapps: Yes, I think that that is probably right.

Chair: You decided not to brief the shadow Secretary of State for Defence for about a month?

Sir Grant Shapps: In any crisis situation, the first thing to do is not to widen the scope; the first thing is to find the facts and then start to brief others.

Q329 **Chair:** What made you change your mind in due course?

Sir Grant Shapps: We just got to grips with it. I came into a situation where there had been this leak, we needed to do something about it and



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we were going to put these programmes in place. I need to find out the extent of it and fully understand what is behind it. I know that Parliament always wants to know. I was a parliamentarian for 19 years; if I were on your side of this, I would be saying the same thing.

Chair: But that is why we are so shocked.

Sir Grant Shapps: Of course, the media is keen to know too. But the truth is, folks, that in the grown-up world we live in, there are just times when the Executive power—the Cabinet, essentially—has to make decisions. I can give you many examples.

Q330 **Chair:** With all due respect, Sir Grant, in a grown-up world, we are shocked that, having been a parliamentarian for so long, you decided to significantly curtail the workings of Parliament and of the Defence Committee. Why did you decide to exclude the then Chair of the Defence Committee? Did you not trust him at the time?

Sir Grant Shapps: It is not about trusting or not trusting somebody; it is just about wanting to save lives. If you want to save lives, you will keep information—

Q331 **Chair:** The Chair of the Defence Committee at the time would have stopped you from saving lives if you had briefed him?

Sir Grant Shapps: Look, when you have a situation where not just the list, but the knowledge that the list exists, could put people's lives at risk, you have to decide where to draw the line. My view was that we should first establish the facts, and then we could start to brief people, which we did in the manner in which we have described. There are lots of things that we do not share with parliamentarians. Folks, I can say this now because I am not a parliamentarian. The position of the nuclear subs, the codes—there are just things that we cannot share, and I did not feel—

Q332 **Chair:** With all due respect, Sir Grant, I do not think that the Chair of the Defence Committee or the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee, who you decided you did not want to brief, would have requested the nuclear codes from you. Likewise, I am not requesting any nuclear codes or the like from anybody. At the very least, it would have been courteous to extend that briefing to the Chair of the Defence Committee and the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee. You decided not to do that, which has put your record in a bad light, wouldn't you say?

Sir Grant Shapps: I disagree. I understand that the Committee may disagree with me on this. I think the Committee will concede that the more people knew about it, the more people could have known about it, because, unfortunately, things get around. The more it was talked of and known of, the higher the chance that it might get out, even if it was a very small chance. Even a 1% greater risk is a 1% greater risk that people will die, including British forces.

Chair: Let's recognise the facts. Several—and I do mean several—journalists, activists and Afghans were aware of the data breach.

Sir Grant Shapps: Yes.

Q333 **Chair:** The thing had been put on Facebook, for God's sake. I am sure the Chair of the Defence Committee and the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee should have been made privy to that information. In fact, there should have been a briefing given to all Defence Committee members, but you decided against that.

Sir Grant Shapps: No, I just disagree. No offence to anybody—probably the Members in this room were not on the Committee, although some may have been. I disagree. Where there are people's lives at stake, there are just times where you have to use Executive authority in order to protect lives. I that know this is not what people want to hear, and everyone thinks that everything should be shared all the time. As soon as you reach out further, there is a chance that somebody says something to someone and word gets back. Frankly, I would rather be sat in front of you today explaining why I acted to save lives than sat in front of you today trying to explain why I did not act and people died.

Chair: Yes, but I think all of us are on the side of saving lives and making sure that the right thing is done. You took a decision to keep that circle very tight.

Sir Grant Shapps: Yes, correct.

Chair: Just for yourself and a few of the officials.

Sir Grant Shapps: Including the Opposition and the Speakers of the House.

Q334 **Chair:** With all due respect, the members of the Defence Committee are duly elected by the House. They have the trust and confidence of 650 fellow parliamentarians. I am sure that those individuals, who are regularly the outriders for defence—I am sure that is what Committee members are doing at the moment—on our predecessor Committee should have had access to that.

That is what has led to this debacle being worse than it is, because those decisions were not taken. That deficiency in democratic accountability has led to the situation whereby we now all feel that the wrong decision was taken at the time.

Sir Grant Shapps: Look, I respectfully disagree. You have asked me here to tell you what I think, and what I think is that everybody says, "You can trust me; tell me on parliamentary terms; tell me on Privy Council terms." Everyone is going to say that. But the truth is, even if it made it 1% more likely that people would die as a result of the knowledge of this list spreading further, I was not prepared to take that risk. It is as simple as that.

Look: there is always a proper balance between Executive authority, parliamentary authority, the courts. You may think I drew the line in the wrong place. I go to sleep at night knowing that I drew the line in the

place where I thought most lives would be saved, and that is the decision I decided on.

Q335 **Chair:** I think we will have to agree to disagree there. We live in a parliamentary democracy, and people—especially elected Members on those respective Committees—should be entrusted with that.

Sir Grant Shapps: Just to probe that a little further, that would involve people who are not actually even Privy Counsellors now having very top-secret classified information. I just think that in the real world, when it comes to saving lives, there are times when the state has to go about its business through Executive power.

Chair: In the real world, when so many journalists, activists, Afghans and all and sundry who were on Facebook already knew about it—

Sir Grant Shapps: Look, I am not the courts. I wasn't the courts. The courts decided on a super-injunction. The courts looked at this and decided it was serious enough that even the fact of there being an injunction could not be reported. I did not then want to go around undermining that by spreading the word further.

Q336 **Chair:** It is also my understanding that the courts were actually advising at the time that there was a lack of democratic accountability and that perhaps other people should be briefed.

Sir Grant Shapps: As we had those discussions—it was a developing situation; it was not the same on day one as in month six—and as the situation developed, we did indeed widen the net of those who were briefed. As I have already discussed, I felt it was an injunction that probably could be lifted around the autumn of 2024, and yet my successor actually decided—I am not criticising; he will have had his own views—to hold it in place for another year.

Chair: Don't worry: we will be questioning your successor as well.

Sir Grant Shapps: I do not know whether my successor did or did not brief this Committee during that time. I understand—

Chair: We will be questioning your successor. Given the lack of time—

Sir Grant Shapps: For a much longer period of time, somebody else came to the same decision, which is interesting to me.

Chair: We will be fully inquiring into the Rimmer review and everything else, and all the actions taken by the current Government. Let me move on to Lincoln Jopp.

Q337 **Lincoln Jopp:** Can I just look at the mechanics of how the compartment of a super-injunction gets extended? For example, was it your decision? Do you apply to the court saying, "We think the Speaker should be read into this"? Or does the judge just come to his own position?

Sir Grant Shapps: My understanding of the mechanics—I was never in the room, in court—is that in a closed hearing there is a discussion with



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the legal counsel at the Department and the judge to come up with a proposal. The judge will say, "This will continue, but you need to inform the Speakers, or make sure that you continue to brief the shadow Defence Secretary, or perhaps it should be the Leader of the Opposition."

Q338 Lincoln Jopp: I do not know whether the Secretary of State gives instructions to his lead counsel on issues as important as this. Are you aware of the motivation for suggesting that the Speaker be read in? Was it so that, in some way at least, Parliament would "know", in inverted commas? Or was it to thwart his granting an urgent question, so if someone found out about the data breach, he could say, "No, I'm not going to grant an urgent question on that"? Was that the motivation behind it?

Sir Grant Shapps: Yes, it was to bring in that degree of parliamentary scrutiny, even though it could not be full scrutiny on the Floor of the House or, under the decisions, even by the Select Committee. It was to bring in some parliamentary scrutiny to the process and also to inform the Speaker, perhaps so that he did not inadvertently grant a debate without realising there was an injunction in place.

Lincoln Jopp: So it was more to ensure that there would be no further parliamentary scrutiny, not to ensure parliamentary scrutiny.

Sir Grant Shapps: The judge's view, I recall, was that a substitute for parliamentary scrutiny would be that a number of people in Parliament would know about it, including the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Defence Secretary.

Q339 Lincoln Jopp: Did you say that the judge and your lead counsel came up with this plan themselves, not under your direction?

Sir Grant Shapps: I was not in the room for these conversations. There would be a hearing, and the judge would typically be very interested in what progress there had been, including how many people were coming out, what the status of the programme was and how we would make sure that there was some parliamentary knowledge of it, I guess, through that process.

Q340 Lincoln Jopp: Lastly, in your subsequent conversations, in your open-source research or in conversations with journalists, have you come across anyone asserting that a super-injunction has been served on the Speaker of the House of Commons before, or was this unique?

Sir Grant Shapps: I am not aware—I do not think that is quite characterising it correctly, though, because there will have been super-injunctions before that would have been of interest to parliamentarians. I don't think the—oh, I see. He was sort of served by being briefed, essentially.

Lincoln Jopp: Yes.

Sir Grant Shapps: Yes, I see your point. I do not know the answer to that.



Q341 Chair: Sir Grant, we are debating parliamentary scrutiny and democratic accountability and transparency, but is it not also the case that the super-injunction was regularly reviewed by the High Court judge, and that on 21 May 2024—the day before the election—he intimated that it should now be discharged? You then decided to appeal that decision, even though that was the court’s decision. We all know that that led to the prolongation of what was not just an injunction, but a super-injunction. Why did you decide to do that?

Sir Grant Shapps: As I said in the previous answer, I felt that on the balance of evidence—it was difficult to be precise about this, because the briefings, frankly, led to different conclusions, depending on who you asked—we probably needed another two or three months to get the number of cases out that would make me feel that the balance of saving lives was improved by having a super-injunction in place.

There was a downside to the court activity that I think is important to put on record for the Committee, and it may not be widely understood. The courts, in order to keep the injunction in place, continued to push for higher and higher numbers of Afghans to be relocated to the United Kingdom—to a point that, in my view, was in danger of becoming unacceptable on the other side of the equation.

I should explain this. The reason why I thought that there were no more than two or three months when we should have allowed this to stay in place was that we were getting to the point where I was worrying that the scheme would end up letting people in who, on balance, were probably not entitled to come to the United Kingdom. Every time this went back to court, the judges would say, “Yes, we will keep this injunction in place, but you need to expand the scheme.”

This was the other reason why I thought that the scheme was coming to the end of its useful life, along with the fact that the further away we were from the breach, the less chance there was that the Taliban were going after these people, or that they already knew about it and therefore you could lift the injunction. I thought that there was one more turn of the wheel, and I thought that in the summer or autumn we would cease to resist it. I am actually fascinated that my successor kept it in place for a whole other year, whether that was based on more intelligence or for some other reason, but that is where I was headed with it.

Q342 Emma Lewell: Just to revisit that, you say, “One more turn of the wheel,” and in answer to my earlier question you said that you thought it would happen around the autumn. Why, then, did you apply for an indefinite extension in May, instead of just a temporary extension?

Sir Grant Shapps: I think that was probably just a kind of legal nicety. It was not that we were trying to keep it in place forever; it was probably just to stop us having to go back every two, three or four weeks, or whatever it was, to renew it. It was not for any other reason.

Q343 Emma Lewell: You can see how it is confusing to us, though. You are saying that you thought it should have probably been lifted in the autumn



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and you were constantly reviewing it, yet you applied for an indefinite extension.

Sir Grant Shapps: It is hard to get into somebody's head afterwards and see what they were thinking at the time, but the reason I mentioned the other factor was that I was starting to become concerned that the courts were becoming very gung-ho about the size of the overall scheme. Every time they were renewing it, they were including more families and more extensions of the families. I was feeling a real pressure to bring it to a close. It was not that I wanted it to be in place forever. I did not want it to turn into a scheme that was trying to do something that was not in the original plan. The plan was to save people who genuinely helped this country when we asked them to, and get them out; it was not there to bring out everyone else.

Q344 **Emma Lewell:** Was it not an option to apply for just a temporary extension?

Sir Grant Shapps: I do not know. I suspect that it was just however the lawyers happened to frame it at the time. I think it may just have been that they decided that rather than going back every three weeks, they would ask for something longer. As far as I am aware—as far as I recall—I was not privy to specifically what language the lawyers used in the extension itself.

Chair: Thank you.

Sir Grant Shapps: I should say for completeness that I do not recall that one way or the other. I am very happy to write to the Committee with the decision tree at that moment in time. There was a very good reason why I did not want this to carry on forever, as I have explained, so it would not have been in my interest for it to continue as a permanent thing. Nor, I think, would the courts ever provide a permanent super-injunction.

Emma Lewell: I think you get the point that I am making, though: you applied for an indefinite extension, even though you did not want an indefinite extension.

Sir Grant Shapps: I do. I think it was probably just the way the lawyers went after it.

Chair: Your offer of a written clarification is greatly appreciated.

Sir Grant Shapps: Sure.

Q345 **Lincoln Jopp:** I am intrigued by the ever-increasing demand signal being set by the judges. We have heard from others this morning that, politically, this is now starting to give you a problem because of the pressure and the juxtaposition with people who have come here illegally being in accommodation and the way that drives up rent prices, drives out local authorities from doing their own social care and things like that. We can see that that problem is getting bigger and bigger. You have just said that the scheme was getting further and further away from the original intent. On what basis do you think the judge is extending that?



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Presumably, he is only getting his briefings from the MoD.

Sir Grant Shapps: On the Chair's point, the judge was as concerned as we all were. I do not want my robustness about how I thought about keeping this super-injunction secret to save lives to be confused with thinking that I do not believe in democracy. I do. The judge shared the same view: if this were to be kept under an injunction, the quid pro quo was that an increasing circle of parliamentarians, through different bits of the parliamentary machine, would need to know. Also, the judges seemed to be becoming quite activist in respect of the list. I did not agree with the judges' interpretation, but increasingly—every time this went back to court—the deal seemed to be, "Yes, you can keep this in place, but you need to let more and more people in." We were getting further and further away from the original point of the scheme.

You might ask, "Well, why renew it?" The simple answer for me was that I was still not, at any given moment, confident enough that we had saved the lives of the right people who had actually helped us, including Brits—as is now known, but was not known initially when the super-injunction was lifted—and British special forces.

Q346 **Lincoln Jopp:** But I do not think that that answers my question, which is on what basis the judges were extending the remit, if they were only getting their information from the MoD. The MoD is the source of the knowledge of the threat to life.

Sir Grant Shapps: They were also, as I understand it, getting their information from secret service briefings, essentially. I think I am right in saying that it was not necessarily directly through the MoD; it was also through the intelligence service briefings.

Q347 **Lincoln Jopp:** You have characterised the judges' decision making as increasingly activist. You have also said that they were also getting secret information from elsewhere.

Sir Grant Shapps: Yes. Not illicitly: we would organise for them to have intelligence briefings. They would have the briefings, and then come back and say, "Well, what about this group here? Who are the family members of this person over here?" Suddenly, the numbers were going from the low hundreds into the many thousands or even tens of thousands—even 100,000-plus. It was becoming unacceptable.

On the Committee's point, I was reaching the point of thinking, "Well, the crossover occurs when the number of people we are going to get safe, we have already got safe, and now we are getting into whole new cohorts of people who possibly do not have any particular reason to be here, but the judge is forcing us in that direction." That is the other reason why I knew that it needed to come to an end.

Lincoln Jopp: We can examine that with the Secretary of State next week.

Chair: No doubt. We look forward to it.



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Q348 **Ian Roome:** Given the exceptional circumstances of this super-injunction, just for the record, did you ever meet your successor, John Healey, to discuss it and to do a handover, or was that left to the Department?

Sir Grant Shapps: Specifically, the Minister responsible—James Heappey, whom you have heard from—handled those briefings directly. I did call the new Secretary of State after the election to provide a handover, but obviously these were not matters that we could discuss widely over the phone. My attitude to the then shadow Defence Secretary was to entrust him with briefings. He was in a role that, in the best interests of this country, required him to come into the job—if Labour were to win the election, which certainly looked likely—with as much practical information as possible. I have always had an extremely good relationship with the current Defence Secretary, because I think that matters of national security matter more than politics.

Q349 **Ian Roome:** We all learn from our experiences in life, so my final question is: with hindsight, what, if anything would you have done differently during your time as Secretary of State?

Sir Grant Shapps: Possibly, in other areas, there are a number of things. In this particular area, I know that the easy answer would be to satisfy the Committee and say, “Well, maybe I would have briefed everyone earlier.” I would not have done. If I lived my time again, on this particular issue, I am satisfied that my course of action is more likely to have saved more lives of Afghans, but also of Brits, than any other course of action. I would not have altered it.

Chair: Thank you very much, Sir Grant. That brings to a conclusion our evidence session today. I am very grateful for your contribution to our inquiry and for your evidence to the Committee.