

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Afghan data breach and resettlement schemes, HC 1304

Tuesday 21 April 2026

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Members present: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Chair); Mr Calvin Bailey; Alex Baker; Lincoln Jopp; Jesse Norman; Ian Roome; Michelle Scroggum.

Questions 350-436

Witnesses

I: Paul Rimmer.

II: David Williams, former Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence, and Paul Lincoln, former Second Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Paul Rimmer.

Chair: Welcome to the House of Commons Defence Committee evidence session on the Afghan data breach and resettlement schemes inquiry. It is a delight to have with us Paul Rimmer. Mr Rimmer, you served as a senior civil servant in the MOD, including holding the post of Deputy Chief of Defence Intelligence until May 2020. We have 45 minutes with you, so without further ado I will hand over to Lincoln Jopp to start the questioning.

Q350 **Lincoln Jopp:** I do not know whether you are a massive fan of “Yes, Prime Minister”, Mr Rimmer, but in a very good episode, they talk about how people are selected to run inquiries such as this—it is very memorable. I would like to leaven that with some reality, so will you talk us through how such things gestate? Is it a cosy chat in the Reform Club, a telephone call or what?

Paul Rimmer: If only! The first I heard about it was in an email I received a few days before Christmas 2024, on 20 December, from the Chief of Defence Intelligence, Adrian Bird, and Dominic Wilson, the SRO for Afghan resettlement, asking whether I would consider doing some potential assessment work in the new year. He mentioned Afghanistan, but I knew nothing more about it at that point. That was when I first heard about it.

Q351 **Lincoln Jopp:** You were unaware of the super-injunction?

Paul Rimmer: I knew nothing about it at all. On 8 January, I came in to have discussion for the first time with Dominic, Adrian and others to understand the issue, what the problem was and what they wanted me to do. I was immediately told that I was now covered by the super-injunction and I had to be signed into a classified compartment in order to conduct the work.

Q352 **Lincoln Jopp:** How does that work? Do they say, “If you were to take on this work, you will need to be signed on to a particular box,” and you say, “I am happy to do that”?

Paul Rimmer: In order to tell me about the problem, given the super-injunction, I had to sign in to the compartment in the first place. That had to come first; otherwise they could not talk to me about the issue. Clearly, I could have decided not to do it—I thought very hard about whether I felt that this was something I could help with—but in the end, I decided that yes, I would see what I could do. After 37 years in the civil service, when your old Department seeks your help, you have a sense of duty to help out, but I was not entirely sure at the outset whether I could be of help.

During January, I went up and down. I do not live in the south-east any more, so I came up and down to the MOD for discussions to understand the nature of the issue, to scope how I might go about it and fit it around existing commitments, to work out what support I would need and that



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sort of thing. January was very much scoping, reading and trying to understand the issue.

I had some other commitments in the first two weeks in February, so I next came into the MOD on 19 February. It was really from then that the serious work got under way.

Q353 Lincoln Jopp: Did the MOD say, "We envisage it lasting this long," or was it an iterative process, whereby you set the work? It is a real tip-of-the-iceberg issue; you might have thought, "What else am I going to uncover when I go through this?" What were the discussions about time balancing?

Paul Rimmer: It was about springtime. I don't think there was ever really a very hard, "It absolutely must be done by this point at the latest." In the end, it did stretch out a bit longer, because I did not finish doing the interviews until the end of April—most of the interviews were done during February and March, but they were finished at the end of April. Then it was drafting, sharing it with other Departments in draft, briefing Ministers and so on. That took the extra time.

Q354 Lincoln Jopp: Were you given any sense of urgency?

Paul Rimmer: Yes, definitely. There was a desire to get on with this. It was not an open-ended commitment by any means. Equally, I was keen to do it, because I had other things on my plate. There was an ambition to get it done during the spring and not really to let it drift any further.

Q355 Lincoln Jopp: Forgive me if I am eating anyone else's sandwiches, but what was your reaction when you first learnt about the super-injunction and the totality of the issue?

Paul Rimmer: Obviously, I was shocked to hear about the data breach and the potential implications of that. The super-injunction was a completely new thing. It was very clear from talking to officials and later to Ministers that they felt uncomfortable about the situation they were in. You will have to ask them, but I understood that part of the reason for approaching me was to try a different avenue to see if they could resolve it and move on.

Q356 Ian Roome: Carrying on with the theme of commissioning the review, when did the bulk of your work take place and when did you submit your report?

Paul Rimmer: As I said, most of the interviews were done during February and March, and they were complete by the end of April. That was the busy time in terms of fixing up and getting those interviews done. I had an initial meeting with the Defence Secretary and the Armed Forces Minister on 27 March to discuss my emerging conclusions, which were starting to take shape in my head at that point. April and May really were drafting, cross-checking, going back, briefing other Departments, checking with Defence Intelligence and the agencies whether anything new had come in—anything else that would provide any insights—and giving the opportunity to other Departments to ask me any questions or for any clarification, and so on.



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I was always clear from the outset that in taking on the role, I could only follow the evidence, and my conclusions would flow from the evidence I saw. In fact, I remember in a conversation with Dominic saying, "You do realise, these will be my conclusions? I am providing a paper for the Defence Secretary as part of his advice and consideration, but I can only follow the evidence and come to those conclusions. Therefore, you may find that I come up with nothing that is of any value at all—it may not advance the decision making at all—or you may find that I discover it is actually a lot worse than you thought. Are you prepared for that?" There was that understanding.

In May, it was about cross-checking and working with the Departments, being very clear, given that by then there was some clarity about how this was going to be handled and that it would be going in front of the Court as a paper. I was being very careful about how I described both the situation in Afghanistan and how I came to my conclusions, so that there was no doubt where I was coming from and that I was not underplaying the situation in Afghanistan itself.

Q357 Ian Roome: What are your thoughts on the commissioning? The *Daily Mail* reported that in an answer to an FOI request, the MOD stated that you were commissioned on 23 January 2025, before the policy review had been formally endorsed by the Secretary of State. It suggested that this new information meant that the MOD had misled the Court as a way of cynically buying time. What are your thoughts about the *Daily Mail* suggestion?

Paul Rimmer: You will have to ask the MOD about what the question was and how they responded to it. As I say, I had that initial approach on 20 December and much of January was just trying to understand the nature of the problem, reading some of the Court papers, and discussing—if I were to take this on and it was approved—how I would go about it. I assume that went into the advice that the officials then put to the Defence Secretary to get the formal sign-off.

Q358 Ian Roome: Did the pace or sequencing of the work place any constraints on the evidence that you were able to gather or test?

Paul Rimmer: I was operating within the constraints of the super-injunction and in a classified compartment, which inevitably made it less straightforward. Some of the people I spoke to were not aware of the data breach, so I could not be as free and open in my questioning as this Committee can be now. I was conscious that there was limited time—I did not have a year or so to do this. Inevitably, time has its constraints. As a manager of analysts, I am conscious that the ideal for any analyst is that they never actually publish their report because they are waiting for something else to come up that will have that extra bit of insight. Nevertheless, at the end of it I felt that I had spoken to a very broad range of people and read a broad range of inputs from NGOs, the UN and others, which gave me a broad insight to conditions on the ground in Afghanistan from people who had current—spring 2025—experience of



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that. I was not sitting there thinking I was missing something that would really change things.

Q359 **Ian Roome:** Given your vast experience and what you brought to the inquiry, looking back, is there anything that you would have done differently?

Paul Rimmer: I am not going to say no, but I do not think so. At the time I felt that we had had a good range of inputs. There was that classification and super-injunction constraint, but broadly I felt comfortable with the process and how we went about it.

Q360 **Lincoln Jopp:** You said in answer to one of those questions that some of the range of people were inside the compartment and some were not. How does that work when you are doing your cross-Whitehall triangulation and you want to talk to someone in the Home Office? Are you presented with the full list of people who are signed on, so you know when you go into the meeting that that is the case—who is in the room, who is not and all of that. How did you manage that?

Paul Rimmer: I think that everybody I spoke to in the Whitehall Departments was aware of the issue and was inside the compartment and aware of the super-injunction and so on. In terms of input from within Government, I am pretty sure that everybody involved knew about the issue, so there was no constraint on the ability to have that conversation. It was more outside.

Q361 **Lincoln Jopp:** Did you have the list of everyone who was in the compartment?

Paul Rimmer: I was able to look at the list. I had a colleague who arranged the appointments, so we were able to check against those.

Q362 **Lincoln Jopp:** So you knew going into the room that they were either in or out?

Paul Rimmer: Yes.

Q363 **Jesse Norman:** How long was it after officials at a lower level heard about the breach that the information was communicated upward to private offices and Ministers?

Paul Rimmer: I could not tell you off the top of my head. I think it was 23 August that knowledge of the breach came about. I did not look into that process at all.

Q364 **Jesse Norman:** Okay. Were you given any kind of steer or expectation alongside the terms of reference for the work that you were doing?

Paul Rimmer: No, absolutely not. It was free and very clear to me, and as I said earlier, I made it very clear that I would follow the evidence and come up with conclusions, and officials and Ministers would have to accept that that would be what it is.

Q365 **Jesse Norman:** Were you aware that it would be quite convenient if the



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report that you put in was able to support closing the resettlement schemes and lifting the injunction?

Paul Rimmer: There was always the possibility that that would be the outcome; equally, my position was that I was providing some of the evidence for Ministers to make that decision. It was not my decision and it was not within my gift. It was perfectly possible for the Defence Secretary to look at that and say, "Well, thank you very much, but I still don't like the risk."

I made that point every single time I briefed and I made it in the paper that this is a risk analysis. It is not black or white, or safe or not safe; there is risk. That is why I thought it was very important to lay out the situation in Afghanistan very clearly up front—I think I used the word "dire" several times—to make sure that people did not go away with the impression that I thought everything was fine and dandy.

Q366 **Jesse Norman:** Obviously it was convenient, as it proved, and you were to some extent aware of that—I think that is what you just said. It did not necessarily shade your judgment, but you were aware of that.

Paul Rimmer: I was aware that that was a possible outcome, of course.

Q367 **Jesse Norman:** Okay. I am just trying to get clear what is happening. You said you gave some emerging findings to colleagues at the MOD. Were they reviewed by Ministers?

Paul Rimmer: I briefed the Defence Secretary and the Armed Forces Minister, Mr Pollard, at the end of March to say this is the direction of travel—but it was very much a draft and just a direction of travel. I took part in a cross-Whitehall meeting myself on 20 May with the draft paper.

The MOD owned the responsibility for staffing and circulating the paper to those who needed to see it. It was not something I could do. I gave an opportunity to those Departments that had an interest in the issue to ask me questions and whether there were any clarifications. Usually, it is "Can you be clearer about this?" or, "Can you be firmer about that?" or, "How strong is your evidence?"

Again, I was always clear that the evidence has taken me in this direction, and that that was why I have come up with these conclusions. Nobody at any time said, "Actually, we disagree—we think you're fundamentally wrong."

Q368 **Jesse Norman:** You briefed Ministers and you did a cross-Whitehall meeting.

Paul Rimmer: Yes.

Q369 **Jesse Norman:** Were there any other updates to Ministers, such as written communications or verbal briefings, in the course of your work before—

Paul Rimmer: I also did a briefing for an informal ministerial meeting with the Home Affairs Committee on 17 June, which was chaired by Pat



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McFadden. Other Ministers attended that. There would of course have been briefings and meetings going on between officials in various departments to their Ministers and to the Defence Secretary.

Q370 **Jesse Norman:** Well, a lot of money was at stake, apart from anything else—so the Treasury and every affected Department.

Paul Rimmer: Yes. That would have been going on, but I was not part of that process. That was departmental work—not mine.

Q371 **Jesse Norman:** But you have said that officials and Ministers did get a chance to review your emerging findings, because they pressed you on how good the evidence was and how strong the view was. Is that right?

Paul Rimmer: I was asked; pressed is probably overdoing it. I was asked, “Where’s this come from? Why have you come to these conclusions?” and so on, but at no point did I feel I was being pushed or pressed in a direction, or being told, “This is the answer we want.” From my point of view, that would be wholly unprofessional. You can ask the MOD folks why they chose me, but part of the reason was that I have been in a number of jobs where I am briefing Ministers and Prime Ministers, and I am perfectly capable of standing up to people who want a certain answer.

Often in the intelligence and intelligence analysis profession, you are in a situation where you cannot give people the perfect answer that they would ideally like. It is not necessarily that they want the answer to be black and you have told them it is white; it is that they want you to be firmer about this or stronger about whether it is likely to be this. Often, as a senior manager, my responsibility was to support junior analysts by saying, “No, we can go this far, but no further.” And that is where I stood.

Q372 **Jesse Norman:** There was a party political aspect to this, wasn’t there? It was not inconvenient to the new Government to try to show that the previous Government had acted precipitately or heavy-handedly.

Paul Rimmer: That was never a conversation or a discussion that we had. I can perfectly understand why, on discovery of the data breach, people would work very hard to make sure it was protected as best as possible.

Q373 **Jesse Norman:** And to protect the discussions under the legal framework, which was the cause of the super-injunction, presumably.

Paul Rimmer: Yes. That was before my time, obviously. I was dealing with the situation as we found it in spring 2025.

Q374 **Jesse Norman:** Were there any areas that Ministers and officials paid particular attention to, more than others, in the report?

Paul Rimmer: Not that I can particularly think of.

Jesse Norman: In relation to the Triples, for example?

Paul Rimmer: No. I specifically drew out the fact that there remained a risk to people. The point was not that there was no risk, but that there



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was a risk to, for example, people who the Taliban might feel are part of the insurgency, or would support the insurgency. I would especially refer to the Triples as the kind of people who might be at risk.

Q375 Jesse Norman: You and your team have certain professional institutional affiliations. What steps did you take to satisfy yourself that those were supporting the aims of the inquiry and not necessarily narrowing the range of evidence that you looked at?

Paul Rimmer: Just my own experience of knowing people, talking to people and understanding their background. I never, at any time, had a feeling that people were trying to drive me in one direction and make sure that I saw only convenient evidence, or that sort of thing.

Q376 Jesse Norman: Obviously. No one is thinking that, but the civil service would not be the civil service if it were not a lot more subtle about such questions.

Paul Rimmer: I was very comfortable with the support I had, which was more about organising meetings. I had widespread discussions with a number of people about who would be useful to speak to. Of course I also read Court papers to give me insights from others. I was also helped with drafting, but ultimately I sat down behind a computer and typed things up.

Jesse Norman: Do you mean drafting the report? They were helping you draft the report?

Paul Rimmer: Yes, with drafting the report.

Jesse Norman: I would have assumed that you would draft the whole thing.

Paul Rimmer: I had assistance because I was not sitting behind a classified computer at home; I had to come into the MOD to write it. I had one member of staff in particular who helped to write up the meetings and helped me with the drafting, but ultimately I would sit down behind a computer and draft it.

Q377 Jesse Norman: So every word of that report was written either by you or personally approved by you?

Paul Rimmer: Yes.

Q378 Lincoln Jopp: We have had a couple of evidence sessions that slightly conflicted with one another. They painted a picture where, every time the MOD went back to reiterate the super-injunction with the Court, the Court would take its own view on the risk envelope and come back with an increased number of people who had to be taken by the UK. Views differ. During your time, did the Court make any decisions that you were aware of? Was there a feedback loop of some sort?

Paul Rimmer: I was able to read Court papers as time went along. I do not think I saw anything that made me think differently about what I was doing and why I was doing it at that time. First, there was an assumption that, at some point, the fact of the data breach would come out. I had to



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assume, therefore, that it was entirely possible that, at some point, the Taliban would get hold of the data. So there was no assumption that the super-injunction would continue indefinitely; indeed, the judge had thought almost a year before that he should lift it.

What I was trying to focus on was, in that case, what context, what environment would that land in? Hence my focus on, what was the evidence for the Taliban having a systematic programme of retribution as of a year ago, and whether they had the information with which to prosecute such a campaign of retribution. Those were the two key points in terms of the analysis I had. I don't think anything that came through in that time impacted on that.

Q379 Lincoln Jopp: So you were more conscious of the risk downrange than of any, as it were, political risk of the courts here putting an increasing burden on the UK to take people.

Paul Rimmer: That is fair. I was also conscious that it was entirely possible that the judge might decide to lift the super-injunction anyway at any point. That could just finish it there and then.

Lincoln Jopp: Indeed. Thank you.

Q380 Chair: Mr Rimmer, many individuals who have been very much involved in this whole process have questioned the independence of the review, saying that, for example, you have obviously reached the wrong conclusions, or that there was "a pre-existing desire to close" the scheme, and that that will have "influenced things". Somebody else told us that it was "a political stunt". Another person heavily involved said that the whole thing was "rushed". How would you counter that? What are your feelings about those comments with regards to the quality of your work?

Paul Rimmer: It was absolutely not a stunt. I would not allow myself to be used in that way. I was perfectly comfortable. Having initially wondered whether I could actually contribute at all when I started, because I had not been looking at Afghanistan in any detail for a while, as I started the interviews I got a very consistent set of reporting coming out.

There was one exception. That was, I think, the person you referred to as Person A, whose evidence to this Committee I saw. That person's evidence was really important and very interesting because it ran counter to everything else I was hearing. That person said that there was in fact a campaign of retribution—that people were being killed deliberately. That was very important because it ran counter to everything else I was hearing.

I stopped and took stock at that point and thought, "We need to examine this." That person provided some details, for which I sought corroboration, but I was unable to get any corroboration. I flagged it to Ministers as an example of, "What if we are wrong? Here is an alternative explanation." But in the end, the overwhelming narrative I was getting from everybody else I spoke to, whether in Government, NGOs, the UN or whatever, and from the NGO reporting was different. So in the end I felt I could not rely on that as the basis for my conclusions. In the same way, if I had been



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speaking to a whole bunch of people who had said, “Yes, there is a campaign of retribution,” and then one person had said, “No there isn’t,” it would have been a bit strange to go with that. But, as I say, entirely because it gave a different story, I thought it was really important to reflect on, and to reflect it in the advice I provided. I think it is important that that person knows that the conversation we had was taken seriously.

Chair: Let’s move on from the independence of the review to the evidence base, the impact and the findings of the review.

Q381 Alex Baker: Mr Rimmer, we have been pretty horrified by the evidence we have received about killings and human rights abuses that have continued in Afghanistan, affecting individuals who are affected by this data breach. We note that you have said that it is hard to attribute specific cases, but we have heard evidence from people who do not feel that you have got this right. How confident are you that these incidents were not linked to the data set?

Paul Rimmer: It is very difficult, but I go back to the fact that the NGO reporting at that time—we are talking about last spring—referred to killings, abuse and detentions, but could rarely, if ever, say the reasons for that. There were multiple potential reasons, such as family feuds or other things.

The sense I got, from all bar one of the sources I read and the people I spoke to, was that, yes, the situation in Afghanistan is dire—if you are a woman, that is multiplied—and people do get killed, abused and so on. But I did not get a strong sense that this was the result of a systematic programme of retribution. There might be local, individual or many other reasons—in a way, I was surprised, because that was not necessarily what I was expecting at the start—but I did not get the sense that there was the programme of retribution that you might expect.

Q382 Alex Baker: It is one thing to talk to organisations, but individual experiences can be very different from an organisation’s experience. How much did you seek out indicators that would challenge that judgment?

Paul Rimmer: Some of the conversations I had—I reflected this in the review—highlighted that if you are in Afghanistan and feel that you are affected in that way, life will feel very uncertain and difficult for you; I did not want to downplay that at all, and I do not feel that I did so in the report. I wanted to be really honest that it can be very difficult, and there are people who will feel threatened; I did not downplay that. As I say, when specific information was provided by one individual, it could not be verified in that way. That was where it fell—

Q383 Alex Baker: That person said to us that they knew that other people were saying the same thing to you, so they could not believe it when they saw your review. Clearly, other people feel the same way as this person. Why did you not speak to those people?

Paul Rimmer: Of the people I spoke to, only Person A came out with that perspective. Nobody else I spoke to did. I sought other advice and evidence to see whether there was any corroboration, and we went back

round some of the NGO reporting, which by that time was much more vague around the rationale for why deaths were occurring.¹

Q384 Alex Baker: We have already talked about the fact that organisations will not necessarily be able to give you that view. I am interested in how far you actually dug into the experience of individuals in this situation.

Paul Rimmer: I spoke to some people in the UK who were involved in looking after Afghans who had resettled, and they do an amazing job. I just did not get that sense from it—that is all I can say.

Q385 Alex Baker: How confident are you that those you spoke to made up a representative sample of those who could tell us what was happening on the ground?

Paul Rimmer: That is impossible to say, but again, as I said earlier, I felt comfortable at the end that I had spoken to a reasonably representative range, and that the evidence I got supported the conclusions I came to.

Q386 Chair: Mr Rimmer, with respect to the Afghan data breach, your report finds that it is “unlikely the dataset would be the single, or definitive, piece of information enabling or prompting the Taliban to act” and that it is “unlikely to substantially change an individual’s existing exposure given the volume of data already available”. Can you define “unlikely” for me?

Paul Rimmer: I deliberately tried not to use language in an obscure or technical way. My “unlikely” is what an ordinary person would take to mean unlikely. The background to that is that the Taliban already have a huge amount of data. I was looking at whether this breach would be the thing that would give them an edge. If they wanted to conduct a campaign of retribution, were they being prevented from doing so by a lack of data? The conclusion I came to was no; they have lots of data if they wanted to do that. Inevitably, if you are an investigator, more information is always more welcome, but would this be the single thing that would instigate such a course of action? I could not see that.

Q387 Chair: Did you perhaps mean that there was a residual risk of between 25% and 35%, as noted in the Court of Appeal? Is that what you meant?

Paul Rimmer: I did not put a percentage on it, deliberately.

Q388 Lincoln Jopp: Going back to the conversation you were having with Ms Baker, you take multiple sources and try to establish that the picture you are seeing is as full as it can be. Did you triangulate with other friendly intelligence agencies? Did you have access to what they were saying and reporting to do a sanity check?

¹ Note from witness: I spoke to a range of people with current experience on the ground in Afghanistan and with experience of helping Afghans resettle in the UK. Of all the people I spoke to, only one, known as Person A, claimed that there was a campaign of retribution in place. No one else made such a claim and details provided by Person A could not be corroborated. I therefore drew my conclusions on the weight of evidence I received, as set out in my report. In so doing, however, I sought not to underplay the severity of the overall situation in Afghanistan



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Paul Rimmer: I had a number of conversations with Defence Intelligence—there is a reference to their assessment—to understand how they came to their conclusions and to read their analysis. We might be straying into ISC territory, but I know that they had discussed with others. I also spoke to our intelligence agencies themselves to see if they could add any insights.

Lincoln Jopp: But other nations' intelligence agencies?

Paul Rimmer: I did not directly, but—

Lincoln Jopp: You knew a man who could.

Paul Rimmer: I knew a man who could, yes.

Q389 **Mr Bailey:** Other witnesses pointed to different cohorts that may have been impacted, notably the Triples, but also other groups that the Taliban, or the Afghan Government as it then became, may not necessarily have had data sources for. Did your report take sufficient account of the risk that revealing the data breach presented to individuals who were not otherwise on the radar?

Paul Rimmer: I was not asked, and did not have the capacity, to go into the totality of the data in a huge amount of detail, in terms of trying to work out the cohorts. From the kind of information I had, I was able to look at some of the data in the breach to understand what was in it. My focus was very much on trying to understand the attitude to retribution, effectively, and how this might fit in, rather than looking at individual cohorts in separate detail.

Q390 **Mr Bailey:** That would have missed out some of the very large groups that, although not necessarily in military posts, could have been in supporting functions, or the families of those people associated with the Triples.

Paul Rimmer: We looked at the broad range of those who were in support during our time in Afghanistan. I cannot say to you if it was this group or that group, but it was certainly not just a focus on the Triples. It was trying to look at the broad context of what was happening in Afghanistan at the time.

Q391 **Mr Bailey:** Did your risk analysis look at the possibility of a full public exposure of the data?

Paul Rimmer: Yes. As I say, I had to assume that, although we had no suggestion that the Taliban had the data at the time, at some point the fact of the data breach would come out, and that it would be possible that the Taliban or others could get hold of it, which I noted at the time.

Q392 **Mr Bailey:** Was there a "break glass" assessment?

Paul Rimmer: You would have to talk to the MOD because there was always preparation in case this came out. There had been preparations for the risk of that happening.

Q393 **Mr Bailey:** Going back to those other groups, the significant cohorts would have been things such as drivers, mechanics and locally employed civilians. Can you give us an idea, in terms of cohorts, of how large they were? They clearly would not have been exposed.

Paul Rimmer: I do not know whether they would have been exposed or not, to be honest, because we know that—

Q394 **Mr Bailey:** Was that an oversight?

Paul Rimmer: No, we know that the Taliban had a lot of information about people who were supporting allies in Afghanistan at the time. As I say, I did not have the capacity and I was not asked to look at the line-by-line detail of what was in the database.

Q395 **Mr Bailey:** So it was a capacity issue, rather than a knowing assessment that these cohorts would not have been looked at. ²

Paul Rimmer: It was not in the terms in which I was asked to do the work.

Q396 **Mr Bailey:** But did you raise the point? These are large cohorts.

Paul Rimmer: I did not.

Mr Bailey: So that is an oversight in the report.

Q397 **Lincoln Jopp:** I completely take your point that we would have to ask the MOD folks about their contingency plan, but you are inside the machine, and your name is going to come out because you knew about all this. From a personal point of view, did you understand the mechanics? Could the judge have, all of a sudden, at one of these renewal hearings, said “You know what, I am not going to renew it. MOD, you have until midnight tonight,” and that is it? Or would it have been graceful degradation? I do not know how the world of super-injunctions work. What was your own mental preparation personally? What was your contingency plan for if there had been a “pop smoke” moment?

Paul Rimmer: I am not a lawyer, and MOD would need to talk to you about the process, but, in the back of my mind, there was the possibility that the judge might say one day, “You know what, I tried to get this overturned last year and I really think the time has come.” I know that MOD was prepared for that to happen and obviously wanted as much time to make provision as possible. From my point of view, in a way, that would have been the end of the work. I would have done what I had done, and it would just stop at that point.

Q398 **Chair:** Mr Rimmer, you are aware that several individuals have questioned the assessment you have come up with, including Person A. It seemed that you were not aware of the specific Taliban unit named Yarmouk 60, whose job it was, apparently, to hunt UK-affiliated Afghan special forces. Were you aware of that during your conversations with Person A?

² Note from witness: A detailed assessment by cohort was outside the scope of the terms of my review.



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Paul Rimmer: I was not aware of it until Person A raised it, and that was one of the things I asked to see if we could get corroboration for, and we could not.³

Q399 **Chair:** It was apparent to many that the amnesty—the so-called amnesty—was not there. We had knowledge that individuals were being targeted, and that is why a lot of people are questioning your assessment that people were safer afterwards, rather than when the super-injunction was there. That is why I was asking you earlier about your assessment of risk. That is why there is so much concern about your assessment. How will you counter that?

Paul Rimmer: I mentioned the amnesty in the review. Obviously, you would not take the Taliban's word for it—it is indicative perhaps, but it is not an important factor in that we are saying, "Yes, we agree. The Taliban had an amnesty and it was all fine." I certainly mention it in the report as a factor, but not by any means as a driving factor. As I said, I had to be driven by the evidence I got. I mentioned early on that it is very hard to get hard information—a lot of it is anecdotal—but it broadly pointed in the same direction, in support of the conclusions that I came up with. To be honest, if I had concluded differently, I think you would be asking me how I came to those conclusions against the weight of the evidence and the way in which the evidence was taking me.

Chair: Fair enough. Thank you for your work, Mr Rimmer, for agreeing to appear before the Committee and for helping us with our inquiry. With that, I call this part of the sitting to a close.

³ See footnote to Q259.