



Foreign, Commonwealth
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Tom Tugendhat MP
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House of Commons
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15 September 2021

Dear Tom,

I am writing further to my written response to a number of issues raised during the session of the Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday 1 September. This letter also covers some residual points raised in your letter of 31 August.

1. How many new applications under ARAP or LOTR have been made each day in July and August? How many applications were declined, broken down by the grounds for refusal?

The power to grant an individual leave to enter the UK outside the normal immigration rules in exceptional circumstances (LOTR) is a discretionary power vested in the Home Secretary. There is no formal application process. In recognition of the circumstances, I proposed for consideration, and secured, the Home Secretary's agreement to call forward for UK military evacuation from Kabul nearly 500 especially vulnerable Afghans using this power. Those called forward included journalists and media staff, Embassy contractors, women's rights activists, senior Government officials and law enforcement (including Judges) and Chevening scholars.

The ARAP scheme for former Afghan employees of the Government has all along been jointly administered by the Ministry of Defence and Home Office.

2. How many applications under ARAP or LOTR have been raised by MPs on behalf of individuals with the FCDO?

The special cases mailbox received roughly 30,000 e-mails from Parliamentarians, alongside a large number of correspondence from other sources, many covering more than one individual, some chasing up previously submitted names.

I undertook that FCDO would reply by Monday 6 September to all MPs who wrote in about Afghanistan cases before 31 August. This was done on 5 September with a letter from Lord Ahmad to all those Parliamentarians who had sent cases to the FCDO. This letter outlined the action that we are taking to progress cases that have been sent to us, as well as setting out the relevant contact routes that are applicable, now that the evacuation phase is over.

In addition to this correspondence, we also sent a Dear Colleague letter on 6 September to all Parliamentarians, outlining the work we are doing to provide safe passage for those still stuck in Afghanistan.

On Thursday 9 September, I committed to the House that all MP correspondence that the department received before 31 August relating to Afghanistan cases would be assessed and forwarded to Ministry of Defence or Home Office within seven days. Members would also be informed of to where their correspondence had been sent. Ahead of the deadline of Thursday 16 September midnight deadline, I wanted to let you know that given the complexity of many of these cases, it has proved more difficult than foreseen to hit this deadline. Many members have sent tens if not hundreds of cases, which the team at the FCDO is thoroughly analysing to ensure they go to the right Department.

The FCDO received over 200,000 emails during Operation Pitting alone, which was significantly more than we received during the entire repatriation operation for British nationals at the onset of the Covid pandemic last year. As I told the House, the priority during the evacuation was getting UK nationals and those Afghans who worked for us on to the flights leaving Afghanistan. We also brought out hundreds of individuals who were identified as special cases owing to the particular risk they faced because of their ties with the United Kingdom.

Since the completion of the evacuation phase, the FCDO has been urgently working through the correspondence. Approximately 30,000 of the 200,000 emails the FCDO received were emails from MPs. In addition to the sheer numbers, the complexity of each case requires due attention to triage cases between the MOD for consideration under ARAP, the Home Office for the Afghan Resettlement Programme or to identify them as British Nationals, often with incomplete data.

The FCDO aimed to complete the triage of cases by 16 September. Given the complexity of these cases and the sheer volume, it will take a few days longer to complete. However, by 16 September we will have contacted more than half of MPs who have written to us with cases, letting them know which Department their cases have been sent to, and we will have completed this task by Tuesday 21 September, for all but a small minority of MPs with the most complex cases. Those MPs with the most complex cases will receive a letter and a telephone call from a Minister to update them on progress, and where necessary to establish further information.

I would like to assure you that responding to MPs' cases and correspondence remains a top priority for the Government and the FCDO has been working tirelessly to undertake the task. Staff from across the global FCDO network have been pulled into the crisis surge team along with colleagues from MOD and HMRC. We are also exploring bringing in external resources to help the FCDO deliver in the shortest timeframe possible. We will continue to work multiple shifts of over 100 people working throughout the day and night, 7 days a week to deliver.

While MOD will consider cases under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Home Office under the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme, the FCDO will continue to handle British National cases and will be in contact with MPs about the specific cases they have raised within 7 days, providing as much detail as possible.

3. How have FCDO staff numbers working on ARAP and special cases schemes changed on a daily basis, throughout July and August; how many staff from MOD and the Home Office were working on these schemes; what hours were staff from each department working?

At the peak of the crisis in the week commencing 23 August, over 500 staff were working on the crisis response across Whitehall departments, around the clock, 7 days per week.

4. How many applicants eligible under ARAP or LOTR remain in Afghanistan?

As mentioned in the Prime Minister's 6 September statement to the House of Commons on Afghanistan, under ARAP, MoD estimated at the time that 311 principals with agreed eligibility for ARAP and who had been called forward, remained in Afghanistan. This estimate was based on the best available information at the time, and work is underway to verify the accuracy of this figure. Under LOTR, we believe around a further 650 individuals who were issued with a call forward instruction did not fly out of Afghanistan on a UK evacuation flight. The majority of these people have remained in the country, but a small number have left Afghanistan on evacuation flights run by other countries or by their own means. Afghan nationals who were called forward to Kabul airport for evacuation by the FCDO will be guaranteed a place under the new Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).

5. How many emails were unread by FCDO officials on the ARAP or LOTR scheme on each day in August? 6. What steps were taken to triage cases and how were cases prioritised?

As stated above, during Operation PITTING alone we received over 200,000 emails, significantly more than during the entire period we were repatriating British Nationals at the onset of the Covid pandemic last year. Approximately 30,000 emails contained questions from MPs and the remainder were from individual British nationals and Afghans as well as members of the public and NGOs. The emails rose to a peak of 20,000 in a day.

As soon as the crisis began we allocated staff to triage incoming correspondence. The top priority was to identify requests for assistance from: British nationals and their dependents; ARAP cases; and Afghan nationals seeking help as special cases. In particular, during the evacuation, the triage exercise rightly sought to identify people requiring help to leave the country.

Since the completion of the evacuation phase, we have been urgently working through the correspondence we have received during the operation. We have now assigned 270 staff to work through this caseload each day, working in shifts and seven days a week to clear the backlog.

6. When did the FCDO begin compiling lists of those eligible as "special cases"; how many were added to this list each day in July and August; and how many of these managed to leave Afghanistan, broken down by category? How many "special cases" applications remained unprocessed on 29 August?

On 19 August it was agreed that the UK would, as part of the evacuation effort, assist others facing serious risk in Afghanistan where possible. The particular focus of this was to assist:

- current or former Chevening Scholars;
- people with existing leave to enter or an open application for student, work and family visas;
- journalists;
- civil society groups for women's rights;
- government officials;
- officials working in counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics; and
- employees of charities, humanitarian organisations and NGOs.

The FCDO also evaluated other special cases on a case-by-case basis, based on vulnerability. Those Afghan citizens and their dependents who received a Call Forward

to Kabul Airport for evacuation, but who we were sadly unable to evacuate before ceasing operations in Afghanistan, will be guaranteed a place under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).

7. How many Afghan nationals were working directly or indirectly for the British Embassy in Kabul on 13 August? How many of these have now left Afghanistan and arrived in the UK?

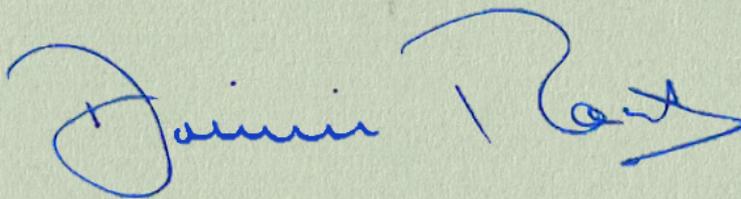
While we have done all we can to evacuate all ARAP eligible individuals and dependents, the conditions on the ground were extremely challenging, and as of September 5, some ARAP eligible individuals were not evacuated.

8. How many meetings did FCDO and MOD Ministers have with counterparts in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan in each month of this year?

The attached table includes a list of Foreign Secretary and FCDO Junior Ministerial meetings with counterparts in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The question of meetings with MoD Ministers is for the Defence Secretary.

9. Which Minister and official was responsible for cross-Whitehall co-ordination on the ARAP and LOTR schemes?

The ARAP programme is administered jointly by the Home Office and Ministry of Defence, with support from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. On my recommendation, the Home Secretary exceptionally agreed to call forward for UK military evacuation an additional nearly 500 Afghans who had not worked for the British Government but who were judged to be exceptionally vulnerable, using the Home Secretary's discretionary power to grant leave to enter the UK outside the normal immigration rules in exceptional circumstances. Daily co-ordination meetings of Ministers from FCDO, the Home Office and Ministry of Defence, and PJHQ, oversaw the flow of British nationals, ARAP beneficiaries, other Afghan and third country nationals through the UK military evacuation under Operation PITTING.



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Timeline of meetings between FCDO Ministers and counterparts in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan in 2021

Date	Minister	International Engagement
14/09/21	Lord Ahmad	Visit to Uzbekistan: met with Abdulla Aripov, Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan and Abdulaziz Kamilov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Senator Safoyev, Minister of Justice and Davletov Laziz Kudratov First Deputy Minister of Investments & Foreign Trade
08/09/2021	Lord Ahmad	Meeting with Uzbekistan Deputy Chair of the Senate, Sodiq Safoev
08/09/2021	Lord Ahmad	Call with Uzbekistan Deputy Foreign Minister
06/09/2021	Foreign Secretary	Call with Uzbekistan Foreign Minister, Abdulziz Kamilov
03/09/2021	Lord Ahmad	Call with Turkmen Deputy Foreign Minister Hajiev
03/09/2021	Foreign Secretary	Visit to Islamabad, Pakistan: Meetings with Prime Minister Khan, Foreign Minister Qureshi and Chief of Army Staff General Bajwa.
03/09/2021	Lord Ahmad	Call to Turkmen Deputy Foreign Minister Hajiev
03/09/2021	Lord Ahmad	Visit to Dushanbe, Tajikistan: meeting with Tajik Deputy Foreign Minister Huseinzoda
02/09/2021	Foreign Secretary	Call with Tajik Foreign Minister Muhriden
27/08/21	Foreign Secretary	Call with Pakistan Foreign Minister Qureshi
26/08/21	Lord Ahmad	Call with Uzbek Foreign Minister Kamilov
25/08/21	Lord Ahmad	Call with Tajikistan Deputy Foreign Minister Salim
23/08/21	Lord Ahmad	Call with Turkmenistan Deputy Foreign Minister Hajiev
23/08/21	Lord Ahmad	Call with Tajikistan Deputy Foreign Minister Farhod Salim

15/08/2021	Foreign Secretary	Call with Pakistan Foreign Minister Qureshi
26/07/2021	Minister Morton	Call with Uzbek Deputy Foreign Minister Fazilov
15-16/07/2021	Lord Ahmad	Visit to Tashkent, Uzbekistan for South/Central Asia Connectivity Conference (met Afghan President Ghani, Afghan FM Atmar, Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar as well as Uzbek Foreign Minister).
23-24/06/2021	Lord Ahmad	Visit to Islamabad, Pakistan: Meetings with Prime Minister Khan and Foreign Minister Qureshi
14/04/2021	Foreign Secretary	Pakistan Foreign Minister Qureshi