

What Britain owes Afghanistan

Sunday 20 July, 2025

In 1999 Nooralhaq Nasimi, my father, fled Taliban-held Afghanistan for Britain. The journey, at one point, involved spending 12 hours inside a refrigerated lorry. He was unable to speak a word of English.

Building a new life had its difficulties, both administrative and personal, but my father did it. Today, nearly three decades later, I work alongside him running the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association (ACAA), a London-based charity dedicated to helping refugees integrate. The ACAA now has branches across the country.

My father gained a law degree. He learned English. He founded a charity. He received an honorary doctorate and an MBE. His work – and mine – attempts to build bridges between Britain and Afghanistan, two nations linked by history and tragedy for the best part of two centuries.

We have also attempted to build relationships between refugees from around the world and their host nation. Perhaps – especially in recent years – there has never been a harder time to do this in Britain's history.

The news this afternoon that the previous government set up a secret relocation scheme, the Afghan Response Route (ARR), involving 20,000 people at a cost in the order of £2bn after a 2023 data breach in the Ministry of Defence has caused a political sensation. The data leak put the lives of thousands of Afghans at risk.

Between 2001 and 2021 [over 150,000 UK Armed Forces](#) personnel served in Afghanistan. Some [457 were killed](#) over 20 years. Between 2006 and 2014 alone, [2,188 were wounded](#) in action. Thousands of Afghans worked with them as interpreters and in other capacities. Those left behind after Western forces left Afghanistan in 2021 feared for their lives as the Taliban took control of the country.

In February 2023, the Conservative MP Tobias Ellwood, said: "The withdrawal from Afghanistan was a dark chapter in UK military history. For the Afghans who cooperated with the UK, and the British troops who served in the country, the nightmare is far from over.

"They are at risk of harm as a direct result of assisting the UK mission. We can't change the events that unfolded in August 2021, but we owe it to those Afghans, who placed their lives in danger to help us, to get them and their families to safety."

Ellwood's words remain salient. The two year cover-up by the British government of the ARR does nothing to change these facts. Britain owed these men a safe home, like the home my father found.

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