



# Foreign & Commonwealth Office

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*Dear Mr. Mackin,*

## **OPERATION AT SRI HARMANDIR SAHIB, AMRITSAR 1984**

Thank you for your letter of 16 January, received on 20 January, to the Minister for Asia and the Pacific on behalf of your client, the Sikh Federation UK. At his request I am replying as Director for South Asia in the FCO and following up the FCO acknowledgement of 2 February.

We have considered the points in your letter and your earlier letter of 3 November 2016 carefully. We respectfully differ on the interpretation that you drew from the Minister's reply. The Government has no wish to downplay the tragic events of 1984 or the seriousness of the points made on your client's behalf.

On the contrary, the decision by the previous Prime Minister to set up an extensive inquiry is evidence of the Government's commitment to establishing the nature and impact of UK advice to the Indian Government in 1984 and to address the serious question of whether Parliament had been misled. Ministers and officials have consistently responded to your client's concerns, since they raised these in their letter of 13 September to the Foreign Secretary. Ministers, including the Prime Minister, have responded to similar points raised by the Leader of the Opposition, Members of Parliament and the broader Sikh community.

The 2014 investigation originated from the discovery in the National Archives of two documents which mentioned UK advice to the Indian Government on its plans for an operation at Sri Harmandir Sahib. It was therefore reasonable for the Cabinet Secretary's investigation to focus on the events that led up to Operation Blue Star. The Cabinet Secretary's report, the Written Ministerial Statement and the subsequent debate in Parliament on 4 February 2014 set out at length the reasons for the terms of reference. As the Minister's letter of 18 November pointed out, the 3 July 1984 note makes neither reference to Operation Blue Star, nor to any other Indian military operations in Punjab.

You raised the 30 July parliamentary answer from the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the FCO, the late Ray Whitney MP quoting from the Cabinet Secretary's report. The Cabinet Secretary's report goes on to state: "... and in this context [i.e. Operation Blue Star] Mr Whitney did not mislead Parliament. This is reinforced by the fact that neither Mr Whitney nor his office were copied any of the relevant papers on the UK military officer's earlier visit in February, which was treated as Top Secret." The full context is important because the Cabinet Secretary was still referring to the events around Operation Blue Star, to which, as previously noted, the 3 July document makes no reference.

We must note the same point as regards your comments regarding the parliamentary exchange between Fiona Mactaggart MP and the then Foreign Secretary. The 3 July 1984 document makes no reference to Blue Star or to other military operations in Punjab.

On the penultimate page of your letter, you assert that the FCO "have withheld a large volume of documents to which our clients do not have access". This is not the case. The FCO has released papers up to the end of 1984 and will be releasing papers for 1985 this year. If you are referring to the recall of papers to help us respond to your client's letter of 13 September 2016 to the Foreign Secretary, we can confirm again that the FCO returned all of these documents to The National Archives on 8 November 2016. It is normal practice for government departments to occasionally recall their records from TNA to assist in operational matters.

We regret that you felt that the letter of 18 November did not address your client's concerns. We set out in good faith the evidence and reasons, and do so again, to explain why the Government believes that the Cabinet Secretary's report was conclusive as regards the matters it set out to examine and that the document cited does not provide evidence to question those conclusions or review the decisions of the government of the day. We fully respect your client's right to disagree with these points and to publish their own report, which we will consider carefully when we receive a copy. The letter of 18 November was not designed to put the burden of discovery on to your client, but simply to restate that the Government is open to considering new evidence from all sources. We would like to restate the Minister's offer in his letters of 20 September and 18 November for officials to meet your client.

*Yours sincerely,  
Owen Jenkins*

Owen Jenkins  
Director South Asia & Afghanistan