Independent Inquiry relating to Afghanistan (IIA)

HQ PM(A) Update: March 2025

Inquiry Update

As there have been no further OPEN hearings, a reminder of the policing expert evidence in January 2025 is as follows:

The Inquiry held two days of OPEN hearings on the 27th and 28th January 2025 at the Royal Courts of Justice where the Inquiry heard evidence from Alan Pughsley QPM, a former Chief Constable with extensive civilian policing experience in serious and complex crime. Through comparison with Home Office best practice, Mr Pughsley prepared a report based only on documentary evidence from the Operation NORTHMOOR and CESTRO investigations. Like any thorough review, Mr Pughsley's report casts a critical eye over all aspects of the investigations. In adducing evidence, it was recognised that the military context will need to be added by future RMP witnesses to the Inquiry.

Themes covered in the hearings include, but are not limited to, resourcing, record keeping, progress of the investigation and the rationale behind the closure of Op NORTHMOOR. Royal Military Police witnesses and others involved in the Operation NORTHMOOR and CESTRO investigations will have their own opportunity to give oral evidence in due course. It will ultimately be for the Chair of the Inquiry to make findings based on all the evidence he has heard.

The recordings of the hearings can be watched on YouTube and the transcripts can be found on the Inquiry website. The report will be published on the Inquiry website in due course.

There were some media articles written by the press regarding the evidence adduced in court. Please do get in touch with the RMP Inquiry team should you wish to discuss them.

At the end of the hearing on Tuesday 28th January, the Chair of the Inquiry, Lord Justice Sir Charles Haddon-Cave, gave an Inquiry update. This can be found in the transcript on the Inquiry website dated 28th January 2025, from page 140, line 10. Or, you can watch on YouTube from 1:55:22-2:04:40.

The first update the Chair provided, was to confirm that some RMP witnesses have officially been requested to provide witness statements to the Inquiry. These witnesses are being supported by members of both the Counsel and Government Legal Department teams. **Supporting the Chair in the difficult task of establishing the truth, the RMP will continue to fully support the Inquiry, in an open and transparent manner, ensuring witnesses provide their best, honest evidence.** It will ultimately be for the Chair of the Inquiry to make findings based on all the evidence he has heard from both OPEN and CLOSED hearings.

> Witness statements from the Royal Military Police have been requested and are being collated. These witnesses will be invited to give evidence in due course and Mr Pughsley will have the opportunity to review that evidence and be informed by it and may wish to update his provisional views that he has expressed in his substantial report.

1 - An excerpt from the transcript dated 28th January 2025, page 140, line 16.

The Chair also went on to provide updates on six key areas:

- Last autumn, the Inquiry heard from witnesses in CLOSED hearings who made direct contact with the Inquiry.
- The Complaints and Concerns Part 2 hearings, also held in CLOSED, have almost been concluded. The Inquiry has heard from those who broadly raised and encountered concerns within the military about the conduct of UKSF in the period covered by the Terms of Reference.
- The MOD's resourcing position has improved, and the progress of the Deliberate Detention Operations (DDO) Phase 3 have advanced.
- The Inquiry has obtained what it believes to be backups of the UKSF server known as ITS1. The Inquiry intends to restore the backups, with help of subject matter experts, and carry out their own analysis.

- Under the supervision of a national senior forensic expert, the Inquiry has also instructed forensic experts to assist with the analysis of selected DDOs. Please see the excerpt below for more details.
- The Inquiry is also in discussion with Leigh Day, on how is best to receive their evidence, the evidence of their clients, the Afghan Families.

> There are four areas, in particular, which are being considered: first, blood stain pattern analysis, to consider the blood stain patterns in the evidence published; second, ballistic analysis, to consider evidence relating to the use of firearms; third, clinical trauma; and, fourth, pathology, to consider the injuries suffered by the deceased, as depicted in the evidence.

2 - An excerpt from the transcript dated 28th January 2025, page 143, line 16.

Hearings

The Inquiry has recently heard oral evidence to the 'Potential obstruction of Operation CESTRO'. Gisted transcripts of the evidence heard during this phase of the Inquiry will be published on the Inquiry website in due course.

The Chair of the Inquiry has made Directions following hearings relating to Operation Cestro.

RMP Inquiry Team Uplift

The RMP Inquiry team which is supporting the RMP's response to the Inquiry is imminently being uplifted with an SO2 Witness Manager to ensure that our witnesses are best supported once they are called forward to give written and oral evidence.

Communications

All previous editions of this newsletter can be found on the Regimental Headquarters website under the 'Newsletters' section.

If you would like to receive this newsletter on a different email address, or if you would like to opt out of receiving this newsletter, then please contact SO1 Policy and Communications IIA via the group mailbox.

Disclosing Information

We continue to reach out to individuals who we require evidence from, in order to fulfil Rule 9 requests from the Inquiry. A Rule 9 evidence request is made under the Inquiries Act 2005 and is a legal notification sent to either individuals or organisations instructing them to provide relevant information or material to a Statutory Inquiry. **We must highlight that the Inquiry does have the power to compel evidence under section 21 of the Inquiries Act 2005.**

If you are approached by the Inquiry please speak to the RMP Inquiry team at this email address: ARMYPM-IIAGroupmailbox@mod.gov.uk. This will ensure that the right support is in place and enables us to act as a single point of contact, as well as ensuring that the agreed processes and protocols in place for the Inquiry to interact with Core Participants, is adhered to.

If you have any other information that you believe is relevant to the Inquiry, you may either contact us via the RMP Inquiry team group mailbox ***or*** you can make direct contact with the Inquiry team using the contact details at this link: https://www.iia.independent-inquiry.uk/contact-us/. If you have any relevant material to share with the Inquiry and wish to remain anonymous, you can use the IIA SecureDrop system. Further information around can be found using the same link as above.

If you are approached to give evidence, this is the opportunity for you to provide your honest thoughts and opinions to support this vital work.

Please continue to monitor your inboxes to ensure that you are up to date with Inquiry related correspondence. If you wish to discuss emails from the Inquiry, please reach out to the RMP Inquiry team. If you are aware of anyone that is affected by the IIA, and if they are not already on our communications distribution list, please inform us & we will add them.

The Media

Several personnel have been contacted by the media in relation to RMP legacy investigations, which is likely to continue as the Inquiry progresses. As all personnel, both serving and retired, are subject to the Official Secrets Act and it is advised that you refer any enquiries to the MOD Press Office who will engage and ensure all enquiries are handled appropriately. Their contact number is: +44207 2187 907.

If you are contacted by the media, you should inform both us (using the group mailbox) and the MOD press office, using the following email address: DDC-PR-News@mod.gov.uk.

You may wish to consider the amount of career detail you post on your social media profile(s), which could be used by journalists to make contact. Further information can be

found at the following link to assist you in securing your social media accounts: https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/social-media-how-to-use-it-safely

Welfare

Your welfare throughout the proceedings remains of upmost importance to us and we will make ourselves available on any day of the week, or location, that suits you in order to provide you with the support you require.

We encourage you to reach out to the following individuals and organisations for support, should you need it:

Army Operational Legacy Branch (AOLB):

Maj Tracey Brooks, tracey.brooks102@mod.gov.uk

RMP Regimental Secretary:

Col Jeremy Green, regsec@rhqrmp.org

Adjutant General's Corps Headquarters:

Assistant Corps Secretary Maj (retired) Ben Culleton, AGCRHQ-0GroupMailbox@mod.gov.uk

The Veterans Gateway:

http://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/

RMP Inquiry team:

ARMYPM-IIAGroupmailbox@mod.gov.uk

Inquiry Welfare page:

https://www.iia.independent-inquiry.uk/support/

Useful Links

DefNet:

https://modgovuk.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet/SitePages/An-update-on-the-Independent-Inquiry-relating-to-Afghanistan.aspx

Defence Connect:

Independent Inquiry relating to Afghanistan | Defence Connect (mod.uk)

Inquiry website:

https://www.iia.independent-inquiry.uk/

Inquiry Terms of Reference:

https://iiaweb-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/2023090_Terms_Of_Reference_IIA.pdf

MOD Inquiry SharePoint landing page (MODNet users only):

https://modgovuk.sharepoint.com/sites/IntranetMOD/SitePages/The-Independent-Inquiry-relating-to-Afghanistan.aspx?web=1

Feedback

We are very keen to hear your feedback regarding this newsletter. Is there something we can add that will make this process easier for you? Is there a section, not already included, that you would like to see? Would you like to see profiles of those in the RMP Inquiry team so that you can get to know us? Please don't hesitate to contact SO1 Policy and Communications IIA with your suggestions via the group mailbox.