Independent Inquiry relating to Afghanistan (IIA)

HQ PM(A) Newsletter: March 2026

Publication of Pughsley Material

You will remember that the Independent Inquiry relating to Afghanistan held two days of OPEN hearings to hear expert evidence from Alan Pughsley QPM on the 27th & 28th January 2025. Through comparison with Home Office best practice, Mr Pughsley prepared a report based on documentary evidence from the Operation NORTHMOOR and CESTRO investigations.

The report does not make findings that unlawful killings occurred, nor does it determine criminal liability for any individual. Instead, it sets out in detail how Mr Pughsley considers that structural weaknesses, leadership failures and repeated changes in strategy and personnel undermined the investigation's effectiveness from an early stage. It is important to remember that the Inquiry is yet to hear from witnesses who worked on Operation NORTHMOOR, and Mr Pughsley will then be commissioned by the Inquiry to review his findings in the light of their evidence and submit a final report informed by that evidence. The Chair will then consider Mr Pughsley's final report findings alongside the broader body of evidence he is examining.

There was a delay in the publication on the Inquiry's website of Mr Pughsley report and related material to permit the MOD Core Participant to make an application for a Restriction Order in respect of sections of these documents. In autumn 2025, the Inquiry responded and published a Ruling made by the Chair of the Inquiry in relation to the Ministry of Defence Corporate Team's application to restrict the report and related material.

Mr Pughsley's report and related material were published on the Inquiry's website on 12th March. The material includes, where relevant, names of RMP personnel, both serving and veteran.

There has been little media interest in the release of this material to date. However, if you are contacted by the media, I recommend that you politely decline to comment and refer the media to the MOD press office (DDC-PR-News@mod.gov.uk). Please inform both the RMP Inquiry team (ARMYPM-IIAGroupmailbox@mod.gov.uk) and the MOD press office as soon as reasonably practicable.

If you have any queries or concerns, or simply wish to talk this through, please do not hesitate to contact the SO2 Witness Manager and the remainder of the team via the RMP Inquiry team group mailbox to access welfare support or seek guidance.

Absences

We are engaging on a regular basis with the Inquiry to update them with witness non-availability and to ascertain the timeline for RMP evidence.

Please contact the RMP Inquiry team at the multiuser mailbox with your 2026 and 2027 long-term absences and non-availability. Do inform us of your deployments, courses and significant travel plans, etc, to ensure that we can keep all parties informed.

Chair's Opening Statement January 2026

The Chair opened the first hearing of 2026 by noting the Inquiry continued to make good progress with its lines of inquiry. He outlined a full year of witness hearings ahead and developments in the Inquiry's forensic work, with detailed materials soon to be shared with Core Participants, subject to security checks. Technical examination of the ITS1 server is ongoing, and the gisting of transcripts has resumed, following the September 2025 ruling, with continued close oversight to ensure only appropriate public disclosure.

The Chair emphasised strict adherence to Restriction Orders and the protection of witness anonymity. He repeated the need for proactive co-operation and the need to minimise delays, echoing directions from senior defence leadership. Finally, the Chair reaffirmed his commitment to ensuring that the Inquiry fulfils its Terms of Reference in the public interest, whilst remaining fair to all concerned. The full statement is: HERE.

Green Hearings Gisted Evidence

The Inquiry received evidence from a number of witnesses over the course of approximately one week during the phase of evidence known as "Green Hearings" under RESTRICTED conditions. Each witness was reminded of the Green Hearing Restriction Order made in relation to them, before giving oral evidence. The following is a summary of the evidence received by the Inquiry insofar as it can be disclosed into OPEN without breaching the Restriction Orders made in relation to the Green Hearings. It should not be taken to mean that such evidence was provided by all witnesses.

The Inquiry heard evidence about:

(i) UKSF being professional, driven, competitive, persistent and aggressive.

(ii) High pressured environments and demanding conditions.

(iii) The belief, at the time, the UKSF acted with integrity and largely within the spirit of the law.

(iv) Rivalry between UKSF1 and UKSF3.

(v) The perception of deficiencies in the detention process, including frustrations over short detention periods, and the perceived impact on the usefulness of Deliberate Detention Operations (DDOs).

(vi) Rumours of Afghan Partner Unit refusals to soldier with UKSF1 because of their conduct.

(vii) One occasion during a DDO when an individual was shot in the head whilst they may have been sleeping.

Inquiry Forensics Programme

The Inquiry's forensic programme comprises experts in pathology, ballistics, blood pattern analysis and clinical trauma. The programme is scientifically grounded, peer reviewed, and explicitly designed to minimise confirmation bias. Outputs will directly inform whether Operational Staff Work (OSW) narratives are credible, contradicted, or undermined by available photographic evidence and, therefore, may have significant implications for assessing the legality of the conduct of UK Special Forces during Deliberate Detention Operations (DDOs).

Purpose

The Inquiry is investigating whether individuals killed during the UKSF conducted DDOs in Afghanistan during mid 2010 and mid 2013 may have been unlawfully killed. Because traditional forensic avenues are unavailable, the Inquiry is using contemporaneous Sensitive Site Exploitation (SSE) photographic images to assess whether the official OSW accounts are

credible, or whether there are features within these images that cast doubt upon accounts given within OSW.

Forensic Strategy

The Inquiry's lead forensic advisor devised the method by which experts of different disciplines can consider the questioned material and comparator data. A multi-disciplinary expert panel covering pathology, ballistics, blood pattern analysis, and clinical trauma will work through three phases of examination in respect of each selected DDO.

Three phase approach

1. Phase 1 – Open Engagement. Experts independently review SSE photographic images and "tracings" (coded outlines of all visible features) from selected DDOs and provides initial observations.
2. Phase 2 – Structured Questioning. Experts answer standardised questions on each DDO, using a pack that includes associated images, tracings of each image and a constructed DDO matrix of OSW, question sets, and an index of the material.
3. Phase 3 – Panel Deliberation. Experts meet to integrate findings and produce a combined assessment on how far the images support or contradict the OSW narrative, using confidence scales.

A filtering stage (Phase 2.5) removes DDOs where meaningful analysis is not possible or where all experts agree the imagery aligns with OSW.

Additional Forensic Workstreams

- Ballistics Experiment: Testing muzzle flash and discharge patterns for UKSF weapons and AK type weapons to infer possible firing distances and compare them to the firing distances given in OSW to test accuracy of reporting in OSW.
- Duplicate Weapons Review: Assessing whether the same weapon appears across multiple operations (relevant to "dropped weapons" allegations).
- Comparative Data Sets: SSE photographic images of a number of comparator DDOs will be compiled and collated for experts so it is available for them ahead of the Phase 3 Panel sessions. Aspects of which the Inquiry will consider compiling comparative data will include: Location of trauma to the deceased, number of deceased compared with weapons identified/recovered, and the nature and extent of SSE conducted.

Quality Assurance

- Each expert's work independently peer reviewed by a specialist in the same field.
- Methodology designed to mitigate cognitive bias and maintain transparency.

Disclosure

Material will be released to Core Participants in staged intervals, following national security checks, to allow informed engagement and timely submissions.

BBC Application

The BBC has asked the Inquiry to lift reporting restrictions relating to the ciphers, 'UKSF1' and 'UKSF3', and 'SU', and to allow the naming of two individuals.

The BBC argues that the continued use of these ciphers is unnecessary, obstructive to public understanding, and contrary to the principles of open justice. The Core Participants were invited to submit their responses. The Chair will consider the application and submissions and issue his ruling in due course.

Inquiry visit to the International Criminal Court (ICC)

In November 2025, the Inquiry paid a further visit to the ICC in The Hague to update the Court about the progress of the Inquiry and, in the interests of complementarity, to provide assurances that the Inquiry continues to carry out its investigations independently and rigorously. The Inquiry will continue to engage with the ICC where necessary and appropriate in accordance with its duties.

Witness Support

Maj Matt Benn-Edwards is your Witness Manager. He is here to provide support to all RMP witnesses that are requested to provide evidence to the Inquiry. Initially he will be supporting witnesses through the process of providing written evidence and, should witnesses be called to provide oral evidence, Matt will be on hand to provide support through that process, too.

Matt can be contacted via the multiuser mailbox during normal working hours, or out of hours by appointment. Matt can be contacted via mobile for easier access, whether via call or text, at: +44 (0) 7717 451 962 or via Microsoft Teams at: +44 303 372 6554.

Matt and the remainder of the RMP Inquiry team remain contactable at: ARMYPM-IIAGroupmailbox@mod.gov.uk.

The team is always ready to assist, whether during office hours or by appointment for after-hours support.

The team has also been working with the Government Legal Department (GLD) to introduce a revised expense process, to ensure that witnesses are reimbursed reasonable expenses (as set out in the Protocol for the payment of non-legal expenses by the Independent Inquiry

relating to Afghanistan ('the Inquiry')) when travelling to witness meetings with GLD, in a timelier manner. Serving personnel will continue to submit claims via JPA. Veterans will now provide receipts to their GLD lawyer, who will then process them, ensuring timely payment via BACS. Further details on the process can be obtained from the RMP Inquiry team or GLD.

The Witness Support Leaflet outlines further support avenues, available to all witnesses.

Disclosing Information

If you have any information that you believe is relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, 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/providing-information-to-the-inquiry/. 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 this can be found using the same link as above.

The Inquiry continue to reach out to individuals who they require evidence from with Rule 9 requests. 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 are approached to give evidence, this is the opportunity for you to provide your honest thoughts and opinions to support this vital work.

If you have any information that does not fall within the Inquiry's Terms of Reference then we request that you report this to the Police.

The Defence Serious Crime Command (DSCC) is independent of the Chain of Command and responsible for investigating serious crime committed by persons subject to service law, in the UK and abroad. The Victim Witness Care Unit (VWCU) forms part of the DSCC and acts as a central point of contact for victims and witnesses of serious crime whilst providing support and guidance where required.

To find out more visit:

1. Defence Serious Crime Unit - Reporting a crime

2. Contact the VWCU

Communications

This newsletter will now be released on a quarterly basis. The next edition will be in June 2026.

Please continue to monitor your inboxes to ensure that you are up to date with Inquiry related correspondence. If you wish to discuss anything about the Inquiry, please reach out to the RMP Inquiry team.

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.

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 and we will add them.

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



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.

Please be assured that support remains available through the chain of command, the RMP Regimental Secretary, the AGC Assistant Corps Secretary, the Army Operational Legacy Branch, and the Veterans Gateway. Should you have any concerns you wish to discuss; please do not hesitate to do so.

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

RMP Inquiry team:

ARMYPM-IIAGroupmailbox@mod.gov.uk

SO2 Witness Manager:

Mobile at +44 (0) 7717 451 962 or Microsoft Teams at +44 303 372 6554

Army Operational Legacy Branch (AOLB):

ArmyPers-APSG-AOLB-0MAILBOX@mod.gov.uk

RMP Regimental Secretary:

Col Jeremy Green, Reg-Sec@RHQRMP.onmicrosoft.com

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/

Inquiry Support page:

Support - Independent Inquiry relating to Afghanistan

Op COURAGE:

Access Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service - GOV.UK

Useful Links

Defence Connect:

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

Inquiry website:

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

Inquiry Terms of Reference:

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.