



Inquiry Newsletter Update March 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: [Chairs-opening-statement-January-2026.pdf](#)

Alan Pughsley report and evidence

An independent expert report commissioned by the Inquiry and authored by the former Chief Constable of Kent Police, Mr Alan Pughsley QPM has today been published on the Inquiry's website.

Mr Pughsley gave OPEN evidence to the Inquiry in January 2025 in relation to Operation Northmoor, the Royal Military Police investigation into allegations arising from operations in Afghanistan, and was asked his expert opinion into the investigation, including how it was led, whether it was adequately resourced, and if it met the standards expected of a major investigation. Mr Pughsley's Report and evidence can be found on the Inquiry Website: [Evidence - Independent Inquiry relating to Afghanistan](#)

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
- 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.

Judicial Review

In June last year, the Chair made a ruling on the Inquiry's approach to 'Green Hearings' in which the Chair stated that, to afford the greatest protection to vulnerable witnesses, only a selected number of legal representatives and Inquiry Staff, would be allowed to attend. That decision was legally challenged by witness IIA126 who was represented by the Ministry of Defence witness legal team. A case management hearing was held on 29 January 2026 which covered a number of procedural issues, including how to manage the OPEN and CLOSED element of the claim.

The Chair repeats his commitment to the welfare and safety of witnesses who come forward to the Inquiry. An OPEN judgment is expected from the High Court in the coming weeks.

A gist of those 'Green Hearings' has been published on the Inquiry's website: [Inquiry-Gist-of-the-evidence-heard-during-the-Green-Hearings.pdf](#)

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.