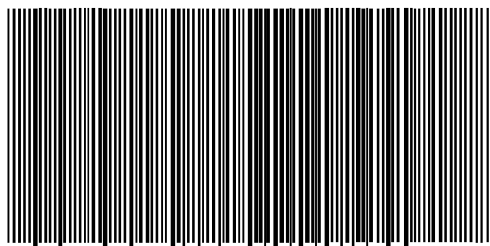


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MOD-221-0004154-A

I wanted to write and repeat formally my long-held concerns regarding the latest dump of emails in the Sunday Times this past weekend surrounding detention operations involving UKSF in 2011.

Upon appointment into the department you asked me to look into these cases, with a view to the potential political implications for the Prime Minister's strategic political objective of ending vexatious claims against our people.

After doing so, I informed you then that I did not think it was credible for [UKSF1] to state to investigators that there is no FMV footage of any of the ten operations John Murphy investigated. Further it was not credible that when questioned, almost [NG UKSF1] members of that unit suffered what the judge has described as 'collective amnesia' when it came to these events.

I stressed that my only concerns were political – moral and operational judgments were for others. But having been a long term campaigner to end the industrial level of vexatious claims against Serving Personnel and Veterans, I expressed very clearly to you, DSF and CGS that the small window of opportunity that I had engineered over many years to pass legislation to this effect, would be closed if we were exposed for being unable to hold our people to account.

That I have now been allowed to read out statements to the House of Commons that individuals in strategic appointments in the department knew to be incorrect is completely unacceptable. These were clearly not complaints by a 'small number of individuals within the investigations team' but widespread. I have continually down-played these allegations in public too to support [UKSF1] and the department. That was clearly a mistake.

I would like to formally request in this letter to make a statement to the House in the first week of September, correcting the record.

The strategic implications of a lethal force such as UKSF being either so naïve as to not collect and keep evidence to protect our people, organisations and Nation from lawfare, or unwilling to share evidence with investigators that might implicate them, presents an extreme risk that the political leadership team should not carry.

My views have nothing at all to do with my service – a theme I have disappointingly been presented with from you today and heard from others in Main Building being put about by senior leaders from [UKSF1]. I have left my experiences a long way behind and am comfortable I have risen to the challenge of being the Minister for Defence People and Veterans. I am proud of the way I have navigated the challenges of the role and believe we have delivered in many areas. I am an elected politician who has previously served; that is all. I have repeatedly made clear that my views on this subject are of the political consideration, not the tactical, operational or moral. Protecting individuals, units and indeed the Government from lawfare is basic professionalism. That this view has been presented to me - ironically questioning my professionalism - has irritated me significantly.

Finally this whole episode makes me very sad. I – like you – have dedicated my political career to improving the lot of those who serve – both currently and veterans. I repeatedly warned against this outcome, and yet it has happened, and I have suffered significant reputational damage in my pursuit of ending vexatious claims that have ruined the lives of so many of our finest people. I will continue in this pursuit, but this boil must be lanced, and I can never be put in this position again.