

HEARING – Monday 12 October 2026

CHAIR’S OPENING STATEMENT – 10:00-10:15 am

The Rt Hon. Lord Justice Haddon-Cave:

Good morning.

1. Before we commence today’s hearing, I want to take this opportunity in OPEN to give a general update on the work and progress of the Inquiry and re-emphasise a few points.

Terms of Reference

2. The Terms of Reference require me to investigate and report on allegations of the utmost seriousness – and I emphasise these remain *allegations* at this stage - namely:
 - (1) whether there is credible information that UK Special Forces deliberately executed Afghan males during Deliberate Detention Operations (‘DDOs’) in Afghanistan between mid-2010 and mid-2013;
 - (2) whether concerns and complaints expressed at the time were properly addressed;
 - (3) whether the 4 ½ year investigation by the Royal Military Police was adequate;
 - (4) whether unlawful conduct was covered up at any stage.
3. It should be understood:
 - This is not about split-second decisions, taken in combat.
 - This is not about the ‘fog of war’.
 - This is about whether the SAS engaged in a practice of executing ‘males of a fighting age’ in Afghanistan.
4. It will be recalled that the allegations of ‘unlawful killings’ originated from within Special Forces themselves.

Support of CoS, PUS and CPs

5. I am grateful for the continuing support of the Chiefs of Staff, who have emphasised again recently: “*Cooperation with the Inquiry is vital to ensuring it can fully and fairly examine these serious allegations, and to upholding the values and standards the Armed Forces are rightly held to*”.
6. I am grateful for the support of Permanent Secretary, Jeremy Pocklington, on behalf of the Sponsor, in particular in providing the Inquiry the resources it needs to date to fulfil its Terms of Reference.

7. I am also grateful for the hard work and efforts of those in the Core Participant teams and their continuing close engagement with the Inquiry teams.

Inquiry work since January 2025

8. The last OPEN witness hearing was in January last year, when we heard the expert evidence of Chief Constable Alan Pughsley. The Inquiry has been extremely busy in the interim. The Inquiry team has sifted huge volumes of documents, pursued multiple lines of enquiry (some of which I will touch on in a moment), and held over 30 weeks of witness hearings - all of which I have ordered to be in CLOSED for reasons of National Security and the protection and safety of witnesses.

Deliberate Detention Operations

9. The Terms of Reference involve the Inquiry considering *hundreds* of DDOs which took place during this three-year period. The Inquiry is now on the third phase of its published three-phase investigative strategy:
 - (1) *Phase 1* established a high-level narrative of each individual DDO, together with patterns and other key details, such as the number of Afghan males killed during the operations, the use of particular tactics, and the ratio of those killed versus weapons recorded.
 - (2) *Phase 2* examined the Official Staff Work documentation, which recorded the events said to have taken place, for a selected proportion of DDOs.
 - (3) *Phases 3A and 3B* involve the comprehensive retrieval and close analysis of documentary evidence, and the obtaining of witness statements and oral testimony from the soldiers and officers involved.

Restriction Order Rulings

10. It will be recalled that in May this year, I issued a Ruling permitting the use of the terms 'SAS' (Special Air Service) and 'SBS' (Special Boat Service) instead of the ciphers 'UKSF1' and 'UKSF3'. I did so for reasons of accuracy and transparency - it was evident that it was the SAS who carried out the overwhelming majority of the DDOs in question - and because the previous naming restrictions were no longer necessary for National Security or in the public interest.
11. It should be noted that I have maintained existing Restriction Order protections for the anonymity of all ciphered witnesses, which remain firmly in place for the present. The Inquiry will continue carefully to monitor media reporting to ensure that all Restriction Orders are adhered to.

DDO Phase 3B

12. As part of its DDO Phase 3B inquiries, the Inquiry has identified numerous SAS personnel from whom it wishes to hear direct evidence as to the DDOs in question, and has issued Rule 9 requests for information to each of them. A high proportion have indicated their intention to rely on their privilege against self-incrimination and have refused to answer any questions asked by the Inquiry.

Tactics, techniques and procedures ('TTPs')

13. The Inquiry has investigated the use of a particular UK Special Forces TTP ('Tactics, Techniques and Procedures') of ordering and/or escorting a male Afghan detainee back into a compound building, ostensibly to assist with clearance of occupants - which is alleged to have been used, repeatedly, as cover to enable the execution of fighting-aged males away from prying eyes. The Inquiry has also investigated an internal UKSF review into this 'clearance' TTP, following concerns expressed about it amongst senior members of both the SAS and the SBS.

Forensics

14. The Inquiry has obtained some 10,000 high-resolution photographic images which were taken in the course of these DDOs, but do not appear to have formed part of the Royal Military Police inquiries. An eminent forensic scientist is leading a team of experts in ballistics, blood pattern analysis, clinical trauma and pathology who are currently examining these images to assess their evidential significance.

ITS1

15. It will be recalled that the Inquiry heard evidence that, in 2016, data was wiped from a key Special Forces computer server (known as 'ITS1'), despite the Royal Military Police being given assurances that it would be preserved for examination. The Inquiry managed to locate and seize the backup tapes to server ITS1, and a team is currently carrying out a specialist forensic analysis of the tapes to determine the nature and significance of material that may otherwise have been deleted.

Afghan families

16. The Inquiry is seeking evidence from the Afghan families who lost loved ones during the DDOs. I intend to hear their evidence in OPEN hearings early next year.

Complaints and concerns

17. The Inquiry has heard extensive witness evidence regarding contemporaneous concerns and complaints raised both by UK Special Forces personnel and other individuals about the manner in which the SAS were conducting DDOs in Afghanistan during the period in question.

Direct contact witnesses

18. The Inquiry continues to hear from witnesses who have approached the Inquiry team, directly and confidentially, with information about what they saw, heard or learned regarding events in theatre at this time.
19. We continue to encourage anyone who believes they have information (however minor) that they think might assist the Inquiry to come forward. There are secure and confidential routes available for contacting the Inquiry explained on the Inquiry website, and the personal safety and anonymity of all witnesses is of paramount concern to me.
20. I am grateful to all witnesses who have come forward.

Referral to Service Police

21. As emerged during a hearing in the High Court last week, at a result of enquiries set in train by the Inquiry, the Ministry of Defence identified material that indicated that UK Special Forces personnel, deployed on some of operations being considered by the Inquiry, may have committed serious offences under the Armed Forces Act 2006. The matter was referred by UK Special Forces Headquarters to the Defence Serious Crime Command, in accordance with s.113 of that Act. It is understood that following a scoping exercise, the Service Police have paused any criminal investigation into the matter pending the conclusion of the Inquiry.

'97 million documents'

22. It will be recalled that MOD recently revealed the discovery of 97 million documents on their DAS system – a digital repository on which electronic data is archived and preserved. Counsel for the MOD assured me only a small proportion are thought to be even potentially relevant, and urgent steps are being taken to interrogate this database. I have directed a further update is to be provided at 10:00 on Friday this week in OPEN in order that the Inquiry and the public can be apprised of the steps taken and the progress made by the MOD in this regard.

Deadline for completion of 'unlawful killings' evidence – April 2027

23. It will be appreciated, from what I have outlined, that the scale of the Inquiry's task and investigation has proved greater and more complex than originally envisaged. It will also be appreciated the vital importance of care being taken to establish the true facts, one way or the other.
24. Over the next few months, the Inquiry has listed a further sixteen weeks of hearings in both OPEN and CLOSED.
25. I have set a deadline for the completion of the evidence relating to the allegations of 'unlawful killings' by 30th April next year. I have made it clear that this deadline must be kept to.
26. As I have said, it would not fair to the veterans, serving soldiers and officers, their families or the Afghan families, for the Inquiry to be delayed further for want of resources or efficiency.

Gists

27. I trust this brief update has been helpful. The Inquiry continues - whenever possible and consistent with national security - to publish summaries of evidence given by witnesses in CLOSED hearings. These summaries or 'gists' are important in assisting public understanding of the Inquiry's work and the evidence given. They involve months of painstaking work and collaboration by Inquiry and MOD teams to ensure national security, operational sensitivities, and witness anonymity and safety are protected. I recognise that the process of preparing, reviewing and agreeing evidence summaries is resource-intensive and takes time. Nevertheless, I am keen to see this process progress more quickly and efficiently, and for delays to be avoided.

ICC and NATO

28. Finally, let me mention a couple of recent visits. In September, I paid a further visit to the International Criminal Court (to which the United Kingdom is a State Party) to update the Office of the Prosecutor as to the continued progress of the Inquiry and, in accordance with the Principle of Complementarity, to provide assurances that the Inquiry commissioned by the UK Government continues to carry out its investigations independently and rigorously.
29. I also travelled again to Brussels for meetings at NATO Headquarters – including with the Office of the Secretary-General, Mark Rutte. I am grateful for their unequivocal support for the Inquiry, and for the extensive work being undertaken by the NATO Archive Team to identify material that may be relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

Royal Military Police ('RMP')

30. Turning now to today's proceedings: the preparation for these Royal Military Police ('RMP') hearings has taken a great deal of time, effort and midnight oil to ensure materials could be appropriately considered in OPEN. I wish to thank those on all sides who have worked hard to ensure the bulk of these hearings could proceed on schedule. I have postponed a small number of RMP witnesses because time ran out properly to address the national security sensitivities of their evidence, and also because it made sense to hear them as a group together the remaining RMP witnesses next year.
31. We will now hear OPEN witness evidence relating to the Royal Military Police investigation Operation NORTHMOOR, and these hearings will run for a period of almost three weeks throughout this week and then the weeks of 26 October and 9 November.

Mr Glasgow...