



SAS didn't refer Afghanistan atrocity allegations to police in case it upset soldiers

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SAS

Commanders of the UK military's most elite special forces didn't refer [war crimes allegations](#) to police, an inquiry has heard. The reasons they decided not to may astound our readers: an anonymous senior officer said that there were fears doing so might upset SAS troops.

[The inquiry](#) has been going on for several years. Current and former Special Air Service (SAS) personnel have been granted anonymity to give evidence. The inquiry concerns allegations that innocent Afghan civilians were murdered in 2011.

Some allegations suggest detainees were handcuffed before being executed. And that weapons seized elsewhere were placed on their bodies to frame the dead as terrorists.

As the *Canary* has [reported](#)

One SAS squadron may have murdered up to 54 people in a single tour in 2011. The Unredacted website has a useful briefing on cover-up culture within special forces. Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) have also followed the inquiry closely.

New testimony emerged on 28 May. The BBC [reported](#)

A former chief of staff of UK Special Forces has told a public inquiry he believed war crimes allegations against the SAS were not referred to military police out of concern an investigation could disrupt operations and negatively affect morale.

The former officer [said](#) that the fact allegations had come from a rival unit, the Special Boat Service (SBS), also shaped decision-making:

The officer, the second highest ranking in special forces at the time, said another factor in the decision was that evidence had in part come via a rival special forces regiment.

The BBC [said](#) the decision not to refer the allegations meant:

military police did not learn for years of special forces concerns that the SAS was carrying out extra-judicial killings and submitting falsified reports.

SAS â?? Internal review instead of police referral

The BBC [reported](#)

Despite the severity of the allegations, the then-director of UK Special Forces decided in 2011 not to refer them to the Royal Military Police, instead commissioning an internal review into the tactics being used by the SAS.

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The decision was controversial because every commanding officer in the British military has a legal obligation to alert military police if they become aware that someone under their command may have committed a war crime.

Details of [that review](#) beggar belief. It was led:

by a UKSF officer close to the SAS unit responsible for the raids under scrutiny and signed off by the commanding officer of the unit.

The SAS [deemed the review completed](#) in:

just a week and found no evidence of criminal wrongdoing.

The officer, known as N2252, [said](#)

he believed the director had felt a military police investigation would take too long to deliver results, and that an internal review â??could be done quicklyâ? and would â??send a signalâ? to those responsible for the troubling operations.

N2252 also [told](#) the inquiry that:

alerting the Royal Military Police to these concerns in 2011 would have interfered with the high tempo of SAS operations, at a time when the regiment was tasked with going after Taliban operatives and bombmakers responsible for laying IEDs.

The officer [said](#)

You would take the sub-unit out, you would conduct the investigation and they would be thinking about the investigation and not on planning the next operation.

The outlet [reported](#) that N2252 felt that:

applying that kind of scrutiny to the SAS's operations could have undermined trust within UK Special Forces, telling the inquiry that if headquarters had questioned the accounts given by troops "the message that will have gone back to them is 'we don't believe you'."

Kay?

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British military exceptionalism

Another former officer, known as N889, did [concede to the inquiry](#) that he had been naive about alleged false reports from the raids:

I totally accept, you know, all these years later looking back that perhaps one should have taken a slight harder view.

[Adding](#)

I maybe naively read this stuff, believed it and carried on.

The absolute cream of the British officer class right there.

As the *Canary* has [reported](#)

Allegedly special forces chiefs blocked asylum claims for allies because they may have witnessed war crimes. In May, "files, disclosed by the Ministry of Defence in court on Thursday, show the unnamed UKSF officer rejected every application referred to him in the summer of 2023". There were 1,585 cases.

The latest tranche of evidence suggests up to 80 people may have been killed. The then-president of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai even [intervened](#) at one point. And Afghan troops allegedly [refused to work with the British](#) due to the allegations.

You can read more about the inquiry and allegations of UK special forces war crimes at [Action on Armed Violence](#) (AOAV) and [Unredacted UK](#). Declassified UK have also reported on the issue a?? one allegation claims that SAS troops [shot toddlers](#)

The inquiry, [led by Judge Haddon-Cave](#) has no legal power. And its [frame of reference is typically narrow](#). It is not clear when or what it will report. What does seem clearer by the day is that a culture of barbarism, impunity and cover-up came to exist in UK and allied special forces in Afghanistan.

Ghaith Abdul-Ahad/Getty Images

By [Joe Glenton](#)

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