



The UK Government's "Long-Standing Policy" on Special Forces Operations: A review 1940-2020

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1. The "long-standing policy"

The first instance of a reference to a policy or practise of not commenting on matters regarding the use of special forces was made on 24 May 1988. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Ian Stewart, was asked by Tam Dalyell "under what and on whose authority does the SAS operate?", to which Stewart replied "it has long been the policy of this Government and their predecessors not to comment on the activities of, or arrangements for, our special forces". The first use of the phrase "long-standing policy" specifically was made on 11 April 1994 by Baroness Lynda Chalker, who stated that "the noble Lord asked about the role of the Special Air Services. He will know that it is long-standing policy not to comment on special forces matters. Beyond that I can make no further comment today".

The seeming 'invention' of the policy can be observed over the course of the 1980s.

In the early 1980s, numerous MPs, including Prime Minister Margret Thatcher, explicitly acknowledged the use of the SAS during the 1980 Iranian embassy hostage crisis. For instance, in May 1980 Thatcher stated that "I should like to say one word about events yesterday. It was, I believe, a brilliant operation, carried out by the Special Air Service with courage and confidence". Furthermore, MPs discussed the presence of UK special forces in the Falklands and Northern Ireland. For instance, in February 1982, Mr Kilfedder stated that "the SAS is presently in Northern Ireland", and in May 1982, Paul Bryan, stated that "the troops that we have sent to the Falkland Islands—marines, parachute battalions, SAS and Gurkhas—are probably the finest and best trained in the world".

In July 1983, a disinclination towards discussing security matters was mentioned. Julian Amery stated that "the campaigns in Oman and the Falklands showed that our SAS and SBS capability is one of the best in the world", but acknowledged that "it is almost taboo to talk about so-called clandestine operations". Moreover, in December 1983, Peter Robinson acknowledged a potential limit on what may be discussed pertaining to the use of special forces, stating that "I realise that there are limitations on what the Secretary of State can tell the House about SAS duties in the Province".

It was from 1988 onwards, however, that references to the so-called long-standing policy/practice emerged. As mentioned above, in May 1988, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Ian Stewart, stated that “it has long been the policy of this Government and their predecessors not to comment on the activities of, or arrangements for, our special forces”. In June 1988, Thatcher claimed that “we never discuss matters concerning security forces in this House”, as did Roger Freeman, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, who similarly asserted that “it has been the general practice of successive Governments not to comment on detailed matters of security policy”. In June 1989, Lord David Trefgarne, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, stated that “it has long been the practice of successive British governments not to comment on intelligence and security matters”.

These claims, however, were demonstrably false. Not only did the Thatcher government not adhere to the so-called policy, but neither had its predecessors ever referred to, let alone adhered to, any such policy. For instance, in January 1976, Prime Minister Harold Wilson revealed during an exchange with an MP over troop deployments in Northern Ireland that “the SAS will be employed and deployed solely under the control of the GOC [General Officer Commanding in Northern Ireland] as soldiers aiding the other soldiers in dealing with all the problems of terrorism in the area”.

The government’s apparent adoption of the so-called policy in 1988 may have been an extension of the existing policy with regard to MI5 and MI6, as Margaret Thatcher, when questioned about MI5 on 4 April 1982 stated that “it is the practice—long hallowed by all parties—not to comment from this Dispatch Box on matters of security”. MI5 was only officially acknowledged in 1989 and MI6 in 1994, although the former had been mentioned in Parliament in 1952 and the latter in 1986. GCHQ was officially acknowledged in 1982.

2. Freedom of Information Act

In addition to the so-called "long standing policy" of not commenting on the special forces, under section 23(3)(d) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, information held by or relating to the special forces is exempt information. The Act defines "special forces" as "those units of the armed forces of the Crown the maintenance of whose capabilities is the responsibility of the Director of Special Forces or which are for the time being subject to the operational command of that Director". The "long standing policy" is still of relevance, however, as the Act does not preclude the government from releasing information pertaining to special forces, it merely ensures that it is not legally obliged to do so.

The elements that Director Special Forces is responsible for, as of 2020:

- Special Air Service
 - 22 SAS
 - L Det (reserves)
- Special Boat Service (SBS)
 - SBS (R) (reserves)
- Special Reconnaissance Regiment (SRR)
- Special Forces Support Group
 - 1 PARA, Parachute Regiment
 - F Company, Royal Marines
 - elements of RAF Regiment
- 18 (UKSF) Signals
 - 264 (SAS) Signals
 - R Troop (reserves)
 - SBS Signals
 - 63 (SAS) Signals (reserves)
 - 267 (SRR) Signals
 - 268 (SFSG) Signals
 - Light Electronic Warfare Teams

Source: Eliteukforces.info

3. Search terms

To identify statements in Parliament pertaining to the use of UK special forces, the following search terms were used in Hansard:

- Special forces
- Air Service
- SAS (inc. S.A.S.)
- Boat Service
- SBS (inc. S.B.S.)
- Special Operations Executive
- SOE (inc. S.O.E.)
- Long been the policy
- Long been the position
- Long held policy (inc. long-held policy)
- Long held position (inc. long-held position)

- Long term policy (inc. long-term policy)
- Long term position (inc. long-term position)
- Long standing position (inc. long-standing position)
- No comment
- Not to comment
- Long standing policy (inc. long-standing policy)

4. 1940–1949

[18/06/1941](#), Lord Addison, "Recent War Events" in the House of Lords:

"More than once I have joined with the noble Viscount [...] in opposing the absorption of the Air service in the War Office [...] It is a deadly, paralysing system, and if we are going to win this war we have got to give brains a better chance. **I cannot help thinking that the reason this great problem of the adequate defence of aerodromes proved to be so critical**, and has not been apprehended and adequately deal with, is that we have not given enough play to brains at the top [...] I am saying these somewhat unkind things deliberately because it is of urgent consequence—and the lessons of Crete prove it to be so—that the neglect, which clearly must be neglect, **or we should not find the Air Ministry last week appealing for special forces to defend aerodromes**, must be ended".

[10/04/1945](#), Sir J. Grigg, "Captured Troops (German Executions)" in the House of Commons:

On or about 20th August, 1944, **two men of the Special Air Service Regiment operating behind the enemy lines near Orleans were captured and executed at Chilleurs Aux Bois**. On or about 3rd July, 1944, **one officer and one trooper of the Special Air Service Regiment were wounded and captured near Poitiers**. The officer was killed by repeated blows on the head with a rifle butt. The trooper was severely beaten but survived. On or about 6th June, 1944, seven British soldiers of the Parachute Regiment were taken prisoner and afterwards killed by German troops. On 5th July, 1944, **two corporals and nine men of the Special Air Regiment were captured near Paris**. On 9th August the two corporals and four of the men were taken by the Gestapo to a wood near Beauvais and were lined up to be shot. The two corporals escaped by running away, but the four men were shot".

[28/01/1947](#), Mr. M. Lindsay and Mr. Bellenger, "2nd SAS Regiment (War Crime Trials)" in the House of Commons:

Mr. M. Lindsay "asked the Secretary of State for War what action, and with what result, has been taken by the War Crimes Commission in the following cases of **German atrocities against officers and men of the 2nd S.A.S. Regiment**: execution at Gaggenau on about 25th November, 1944; torture and maltreatment at Rotenfels, Schirmeck and Eaales, November, 1944; the cases of Lieutenant Silly, Sergeant Fitzpatrick, Privates Brown and Lewis, captured in France in November, 1944; and **the case of Captain Dudgeon, S.A.S. Regiment, executed in the Passe della Cisa, on 3rd October, 1943, by order of General von Zielberg**".

Mr. Bellenger - (written answer) "The Gaggenau Case, **which relates to the shooting of four officers and two other ranks of the 2nd S.A.S. Regiment**, together with four United States prisoners of war and four French civilians, was tried by British Military Court at Wuppertal between 6th and 10th May, 1946. Of 11 accused, five were sentenced to death, one to 10 years' imprisonment, one to eight years, one to four years, one to three years, one to two years, and one accused was acquitted. Torture and maltreatment at Rotenfels, Schirmeck and Saales. **There are two cases involving the shooting of 16 members of the 2nd S.A.S. Regiment.** There is, however, no evidence of torture or maltreatment of the victims. **In the first case eight other ranks of the 2nd S.A.S. Regiment were taken from Saales to La Grande Fosse and shot there on 15th October, 1944.** Fourteen accused were tried by Military Court at Wuppertal between 15th and 21st May, 1946. Of these, one was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, two to eight years, three to four years, one to three years, one to two years, and six were acquitted. Investigations into the complicity of other suspects are continuing. In the second case, **one officer and seven other ranks of the 2nd S.A.S. Regiment were taken from Schirmeck to St. Die and shot there in September, 1944.** Fifteen accused were tried by Military Court at Wuppertal between 22nd and 25th May, 1946. Of these, three were sentenced to death, one to 13 years' imprisonment, two to 10 years, one to seven years, one to six years, one to five years, one to three years, and five were acquitted. Investigations into the complicity of other suspects are continuing in this case also".

[09/03/1948](#), Mr. Fitzroy Maclean, "Mr Shinwell's Statement" in the House of Lords:

"When I first joined the Special Air Service Regiment in the Desert at the **end of 1941, it numbered half a dozen officers and about 30 other ranks.** We made our parachute jumps from Wellington bombers borrowed on their off-days from the R.A.F. station next door when they were not required for bombing operations. **At that time we had the distinction of being the only British parachute unit in the whole of that Middle Eastern theatre of war.** Indeed, the fact that the Special Air Service Regiment ever came into existence and its successes in several theatres of war, were in the first place largely due to the initiative and enterprise of one subaltern of 25".

5. 1950–1959

[10/11/1950](#), Colonel Crosthwaite-Eyre, "Royal Marines Volume 480: debated on Friday 10 November 1950", House of Commons, Columns 1340-1341.

"Surely the first lesson we have learned this summer, particularly in Korea, is the necessity of having a striking force immediately available; not a force that can be collected in a few weeks or months, but something that is there, poised and ready, and able to be used in time of need. We have heard General MacArthur's pleas for seasoned troops and how **he welcomed our one Royal Marine special unit, which I think was raised by special recruitment, including wireless appeals.** It was raised literally in hours, and **it has done extremely well in Korea.** I believe I am right in saying that **they took part in four special operations of which three were outstanding successes.** No doubt the **Parliamentary Secretary can tell us a little more about the history of that unit when he replies.**"

[12/12/1950](#), Mr Driberg & Mr Callaghan, "Royal Marine Commando (Operations, Korea) Volume 482: debated on Tuesday 12 December 1950

Mr Driberg: “will [the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty] publish in HANSARD a summary account of the part so far played in the Korean campaign by the 41st Independent Commando, Royal Marines, including a statement on the present whereabouts and function of this unit and the number of casualties sustained.”

Mr Callaghan: “Following is the account:

“41st Independent Commando R.M. (Lieut.- Colonel D. B. Drysdale, M.B.E., R.M.) arrived in Japan by air in early September as the result of a request from the American naval commander in the Far East for troops for **special commando type operations against North Korea.**

Within four days of their arrival in Japan a detachment of the Commando—1 officer and 14 other ranks—**left to take part in an operation in the Inchon area.** They left Japan on 10th September with a Special Operations company of the U.S. Army and **took part in a beach reconnaissance** on the night of 12/13th September to the south of Inchon. On 18th September the detachment landed at Inchon with the U.S. Special Operations company and subsequently took part in **several successful operations in the Seoul area.**”

[10/03/1952](#), Mr White, Mr Maclean & Mr Head (Secretary of State for War), “Training Methods Volume 497: debated on Monday 10 March 1952”, House of Commons, Columns 1108, 1189-1190, 1206.

Mr White: “I now turn to a very important aspect of advanced training, and that is the question of the Special Air Service Regiment. **Can the House be told, within the limits of security, more about the Special Air Service Regiment?** It is not mentioned in the Memorandum to the Estimates. In the Explanatory Note to the Estimates it is mentioned in 14 words: “**The Special Air Service Regiment carries out small scale operations behind the enemy lines.**”

... I believe that there is a Territorial unit up to strength, but I should like to know something more about such Regular formations as there are. My own wartime experience in close contact with special operations leads me to believe that the Special Air Service Regiment should be raised as soon as possible to divisional strength...

... I do not suppose there is anyone in the War Office today who knows more about the value and **importance of the Special Air Service than my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. He will also know the hostility that existed to the Special Air Service in the War Office during the war**, based on a deep-rooted fear and dislike of private armies, until the Special Air Service, the Long Range Desert Group, and the Special Boat Service of Raiding Forces Mediterranean had proved their sterling worth. I hope we shall have a Special Air Service Division as soon as possible.”

Mr Maclean: “If we are going to make the best of our opportunities in the event of war... What preparations are in fact being made? I am glad to see that provision is made in the Estimates for the retention of the Special Air Service Regiment, **which had such a fine record of operation in the field of small-scale raiding in the last war.** But, as far as I know—and I hope, when the Secretary of State replies, he will enlighten me if I am wrong, the **Special Air Service Regiment consists at the moment of a single Territorial battalion that is not quite up to strength.** That battalion happens to be a first-rate Territorial unit. That is not enough.

...I think **there should be other S.A.S. battalions** and that they should include at least one Regular battalion. I do not think we can do all the training needed for this sort of operations in a fortnight once a year or in an hour or two's training once a week...

... Today we are spending vast sums on defence. The preparations for which I ask are not primarily a question of money. The results produced are out of all proportion to the outlay. Hon. Members will perhaps understand better what I mean when I say that **in the Western Desert one of my brother officers in the Special Air Service Regiment**, drawing, I think, at the time a captain's pay, **destroyed with his own hands and with a certain amount of high explosive in the space of 12 months no fewer than 100 enemy aircraft on the ground**. That, I think, was a very good return indeed for the money spent."

Mr Head: "The hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Baker White) particularly asked me about the Special Air Service Regiment, and so did the hon. Member for Lancaster (Mr. Maclean). I have, as the latter knows, a great sympathy for this type of unit. **It is in existence today, and I believe that in a future war, which is less and less a linear and more and more a war of points, that type of unit is of great importance**, and I can assure him I have the matter in mind.

Of course, in both that and the question of airborne formations raised by the hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Gough), **it is no good having large Forces** capable of dropping here, there and everywhere **unless one can match them with the necessary supply of transport aircraft**. **That, as hon. Members will know, presents a considerable problem.**"

[08/03/1955](#), Mr Head in "Children's Educational Facilities Volume 538: debated on Tuesday 8 March 1955", House of Commons, Column 368.

"My hon. Friend made some remarks about the S.A.S., a unit in which the Under-Secretary and I have a particular interest, so it is well represented on the political side of the War Office. I believe it is a significant unit in the sense that it is capable of operating independently, relying entirely on air drop, and can be dropped almost anywhere.

It is of great use in the cold war, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that both of us have a sympathy with it, that **recently the numbers have been increased in Malaya, that I think there will probably be still further contributions to it in Malaya**, and that the technique and use to which it has been put in that country has been of great value. As some hon. Members know, **these are now, I think, the only airborne troops in the world who jump straight out of the aircraft into the tops of trees, to which they tie a rope, and then lower themselves**. Any hon. Member who has been to Malaya and knows the conditions there will know that that is a very dangerous manoeuvre."

[01/03/1956](#), Mr Maclean (War Office), in "Organisation Volume 549: debated on Thursday 1 March 1956", House of Commons, Column 1626.

"In the **future the rôle of our airborne forces will lie somewhere between that of the old airborne division, designed to go into battle as a formation, and that of the Special Air Service Regiment, trained to operate in small parties at considerable distances behind the**

enemy lines. That applies both to the Territorial Army Brigade Group and to the Regular Brigade Group.

Following my right hon. Friend, I have tried to give the House an idea of the tactical changes taking place in the Army. It is a continuous process and I think it can be said that we are successfully keeping abreast of the times.”

[06/06/1956](#), Mr Hare in “Kenya (Situation) Volume 553: debated on Wednesday 6 June 1956”, House of Commons,

I think the House will agree with me that this success reflects the greatest credit upon the leadership and imagination of General Lathbury. He has ceaselessly **adapted the use of military forces** to the very rapidly changing nature of the campaign. This campaign, as the House knows, **largely consists of special operations against limited and exceedingly elusive targets in very difficult country.** In this context also I should like to pay tribute to those who had been and **still are engaged in these hazardous operations.** This year these have led to the award of three George Cross Medals.

[25/06/1958](#), Lord Mancroft, in The Territorial Army's Jubilee Volume 210: debated on Wednesday 25 June 1958, House of Lords, Column 197.

“Armoured regiments will carry out firing practice at Castle Martin. The noble Lord, Lord Ogmore, asked about equipment. He will be interested to know that the armoured regiments are getting Centurion tanks. The gunners will also get as much opportunity for firing as possible. No. 44 Parachute Brigade will be holding several small airborne exercises during its camp at Castle Martin in August. **Three squadrons of 21 S.A.S. regiment are due to take part in a N.A.T.O. exercise in Norway in September.** Ten infantry battalions and one gunner regiment will undergo civil defence training during their annual camps this year. **I give your Lordships this catalogue** merely to show the realism and energy with which the training programme is being pursued.

The noble Lord, Lord Ogmore, referred to an article in yesterday's Daily Telegraph which, coming as it did from the pen of General Martin, universally regarded as a well-informed defence correspondent, caused some apprehension. **I hope that that has been dispelled by his further article to-day. There is no need for the alarm originally inspired. I wish to make it perfectly clear that we are providing enough money for all the training necessary for the Territorial Army.**”

[03/03/1959](#), Mr Fraser (The Under-Secretary of State for War) in “Army Estimates, 1959–60 Volume 601: debated on Tuesday 3 March 1959”, House of Commons, Columns 406-414.

“The hon. Member for Bermondsey asked if I could say something about **operations in Muscat and Oman.** As hon. Members will know, a request was received some months ago for help by the Sultan of Muscat in training his troops. **That aid was readily granted.** Since then, as is well known, there was a continuation of the fighting of 1957, and that had reached a crisis at the end of last year.

At the end of January the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces, **assisted by two squadrons of the S.A.S.** and dismounted elements of the Life Guards, with R.A.F. support, **succeeded in forcing their way to the top of the rebel fastness on the Jebel Akhdar**, which is a steep and dangerous escarpment. The rebels were caught by surprise and there was little opposition to the assault. It was a great physical achievement, because the Jebel Akhdar is not only precipitous but rises to a height of 9,000 feet. **A considerable quantity of rebel equipment was captured**, and the rebel leaders are thought to have left the country. The situation, as far as we know, is quiet, but I regret that, although there were no casualties on our side in the final assault, **during the last six months there have been three British casualties in the area through rebel activity**. In two cases, I believe—though I could not swear to it—these were **due to mines**.

We have **been carrying on** our help to Commonwealth and colonial Governments.”

[06/05/1959](#), Earl of Selkirk in “The Navy Estimates Volume 216: debated on Wednesday 6 May 1959”, House of Lords, Column 167.

“I think it appropriate to pay a tribute to the part which the Royal Marines have played in Muscat. I think it is a good example of their ability to tackle almost any job in almost any part of the world. A small group of Marines were made available in March, 1958, for temporary service with the Muscat armed forces. There were never more than twenty of them on this duty. Their duties were partly to train recruits in the Muscat armed forces and partly to lead small detachments of these forces against the rebel elements who, after their attempted revolt had failed in the summer of 1957, were continuing to defy the authority of the Sultan from positions on top of the Jebel Akhbhar. There were many difficulties, including those of language and climate and intense heat, but I can say that their activities did much to improve the morale and effectiveness of the Sultan's forces. **They played a valuable part in containing the rebels and so contributing to the success of the final operations to dislodge the dissident forces, which have now been completed by the Special Air Service Regiment** which has been to Muscat.”

[30/07/1959](#), The Under-Secretary for War (Hugh Fraser), “Arabian Peninsula (Military Operations) Volume 610: debated on Thursday 30 July 1959”, House of Commons, Columns 697-698:

“In 1957 and 1958, we mounted operations to quell rebellious tribesmen of the ex-Imam of Oman and his brother Talib, to whom the right hon. Gentleman referred. After due warning, the Royal Air Force gave support by attacking forts in the dissident area. Leaflets were dropped on behalf of the Sultan. This operation resulted in the rebels being driven up the Jebel Akhdar, an inaccessible mountain region rising to about 8,000 to 9,000 ft. **From December, 1958, to February, 1959, British forces, including elements of the Life Guards and the Special Air Service Regiment, assisted the Sultan's armed forces in clearing the rebels from the Jebel Akhdar**. The Royal Air Force assisted, and I think that proper tribute has been paid in the newspapers of this country to this brilliant operation successfully carried out with very few British casualties.”

6. 1960–1969

[28/01/1963](#), Mr. Wigg and Mr. Thorneycroft, "Singapore And Brunei (Troops)" in the House of Commons:

Mr. Wigg “(by Private Notice) asked the Minister of Defence whether he will make a statement on the reinforcement of Singapore and Brunei by the 51st Infantry Brigade and whether he is satisfied that the strength and equipment of this force are of such a character as will enable it to undertake operations”.

Mr. Thorneycroft - "**A squadron of the Special Air Service was moved some time ago to Singapore and has been landed, in the ordinary course of the operations there, in North Borneo.** I think that it is of this move that this particular mention may have been made. The right hon. Gentleman asked whether something grave has happened. Nothing has happened, but it is sometimes prudent in defence matters to make some dispositions ahead of something happening. It was, therefore, thought right on this occasion to bring these troops to that degree of readiness”.

[08/03/1965](#), Mr. Goodhart, “Vote A Number Of Land Forces” in the House of Commons:

“Turning to the question of equipment, I note that the **wireless set carried by the Special Air Service Regiment on patrol in the jungles of Borneo**—and what magnificent work the regiment is doing in Borneo and elsewhere—is also designed by private enterprise”.

[02/02/1966](#), Mr. Goodhew and Mr. Reynolds, “British Forces, Far East (Armalite Rifle)” in the House of Commons:

Mr. Goodhew “asked the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent **British forces in the Far East** are now equipped with the Armalite rifle”.

Mr. Reynolds - “**Infantry rifle companies, Commando and Special Air Service units operating in Borneo are equipped with this rifle**”.

[27/05/1966](#), Mr. David Ennals, “Army Exercise, Wales” in the House of Commons:

“**The escape and evasion exercise**, about which we are talking, lasted for 12 days and covered seven Welsh counties—a good deal in open, mountainous land. It was designed to exercise Regular troops and members of the Territorial Army in counter insurgency and guerrilla warfare. **It included** a parachute battalion, **a Special Air Service regiment**, a unit of the Royal Naval Helicopter Squadron and a small contingent of men of the United States Army. Several hundred troops were involved”.

[13/11/1968](#), Mr. Healey, “North Atlantic Treaty Organisation” in the House of Commons:

“The intelligence system of the allies worked extremely well during the whole Czechoslovakian crisis. That is agreed by all our allies. With respect, I think that the allied Governments may know more than does the hon. Member about what information in fact was circulated. On the second question, we made it perfectly clear that **the commitment of 3 Division, the Parachute Brigade and S.A.S. Regiment was for use by SACEUR wherever he decided**—in the central zone just as much as on the flanks, if he should wish to operate there”.

[16/12/1968](#), Mr. Healey, “Armed Forces And Reserves (Run-Down)” in the House of Commons:

“The basic result of the Czech affair was not that it led to a big increase in total capability of N.A.T.O. [...] The Government have played a leading role in the political discussions which led to these decisions and, during the present year, Britain has made far bigger improvements in her physical contribution to N.A.T.O. than any other member of the Alliance [...] **There has been a big increase in our forces assigned to N.A.T.O. We have earmarked for assignment on M-day, wherever needed, the Third Division, 16 Parachute Brigade, and the S.A.S. Regiment to support 38 Group.** We have also earmarked some badly needed signallers for ACE Mobile Force”.

[08/12/1969](#), Mr. Dalyell and Mr. Stewart, “Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement” in the House of Commons:

Mr. Dalyell - “Would my right hon. Friend **take the opportunity of denying a headline that appeared in last Thursday's Daily Mail—“A Secret War”—to the effect that Britain was sending S.A.S. troops as a replacement on the Thai-Malaysia border?**”.

Mr. Stewart - “That is a different question, which my hon. Friend should table”.

[04/03/1969](#), Mr. Healey, “Defence” in the House of Commons:

“The House is already aware that **we have committed to N.A.T.O. 3rd Division along with 16 Parachute Brigade and the S.A.S. Regiment and the integral transport and combat aircraft of 38 Group**—constituting a mobile task force of about 20,000 men capable of rapid deployment to any part of N.A.T.O.'s front from the Arctic to Eastern Turkey. One brigade of 3rd Division is now exercising with Danish and German troops in Schleswig-Holstein”.

7. 1970–1979

[30/06/1974](#), Mr Kilfedder and Mr Mason, in “Northern Ireland Volume 878: debated on Sunday 30 June 1974”, House of Commons.

Mr Kilfedder: “Will the right hon. Gentleman **reply to the charge which is frequently made that the Special Air Service is operating in Northern Ireland?** Secondly, with regard to the admission by the Army that the IRA has been listening in to Army telephone calls, can the right hon. Gentleman explain **why so-called innocent calls were made with a scrambling device?** Is this likely to occur again?”

Mr Mason: “**No units of the SAS are operating in Northern Ireland.** I give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. There is no secure speech on telephones. The arrest of Brendan Hughes proved that the Provisionals' tapping of telephones was not very successful.”

[24/06/1975](#), Mr. Christopher Price, Mr Robert C. Brown, Mr Townsend, “Special Air Service Regiment Volume 894: debated on Tuesday 24 June 1975”, House of Commons, Columns 226-227.

Mr. Christopher Price: “asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the Official Report those **countries in which members of the Special Air Service Regiment are currently operating.**”

Mr. Robert C. Brown: “I have **nothing to add** to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Newens) on 20th May 1975.—[Vol 892, c. 355.]”

Mr. Price: “Is my hon. Friend aware that **I am not in the least surprised that he has nothing to add to his previous reply?** As his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence said that it was no longer his aspiration to police the world, and as no doubt my hon. Friend is helping his right hon. Friend to go through the estimates with a fine-tooth comb to try to find something else to cut, **will he consider the SAS as a candidate?** Many Government supporters do not consider that the **activities of the SAS in Northern Ireland, Oman, Malaysia, Thailand or wherever the SAS might be are any credit to this country.**”

Mr. Brown: “First, I must put my hon. Friend right. **The SAS is not involved in Northern Ireland.** The House was told in the Statement on the Defence Estimates that **it was the Government's intention to continue to give military support to the Sultan of Oman.** The level of our assistance is kept under regular review.

Mr. Townsend: “Is the Minister aware that many Opposition Members are getting increasingly bored with the totally uncalled-for attack on what is perhaps the finest regiment in the British Army? It is a volunteer regiment which is probably the best-equipped and best-trained in the Army. Will the hon. Gentleman point out to his hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Price) that the regiment has also an important rôle in the defence of Western Europe?”

Mr. Brown: “Yes, Sir. I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. The SAS is a fully volunteer regiment and it is a fine regiment which is doing a fine job. In spite of what my hon. Friend said, **the main rôle of the SAS is in the NATO context.**”

[12/01/1976](#), Mr Harold Wilson (Prime Minister), “Northern Ireland (Security) Volume 903: debated on Monday 12 January 1976”, House of Commons.

The Prime Minister: “Steps to strengthen the security forces in the area have already been set in hand.

The Spearhead Battalion has been moved from Great Britain to Armagh. **Troops of the Special Air Service Regiment are joining them. They will be used for patrolling and surveillance, tasks for which they are particularly suited and trained. They will operate wherever they are required throughout the county.** Extra police have already moved to the area, including the Special Patrol Group and the RUC's Anti-Assassination Squad.”

Mr. Fitt: Is the Prime Minister aware that there is a great deal of suspicion—some people would call it mythology—about the SAS Regiment? Is he aware that in two interviews given this morning to the Irish Press, which is a national daily in the Republic, and the Irish Independent, two former members of the SAS said that it was an unorthodox regiment which used

unorthodox methods in its everyday duties? That may or may not be true, but such a suspicion can create fear in the minds of people who do not fully understand the nature of the SAS Regiment.”

The Prime Minister: “concerning the SAS, I think my hon. Friend is right in saying that there has been some misunderstanding about its rôle, its nature, its training, its purpose in life, and all the rest of it. For example, I think he was tempted, for a moment at least, to compare the SAS with the CIA. I see **nothing at all comparable between the SAS and the CIA**. In as much as I understand what the CIA does—and I find it more difficult every day—I think its official rôle in most cases is the collection of overseas intelligence. This is not, may I say, the basis of the SAS. May I tell my hon. Friend that **the SAS will be employed and deployed solely under the control of the GOC as soldiers aiding the other soldiers in dealing with all the problems of terrorism in the area.**”

[13/01/1976](#). Mr Biggs-Davison, Mr Mason, Mr Younger Mr Hastings and Mr Flannery in “Northern Ireland Volume 903: debated on Tuesday 13 January 1976”, House of Commons.

Mr Biggs-Davison: “Before making the decision that the Prime Minister announced in his statement yesterday, **did he check with the right hon. Gentleman the dispositions of the SAS?** Has the Defence Secretary read Mr. Chapman Pincher's report in today's Daily Express? If it is true—Mr. Pincher has usually been shown to be a reliable journalist—does the report not show that the **Prime Minister has deceived the hard-pressed people of Ulster and the whole nation—**

... does it not show that the Prime Minister has irresponsibly misled the people of Ulster and the whole nation with his sabre rattling?”

Mr. Mason: “I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has stooped to such depths to try to make a point, especially following a highly speculative and misleading article in the Daily Express. If the hon. Gentleman wants to be better informed, it is far better to ask Questions than to rely on Press reports.

Secondly, the Prime Minister and I, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, **all agreed with the deployment of the SAS, that it should be announced publicly, and that there should be no covert operations by the SAS.**”

Mr Younger: “Will the Secretary of State please tell us **how many members of the SAS are at present on the ground in South Armagh and serving as advertised** by the Prime Minister? Will the Secretary of State tell us what is his target for the total forces that he intends to send there? Does he realise that unless he can give us some reassurance, and give some reassurance to the people of South Armagh, we shall begin to wonder what the Prime Minister meant when he made that important statement last Wednesday?”

Mr Mason: “I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman, as an Opposition defence spokesman, **should seriously ask me to reveal the figures and deployment of security forces in Northern Ireland, and particularly in South Armagh—but, first, the SAS is deployed, and, secondly, it will increase in numbers.** Contrary to what that Daily Express article says, the **SAS will stay there as long as the GOC Northern Ireland requires it.**”

Mr. Hastings: “Whether or not the report in the Daily Express is true—I speak as an old SAS officer—**may I ask the Secretary of State whether he is really satisfied, in view of the particular capability and training of these troops, that their numbers are in any way adequate in present circumstances?**”

Mr Mason: “I give the House an assurance that **we shall be increasing the numbers of the SAS as their reconnoitering is complete and as their training is complete**, so that they can fully perform the job for which **their skills will be of special service in South Armagh**. Most of the time **they will be operating in uniform but occasionally they will not be operating in uniform. This is not unusual**. The security forces in Northern Ireland are allowed to do that **for surveillance purposes** as well. I am hopeful that **the SAS, with its special skills, will, when fully deployed, make its impact, but it will not be sudden**. It will take time.”

Mr Flannery: “Will my right hon. Friend accept from me that I was never an SAS officer? Will he further accept from me that, no matter with what good intentions and no matter how many troops we deploy in Northern Ireland, the answer is basically a political answer and that it must be sought in the interests of peace and to avoid any more killings?”

Mr Mason: “I am much obliged to my hon. Friend for that remark. I think it is absolutely wrong that, when **we have squadrons of the Special Air Service who are specially trained in surveillance**, and who, with their special skills, **can operate in small squads without logistic support, they should be denied this opportunity of helping to solve the problem in South Armagh.**”

[26/04/1976](#), Mr McCusker, Mr Kilfedder, Mr Powell, Mr Flannery & Mr Brown (The Under-Secretary of State for Defence for the Army, “Northern Ireland Volume 930: debated on Tuesday 26 April 1977”, House of Commons, Columns 1021-1022.

Mr. McCusker: “asked the Secretary of State for Defence **if he will make a statement about the operations of the Special Air Service in South Armagh.**”

The Under-Secretary of State for Defence for the Army: “The **Special Air Service continues to operate with success** in South Armagh and elsewhere in Northern Ireland.”

Mr. McCusker: “Bearing in mind the strategic importance of South Armagh, **will the Minister resist any attempt to reduce the strength of the SAS in that area?** In order that the specialist skills of the regiment may be deployed in other parts of the Province, **what plans, if any, has he to increase the strength of the regiment?**”

Mr. Brown: “**Where the SAS operates is a matter for the GOC**. I am not prepared to discuss the details of deployment. Equally, it would not be in the interests of security to discuss the numbers deployed.”

Mr. Kilfedder: “Even though **some members of the SAS may be taught to speak with an Ulster accent**, surely that is no answer to the problem presented by the terrorists in Northern Ireland. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the **only way to deal with them is to create an anti-terrorist force which will seek out and destroy the bombers and the gun men?**”

Mr Brown: "I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would recognise that **all the units of the British Army at present in Northern Ireland represent an anti-terrorist force.**"

Mr. Powell: "I agree that it is **appropriate that the Minister should not comment on actual deployment.** In view, however, of the proven success of this unit in South Armagh, **will he ensure** that the Army command is particularly quick **to switch this force to other parts of the Province** which are threatened in the same way?"

Mr. Brown: "I am sure that the point made by the right hon. Gentleman will not be lost on the GOC. **The SAS will operate wherever it is needed** in Northern Ireland."

Mr. Flannery: "Does my hon. Friend agree that the task of the SAS in Northern Ireland would be rendered much easier if certain politicians ceased making inflammatory speeches in the Province?"

Mr. Brown: "If my hon. Friend is suggesting that we must seek long and earnestly for a political solution in Northern Ireland, I agree with him."

[06/05/1976](#), Mr. Brown and Mr. Gerard Fitt, "The Army Volume 910: debated on Thursday 6 May 1976", House of Commons, Columns 1516-1517.

Mr. Brown: "I turn to Northern Ireland. I begin by saying a few words about an incident that occurred in the early hours of this morning, when **eight members of the Special Air Service Regiment on routine patrol made an accidental incursion into the Irish Republic.** After traveling approximately 500 metres **they encountered a checkpoint manned by the police of the Irish Republic.** They realised that they had made a mapreading error, and accompanied the police to a police station. They are still there, and we are in touch with the Irish authorities."

Mr. Gerard Fitt: **Is it not a fact that some members of the regiment, if not all, were in civilian dress and armed with a variety of weapons, including a sawn-off shotgun?** Does my hon. Friend accept that that is now a standard arm for the British Army? This is the **information that I have from Ireland** today.

Mr. Brown: "I **do not accept all the suppositions** in my hon. Friend's intervention. **I am sure he does not expect me to go further than I have gone already. If I am able to indicate to the House any further progress** in this matter, I shall most certainly do so in my winding-up speech.

Mr. John Stonehouse: "What steps have been made so far to secure the release and return of these men."

Mr. Brown: "The Government are in touch with the public authorities, and I hope that we shall secure their release, but **I do not want to say any more** at this stage."

[10/05/1976](#), Mr. Concannon (The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office), Mr. Powell, Mr. Whitehead and Mr. Naeve, "Northern Ireland (Security) Volume 911: debated on Monday 10 May 1976", House of Commons, Columns 31-33.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office: “On 6th May **eight men of the Special Air Service Regiment entered the territory of the Irish Republic near Omeath**. The circumstances were described by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence for the Army later that same day. Subsequently, as the House will know, **these men were charged before the Special Criminal Court in Dublin with offences relating to the possession of weapons** and released on bail.

From time to time **members of our security forces and those of the Irish Republic cross the border inadvertently. It is the usual practice when the mistake is discovered for the units concerned to be informed and the troops to be returned**. For example, **two further incidents occurred on 7th May**. These were at Carrickarnan on the main Belfast-Dublin Road and near Aughnacloy in Co. Tyrone. **In both cases the matter was handled locally. In one case the border was crossed during an agreed change of escorts**.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who visited troops in border areas on 8th May, is determined that the procedures in such cases should be reviewed to prevent misunderstandings. While the **border is crossed occasionally by security forces despite all precautions**, it is crossed time and again by the brutal criminals whom the security forces are seeking to apprehend. In the view of my right hon. Friend, this is the problem we really have to tackle.

The **wider implications of the incident involving the SAS men are being closely studied**. The House will understand that it is better at this stage that **I should not discuss the matter further.**”

Mr Whitehead: “If I may revert to the incursion of the SAS into the Republic, is it not abundantly clear that if the scourge of terrorists in border areas is to be adequately combated, a **fresh approach must be made by her Her Majesty's Government and the Government of the Republic concerning cross border patrols by the armed forces on both sides?**”

Mr Concannon: “**Security co-operation has greatly improved**. Obviously there are areas in which we shall have to discuss these matters further, and **my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be doing so.**”

Mr. Naeve: “Is the Minister aware that we fully endorse what he said in his statement? Is he also aware that the SAS is one of the best counter-insurgency forces in the world, is carrying out a tremendous job, and has **already done much to keep the peace as a result of its presence in South Armagh?**”

Mr Concannon: “Up to the present **these incidents have been handled locally**, and with success. The latest incident puts the matter in a different light and my right hon. Friend will be discussing the matter. I readily agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the qualities of the SAS. The **SAS is deployed in South Armagh where its skills are particularly valuable**, and the force has played a valuable role in that area.”

Mr. Gow: “Since the **soldiers in the SAS went into the Irish Republic inadvertently and were engaged on the same objective as that of the Republican Government**—namely, the elimination of terrorists—is it not regrettable that the Republican Government acted in such a way?”

Mr. Concannon: “**We are all the time seeking to improve cross-border relationships**. This **incident was a very recent one and we shall conduct talks** about it. It is a continuing process.”

[14/03/1978](#), The Under-Secretary of State for Defence for the Royal Air Force (Mr. James Wellbeloved), House of Commons, Column 233.

“...We also contribute theatre nuclear forces and, by means of the Polaris force, add to NATO's strategic nuclear capability.

Our forces also **make significant contributions to SACEUR's strategic reserve**, including the United Kingdom Mobile Force, contributions to the ACE Mobile Force and **three squadrons of the Special Air Service**. On the northern flank, Royal Marine commandos contribute reinforcement forces.”

[07/12/1978](#), Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mr. Mason, “Terrorist Incidents Volume 959: debated on Thursday 7 December 1978”, House of Commons, Columns 1596-1597

Mr. McCusker: “Does the Secretary of State recognise that the violence in South Armagh presents a very serious situation, and that the statistics he has given us today include the deaths of 10 innocent people, soldiers, UDR men, policemen and civilians? Will he have another look at the action which his right hon Friend the Member for Huyton (Sir H. Wilson) took in 1976 **to combat the growth of terrorism in South Armagh and perhaps reintroduce those measures?**”

Mr. Mason: “**I suppose that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the operations of the SAS**. As he well knows, the **SAS is now operating Province-wide, and I can assure him that it is not neglecting his constituency**. Though **there have been 46 incidents**—every one of which is one too many—in his area this year, that represents **a big improvement on the whole of 1977**.”

8. 1980-1989

[15/04/1980](#), Mr Wilkinson, “Reservists (Gratuities And Pensions)” in the House of Commons:

“Does my hon. Friend agree that the risks of certain aspects of reserve training are almost as great as those experienced by the Regulars? **For example, is the Minister aware that a few weeks ago a member of the 21st Special Air Service Regiment (Artists) of the Territorial Army, died in a training exercise on the Brecon Beacons?** Will my hon. Friend conduct a review with the greatest urgency and ensure that compensation is in line with that awarded to the Regulars? Does he accept that nothing less is just?”.

[23/04/1980](#), Lord Newall, “Defence Equipment: Policy On Overseas Sales” in the House of Lords:

Lord Newall - “There are many other examples referring to different countries, but perhaps I have said just enough to show that Government can use many devious means for selling their arms and defence equipment abroad, sometimes assembling them in a third country for purely commercial reasons. **I wonder whether the Government know of another small instance where German small arms were given to our own SAS**; and now our own soldiers, as they travel around the world, have often been heard to be recommending these German arms to

foreigners. I do not think that that is a good idea, any more than the idea that we should ask for the Americans to supply revolvers in Ulster”.

[25/04/1980](#), Mr Benn and Sir I. Gilmour, “Iran” in the House of Commons:

Mr Benn - “Did Her Majesty's Government know that this operation was to be mounted? **Was the SAS involved in advising the Americans**, as it was at Mogadishu in regard to the release of the German hostages? Did the Government give support to the idea of a military rescue operation before it took place?”.

Sir I. Gilmour - “At the time of the Entebbe rescue the then Leader of the Opposition—rightly, in my view—refrained from making any strictures and pointed out that the fault lay with the hijackers. I think the same applies here. **The SAS was not involved**. We were not consulted, but we were informed of the possibility of a rescue attempt”.

[06/05/1980](#), Margret Thatcher (Prime Minister), “Prime Minister (Engagements)” in the House of Commons:

“I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. **I should like to say one word about events yesterday. It was, I believe, a brilliant operation, carried out by the Special Air Service with courage and confidence**. I agree with my hon. Friend that the performance both of the police and the SAS made hon. Members on both sides of the House proud to be British”.

[06/05/1980](#), Mr William Whitelaw (Secretary of State for the Home Department), “Iranian Embassy, London” in the House of Commons:

“**As the House is aware, this incident was brought to a conclusion yesterday evening following an assault by members of the Special Air Service Regiment**. I regret that it proved necessary to resort to the use of force, but there was in the end no alternative. The terrorists killed two hostages. The outcome of the assault, I believe, speaks for itself. Of the 19 hostages known to be alive when the assault took place, all were rescued. Sixteen have already been discharged from hospital. Three remain there. Four gunmen are believed to have been killed in the assault and another is in police custody. None escaped. **There were no police or SAS casualties**”.

[06/05/1980](#), Mr William Whitelaw (Secretary of State for the Home Department), “Iranian Embassy, London” in the House of Commons:

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[08/05/1980](#), MR McQuade, “Security” in the House of Commons:

“Will the Secretary of State make a statement about the murder of a member of the SAS? [Interruption.] He was murdered in my constituency, close to where the hon. Member for Belfast West (Mr. Fitt) lives. The members of the IRA, who were surrounded, gave themselves up. What weapons were seized and what charges have resulted from the incident? [Interruption.] I want to know because they came out with a white flag, as usual on the New Lodge Road, close to where the hon. Member lives”.

[08/05/1980](#), Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal (Minister of State, Ministry of Defence) and Lord Murton of Lindisfarne, “The Defence Estimates 1980” in the House of Lords:

Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal (Minister of State, Ministry of Defence) - “Perhaps I may begin by saying that we embark upon this debate in what has been a good week for defence. I think it would be difficult to conceive of a more convincing demonstration of confidence, calmness, courage, professionalism and **dedication to duty in highly dangerous circumstances than that provided by the SAS on Monday**”.

Lord Murton of Lindisfarne - **“So far as I can gather, having dealt with the Fifth and the Seventh Field Forces, that would leave in the United Kingdom—apart from Northern Ireland—a battalion group as a mobile force and an SAS regiment.** At some stage thereafter presumably would be called to the Colours the balance of the 125,000 regular reserves and the balance of the 59,000 Territorial Army Volunteer Reserves, and hopefully from these would be furnished, as I understand it, two armoured reconnaissance regiments, 38 infantry battalions, **two Special Air Service regiments**, seven engineer regiments and sundry other units. Have we the equipment to put these units into the field and, indeed, how long would it take to do so?”.

[26/06/1980](#), Mr Concannon, Mr Hayhoe , and Mr Buck, “The Army” in the house of Commons:

Mr Concannon - “During the last year the exploits of the Army have been forced into the limelight. **I speak of the activities of the SAS in the centre of London** and of those of our Commonwealth forces in Zimbabwe”.

Mr Hayhoe - “The Army also stands ready to give assistance to the civil power. The most dramatic example of such military assistance during the past year, again referred to by the right hon. Gentleman, **was the SAS assault which ended the siege at the Iranian embassy in Princes Gate on Monday, 5 May**”.

Mr Buck - “It was the first time that troops had been used in that way, and the decision to deploy them was taken only after one of the hostages had been murdered in cold blood and his body thrown out of the embassy. Once that had happened, it was regrettably clear that the hoped-for peaceful resolution of the siege was not possible. **The SAS had to be used as the only means of bringing the incident to an end with the minimum loss of life.** The SAS did that with enormous aplomb and skill. Once committed, the soldiers acted with unexampled courage and dedication which has rightly earned them praise from many quarters both at home and abroad”.

[09/02/1981](#), Mr Canavan, “Armed Forces (Criminal Proceedings)” in the House of Commons:

“Although the Armed Forces have an unenviable task when dealing with terrorists, does the Attorney-General agree that it would be a deplorable legal precedent in this country for members of the Armed Forces to be given immunity from prosecution for carrying out summary execution of terrorists, especially after they have given themselves up? **Was any such immunity from prosecution, or any order for summary execution, approved by either the Attorney-General or the Home Secretary in the case of the SAS raid on the Iranian embassy?**”.

[12/02/1981](#), Mr Kilfedder, “Security” in the House of Commons:

“In view of the **success of the operation by the SAS against the Iranian Embassy** terrorists in London last year, and the findings of the court that the members of the SAS were not guilty of murder in the circumstances of the siege when they shot the gunmen, will the right hon. Gentleman deploy enough units of the SAS in Northern Ireland to deal effectively and immediately with the terrorists, particularly along the border of West Belfast and Crossmaglen?”.

[09/07/1981](#), Mr James Molyneux, “The Army” in the House of Commons:

“The second aspect of deployment that I wish to raise stems from the eruption of street violence in English cities. Like every other hon. Member, I wish that street violence would go away. However, in the light of experience in Northern Ireland I fear that what we have seen is something in the nature of a rehearsal. The next stage will be a determined attempt to stretch the police to breaking point by launching, in possibly six different centres in the same region, the same vicious attacks. One assumes that plans are being prepared to enable the Army to support the civil power in the event by means of what might be called a United Kingdom rapid deployment force. In such circumstances we in Northern Ireland will not be critical if Army manpower has to be switched to other regions of the United Kingdom that are under serious threat. **For us in Ulster the retention of the SAS is essential.** Perhaps it might be possible to increase its strength as its special skills are not at the time being likely to be required to deal with security in England. This suggestion implies no lack of appreciation of the contribution made by all the Army units in Ulster, where they have developed effective methods and techniques of dealing with a variety of situations”.

[25/02/1982](#), Mr Kilfedder and Mr Prior, “Security” in the House of Commons:

Mr Kilfedder - “Is the Secretary of State aware of the warning given yesterday by the RUC that the IRA is about to launch a new campaign of murder? Instead of waiting until an atrocity is committed, **will the Secretary of State ensure that enough troops are brought into the Province now, including members of the SAS,** to contend with such a threat from the evil men of the Provisional IRA?”.

Mr Prior - “**The SAS is presently in Northern Ireland.** If the GOC believes that he needs extra troops he has only to ask for them. However, the increasing strength of the RUC, the

ability of the intelligence forces to gain information and the willingness of the public to co-operate with the police is perhaps the best defence against what is happening”.

[04/04/1982](#), Mr Michael Meacher and Margret Thatcher (Prime Minister), “Engagements” in the House of Commons:

Mr Michael Meacher - “Is the Prime Minister aware of today's reports that MI5 has set up a gigantic secret State data bank in Mayfair which is two and a half times the size of the already vast police national computer? Is she aware that MI5 has been given unlimited access to the files of other Government Departments, which it is using to build up a comprehensive national filing system on each individual? Is this not 1984 writ large? Will the right hon. Lady legislate to ensure that this monstrous system is checked by a proper security-cleared consultant appointed by an independent data protection authority?”.

Margret Thatcher - “The hon. Gentleman knows that **it is the practice—long hallowed by all parties—not to comment from this Dispatch Box on matters of security**”.

[20/05/1982](#), Mr Dalyell and Mr Pattie, “Type 42 Destroyer” in the House of Commons:

Mr Dalyell - “Is not the brutal lesson of "Sheffield" either that one goes in and destroys the bases from which these weapons are launched or that one withdraws the task force? Whereas some of us might want to withdraw the task force, **is it a fact that the SAS or other operational troops did their best to go on to the South American mainland and destroy the bases?**”.

Mr Pattie - “**The hon. Gentleman is following press speculation, as he is entitled to do.** On his question about the so-called brutal lesson of "Sheffield", I would say that nothing is quite as black or as white as he suggests”.

[25/05/1982](#), Sir Paul Bryan, “Falklands Islands” in the House of Commons:

“**The troops that we have sent to the Falkland Islands—marines, parachute battalions, SAS and Gurkhas**—are probably the finest and best trained in the world. Only with superlative training could they have carried out the superb operation on Pebble Island the other day without loss of life”.

[06/07/1982](#), Mr Peter Blaker, “Defence” in the House of Commons:

“A vital contribution to the success of our operations was made by the Special Forces. **Patrols of the Special Air Service and the Special Boat Squadron were landed into East and West Falklands** from the task force three weeks before the landing. Working in among the enemy, living in the field in conditions of extreme discomfort and danger, they were able to provide intelligence that was vital to the successful conduct of the landing and to carry out the most daring and successful raid against Pebble Island, destroying aircraft that would have been a threat to the subsequent landing”.

[08/07/1982](#), Mr Peter Blaker, “The Army” in the House of Commons:

“On Tuesday I referred to the **role of the Special Forces in the campaign, which was carried out with all their customary skill and daring**”.

[21/12/1982](#), Mr Tam Dalyell, “Falklands Campaign” in the House of Commons:

“On 5 July, Commander Wreford-Brown returned to the West of Scotland, hoisted the Jolly Roger—tastelessly, in view of the number of lives lost—and imprudently displayed the dagger to show that **the submarine had participated in operations in conjunction with special forces**”.

[07/03/1983](#), Sir Philip Goodhart and Mr Nelson, “Prevention Of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976” in the House of Commons:

Sir Philip Goodhart - “In recent years diplomats have often been the targets of international terrorist attacks. I knew our ambassador in Dublin who was murdered by the IRA in a car ambush. **Almost every day I drive past the burnt-out shell of the Iranian Embassy, which had to be stormed by the skilful specialists of the SAS under the overall command of the Home Secretary**”.

Mr Nelson - “The most effective deterrent to international terrorists coming to this country to commit crime has been the effective way in which the police have dealt with terrorist incidents. **I think, in particular, of the Iranian embassy siege and the action of the SAS**, to which wide publicity was given throughout the world, and the statement that was made, I think, by the Home Secretary shortly after, that no one should be under any doubt that this country would not tolerate and would not be a haven for terrorism. That point was made effectively and it was heard throughout the world. **Prompt and effective action by the police—and, in that incident, by the SAS**—had far more influence in deterring the commission of international terrorist activities in London and this country than the costly extension of this legislation, which, in my judgment, will have damaging implications for Britain's image abroad and for the important balance of confidence between the police and the public. Moreover, it will build on temporary legislation by creating a permanent position, which in my opinion is most undesirable”.

[15/04/1983](#), Mr Dalyell, “Dependent Territories” in the House of Commons:

“I now believe that the Prime Minister knew in February 1982 of the likelihood of fighting in the Falklands. **I have been told by various sources—unquotable because, for understandable reasons, they were not prepared to support in public what they told me in private—that the SAS, based mostly in Hereford, was warned in February 1982 that it would be fighting in the Falklands.** Now the cat of the supporting evidence has been let out of the bag. In the Sunday Standard, on page 3, Margaret Vaughan—whom I knew some years on Radio Forth, and subsequently on the Daily Record, as an extremely accurate journalist—riveted my attention with a passage in her article headed "Tears on the SS Pilgrimage" about Corporal Robert Allan Burns, ex-Royal Corps of Signals, **late of the SAS,**

who tragically lost his life on 19 May when his Sea King helicopter hit an albatross and fell into the water”.

[23/07/1983](#), Mr Julian Amery, “Defence Estimates” in the House of Commons:

“**The campaigns in Oman and the Falklands showed that our SAS and SBS capability is one of the best in the world;** but I suspect that something more is needed. We need an organisation to support resistance similar in character, although not necessarily in size, to the organisation that we had in wartime to sustain resistance in the occupied territories. **It is almost taboo to talk about so-called clandestine operations, but I make no apology for raising this in Parliament.** As we sit here, a subversive war is going on in the middle east, in Africa, in south-west Asia and in central America. Moscow makes no secret of its support for subversive movements. The Soviet Foreign Minister may talk about non-interference as a principle of Soviet policy, but the Politburo makes it quite clear openly and efficiently that it supports "progressive movements".”

[25/10/1983](#), Lord Hill-Norton, “The Defence Estimates” in the House of Lords:

“Their purpose, my Lords, is straightforward. It is to disrupt the whole domestic machine of our country, including power systems, the communications networks, airfields, air defence and naval installations, command and control systems, oil and gas installations, and other essential services such as sewage and water. **There can be no doubt whatever that they are trained and equipped to do it, just as our SAS and SBS are trained and equipped to do it—and actually did it in the Falklands**—and as the Argentine similar forces are trained and equipped to do it, and would have done it in Gibraltar had it not been for an alert Spanish Government”.

[03/11/1983](#), Sir Philip Goodhart, “Foreign Affairs” in the House of Commons:

“Within the past six years we have seen the Governments in Grenada and the Seychelles overthrown by armed bands also not much larger than a Regular Army platoon. **In Gambia, two and a half years ago, a semi-mutiny, semi-coup by the paramilitary police was checked by the fortuitous presence of a couple of SAS men, followed by the massive intervention of the Senegalese army**”.

[10/11/1983](#), Mr Dennis Canavan and Mr Biffen, “Business Of The House” in the House of Commons:

Mr Dennis Canavan - “Could we have a further statement next week on the up-to-date situation in Grenada and in particular on the role of the Governor-General Sir Paul Scoon who, in asking for external intervention and appointing an interim Government with himself as their head, seems to be in breach of the constitution which gave him his job and which was approved by this House? **Can the Leader of the House confirm reports that the British Government's plans to use the SAS to rescue Sir Paul Scoon from Grenada had to be abandoned because of the American invasion?**”.

Mr Biffen - **“I simply cannot confirm any of the hon. Gentleman's more exotic speculations**, but I assure him that if the situation in the Caribbean next week necessitates a Government statement, a statement will be made”.

[08/12/1983](#), Mr Robinson, “Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions)” in the House of Commons:

“The Secretary of State must realise that there are restrictions on overtime, and must ensure that no such restrictions on those carrying out operational duties or on those who give support to them, hinder them in their fight against terrorism. The Secretary of State implies that he seldom receives any suggestions, but I could mention several. If he wants to help the border area, he should increase the number of SAS men. **There is great respect in Northern Ireland for the SAS-type activity.** It has had advantages in many parts of the world, as well as in Northern Ireland. It is a sort of covert operation. **However, I realise that there are limitations on what the Secretary of State can tell the House about SAS duties in the Province.** Nevertheless, I hope that he will give an assurance to the people of Northern Ireland that there is a sufficient number of SAS men along the border area now, and that he is prepared to consider an increase in the number”.

[08/06/1984](#), Mr Tam Dalyell, “South Atlantic” in the House of Commons:

“If we had been reading their telegrams for years, are we really saying that in January 1982 we did not have an inkling of Argentine intentions? I believe and I assert that we had such an inkling, because I believe that the British intelligence services, then as later, did not fail to do their job. **I also assert that the Special Air Service and the Special Boat Service knew in February 1982 that there was every possibility of going to the Falkland Islands**”.

[20/11/1984](#), Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos, “Brunei And Maldives Bill HI” in the House of Lords:

“**Our connection with Brunei remains strong and the brigade of British Army Gurkhas stationed there under a new agreement underlines this. There is also the Jungle Fighting School used by the SAS.** Perhaps we may be given some guidance by the noble Baroness as to the purpose of the Gurkha presence, given that Brunei has efficient defence forces with some British officers still on station. I assume that the Gurkhas are under British control, but I think it would be helpful if we could be told the circumstances under which they might be brought into operation. Their presence does, of course, increase our interest in the political situation in Brunei itself and in the adjacent countries”.

[04/04/1985](#), Mr Procter and Mr Hurd, “Security” in the House of Commons:

Mr Procter - **“The whole House will wish to join in the sentiments expressed by my right hon. Friend. Will he confirm that the SAS and other undercover security forces are active in the frontier area**, and that those forces will be increased in and around Newry and South Armagh in the light of yesterday's events?”.

Mr Hurd - “I can confirm that the General Officer Commanding has at his disposal in Northern Ireland specialist Army units which he deploys to meet operational needs throughout the

Province. **My hon. Friend will understand why it would not be sensible for me to go further than that**".

[04/12/1985](#), Viscount Buckmaster and Baroness Young (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office), "Uganda" in the House of Lords:

Viscount Buckmaster - "According to the doctor—and I shall not quote again from him, because time does not permit me to do so—he met members of our training team at Jinja and they told him that they were achieving nothing at all. **Museveni has alleged that our training team contains elements from the SAS. I wonder whether the noble Baroness can tell us anything about that.** Can she tell us, too, whether the training team is to be reinforced? May I ask her also, while I am on the subject of Her Majesty's Government's policy, what is our aid programme? Is it effective? One does not know, but one has heard stories of much of the aid going to the wrong quarters. How should Her Majesty's Government act? Clearly we must support the Government of Tito Okello. We should also work for reunification of the country after arms have been laid down. That is essential. We should consider our relations with the army and our aid programme".

Baroness Young discusses British involvement in Uganda, but does not address the question about the SAS.

[18/04/1986](#), Lord Elwyn-Jones, "Libya: Us In Action" in the House of Lords:

"In October 1977 a group of West German border guards released the hostages on a Lufthansa aircraft hijacked to Mogadiscio. **As the House will remember, in May 1980 an assault by a British SAS detachment on the Iranian Embassy in London,** following the murder of an Iranian press attaché resulted in the release of 19 of the remaining 20 hostages and the detention and death of the Six terrorists. More recently, in October last year, American forces intercepted the aircraft carrying the "Achille Lauro" hijackers over international airspace and directed it to land in Italy".

[06/02/1986](#), Mr John Stanley "They Royal Navy" in the House of Commons:

"Quite apart from their amphibious landing and Arctic warfare skills, the Royal Marines perform many other valuable operational roles. They have undertaken 26 Northern Ireland tours since 1969. 40 Commando is now making the first Royal Marine deployment to Belize, having carried out a United Nations peace-keeping tour in Cyprus last year. The Royal Marines also provide units for protecting our offshore oil and gas installations, boarding detachments for the Falkland Islands patrol vessels, an air defence element for the Royal Navy ships in the vicinity of the Gulf, our maritime counter-terrorism capability **and an important element of our special forces in the shape of the special boat squadron**".

[09/12/1986](#), Mr Ron Brown, "Ethnic Monitoring" in the House of Lords:

"Some members of the ethnic minorities serving in the SAS helped to organise the shipment of submarine lifting gear from Scotland to Libya. Will the Minister explain their

role? Was that to make amends for the bombing of Libyan cities, or will the hon. Gentleman say simply that it is a state secret?”.

The question was not answered.

[13/01/1987](#), Mr Neville Trotter, “The Army” in the House of Commons:

“I know the arguments against making decisions at this time. For one thing, it is hard to decide the size of the new troop helicopter. Personally I believe that it should not be too large. Obviously, there are advantages in carrying a large number of men at one time, but if we lose a large helicopter, we are in danger of losing a large part of an infantry battalion with it. **The Special Air Service was involved in a tragic crash in the Falklands. A large part of the force was lost in one helicopter. I favour a 15-man or 16-man lift rather than a lift involving 30 men or more**”.

[27/03/1987](#), Mr Roy Mason and Mr Tom King (The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland) “Northern Ireland” in the House of Commons:

Mr Roy Mason - “There is no doubt that the political wing of the Provisional IRA has had to give way to a more militant campaign since it was shunned in the elections in the Irish Republic. Therefore, its increased kill and bomb campaign is intended to terrorise the whole Province and, coincidentally, to try to smash the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Is the Secretary of State aware that that will now necessitate a higher security profile in many previously quiet areas? Will he confirm that, if need be, more British troops will be drafted into the Province? I hope that he will consider parallel patrols by the Army and RUC and that, for a time, they will increase their presence on the streets. **I hope that he will also consider increasing the facilities of the British Army and of the special forces in the Province so that they can retaliate and capture more easily than hitherto.** The Secretary of State must now turn the tide and retaliate more effectively against the terrorists. If he adopts some, if not all, of those measures, I am sure that he will receive the support of most hon. Members in this House”.

Mr Tom King - “I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. As he was a predecessor in my office, I listened with particular respect to his points. I accept his analysis of the split in Sinn Fein following the last Ard Fheis, its decision to stand and to take seats in the Dail, with the consequent humiliation at the polls and the advent of a new Government in the Irish Republic. I am sure that some of those factors, and their consequences, are the explanation behind the recent burst of violence. Although any death is one too many, it is fair to say that the violence of the past few weeks has followed a period when, otherwise, casualties were significantly lower than in the corresponding period last year. **The right hon. Gentleman will understand if I do not go further, but I take careful note of all the points that he has made.** A number of those options must be considered and some will undoubtedly be discussed later today when I meet the leaders of the security forces”.

[06/05/1987](#), Mr Mallon, “Northern Ireland (Security) in the House of Commons:

“The theory that there is a security solution to this problem must be put into its proper context. What has been the context of the last 16 years? There has been a very heavily armed Army

presence throughout Northern Ireland—the biggest outside the NATO forces in Europe. There has also been a preponderance of Army bases, lookout posts and fortifications. In my constituency alone there is one for every 1,000 people. **The SAS, MI5 and MI6 have also been used in Northern Ireland.** A very much expanded police force has been backed up by a police reserve that is also expanding, and it is costing £1 million a day to service. Furthermore, there is the Ulster Defence Regiment. Does anybody seriously suggest that the resources to deal with the security problem have not been provided?”

[08/05/1987](#), Lord Monson, “Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill” in the House of Lords:

“As Northern Ireland is now, for various reasons which we need not go into at the moment, it is not an effective democracy. The Government are in a position virtually to ignore public opinion in the Province. The sole response to the latest wave of violence has been to recruit more RUC men, some of whom are to replace those who have been murdered, and to **send a few more SAS men into the border areas**”.

[07/03/1988](#), Mr Robertson and Sir Geoffrey Howe (Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs) “Shootings (Gibraltar)” in the House of Commons:

“Fifthly, since there is still considerable confusion in the reports of what happened yesterday, can the Foreign Secretary confirm that those who were shot were warned before fire was opened, and can he say whether there is to be any inquiry into the circumstances of the shooting? **Finally, will he place on record, in order to counter the continuing speculation, whether this operation involved the Metropolitan police special branch or the SAS?**”.

Sir Geoffrey Howe does not address the question about the SAS.

[21/03/1988](#), Lord Lyell, “Northern Ireland Killings” in the House of Lords:

“The noble Lord, Lord Donaldson, asked about the Provisional IRA. Whatever the IRA may have had to say in the media, I am sure that all noble Lords—indeed everyone—will treat those comments with the contempt that such remarks and justifications deserve. The facts are that those two soldiers, as I have described in the Statement, were brutally beaten and shot. **I stress again that the soldiers did not have anything to do with the SAS. We shall never know why they were in that particular location**”.

[03/05/1988](#), Mr Tam Dalyell and Mr Younger (Secretary of State for Defence), “Terrorist Incidents (The Netherlands)” in the House of Lords:

Mr Tam Dalyell - “Speaking as a contemporary of the Secretary of State—I did my national service in the British Army of the Rhine, rather than, like the Secretary of State, in Korea—it is a formidable task that the forces face in maintaining personnel security in West Germany. The Secretary of State says that there is no link between what happened there and what happened in Gibraltar. Some of us believe that, whether one likes it or not—it may be very unpleasant—there is a link. **As Secretary of State for Defence, did the right hon. Gentleman know about the SAS operation before it happened?**”.

Mr Younger (Secretary of State for Defence) - "I agree with the hon. Gentleman's first point. It is indeed a formidable task, but that does not mean that we should not do everything we can to improve security and protect our service men whom, after all, we ask to do a job for us. **On the hon. Gentleman's second point, I, like anyone else, should not anticipate the results of an inquest**".

[24/05/1988](#), Mr Tam Dalyell and Mr Ian Stewart, "Sas" in the House of Commons:

Mr Tam Dalyell - "To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will **make a statement on the role of the SAS in Europe**".

Mr Ian Stewart - "**No**, Sir".

Mr Tam Dalyell - "Under what and on whose authority does the SAS operate?".

Mr Ian Stewart - "**It has long been the policy of this Government and their predecessors not to comment on the activities of, or arrangements for, our special forces.** To depart from that policy would, in my view, be against the interests not only of members of our armed forces but of British citizens who may be exposed to danger at home or abroad".

[09/06/1988](#), Mr Williams and Mrs Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister), "Engagements" in the House of Commons:

Mr Williams - "**Was it the Prime Minister's decision to send the SAS assassination squad to Gibraltar?**".

Mrs Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister) - "**We never discuss matters concerning security forces in this House**".

[20/06/1988](#), Mr Roger Freeman (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces), "Psychological Operations (Northern Ireland)" in the House of Commons:

"The hon. Gentleman has raised the issue of so-called psychological warfare operations in Northern Ireland—based in part, I believe, on a number of allegations made to him about events that are alleged to have taken place in the Province more than a decade ago. I know from their presence tonight that several other hon. Members have interested themselves in this general issue, and, indeed, in the specific cases lying behind the hon. Gentleman's allegations. **It has been the general practice of successive Governments not to comment on detailed matters of security policy.** I need hardly stress the importance of adhering to that practice where operations in Northern Ireland are concerned, and I have no intention of departing from it this evening. The Government are committed to pursue their efforts to restore peace and order in Northern Ireland, and, in keeping with the security policy that has been followed by successive Governments, are determined to fight terrorism, with all appropriate resources, under the rule of law".

[20/10/1988](#), Mr Archie Hamilton (Minister of State for the Armed Forces), “Second Day’s Debate” in the House of Commons”:

“The most telling recent example of the Provisional IRA's utter callousness when it comes to the murder of innocent civilians was the plot to detonate a massive car bomb in Gibraltar in March. Had this attempt not been thwarted, it is possible that there would have been hundreds of civilian and military casualties. I welcome the clear and conclusive verdict of the Gibraltar jury, which was reached after an exhaustive public examination of all the relevant facts. I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our special forces. **Because of their covert nature, very little is usually said about them.** It is often forgotten that they are ordinary people with families and are no different from anyone else. They are, however, highly trained, they have to take great risks and, as a fighting force, they are the envy of the world. **In Gibraltar the SAS showed great courage and determination.** They had a difficult task and they carried it out within the law. I have no hesitation in saying that they are a credit to the country and I join in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's recent tribute to their bravery in going back to Gibraltar to give evidence at the inquest”.

[02/11/1988](#), Mr Gerald Howarth, “Business Of The House” in the House of Commons:

“Some broadcasters are so arrogant that they do not believe they are part of this country. That was the problem during the Falklands campaign, when our troops were referred to as the British troops. There can be no excuse, either, for the Thames Television programme "Death on the Rock". I and most of my hon. Friends thought it an outrageous attempt to scour the Rock to find someone to say something to undermine the SAS. To judge from my post—perhaps other hon. **Members have read different views in theirs—most British people completely supported the noble efforts of the SAS to prevent bloodshed and mayhem in Gibraltar**”.

[01/03/1989](#), Lord Harris of Greenwich, “Death On The Rock” in the House of Lords:

“**Certainly in some cases involving terrorists, as the House will recall, the SAS has in the past been asked to help the police.** But in all the cases of which I have direct personal knowledge the SAS was asked to do this only when hostages had been taken. I should add that in the three cases in which I was involved with the SAS, I formed the highest regard for the professionalism of both officers and men of that unit who were brought to London. I do not believe that any other Western democracy has a force of superior quality to the SAS. But of course in Gibraltar the situation was entirely different. There was a small police force in Gibraltar which, in my judgment, could not have tackled this problem unaided. That police force would not have had enough experience to do that. In the special circumstances of the episode in Gibraltar, a significant number of other organisations and individuals were involved. There was the Governor, who was of course the Commander in Chief. **There was the Gibraltar garrison itself.** There was the Gibraltar police, the Spanish police, the Spanish security service, MI5 and MI6; there was the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the SAS”.

[22/05/1989](#), Mr Tam Dalyell, “Spring Adjournment” in the House of Commons:

“The second issue I want to raise relates to the unpopular subject of what happened in Gibraltar. Right hon. and hon. Members will see from a letter to me from the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office that he has placed in the Library copies of a statement made by a Spanish police officer concerning the surveillance of **three IRA personnel—Mairead Farrell, Daniel McCann and Sean Savage—in the period prior to their deaths at the hands of the SAS in Gibraltar on 6 March last year**”.

[05/06/1989](#), Lord Trefgarne (Minister of State for Defence Procurement), “Intelligence And Security” in the House of Lords:

“My Lords, it has long been the **practice of successive British governments not to comment on intelligence and security matters**. I do not propose to depart from that convention today”.

[13/11/1989](#), Mr Gerald Kaufman, Mr William Waldegrave (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office), and Mrs Lynda Chalker (Minister for Overseas Development), “Cambodia” in the House of Commons:

Mr Gerald Kaufman - “If Jane's Defence Weekly is anything to go by, another ringing endorsement of the rights of the Cambodian people by the Government is the **provision of training by British forces for troops fighting alongside the Khmer Rouge to overturn the present Government of Cambodia**. Jane's Defence Weekly says that that has been going on for four years. When the Prime Minister and the deputy Prime Minister were asked about that on Thursday 2 November in the House of Commons, they dodged the question eight times. The deputy Prime Minister said that it was not the practice to give details of training by British special forces of foreign troops. The Government cannot hide behind that formula any longer. Only last year, the Prime Minister boasted about British forces training Zimbabwean troops. On 19 July, she said that such training was "greatly appreciated." If that information can be given about training Zimbabwean troops, it must be given about training Cambodian troops. **Unless the Minister states unequivocally this afternoon that British service men have not been training Cambodian forces, we shall take it, by his silence or lack of response, that those authoritative allegations are true**. We shall have to proceed in the knowledge that the Government are taking positive steps to subvert by force the present regime in Cambodia by assisting fighting men who are part of an army dominated by what the Foreign and Commonwealth Office calls the "powerful army of the Khmer Rouge”.

Mr William Waldegrave (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office) - “The hon. Gentleman inadvertently makes my point for me, **because there have been no special forces ever involved in Zimbabwe**”.

Mr William Waldegrave (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office) - “The right hon. Gentleman, with his slightly schoolboyish debating skills, tries to make a bogus point. **The military training for the Zimbabwe army is not special forces training. We do plenty of open military training for friendly countries around the world. We have never ever commented on the role of the special forces—either to say yes or to say no—and that remains the position just as it has been the position of Labour Governments**”.

Mr Tam Dalyell - “**On the question of external military, what is the hon. Gentleman's view of alleged British military training of forces in Cambodia?** Does he accept that, when

Ministers say that they never discuss these matters, that is belied by the fact that press statements were issued in relation to the SAS training for the South Korea olympics, and in relation to Mazambique, Spain and a Foreign Office statement on the work which the British military are rightly carrying out in Colombia. Therefore, there is no precedent for not making statements to the Commons about the military problems”.

Mrs Lynda Chalker (Minister for Overseas Development) - **“We have been helping Colombia with its serious drugs problem. The question asked about Cambodia concerns the special forces. Neither previous Labour Governments nor this Conservative Government have commented on the use of special forces, and I have no intention of doing so now”.**

[29/11/1989](#), Mr Tam Dalyell and Mr Archie Hamilton (Minister of State for the Armed Forces), “Captain Fred Holroyd” in the House of Commons:

Mr Tam Dalyell - “If what Captain Holroyd writes is true, it raises the gravest questions about the conduct of the British state in Ireland and in this country. **This is the first book which may challenge the spirit of the Official Secrets Act 1989 head on.** Do Ministers condone the book or do they believe that it does not break the spirit of the new Act as it will be when it comes into effect?”.

Mr Tam Dalyell - **“Again from page 47, was the SAS operating from Castle Dillon long before the Government of the day were aware of it?** This debate is about accountability. The MOD has admitted that a sub-unit called 4 Field Survey Troop, Royal Engineers was based at Castle Dillon in County Armagh in the 1970s. However, it claims that no records are available today to identify its role. **In his book, Captain Holroyd identifies the unit as an undercover SAS troop.** Sir Michael Quinlan's office has been given notice of my question, as has the office of the Secretary of State for Defence. Will the Minister check the personal records of Captains Robert Nairac and Julian Ball held by the officers record department of the Grenadier Guards and the King's Own Scottish Borderers to ascertain whether those two officers served as OC and 2IC of that unit between 1973 and 1976?”.

Mr Tam Dalyell - **“On page 127, can the Minister assure the House that members of the British Army special forces or any special units of the British Army were in no way involved in the bomb plot targeting Mr. Mugabe during the Rhodesian elections arranged during the Lancaster house talks?”.**

Mr Archie Hamilton (Minister of State for the Armed Forces) - **“The hon. Gentleman has asked me yet again to comment on claims that SAS units were present in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s. The Government of the day first announced in January 1976 that the SAS Regiment was being sent to Northern Ireland. In making that statement they departed from the more normal practice of making no comment on the activities of the SAS, and I do not intend to follow them down that path by commenting further.** The hon. Gentleman also asked me to say something about a number of other allegations made by Mr. Holroyd concerning dirty tricks and illegal activity by the security forces in Northern Ireland. Those allegations range from kidnapping to assassination. The Government's position on all allegations of illegal activity in Northern Ireland is that, if anyone has any evidence, they should present it to the proper authorities—the police. Mr. Holroyd's allegations appear to be based largely on hearsay and rumour and do not seem to arise from any direct knowledge of the alleged events”.

[22/11/1989](#), The Earl of Arran, “Address In Reply To Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech” in the House of Lords:

“The Government remain firmly of the view that punitive sanctions will create an economic wasteland without ending apartheid. Our contribution to the United Nations' plan for Namibia is 15 million and assistance with the return of refugees. Other forms of assistance have been British election monitors and 170 men for a signals unit there. Cambodia was the main interest of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Ripon and of the noble Lord, Lord Molloy. **We shall not deviate from the practice of successive Administrations not to comment on allegations of the involvement of special forces. We help to promote a political settlement through the United Nations and the Paris conference, not a military solution**”.

9. 1990–1999

[24/10/1990](#), Lord Rodney and Lord Reay, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, “Cambodian Conflict, Volume 522: debated on Wednesday 24 October 1990”, House of Lords, Column 1333:

Lord Rodney: “My Lords, can my noble friend the Minister confirm that there is no truth in the suggestion in newspaper articles that **the SAS has been training Khmer Rouge people?**”

Lord Reay: “My Lords, **I cannot comment on that allegation.** However, I can say that we have given no assistance of any kind to the Khmer Rouge.”

[24/10/1990](#), Mr. Alan Williams and Mr Mark Lennox-Boyd (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of state in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office), “Cambodia Volume 178: debated on Wednesday 24 October 1990”, House of Commons, Column 333.

Mr. Alan Williams: “**Will the Minister comment on continuing reports that the SAS is involved in training the Khmer Rouge to lay land mines in Cambodia?** In view of the excellent reputation of John Pilger, the journalist who is making these reports, and the way he has spoken the truth about Cambodia for years, does the Minister realise that the public are horrified by the prospect that the British Government are supporting militarily the return of the Khmer Rouge?”

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: “**The British Government have never given support or help of any kind to the Khmer Rouge.**”

[26/10/1990](#), Mr Mullin, Mr Lawrence, Mrs Clewyd (opposition House members) and The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd), “Cambodia Volume 178: debated on Friday 26 October 1990”, House of Commons, Column 655, Column 669.

(Column 655) Mr. Mullin: “I spoke yesterday to someone who is personally acquainted with some of the **SAS men who have been engaged in training Cambodians...** I was told that

some of the SAS men have accompanied raiding parties of Khmer terrorists into Cambodia and that several British service men have been injured. I recall discovering in the mid-1970s from someone who was in the SAS that one or two SAS men were killed in Malaysia. Through a friendly Member I tabled questions about the fatalities of service men in Malaysia. By God, there had been a lot of car accidents and swimming accidents that year. **I suspect that if any SAS men who have been involved in training Cambodians have been killed**—I have no knowledge that they have—there will be car accidents in Thailand as people return from leave spent in Hong Kong, or something like that.

The person to whom I spoke yesterday said that SAS involvement with the Khmer Rouge and its allies was causing misgivings among SAS soldiers.”

Mr. Lawrence: “I have a **letter dated 19 October from Lord Caithness**. It says:

“There is **no British Government involvement of any kind**”—
the **Minister is referring to support** for the Khmer Rouge in any form—and never has been
“**training, equipping or co-operating with the Khmer Rouge forces**”.

That is the complete sentence.”

(Column 669) Mrs. Clwyd: “The **Government have repeatedly denied** that there is British Government support for the Khmer Rouge, but to my knowledge **they have never specifically refuted the charge that SAS forces have been involved or that former members of the SAS have been to Cambodia on behalf of the Government**; nor have they denied giving military support to the other resistance factions which are fighting alongside the Khmer Rouge.

(Column 671) There have been so many incidents about which we have attempted to establish the truth and have been palmed off—either through **questions being blocked at the Table Office or being given half-truths by Ministers**. It is interesting that; following the Pilger programme to which my hon. Friend referred, the Foreign Secretary wrote a half-page article in The Independent. As far as I know, that is the first time that a Minister has responded to a television programme in this way. I suspect that the Foreign Secretary did not write the article but that it was ghosted for him by somebody quite close to the Chamber and to him.

...For example, he had said:

“The British Government has never given aid of any sort to the Khmer Rouge, nor will it do so.”

I asked whether references to the British Government include former SAS officers who could be pursuing British Government policies in their retirement. In his article he attempted to dismiss my suspicions about the two men whom I met in Cambodia, but unless he is willing to say what they do and why they were in Cambodia, I cannot help but be suspicious.”

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): “The Government never sustain, succour or support terrorists and terrorism. As to questions which the hon. Gentleman raised about the special forces or their activities, he **will have heard before that it is the practice of all Governments—previous Governments over the years—to make no comment on those matters**. The words that I have used are perhaps **hallowed by time, but they are the words that I shall stand by.**”

[17/01/1991](#), Mr. Kenneth Hind and The Prime Minister, “The Gulf Volume 183: debated on Thursday 17 January 1991”, House of Commons, Column 991:

Mr. Kenneth Hind: “Does my right hon. Friend agree that **what happened last night** was a great credit to British and allied planning? Will he confirm that the fact that Scud missiles in Iraq have been knocked out makes it unlikely that the Iraqis will be able to make an attack on Israel and that that means that Saddam Hussein will not be able to divide the allies and split off the Arabs, which is clearly his intention?”

The Prime Minister: “As I said a moment ago, I very much hope that no such attack takes place. If my hon. Friend will forgive me, **I can make no comment on the effectiveness of the attack on the Scud missiles.**”

[Attack on Scud missiles reported by RAND.org to have been carried by UK and US special forces]

[13/02/1991](#), Mr. Cryer, Mr. Lennox-Boyd (The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs) & Mr. Allason, “Cambodia Volume 185: debated on Wednesday 13 February 1991”, House of Commons, Column 837:

Mr. Cryer: “Are not people a little suspicious of the Government's intentions when the Government have been involved in training members of the Khmer Rouge, which includes the Pol Pot faction?”

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: “We have repeatedly stated, and I shall state it again today, that there has never been and there is **no Government involvement of any kind in training, equipping or co-operating with the Khmer Rouge.**”

Mr. Allason: “**Given Mr. John Pilger's apparent success in perpetuating the myth that the SAS and other British units have been training the Pol Pot regime** and its supporters, has the Foreign Office given any consideration to employing Mr. Pilger as a propagandist against the regime in Baghdad?”

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: “**The Foreign Office has made clear its fundamental disagreement** with so many of Mr. Pilger's allegations.”

[22/07/1991](#), Mr. Bernie Grant, Mr. Mullin, Mr. Allason, Mr. Campbell-Savours, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. Lennox-Boyd (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs), “Cambodia Volume 195: debated on Monday 22 July 1991”, House of Commons, Columns 863-879:

[Extended quotations included to show denials made by government ministers]

Mr. Bernie Grant: “Over the years, the British Government have **repeatedly denied supplying military training to any of the factions fighting the Cambodian Government.** Many questions have been tabled by hon. Members in an attempt to get at the truth, and hundreds of letters from constituents have been passed to Ministers for answer. Now, after years of denial, Her Majesty's Government have finally admitted, in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 25 June this year:

"From 1983 until 1989 **Her Majesty's Government provided training to the armed forces of the Cambodian non-communist resistance**, that is the Khmer People's National Liberation armed forces and the Armée Nationale Sihanoukienne."

They said:

"There has never been and will never be any British assistance or support, military or otherwise, for the Khmer Rouge. Since 1989 Her Majesty's Government have not been involved in any way in training, equipping or supplying the forces of any of the Cambodian parties. **In accordance with normal practice no further details about this training or any information about the nature of this training will be given.**" —[Official Report, 25 June 1991; Vol. 193, c. 454.]”

Mr. Mullin: “Parliament has been misled over a long period. On 13 March 1989, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), the shadow Foreign Secretary, said to the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), then briefly the custodian of Government policy on Cambodia:

"If the Government want to avoid a protracted civil war in Cambodia, **why are they providing special forces training to one of the participants in that war?**"

The Minister replied:

"As the right hon. Gentleman knows, **I will give no answer**".—[Official Report, 13 March 1989; Vol. 160, c. 49.]

The subject came up repeatedly in our debate on this subject on 26 October 1990. The Minister—happily, the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (**Mr. Lennox-Boyd**), who has record tenure in justifying Government policy on Cambodia—said:

"I am personally completely satisfied that the explanations that I have been given are comprehensive and accurate."

He declined to share those explanations with the House and said:

"I cannot say more than I have said ... I must place it clearly on record that the **British Government, of course, utterly and clearly refute the allegations** made by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South and by Mr. Pilger in his programme."—[Official Report, 26 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 692.]

...On 24 September 1989, The Sunday Telegraph reported: "British Army teams—**almost certainly from the SAS**—have been training guerrillas of the Sihanoukist National Army of Cambodia at a secret training base in Thailand for the past two years."

Mr. Mullin (Columns 870-871): “Did operations really cease in 1989? The Government say that they did, but they have told us all sorts of things over the years. Perhaps the matter was privatised, because such operations, when they become embarrassing, have a long history of being put out to **people who call themselves ex-SAS or ex-this or ex-that**...

... I am unable to see how British people learning about the activities of British soldiers based in Thailand, some 8,000 miles from here, could possibly be a threat to national security. **What are the Government trying to hide? We shall shortly hear a great deal of bluster from the Minister. The Government cannot have much confidence in their case when they have to issue affidavits of that nature in an attempt to gag witnesses and fix the outcome of the**

case. I regret that that case was settled, because if a jury had found out the truth about what was going on, the outcome might have been somewhat different.

If the past is anything to go by, the Minister will be at pains to assure us that the Government have not supported the Khmer Rouge.”

Mr. Allason: “...I asked my hon. Friend [Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State] categorically whether SAS personnel were deployed in Cambodia. I was given a categorical assurance that they were not.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: “My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Bailey (Mrs. Clwyd) first met Geidt and de Normann in Phnom Penh in September 1989, in the company of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester). The Foreign Office Minister, the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Mr. Lennox-Boyd), told the House:

“Those two men did not visit Indochina at our behest or as representatives of the Government.”... —[Official Report, 26 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 691.]

In a letter to Central Television, lawyers for Geidt said that he was not military. That was not true. **Mr. Geidt had links with military intelligence** and had served in the regular Army...

... when the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton), was asked about contacts between Geidt, de Normann and the Ministry of Defence, he stated:

“The only contact with the Ministry of Defence in relation to the visit that has been traced was a **routine inquiry by Mr. de Normann prior to departure to check on the regulations governing visits by ex-service personnel** to communist countries.”—[Official Report, 18 October 1990; Vol. 177, c. 923.]

That was a perfectly acceptable request to make. But what happened? **That answer was quickly amended when it was realised that the libel trial was proceeding.** On 13 May, the story changed. The MOD, out of the blue, wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin):

“More recently it has come to light that Mr. Mackenzie Geidt had an informal discussion”— the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) knows all about such discussions and he has written many books about them—

“with an MOD officer in October 1989 on his return from Indochina””.

Mrs. Clwyd (Column 878): “Ministers must be accountable to Parliament. The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) made that point in the House just a couple of weeks ago. Other democracies do not have the same paranoia about national security as our Government seem to have. **They seem to be able to accommodate secrecy and security without dashing for cover and invoking public immunity** orders at the drop of a hat. It is **ironic that former eastern bloc countries are looking at ways to make their security services accountable to an independent body.** Even the KGB now has a press officer... Although we all recognise that secrecy is sometimes in the public interest, we should also expect that, **in a democracy, disclosure can sometimes be in the public interest.**”

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd) (Column 879): “The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said that he would be met with some bluster by me. **I wish to say something that will be controversial,**

but I shall say it at the outset because I do not seek to shirk it. I shall not elaborate tonight on the written answer of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces..”

[15/10/1991](#), Mr. Tam Dalyell (Opposition Member of the Commons), “Points Of Order Volume 191: debated on Wednesday 15 May 1991”, House of Commons, Column 281:

Mr. Tam Dalyell: “On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. **It has always been a rule of the Table Office—and understandably so—that it does not accept questions about the SAS.** However, one read in this morning's newspapers that at a function organised by an Anglo-Israeli business man, Mr. Benjamin Pearl, the **Prime Minister made a rather detailed speech about the operation of the special forces.** If the Prime Minister can make speeches on sensitive matters, may we take it that Members of Parliament can put down questions about security operations?”

Mr. Speaker: “I understand that the **speech in question was not made in public.** However, the answer to the hon. Member's question is that the **Table Office will continue to examine questions** carefully to ensure that they come **within the rules of the House.**”

[10/06/1991](#), The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke) and Mr. Peter Robinson, “Northern Ireland (Interim Period) Volume 193: debated on Thursday 20 June 1991”, House of Commons, Columns 514-515:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): “I must pay a special tribute to the security forces, whose courage and professionalism in the face of unremitting threat to their lives is exemplary and who strive to protect the people of Northern Ireland. **The efforts of the security forces are all the more vital because it is the present intention of the terrorists to prevent any political progress.** The security forces deserve the support of everyone in Northern Ireland.

The Government will do all in their power to assist and support the security forces.”

Mr. Peter Robinson: “Will the Secretary of State assist the House? He said that more had to be done in terms of security co-operation with the Government of the Irish Republic. **Can he tell us on what sort of security issues he is currently pressing the Government of the Irish Republic?**”

Mr. Brooke: “I understand the hon. Gentleman's question and his reason for asking it, but **I do not think that it would be in the interests of joint security efforts if I shared those details** with the House because to do so would be to afford intelligence to others.”

[22/07/1993](#), Mr. Ken Livingstone and The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton), “Business Of The House Volume 229: debated on Thursday 22 July 1993”, House of Commons, Columns 512-513:

Mr. Ken Livingstone: “Is the Leader of the House prepared to arrange a debate on two early-day motions, Nos. 2369 and 2370?”

[That this House notes the grave allegations in Yorkshire Television's exhaustively researched investigation into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, in which 33 people lost their lives in 1974... that the bombers were being 'run' by the Special Duties team, a group of SAS-trained undercover soldiers operating from Castledillon (under the cover of 4 Field Survey Troop), controlled by MI5 and led by Captain Tony Ball and Captain Robrt Nairac, that 4 Field Survey Troop were involved in cross border raids without political authorisation].

They relate to the horrifying revelations in Yorkshire Television's investigation of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, which left 33 dead, and to the view...that **members of the British Army were using captured IRA explosives and detonating them south of the Border?**

Mr. Newton: “As I understand it, these are clearly **matters for the authorities in the Republic of Ireland**. Any investigation in the light of the allegations made in the programme to which the early-day motions refer is **a matter for the Irish authorities and the Garda in the first instance.**”

[20/01/1994](#), Mr. Maginnis and The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler), “Security Volume 235: debated on Thursday 20 January 1994”, House of Commons, Column 1028.

Mr. Maginnis: “Will the Minister unequivocally **assure us that there is no reduction in the level of the security services' capabilities, including the deployment of special forces** [in Northern Ireland]?”

Sir John Wheeler: “...I am glad to tell the House that the **security forces also have their successes**. In 1993, 366 people were charged with terrorist-related offences—60 of them with murder or attempted murder.”

[11/04/1994](#), Lord Stoddart of Swindon and Baroness Chalker of Wallasey (Minister of State for Overseas Development and Africa at the Foreign Office), “Bosnia: Nato Air Action Volume 553: debated on Monday 11 April 1994”, House of Lords, Columns 1288-1289:

Lord Stoddart of Swindon: “My Lords, is the noble Baroness aware that those of us who are fearful of this country getting involved on one side of a civil war are even more fearful today? Secondly, **will she comment on reports which have come out that one of the UNPROFOR observers was a member of the SAS who directed fire on the Serb positions?** Thirdly, is there still contact with the Serb political leaders or commanders in an effort to stop this incident—I call it an incident advisedly—from escalating further?”

Baroness Chalker of Wallasey: “My Lords, I can tell the noble Lord that there is still contact with the Serbs. It is not at all levels and in all places, but we shall be doing all we can to maintain the contact with the Serbs for the simple reason that what we believe is necessary is to gain a cease-fire. As the noble Lord, Lord Richard, said, that was what seemed to have been agreed on Thursday but was totally broken by the Serbs on Friday. The noble Lord asked about the role of the Special Air Services. **He will know that it is long-standing policy not to comment on special forces matters.** Beyond that I can make no further comment today.”

[18/04/1994](#), Mr. John Wilkinson and The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind), “Bosnia Volume 241: debated on Monday 18 April 1994”, House of Commons, Column 645.

Mr. John Wilkinson: “I am sure that the Government and my right hon. and learned Friend will, like the whole House, have as their first interest the security of British armed forces personnel on the ground and in the air over Bosnia. **May I express my condolences to the family of Corporal Rennie of the Special Air Service Regiment and to that of Marine Commando Coates who so tragically died?** What arrangements have been put in place to enable the commander of the United Nations Protection Force and his subordinate commanders in Bosnia to call on close air support more rapidly and more effectively when the lives of their own forces are at serious risk?”

Mr. Rifkind: “There is no difficulty about the use of close air support where it is required for the defence of UNPROFOR forces. As we saw in Gorazde itself, General Rose was able to call on air power, which was available within 45 minutes. Therefore, where it is required for the defence of United Nations forces, **I believe that the present procedures are indeed appropriate.**”

[16/10/1995](#), Mr. Menzies Campbell, “First Day Volume 264: debated on Monday 16 October 1995”, House of Commons, Column 76:

Mr. Menzies Campbell: “It...gives me no pleasure to say that his [The Secretary of State’s] speech last week to his party conference was not worthy of his office...

... In particular, I believe that the **Secretary of State's references to the special services** displayed a gross error of judgment...

... The references to the SAS were the more inept, since it is **a regiment that deliberately shuns publicity. As recently as this summer the Ministry of Defence went to court to prevent publication of material that might be thought detrimental to the SAS and its procedures.** A speech containing language to the effect, "Don't mess with Britain", is a speech containing the language of the saloon bar.”

[14/07/1997](#), Mr. Dalyell and Mr. George Robertson (Secretary of State for Defense), “Strategic Defence Review Volume 298: debated on Monday 14 July 1997”, House of Commons, Columns 10-11.

Mr. Dalyell: “In the strategic review, will account be taken of the safety of our forces, given the **all too likely retaliation by the Serbs following the SAS operation? If there are to be any more such operations,** would not it be wise to talk to the Russians first?”

Mr. Robertson: “The safety of our troops and, indeed, of other British citizens serving in the former Yugoslavia, was one of our principal concerns before any decision was taken about serving indictments on those accused of war crimes. We made that clear beforehand and we have made it clear subsequently. We regard that obligation as absolutely paramount.

The exercise conducted last week by NATO troops, with British stabilisation force troops in the vanguard, revitalised the Dayton process by bringing to justice the people accused of those terrible crimes. We have acted not just for the future of Bosnia but for future standards of conduct in the world.”

[02/02/1998](#), Dr. Julian Lewis and The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook) “Iraq Volume 305: debated on Monday 2 February 1998”, House of Commons, Columns 727-728.

Dr. Julian Lewis: “Is the Foreign Secretary aware of the report in The Mail on Sunday yesterday by Chris McLaughlin, which **purported to give details about the SAS already being in Iraq?** Will he join me in condemning any journalism that puts the lives of our troops in danger when sensitive preliminary operations are possibly being undertaken?”

Mr. Cook: “I am happy to assure the House that that report was **probably as unreliable as most reports** that I have read in The Mail on Sunday recently.”

[17/06/1998](#), Rev. Martin Smyth and The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram) “Applications To Revoke Declaration Volume 314: debated on Wednesday 17 June 1998”, House of Commons, Columns 436-437.

Rev. Martin Smyth: “Can I have some clarification from the Minister? He may be aware that the Irish News reported at the weekend that attacks were carried out in the Markets area of my constituency by the official IRA. He may be aware also that Mr. Turley, a constituent of mine, was murdered at the weekend. At a time when the House is against judicial sentencing for capital offences, he was murdered without any trial. He may have been a drug runner, but that does not justify what happened. **It has been put to me that the body which did that can be described as the SAS of Provisional IRA-Sinn Fein. Would that type of thing be considered in the light of new clause 4?**”

Mr. Ingram: “First, **I will not speculate** on matters raised in the press. However, from the way in which the hon. Gentleman has described the issue, it does not seem to be a description of events which would be reported to me. **As he knows, we never discuss information which may be in the hands of the Secretary of State or myself and which has been passed to us by the security forces.** We must consider the details. Clearly, our sympathy would go to the family of anyone murdered, because they are still victims—irrespective of what they may have been involved in.”

[24/05/1998](#), Mr. Julian Brazier and The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar), “Parachute Regiment Volume 314: debated on Sunday 24 May 1998”, House of Commons, Columns 1018-1019:

Mr. Julian Brazier: “In the Gulf war, within only a week, the 81st US Airborne had established a substantial footprint in Saudi Arabia. Our own much-vaunted 24 Air Mobile Brigade took several months just to get to Bosnia. This is not an issue about the tactical use of parachutes versus helicopters; it is about the incredible complexity of planning and executing rapid strategic air moves, which only 5 Brigade can do.

Secondly, will the new brigade include the excellent supporting units that my hon. Friend mentioned—the 9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers, the 7 Parachute Regiment Royal Horse Artillery and the Parachute Logistics Battalion, in which **every soldier is hardened by P**

Company training? It is a measure of their excellence that one brigade should provide half the successful applicants to the 22 SAS Regiment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): "... As the hon. Member said, the battalions of the Parachute Regiment are famous for their commitment, their skills and their high training standards... Its history is very much a history of our times, especially the **desperate nature of many of the actions in which the regiment has been involved—a feature, perhaps, of parachute operations, to which I shall return...**

... The ability to **deploy force quickly in the early stages of an international crisis** can be crucial. Such forces can have a military and political impact well beyond the size of the units deployed. There is no faster way of deploying units to a combat zone than by air—especially if there are long distances to travel. In such circumstances, where there is no suitable airfield in friendly hands, the best way to land may be by parachute. Obviously, therefore, we need to retain a parachute capability. The question that confronts us, which the hon. Member for Aldershot rightly identified, is how big that capability should be."

[28/10/1998](#), Mr. Paul Keetch and Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. Doug Henderson), "Army Volume 318: debated on Wednesday 28 October 1998", House of Commons, Column 361:

Mr. Paul Keetch: "Does he agree that the 22nd Special Air Service Regiment, based in my constituency, is one of the finest regiments in the world? He also mentioned loyalty. Does he agree that the number of books that we are now seeing by former members of the regiment are **of great concern to serving and former members of the regiment?** Would he once and for all destroy the myth published in a recent book that **it might be Government policy to disband the regiment** and start again? **Will he assure me and the regiment** that that is not the Government's intention?"

Mr. Henderson: "...I am proud to confirm that the quality is high throughout the British Army, and that that is built on the strength of its historic role. In relation to the publication of articles by ex-serving members, where their contracts prohibit the disclosure of certain forms of information, the **Government will take every action to make sure that they are unable to engage in disclosure** which could be harmful not only to their ex-colleagues but to the interests of the **defence of this nation.**"

[Discussions of accountability for SIS \(MI6\) - intelligence services, February 22, 1994 - Hansard](#)

10. 2000–2009

[15/05/2000](#), Lord Blaker and Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean, “Sierra Leone” in the House of Lords:

Lord Blaker - “My Lords, I have had the **strong impression in recent days that there are more reports than there used to be about the activities of the SAS, its equipment and even its intentions.** This seems to me to be undesirable. Can the Minister assure us that there has been **no change of policy as regards the release of information on that sort of subject?**”.

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean - “Yes, my Lords, I can. I, too, have been rather disturbed by some of these reports. I was most disturbed to hear a reference to special forces from the noble Lord's right honourable friend the shadow Secretary of State on a radio programme this morning. I thought that that was an astonishing reference for a responsible member of the Opposition to make. I should tell the noble Lord that such reports are not "reports" in the accepted sense of being official reports from the MoD, the Foreign Office, or anywhere else. There is a great deal of speculation about what is happening. **In line with our predecessor administrations—and, I hope, our successor administrations—we do not comment on the activities of special forces.**

[22/05/2000](#), Julian Lewis and Jack Straw (the Secretary of State for the Home Department), “Security Service” in the House of Commons:

Julian Lewis - “If he will make a statement on the capability of the Security Service to monitor subversive groups”.

Jack Straw (the Secretary of State for the Home Department) - “The functions of the Security Service are set out in section 1 of the Security Service Act 1989 as amended by the 1996 Act. The Security Service cannot, on its own account, investigate activities, or planned activities, unless they are threats to national security. **It has been the long-standing policy of successive Governments not to comment on the operations and capabilities of the Security Service.** However, I can say that I, as Home Secretary, and the director general of the service are both content that the service is properly resourced to undertake its statutory functions.”.

[25/05/2000](#), Lord Cope of Berkeley and Viscount Slim, “Dame Stella Rimington: Memoirs” in the House of Lords:

Lord Cope of Berkeley - “My Lords, when considering this matter, will the Government bear in mind the **unfortunate precedent of the SAS**, when the floodgates did indeed open?”.

Viscount Slim - “**My Lords, is it not a fact that one of the weaknesses, whether we are talking about the security services or the special forces, is that the Official Secrets Act no longer stands up in court?** Is it not vital that the Government bring forward new official secrets legislation or a new form of contract which lasts for the lifetime of a member of the security services or special forces? The weakness is that signing the Act does not seem to matter. Is the Minister aware that in a recent case we as a nation lost business because the friendly country with which we dealt said that it would rather employ the services of another government because they do not write books?”.

[10/02/2000](#), Jimmy Hood, “Stansted Hijacking” in the House of Commons:

“I add my compliments to the police and special forces on their excellent work. However—why Stansted? I have not heard a satisfactory answer to why it was chosen. We have an air force base at Brize Norton, which I should think could have been isolated much more

easily and without bringing the problems associated with a hijacking to a commercial airport. Was Brize Norton considered as an alternative for dealing with the hijacking? If not, why not?”.

[15/05/2000](#), Iain Duncan Smith and Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence), “Sierra Leone” in the House of Commons:

Iain Duncan Smith - “As I have pointed out, it now appears that, whatever reservations we have, British troops are in de facto full support of the UN forces and President Kabbah. Regardless of what others have said about us not being part of the UN mission, the reality is that we are in complete support of it and President Kabbah. Reports over the weekend show that British troops are patrolling Freetown and manning road blocks. **We hear that special forces are operating in the countryside and that British officers are, to all intents and purposes, running the day-to-day operation of UN forces**”.

Geoffrey Hoon - “On the specific concerns raised by the hon. Gentleman, he ought to know better than to ask about the deployment of special forces. He has supported the Government in the past. He knows full well that **it is well established practice that Governments never comment on the deployment of special forces**”.

[22/06/2000](#), Archie Hamilton, “Security And Intelligence Agencies” in the House of Commons:

“Does my right hon. Friend agree that we also have the unfortunate precedent of General de la Billiere's memoirs, which described what the SAS did during the Gulf war? **It opened the door to a large number of other books by former members of the SAS**”.

[10/07/2002](#), Lord Vivian and Lord Bach “Sa80-A2 Rifle” in the House of Lords:

Lord Vivian - “My Lords, can the Minister inform the House of the failure rate in rounds fired from the SA80-A2, the M16 and the AK47 rifles? **Have any faults been reported by the SAS in their use of the Demarco rifle?**”.

Lord Bach - “My Lords, as to the last part of the noble Lord's question, **he knows that we do not comment on equipment that special forces may or may not have**. As to the first part of his question relating to failure rates, extensive trials were undertaken before the SA80 was issued. As I replied a moment or two ago, those trials demonstrated that the SA80-A2 was a very reliable weapon system. The testing included trials in Kuwait in very high temperatures with strong winds and blowing sand”

[17/07/2002](#), “Defence Procurement” in the House of Commons:

Paul Keetch - “The Minister is right, and I welcome the news that he has just given. Will he assure the House and, more importantly, the men and women who carry the SA80 that, if that report shows any doubt at all about that weapons's serviceability and record, **the Government will be prepared to procure a different rifle, if not for the entire British armed forces, at least for those infantry, special forces, paratroops, Marines and so on who might use it in battle?**”.

Adam Ingram (the Minister of State for Defence) - That is perhaps a step too far. The hon. Gentleman should not use language that could somehow lead to a lack of confidence in what is a very sophisticated rifle, which, unfortunately, in some reports, has been shown not to have performed as well as we anticipated that it would in the extreme circumstances of Afghanistan.

David Burnside - **“Will the Minister confirm that other weapons are already used by special forces, including in Afghanistan?** The problem being raised is not relevant to many operational forces, at present, who are using a Heckler and Koch”.

Adam Ingram (the Minister of State for Defence) - **“I shall not comment on what special forces may or may not use in theatre.** Clearly, as I said in my earlier response, we must carry out that detailed analysis. We must consider that rifle in connection with other equivalent weapon systems”.

[18/07/2002](#), Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence), “Strategic Defence Review” in the House of Commons:

“The work on the new chapter has also confirmed the increasing utility of special forces. It is not our policy to comment in detail on those forces, and I do not intend to do so today. However, I can say that we will be enhancing the capabilities of our special forces, particularly their key enablers, maximising their utility and flexibility”.

[25/10/2000](#), Jimmy Hood, “Fuel Protests” in the House of Commons:

“In discussing what happened only a few weeks ago, it is not right for hon. Members to describe themselves as democrats and then condone in any way, shape or form the blockading of our refineries. Those hon. Members who believe that the protest was a coincidence and a popular uprising should consider that **the SAS—the best trained troops in the world—took four or five weeks to prepare and effect the rescue of five of our soldiers who were held hostage in Sierra Leone.** If it takes the best trained armed forces in the world five weeks to rescue five men in Sierra Leone, hon. Members should not try to kid me that a lot of organisation was not done behind the scenes by certain faceless, unrepresentative people. That is what I fear most about the protests”.

[26/10/2000](#), Duncan Smith, “Defence Procurement” in the House of Commons:

“The point is that—despite concerns about the light support weapon as well as the personal weapon, which the Secretary of State knows are widespread—the Government have now decided to go ahead and spend about £80 million on upgrading the **SA80.** That is about £400 per weapon. The right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have clearly reached that conclusion in the belief that the get-well programme—for that is what it is—**will eradicate all the problems that have made the military so concerned about the weapon and so dismissive of its capabilities, to the extent that special forces and others do not want to use it if they can avoid it**”.

[04/03/2001](#), Andrew Mackinlay and John Spellar (the Minister for the Armed Forces), “Sierra Leone” in the House of Commons:

Andrew Mackinlay - **“How many United Kingdom forces personnel, including our special forces—police, security and intelligence services—have been killed during their deployment in Sierra Leone, or as a consequence of that deployment?”**

John Spellar (the Minister for the Armed Forces) - **“According to my recollection, one member of the Paratroop Regiment was killed in an extremely successful operation to rescue some of our forces—an operation that was widely remarked on not just in the House, but across the world”.**

[16/10/2001](#), Patrick Mercer, “Coalition Against International Terrorism” in the House of:

“I should like to discuss the idea that humanitarian aid is alien to military aims. We have heard about the three British campaigns in Afghanistan in the 19th and early 20th centuries. All were more or less failures. We have heard about the Soviet campaign in the late 20th century. However, we should consider **two remarkably successful British counter-terrorist campaigns: the Malaya campaign and the little known Oman campaign. The latter was fought on the Jebel Akh'dar, largely by small numbers of special forces.** However, an integral part of both campaigns was humanitarian aid”.

[05/11/2001](#), Lord Craig of Radley, “Afghanistan” in the House of Lords:

“Can we snatch bin Laden with special forces? We had tough experiences with special forces in the Gulf War. Worried about Iraqi Scud missile attacks on Israel, **we sent special forces helicopters and ground troops deep into Iraq.** Stories such as Bravo Two Zero have since dramatised the difficulties of getting at Scud communications and their mobile launchers over inhospitable territory. Bin Laden is much smaller and a great deal nimbler on his feet than any Scud launcher. He will be an even more difficult special forces target. I hope that we are getting good intelligence on his whereabouts”.

[17/12/2001](#), Lord Inge, Lord Bramall, and Lord Vivian, “Afghanistan” in the House of Lords:

Lord Inge - “The combination of the **devastating impact of US air power and the Northern Alliance, brilliantly and bravely encouraged by British and US special forces,** has proved highly effective.”.

Lord Bramall - “As a result, the most impressive results in destroying the power of the Taliban have been achieved far quicker than many of us dared hoped. In all this the American marines and special forces and **our own special forces have clearly played a significant part in advising local forces of the Northern Alliance and other factions and specifically in directing the air effort to both Taliban and Al'Qaeda targets** and also by providing maximum fire support to friendly forces on the ground [...] The organisation and speed of reaction of our forces works—as has been manifest over and again. After all, we sent a task force to the Falklands with four days' notice; we have long had a spearhead battalion at immediate readiness; **we have special forces grouped for quick reaction,** a Marine Commando Brigade, an Air Assault Brigade, a Strategic Reserve Division and a Rapid Reaction Corps all designed for rapid deployment anywhere in the world”.

Lord Vivian - “Secondly, the need for flexible military capability, backed up by the abilities to deploy rapidly and provide sound and timely intelligence. **Special forces are playing a key role in the effective deployment of anti-Taliban forces** and the destruction of the enemy. Their effectiveness is out of all proportion to their relatively small numbers and they have been and will continue to be a vital asset in these operations [...] The task force consists of the aircraft carrier HMS "Illustrious", with a number of helicopters embarked, the assault ship HMS "Fearless", the destroyer HMS "Southampton", the frigate HMS "Cornwall" and seven Royal Fleet Auxiliaries. **The Army has provided ground forces from special forces and specialist troops.** There are Royal Marines at Bagram airport and lead elements of 40 Commando embarked with the task force for immediate support with the remainder in the United Kingdom at immediate notice”.

[05/03/2001](#), Lord Chalfont, “Chinook ZD 576” in the House of Lords:

“It began at approximately twenty minutes to six on the evening of 2nd June 1994 when Chinook helicopter ZD 576 took off from the Royal Air Force station at Aldergrove in Northern Ireland. **The crew of the aircraft were two experienced special forces officers Flight-Lieutenant Tapper, the captain, and Flight-Lieutenant Cook,** the co-pilot—and two

Royal Air Force crewmen. There were 25 civilian and military passengers, most belonging to the Northern Ireland intelligence community. Their destination was Fort George in Scotland. However, at about 6 p.m. the helicopter crashed on the Mull of Kintyre”.

[04/10/2001](#), Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale, “International Terrorism” in the House of Lords:

“I conclude with a word about the special forces, who are currently much discussed in the media by people with varying degrees of expertise or wisdom and sometimes with not a great deal of either. **I believe that the less said in public about the special forces the better**”.

[04/10/2001](#), John Barron, “International Terrorism” in the House of Commons:

“My concern is that that approach not only puts our own security at risk, but adds to the risks to our own troops on the ground. We all know that our troops in Kosovo, for example, did not have enough boots and that their radios were not up to sufficient standard so mobile phones had to be used. **We know that the SAS has yet to receive its new Chinook helicopter.** I ask the Government to realise that they cannot penny-pinch when it comes to the cost of defending the realm”.

[08/10/2001](#), Lord Gilbert, Lord Rogan, and Baroness Amos (the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office), “International Terrorism” in the House of Lords:

Lord Gilbert - “Noble Lords know that I was in North America at the time of the events of 11th September. I was startled to see some **headlines in the newspapers saying that British special forces were already in Afghanistan.** That information became available as a result of a briefing given apparently by the Pentagon, which said that American and British forces were in Afghanistan on the ground. I telephoned one of my friends in Washington to ask what the hell was going on. **I very much hope that the full weight and influence of the British Government will be brought to bear to ensure that we do not have briefings of that kind involving the release of information about the activities of our troops**”.

Lord Rogan - “Based on my admittedly limited experience of last week, your Lordships will be glad to know that our Armed Forces in Oman are ready. We have been told that last night two missile firing Royal Navy submarines, "HMS Trafalgar" and "HMS Triumph", opened the joint US/UK attack on the Taliban from the Indian Ocean. **We are also led to believe that troops from our elite Special Air Service have been on the ground in Afghanistan for some time and yesterday helped to guide the cruise missiles to their targets.** Today they are expected to assess the damage inflicted and report back. These are skilled and dedicated men and women whose skill and bravery are both unparalleled and somewhat humbling from a mere mortal's point of view”.

Baroness Amos (the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office) - “I assure my noble friend Lord Gilbert that information operations, as I am reliably informed they are now more correctly known, continue to be part of our military capabilities. **My noble friend will also know that we do not comment on the intelligence services,** but my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced that following the events of 11th September we are seeking to rebalance our capabilities. My right honourable friend said that we must have the right concepts, the right levels of forces and the right capabilities”.

[16/10/2001](#), George Galloway, “Coalition Against International Terrorism” in the House of Commons:

“The American and British Governments invented the Taliban. I do not say that to score points, although that is irresistible for those of who stood in the Chamber and bored the House stiff

with warnings of the dark night that would ensue under those holy warriors—those freedom fighters—whom the American and British Governments were arming, financing and training. **After all, bin Laden's guards were trained in what can only be described as a terrorist training camp near Fort William by the Special Air Service of the British Army.** So there are no supporters of the Taliban or bin Laden among my right hon. and hon. Friends. To sketch out a simplistic argument saying that there is no alternative, as was done from the Dispatch Box today, is a grave error. In politics, there is seldom only one alternative. There is seldom no other way to skin a cat than the way advanced by the Government”.

[26/10/2001](#), Julian Lewis and Adam Ingram (the Minister of State for Defence), “Armed Forces (Deployment)” in the House of Commons:

Julian Lewis - “**I strongly endorse the plea that the Minister has been giving to the mass media to show restraint in what they publish at this delicate time, particularly in relation to speculation on what might happen in the employment of special forces.** Surely the media should bear in mind that even a newspaper published in London is now accessible worldwide on the internet, and that bin Laden has not been slow to use western technology against the west”.

Adam Ingram (the Minister of State for Defence) - “We hold almost daily briefings either in the United Kingdom or in the United States to set out the various developments. This statement is an addition to that process. There is no paucity of information although, for very good reasons, **there are some matters—on detailed operational activities, or to confirm or deny the presence and actions of special forces—on which we will not comment**”.

[05/11/2001](#), Lord Privy Seal, “Northern Ireland: Terrorist Contacts” in the House of Lords:

Lord Glentoran - “*asked Her Majesty's Government: Whether they are aware of evidence of any contacts or attempted contacts between Northern Ireland-based terrorist organisations, including the Real IRA and the Provisional IRA, and Al'Qaeda or its linked terrorist organisations*”.

Lord Privy Seal - “My Lords, it is **long-standing government policy not to comment on intelligence matters.** Noble Lords will know that I am obliged to reinforce that position, although I hope not with discourtesy either to the noble Lord or to the House”.

[14/11/2001](#), Baroness Williams of Crosby, “Afghanistan” in the House of Lords:

“My Lords, I, too, thank the noble and learned Lord the Leader of the House for repeating a Statement made by the Prime Minister. It would be churlish not to recognise the remarkable function and role of the Prime Minister and also of President Bush in what has happened. **We also recognise the work of the special forces, both British and American, and their remarkable achievement so far**”.

[29/11/2001](#), Alice Mahon, “Business Of The House” in the House of Commons:

“I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 489. [*That this House notes the call of Amnesty International for a public inquiry into the **mass killing of Afghan prisoners at the Qala-i-Jhangi Fort on 25th and 27th November; conscious of the presence of British and American special forces on site during the massacre and the heavy bombardment of the prisoners by the US Air Force, calls upon Her Majesty's Government to support the setting up of such an inquiry; further notes that the Northern Alliance commander of the Fort, General Dostum, is a notorious killer with a long record of war crimes; and reminds Her Majesty's Government and the US Government of the international opprobrium which still surrounds***

General Ariel Sharon resulting from his 'indirect responsibility' for the massacres in the Sabra and Chatilla camps in Lebanon in 1982, which though committed by others, would not have been possible without his involvement.] Will my right hon. Friend ask the Government to make a statement on the matter? Will he also ask them to state clearly that the perpetrators of the massacres in Kabul and elsewhere, whichever side they are on, will answer for their war crimes at an international criminal court convened by the United Nations?"

[17/12/2001](#), Lord Wallace of Saltaire, "Afghanistan" in the House of Lords:

"The implications for British forces, about which my noble friend Lord Redesdale will say more, are complex. **We have used special forces heavily in Afghanistan**".

[10/01/2002](#), Patrick Mercer and Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence), "International Assistance Force (Kabul)" in the House of Commons:

Patrick Mercer - "May I begin by applauding the deployment of ISAF, and especially the work of Major-General John McColl? However, the Secretary of State has spoken about the importance of rounding up the elements of al-Qaeda that are still effective in the Kandahar area. Without dwelling on Canada's decision to deploy a light infantry battle group there, will he say why Britain has not thought fit to honour the words of the Prime Minister, who spoke of standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States? **Currently, only a tiny number of our special forces have been deployed in the teeth of the enemy.** Have we run out of personnel in the Parachute Regiment, the Royal Marines or special forces? Have we run out of Guardsmen and line soldiers trained in desert and mountain warfare? Or have we run out of resolve?"

Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence) - "We have not run out of any of those elements. We deploy the right types of forces to do the job that is required of us. As I said, up to 5,000 of Britain's armed forces are actively engaged in the hunt for al-Qaeda and remaining elements of the Taliban. They are ensuring that precisely those tasks to which I assume that the hon. Gentleman was referring are completed".

[14/01/2002](#), Michael Fabricant, Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence), Sir Patrick Cormack, and Harry Cohen, "Special Forces" in the House of Commons:

Michael Fabricant - "If he will make a statement on the role of special forces in countering terrorism since 11 September".

Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence) - "**The United Kingdom's special forces have a key role to play in countering terrorism: a responsibility they have had for many years. As a result of the events of 11 September**, we are considering the capabilities, including those of Britain's special forces, that we need to deal with the challenges posed by international terrorism. That is being taken forward as part of our work on a new chapter for the strategic defence review".

Michael Fabricant - "**I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, which was rather fuller than I expected**, and I am grateful for just that. **Does the Secretary of State have a view about the amount of information that can be given about the role of special forces? He will be aware that, in the past, special forces have felt that all their activities should be kept secret**, whereas those in the United States are given, if not full, then at least some, publicity. **Has the Secretary of State considered giving slightly more publicity to the role of our special forces than it has previously had?"**

Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence) - "The view of the Secretary of State is that the disclosure that we currently allow is exactly the right amount. There are a number of reasons for that policy, **which have pertained for a long time.** First, further **disclosure would**

forfeit the element of surprise, which is essential for the operational effectiveness of UK special forces. Secondly, it is **vital to protect the identities of special forces personnel**. They are a key element of our anti-terrorism capability, and are significant targets for terrorists. Disclosure of identities and capabilities would have severe consequences for the effectiveness of our special forces and the safety and morale of personnel.”

Sir Patrick Cormack - “I appreciate the reasons for the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), **but does the Secretary of State accept that the most important consideration is the security of our special forces, and that the less we know about what they are doing, the better?**”

Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence) - “I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and **that is the reason for the present disclosure policy**”.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead) - “**There remains concern about the killing of the Mazar-i-Sharif prisoners during their apparent uprising. Some members of the special forces were present at that event. Will the Secretary of State arrange for their reports on the matter to be published**, so that we can clear up some of the fears and concerns that people have expressed?”

Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence) - “My hon. Friend talks about an apparent uprising. **I can confirm to him that there was an uprising**, when prisoners tried to take control of the armoury and obtained various weapons, which were then used not only against coalition but against Afghan forces in the area. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members will understand that, for reasons of operational security, **I shall not go into specific details about the involvement of any British troops in that incident**. However, I can tell my hon. Friend that British troops went to the aid of their US colleagues, and under heavy fire attempted to recover two US personnel who had apparently been captured by Taliban fighters. Their involvement was a perfectly proper response to the attack on their fellow coalition members, and they showed great bravery in their efforts to secure their release.”

[7/03/2002](#), Patrick Mercer, “Terrorism” in the House of Commons:

“Last and perhaps most contentiously, I should like to draw attention to the activities of our Special Air Service—a handful of men whose activities are rarely talked about. I do not intend to intrude into their modus operandi or exactly what they have been achieving in Afghanistan. I would say this, however; currently, some of the hardest fighting of the Afghanistan campaign is going on. As far as I am aware, there are no British forces involved at the cutting edge of this campaign at the moment. Without letting too many cats out of the bag, I strongly suspect that that is because the tiny numbers of our special forces involved over there are exhausted”.

[18/03/2002](#), John Smith, Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence), and Nicholas Soames, “Afghanistan” in the House of Commons:

John Smith - “I am not in the least surprised that 45 Commando is to be deployed in Afghanistan. I have just returned from Central Command; enormous tribute was paid to British service men already serving on the front line in Afghanistan. Because of our traditions and conventions, we are unable to pay them proper tribute, yet in the United States, people can. Is my right hon. **Friend looking at the role of our special forces and our ability—I appreciate the complications—to pay tribute to them for the fantastic work that they are doing?**”

Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence) - “It is obviously important to pay proper tribute to the role of British forces, particularly in Afghanistan, but also in other theatres. It is equally important that **we maintain operational confidentiality and do not in any way put at risk those forces carrying out tasks on the Government's behalf**”.

Nicholas Soames - “Will the Secretary of State accept that I welcome the deployment, not least because I am in no doubt—given its size and composition—that it would not be going unless it were absolutely necessary. I share the views of my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Defence in wishing them well. **Will the Secretary of State pay tribute, in the way that only he can, to the astonishing skill at arms of British forces in Afghanistan in the past few weeks? They have behaved remarkably and we owe them an enormous debt. I mean not only the special forces, but the soldiers doing the run-of-the-mill work around Kabul and elsewhere,** which has been very hazardous. Will he also say a word about the importance of the ongoing commitment to getting aid into those areas of Afghanistan that find themselves in a difficult state? Will he assure us that there will continue to be that commitment to Afghanistan that was so lacking last time?”.

[20/03/2002](#), Jim Knight and Nicholas Winterton, “Afghanistan” in the House of Commons:

Jim Knight - “Finally, will the Minister comment on the longer term? We are talking about a substantial level of deployment. Should our foreign policy require further ground operations, is there further capacity to do more in Afghanistan or elsewhere in the middle east? **Do we need to scale back commitment elsewhere and increase capability in other sectors, such as special forces?”.**

Nicholas Winterton - “I can only pray, as have other contributors to the debate, that the warlords, the Northern Alliance and the Pashtun forces can work together as part of the interim Government and bring permanent stability and peace to Afghanistan, depriving terrorist organisations of refuge in the country. Remaining elements of al-Qaeda and the Taliban are now fighting from caves in the eastern mountains of Afghanistan. **I hope that the special forces that we are sending in—they are without reservation the best trained and most disciplined in the world—will be successful in routing those elements.** I make no bones about the need to remove them, because they are a danger to mankind and to the future stability and prosperity of Afghanistan”.

[19/03/2002](#), David Davis, “Chinook Crash” in the House of Commons:

“The original air marshals' criticism of the two pilots was based on the assertion that they had voluntarily flown over the Mull of Kintyre at too low a rate of climb in instrument conditions. But why would an experienced helicopter crew, immediately after selecting a pre-programmed visual way point, suddenly agree not to turn on to it, switch to instrument flight rules, which they had ruled out at the pre-flight briefing, and fly straight on to cloud-covered high ground which it knew to be there? **Special forces helicopter crews exercised regularly in that area** and were extremely familiar with the landscape and the weather conditions associated with it [...] I recognise my hon. and gallant Friend's experience in this area. The Sea King went after the accident. It is well known that the weather changes in that area, **a point well understood by the special forces crew that flew there,** but I will come back to that point. On what evidence was ZD 576 "too fast" at the way point change? [...] I am afraid that the use by my hon. and gallant Friend of the word "assumption" rather blows the case. We cannot make assumptions on this. The level of proof required is no assumptions. **Two witnesses who spoke to the House of Lords Committee—witness A., a special forces pilot who could not be identified,** one of the most decorated pilots around today and certainly very high on experience of Chinooks, and Squadron Leader Burke, who was the squadron test pilot on the aircraft— both recognised intermittent faults that were brought on in erratic, unpredictable ways, and a small change of direction could well make that change”.

[10/04/2002](#), Lord Vivian, “Iraq” in the House of Lords:

“There is not time in this debate to discuss the types of military action that could be used. However, a nuclear-armed Iraq would be a disaster waiting to happen and any military attack on Iraq must be carried out by a very large-scale allied forces operation using overwhelming ground forces. **An approach similar to the employment of air power, the use of special forces and the enlistment and deployment of local opposition groups from the Shia and Kurds to do most of the fighting, as has been used in Afghanistan,** is highly questionable and may not produce the rapid and conclusive result required, especially by the Arab states. It must be clearly understood that, if Saddam Hussein realised that the West was intent on a regime change, he would fight back with everything that he had. That could include a ballistic missile attack on Israel. Whichever course is adopted, it must be robust and be seen through to the bitter end”.

[16/05/2002](#), Paul Keetch and Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence), “Afghanistan” in the House of Commons:

Paul Keetch - “May I give the Secretary of State a chance to scotch some of the more ridiculous rumours that appear to be coming out of Bagram, especially those about the number of people in quarantine? I have heard journalists mention figures ranging from 60 to 300. Can the Secretary of State tell us roughly how many people are in quarantine? **Can he confirm that all those in quarantine are medical staff, and that none are combat staff—or even special forces, as has been suggested in the press?** Is it not the case that if our combat staff were being detained in quarantine, Operation Veritas would be considerably affected”?

Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence) - [*Did not address special forces*].

[29/10/2002](#), Julian Brazier and Patrick Mercer, “Overstretch (Armed Forces)” in the House of Lords:

Julian Brazier - “There is something bizarre about the MOD thinking that this reserve should be used only in logistic areas. If the worst comes to the worst, personnel for logistic areas can always be found from civilian life and can be trained very quickly. **It is weird to claim that it is appropriate to use special forces from the Territorial Army in formed units, although we never discuss their detailed deployments;** that it is appropriate to use Royal Marine reservists, commando infantry, in up to company strength, as they have been used; and that it is appropriate for 131 Commando Squadron, Royal Engineers to send formed troops around the world; while claiming that it is inappropriate to use ordinary infantry, engineers and yeomanry, the three areas that were most heavily cut in the Government's defence review, in formed units”.

Patrick Mercer - “**I expect no answer—it will become clear why not—on my final point. This week our special forces are to receive recognition from Her Majesty the Queen for their enormous gallantry in Afghanistan.** I want to put on record my undying admiration for these men, one of whom is to be rewarded by Her Majesty for despatching the Queen's enemies with a knife. That is wonderful. I regret the circumstances in which it occurred, but such gallantry should be recognised”.

[31/10/2002](#), Keith Simpson and Patrick Mercer, “Defence in the United Kingdom” in the House of Commons:

Keith Simpson - “**I shall begin by extending our congratulations to the members of the Special Air Service and the Special Boat Service, and the Royal Air Force crews on the gallantry awards made to them for their role in Afghanistan.** They get a lot of publicity, some of which is perhaps unfortunate, but the nature of the operations that they undertake often makes it difficult for them to get proper public recognition. **I am conscious that discussing operational or training matters in relation to our special forces is not something in which we should indulge,** but we should all recognise that, although those forces are high quality, they are limited in numbers and used on an extensive scale. That means that the time available

to them for reorganisation, retraining and recuperation is often very limited. We should be aware that they have to put even more into those activities than members of the regular armed forces, of which they are, of course, a part. Unlike the special forces in some countries, ours are directly recruited from our mainline armed forces. They do not just have a label attached to them because they happened to join the service directly from civilian life.”.

Patrick Mercer - “My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) touched on the numbers of our special forces. **I do not want to labour the point, as it is a sensitive matter, but our special forces are being overworked, in the same way as some of our specialist troops.** I ask the Minister to examine carefully the selection process for our special forces, the use of special forces reserves, and the present level of overstretch that these precious resources are facing. I have no doubt that with a little more imagination and a few more shibboleths being knocked over, the Special Air Services and the Special Boat Squadron can be expanded considerably through recruitment, despite what some of their own members would say.”.

[05/11/2002](#), Lord Jauncey of Tullichettle, Lord Lyell, and Lord Bach, “Chinook ZD576: Select Committee Report” in the House of Lords:

Lord Jauncey of Tullichettle - “**The flight in question, from Northern Ireland to Inverness, was made by a special forces crew that was very experienced in flying helicopters.** The senior sergeant load master was also reckoned to be a very good navigator. They planned the flight under visual flight rules (VFR). Owing to icing restrictions imposed on Mark 2 Chinooks as a result of the difficulty that had been experienced in verifying the software, the entire flight could not have been carried out under instrument flight rules, given the high hills that would be encountered in Lochaber. The crew was aware that fog and low cloud were covering the Mull of Kintyre. The crash took place in cloud at 810 feet above sea level, a short distance inland from the lighthouse on the Mull.”

Lord Lyell - “It was set out in all the reports, as well as in the fatal accident inquiry, which has been mentioned, certainly by the noble Baroness, Lady Michie, that the entire four-man crew were the *creme de la creme*. It is in the report and witness A stated that **they served with special forces.** So they were probably one of the best crews in helicopter flying and in the Royal Air Force. It is amazing to me that they were active in and around Northern Ireland during their duties with this aircraft. **I find it hard to believe that the Royal Air Force would permit, or indeed tolerate, this distinguished *creme de la creme* crew to fly an aircraft, the Chinook Mk 2, that was in any way unsafe or unfit for duty, especially on special forces duty.”.**

Lord Bach - “**But there was, and is, simply no reason why two highly regarded and well-trained special forces pilots should have flown at speed so close to the Mull,** into poor weather that they had been warned to expect. As has been said, this was contrary to all their training. The inquiry's two senior reviewing officers concluded that the failure to take action before the waypoint change to avoid the high ground ahead amounted to gross negligence”.

[14/11/2002](#), Lord Astor of Hever, “Address In Reply To Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech” in the House of Lords:

“We give a guarded welcome to Saddam Hussein meeting his first deadline. However, I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Ramsay, that, in the light of Saddam Hussein's record, we must prepare for a possible war. At this time, we think of our brave servicemen and women and of their families. On these Benches, we also recognise the dedication and professionalism of our Armed Forces. They are respected and admired around the world. **I congratulate those members of the Special Forces on their awards for outstanding bravery in Afghanistan”.**

[15/11/2002](#), Patrick Mercer, “Un Security Council Resolution 1441” in the House of Commons:

“I want to concentrate on the forces that are available to achieve that deterrence. I disagree with the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), who talked about the nasty shooting war—I hope he will forgive my paraphrasing him—that is likely to happen in Iraq should war break out. I do not believe that that is the Government's intention at all. **I believe that they intend to do what was done in Afghanistan and in Kosovo, which is to fight the opening phases of the war with a small number of special forces, aircraft and submarines, and to avoid a shooting war if at all possible.** I believe that they intend to commit British troops only when a shooting war has finished”.

[28/11/2002](#), Lord Craig of Ratley, “Iraq” in the House of Lords:

“The aircrew who fly these missions are not out on some training exercise. Often Iraqi air defences will catch them with their radar and try to shoot them down. Coalition aircraft were fired on 120 times recently in one month alone. In my maiden speech in your Lordships' House in 1991, **following the end of the Gulf conflict, I drew attention to the courage and determination that aircrews showed then when they flew into danger. I also referred to the bravery of our special forces and those in minesweepers.** I said then that I counted it a privilege, "to have been associated with the activity of such brave people who display that very special kind of individual courage: to outface danger and conquer fear on their own"—[Official Report, 4/11/91: col. 36.]—It requires a special form of bravery and grit to fly today's missions not once or twice but many, many times. More than 30 RAF crews patrolling Iraqi no-fly zones have done it over 100 times; the highest scorer's next mission will be his 160th”.

[09/12/2002](#), Alice Mahon and Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence), “Iraq” in the House of Commons:

Alice Mahon - “**Do we have any special forces operating in Iraq at the moment?** Is it true that some minesweepers are on their way to the Gulf? If so, for what purpose?”.

Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence) - “My hon. Friend is an experienced Member of the House and will know that **no member of the Government ever comments on the deployment of special forces.** I assure her that no military decisions whatsoever have been taken on military action against Iraq. That situation will be reported to the House should it change”.

[18/03/2003](#), Lord Hardy of Wath, “Iraq” in the House of Lords:

“In the 1991 war there were, fortunately, very few casualties. But some very dangerous jobs were carried out. **The special forces were deployed miles and miles inside Iraq.** RAF Tornados flew missions to deny Iraq the use of runways. When the ground forces were vulnerable on day one, if the Iraqi Air Force had flown with resolution it could have effected enormous damage. Those Tornado flights were dangerous and the aircrew risked their lives”.

[24/03/2003](#), Tony Blair (the Prime Minister), “Iraq And European Council” in the House of Commons:

“**I hope that the House will understand that there is a limit to how much I can say about the detail of our operations, especially those involving special forces, but with that caveat, at present British and US troops have taken the al-Faw peninsula; that is now secure.** The southern oil installations are under coalition control. The port of Umm. Qasr, despite continuing pockets of resistance, is under allied control, but the waterway essential for humanitarian aid may be blocked by mines and will take sonic days to sweep. Basra is surrounded and cannot be used as an Iraqi base, but in Basra there are pockets of Saddam's most fiercely loyal security

services, who are holding out. They are contained but still able to inflict casualties on our troops, so we are proceeding with caution. Basra international airport has been made secure. The western desert is largely secure. In the north, there have been air attacks on regime targets in Mosul, Kirkuk and Tikrit. We have been in constant contact with the Turkish Government and the Kurdish authorities to urge calm”.

[03/04/2003](#), Lord Eden and Lord Bach, “Iraq: Military Operations” in the House of Lords:

Lord Eden - “My Lords, is it praiseworthy that there is such effective co-ordination between British and American ground and air forces? As the war is now entering a particularly hazardous phase, **can the noble Lord assure the House that sufficient strength is held in reserve to support our forces on the ground, in particular in the event that special forces on the Iraqi side are concealed in bunkers deeply underground?**”.

Lord Bach - “My Lords, I can give the noble Lord the reassurance that he seeks.”.

[03/04/2003](#), Angela Browning, “Adjournment (Easter)” in the House of Commons:

“I want to say only one thing about the war, because this is not the time for a detailed examination of the questions that must be answered when it is over. Before the war began, I asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether we had learned lessons from our experiences in Afghanistan. **Our special forces went into Afghanistan to try to locate Osama bin Laden in the mountains along the border with Pakistan only to find that there was no one there.** The map of where they were going had been printed in the British press the day before and I told the Secretary of State that it beggared belief that we were so daft as to allow that. Although he did not use the same language as me, he seemed to agree”.

[12/11/2003](#), Lord Ahmed and Baroness Scotland of Asthal (the Minister of State, Home Office), “Pakistan High Commission, London” in the House of Lords:

Lord Ahmed - [*asked Her Majesty's Government: Whether recent reports of alleged bugging of the Pakistan High Commission in London are true; and, if so, whether this is a breach of the Vienna convention*].

Baroness Scotland of Asthal (the Minister of State, Home Office) - “My Lords, it is the **long-standing policy of successive governments to neither confirm nor deny allegations concerning the activities of the intelligence and security agencies**”.

[11/12/2003](#), The Earl of Sandwich and Lord Bach, “Defence White Paper” in the House of Lords:

The Earl of Sandwich - “My Lords, among the forces for good that the Minister mentioned, **I am sure that he would include the special forces and the provincial reconstruction teams that we have in Afghanistan.** They are some of our most able troops. However, can he explain why those are still so few in number compared with those in southern Iraq? Why do the Secretary-General of NATO and the Foreign Office have a campaign to increase the numbers coming from Europe within NATO?”.

Lord Bach - “**My Lords, the noble Earl will know I will not say anything about special forces. It would be quite inappropriate for me to do so.** As for Afghanistan, I will take that point back and write to the noble Earl. It is important to remember the huge amount of work that British Armed Forces have done in Afghanistan and the crucial role they played in setting up ISAF, when that force was absolutely necessary. I shall take back his point and write to him”.

[13/01/2004](#), Baroness Cox, “Defence” in the House of Lords:

“Britain, as a country with global strategic, political and economic interests, will be adversely affected because many British forces may find themselves involved in an increasing number of conflicts and crises, such as fighting terrorism and trying to prevent the collapse of states. Thus, it is imperative for Her Majesty's Government to ensure that our Armed Forces are adequately prepared for such intervention operations: that is, expanding and properly equipping the myriad of excellent special forces; increasing the military and intelligence communities' expertise on the special features of crises in developing countries; and preparing dedicated special forces teams for crisis management and interaction with local and indigenous forces”.

[24/03/2004](#), Baroness Park of Monmouth, “Defence” in the House of Lords:

“Unfortunately, developments in the EU in the past four years and the many new tasks arising from the SDR doctrine of a defence strategy driven by foreign policy and humanitarian needs mean that our Army, as well as ensuring strategic national defence, both here and abroad, must be ready for global intervention, **peacekeeping at several levels and special forces tasks as in Afghanistan and Sierra Leone**”.

[31/03/2004](#), Lord Mitchell, “Middle East” in the House of Lords:

“**At this moment in Afghanistan and Pakistan, are not our special forces working with the Americans in trying to track down and eliminate bin Laden and the rest of his terror network?** And will we not feel just that little bit safer when they, too, pay the price of their evil? Perhaps my noble friend the Minister will explain to me, because I really do not understand, why my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary described the Israeli assassination as "unacceptable and unjustified"? In Britain, are we not attempting to do exactly the same to another global terrorist? To me that seems somewhat hypocritical, or am I missing something?”.

[21/04/2004](#), Lord Mitchell, “International Self-Defence” in the House of Lords:

“That leaves another hypocrisy. When coalition forces in Iraq successfully targeted the sons of Saddam Hussein, nobody cited Article 41 or the 4th Geneva Convention. Rantissi, like his predecessor, Sheikh Yassin, was responsible for the sort of indiscriminate killings of which the Hussein brothers would have been proud. Therefore, it must be asked why Israel's targeting of Rantissi was so deplorable when the death of the Hussein brothers was widely supported by the international community. Here is yet another hypocrisy: **when our special forces based in Afghanistan and Pakistan are busy, presumably, tracking down terrorist number one, Osama bin Laden**, nobody complains. Indeed, I suggest that there would be some rejoicing were he to be removed from the scene. So why should Israel be treated any differently?”.

[21/07/2004](#), Geoffrey Hoon (the Secretary of State for Defence), “Delivering Security In A Changing World: Future Capabilities” in the House of Commons:

“Amidst those structural and major equipment changes, we must never neglect the more immediate needs of our armed forces in the field and in particular their personal equipment. We already have a major programme under way in the light of experience from Operation Telic, and I can announce some further enhancements. This year, we will procure additional light machine guns for the infantry, together with night vision and target acquisition systems for forces in land, sea and air environments, **as well as further enhancements to our special forces capabilities**. We will also make major enhancements to our asset tracking capability to ensure that the right

matériel is in the right place at the right time—we have learned the lessons from recent operations in Iraq”.

[17/01/2005](#), Lord Bach (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence) and Viscount Slim, “Defence” in the House of Lords:

Lord Bach - “**The move to larger, multi-battalion regiments, along with the creation of a tri-service ranger unit providing dedicated support to the Special Forces**, will create an infantry structure that can be sustained in the long term. Regimental traditions, heritage, cultures and local connections will be retained under these arrangements”.

Viscount Slim - “**I seldom speak about Special Forces, for the obvious reason that it is better that I should keep my mouth shut**. I am very pro, on the whole, what is happening within the Special Forces under this new guise. I am also worried, however, about the particular ethos of the SAS, of which I have to declare that I am president, and the SBS, who are my dear friends. The word "special" means just that. Second-class special is not special. If you dilute this product, you are putting its future, and the future of the things that it needs, in grave danger”.

[21/06/2006](#), Adam Holloway, “Troop Deployment (Helmand Province)” in the House of Commons:

Referring to the Basra prison incident (two SAS officers were arrested by Iraqi police).

“At the time of the **abduction and rescue of two special forces guys in Basra last year**, the brigade commander’s staff are reported to have spent hundreds of hours making the case for more helicopters and more troops. That request was for the most part denied, apparently because it would look presentationally wrong. We are about to take delivery of a couple of hundred partly irrelevant air defence jets, just when the size of our battlefield helicopter fleet is proving completely inadequate to the task. Another officer who will shortly take his troops to Afghanistan rang me the other night to say that he had just heard the likely number of helicopter hours that he would be allocated in Helmand”.

[06/07/2006](#), Mark Pritchard, “Armed Forces Personnel” in the House of Commons:

“Some months ago, I raised the issue of the haemorrhaging of special forces personnel to private security companies. The then Secretary of State for Defence said that a statement on the matter, either written or oral, would be presented to the House. It may have passed me by, but I am not aware of any statement on **how the Government are dealing with the ongoing haemorrhage of special forces, such as members of the Special Air Service, the Special Boat Squadron, the close protection trained Parachute Regiment** and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Robert Key) mentioned earlier, the Royal Military Police. Retention of such personnel is a problem and I hope that the Minister will give us some idea of how the Government are dealing with that important matter”.

[10/10/2006](#), Lord Chidgey, “Afghanistan” in the House of Lords:

“Will she tell noble Lords when last the UK Government made representations to President Musharraf of Pakistan over the pressing **need for his military intelligence and our coalition Special Forces to work towards the same goals and the elimination of terrorist enclaves on both sides of the border?**”.

[17/10/2006](#), Patrick Mercer, “Afghanistan” in the House of Commons:

“Winter is when things go quiet—ask Roberts, of the British punitive expedition mounted from 1878 to 1880, which was extremely successful for a punitive expedition, inasmuch as it killed a lot of people. Ask him what happened in the winter. Things go quiet. **The farmers and the Taliban retire to their deep valleys, where the satellites and the B-52s cannot get at them, let alone the special forces patrols.** The farmers prepare their crops for the next season. It will be easy for the western press to say, “Yeah, things are fine, guys—let’s not worry about it”, but what happens next spring? What happens when we find ourselves without the troops, money or Government direction to take on the next phase of the campaign, both civil and military?”.

[30/01/2007](#), Adam Ingram (the Minister of State, Ministry of Defence), “British Army” in the House of Commons:

“In April last year, a new special forces support group was also formed to work alongside special forces tackling the terrorism that we face globally. I have visited a support group and spoken to those deployed in Afghanistan. I cite those examples because they are never recognised as part of the process of substantial change that we have seen. That process has been driven by a military imperative to get things right, and there has been political and financial support for it”.

[16/04/2007](#), Lord Robertson, “Iraq” in the House of Lords:

“Decisions have been taken in the past that were benign at the time but dramatic in their consequences. There was the decision to allow Mr John Nichol, the **captured pilot in the first Gulf War, to talk to the media; the decision taken to allow General Sir Peter de Billière to publish his memoirs, especially about his time in the Special Forces; and the decision, regretted as it was, when Michael Portillo mentioned the Special Air Service at the Conservative Party conference.** All of those were done in a benign context but had repercussions and I think that everyone connected with them might have wished for the wisdom of hindsight. Such things happen in the circumstances and it is right, appropriate and in the spirit of the man that Des Browne has come to make such a significant apology for his misjudgment—his temporary misjudgment—in the situation”.

[27/04/2007](#), Norman Baker, “BA Flight 149” in the House of Commons:

“There has been an investigation into this matter on and off by a journalist called Steve Davis. The Minister may, or may not, have seen an article in The Mail on Sunday last year. There was also a documentary on the matter which was put on at a ridiculously late hour by the BBC. That referred to the views of what might be called special forces. **I have here today copies of affidavits signed by members of special forces to the effect that they were on that plane and were put there to carry out a mission at the request of the British Government.** It is not my intention, as you will understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to give the names of those particular individuals. That would be irresponsible. However, because the Government have continually denied that this took place, I do want to read out the relevant sections that demonstrate that, in fact, the version of events is as the journalist has said, rather than Ministers have continually suggested”.

[15/05/2007](#), William Hague, “Armed Conflict (Parliamentary Approval)” in the House of Commons:

“Such arguments are compelling, but, of course, we are considering no simple matter. That is why we have given careful thought to the phrasing of our motion, which supports the principle that parliamentary approval should be required and calls on the Government to bring forward proposals to give effect to the principle, so that the practical difficulties that many Departments might raise can be taken fully into consideration. **We have called for the principle to apply to “any substantial deployment” of British armed forces, bearing in mind that there is**

occasionally the need for deployment of special forces or others, in small numbers and in great secrecy, as part of rescue or intelligence missions or anti-terrorist activities”.

[16/10/2007](#), Ann Winterton, “Defence Policy” in the House of Commons:

Let us look at the Army’s new vehicles. The Panther command and liaison vehicle is a very expensive runabout, not to be used on operations. The inadequately protected Tellar bomb disposal vehicle, the Pinzgauer Vector, is an excellent off-road vehicle, but any engineer knows that a mine blast turns it into a death-trap. **The so-called Supacat mobility weapon-mounted installation kit is super for the special forces, but why have 130 of them, when they are a liability for normal patrols and convoys, as an infantryman can take them out with one bullet?** Who is to say that the first round of FRES for the utility vehicle will be any better? Given the recent track record, we can have little confidence in getting that right. The vehicles can be transported, one at a time, only by the A400Ms—an aircraft that we might never get. What sort of a rapid reaction force will that be?

[12/11/2007](#), Jeremy Corbyn, “Foreign Affairs and Defence” in the House of Commons:

“My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) pointed out in an intervention that **despite the presence of a significant number of NATO forces, including British forces and US special forces, in Afghanistan**, drug production is at record levels and rising, and is unlikely to reduce in the near future. We should take a slightly more sanguine view of our role in the region”.

[21/11/2007](#), Paul Keetch, “Engagements” in the House of Commons:

“The Prime Minister rightly paid tribute to the servicemen killed in Afghanistan and Iraq. The two men killed in Iraq were possibly in a Puma helicopter that was older than some of the personnel it was carrying. **When will the Chinook helicopters ordered by the previous Conservative Government for use by our special forces be delivered for use by our special forces?**”.

[22/11/2007](#), Earl Attlee, “Armed Forces” in the House of Lords:

“Almost every problem that we have talked about today derives from operating far outside defence planning assumptions. The noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, mentioned the problem, as did many others, but he did it particularly well. To recap, our current defence planning assumptions allow us one medium-scale enduring operation and one small-scale operation that is possibly enduring. Medium-scale means a brigade; small-scale means a battalion. **What we actually have is double medium-scale plus; the plus refers to such assets as ISTAR, special forces and everything else that we need to support two very difficult operations [...]** The noble and gallant Lord, Lord Guthrie, touched on his SF role. Only a small percentage of our Armed Forces have that innate incredible skill set that makes them suitable for service in the Special Forces. We cannot easily train more SF without diluting their capability, but we are using them far too much and we cannot go on like this.

[25/03/2008](#), Jack Straw (the Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor), “Constitutional Renewal” in the House of Commons:

“**As for retrospective approval where there has been an operational need for a decision to go into armed conflict to be made in secrecy**, or where other operational matters have been involved, we have thought about that a great deal. Ultimately, it should be a matter for this House, but there are genuine problems—for example, if, when troops have already been

committed to a theatre, there is then a big question about whether the action will subsequently be approved. **We hope that, aside from operations by special forces, occasions when there is a total emergency and this country needs to undertake major armed conflict in secrecy are likely to be very few and far between. I cannot think of any such example over the past 20 years.** That was why we came to the judgment that we did, but let us hear what the House has to say”.

[08/05/2008](#), Tobias Ellwood, “Defence in the World” in the House of Commons:

“The problems manifested themselves in the uprising on 9 April. The Secretary of State said today that the grip of the militias had now been broken, but I beg to differ. As we heard from other interventions at the time, it is clear that the Iraqis could have contained the situation only with the support of the Americans. Indeed, Time magazine has reported this week that US and British planes had to be called in and that medical supplies and even bottles of water were needed to support the Iraqis. According to the Iraqi Government, many soldiers refused to fight. Many surrendered and many switched sides; 1,300 soldiers deserted. **That is why UK and American special forces were needed to try to quell the uprising.** The situation is not under control; it is very much teetering on the brink of civil war. We have walked away from the issue and it is less in the headlines than it has ever been before. However, there will be a period of uncertainty before there is any long-term peace in the south and in the Shi’ite sector”.

[19/06/2008](#), Gerald Howarth, “Defence Procurement” in the House of Commons:

“The Minister ended his remarks by saying that some felt that there had been failures, which he was prepared to acknowledge. The Government are in complete disarray in their procurement programme. Let me go through some of the examples. **Chinook helicopters intended for our vital special forces operations** have been grounded for seven years while Ministers have tried to work out what to do”.

[10/12/2008](#), Patrick Mercer, “Foreign Affairs and Defence” in the House of Commons:

“Lastly—I promise that this is my last point—we need a root-and-branch review of the special forces that we have available to deal with such a style of attack. There is no doubt that our SBS, our Special Air Service and the police specialist armed response units are first class. They have done sterling service not just in dealing with such style of attacks when they develop but, more importantly, in deterring them before they occur. **However, by the time that the groups of two, three or four in which we have seen our enemies operating most recently start to operate in dozens, with two operational theatres being manned by our special forces in Iraq and Afghanistan** and the crippling manpower problems faced by the Army at the moment, we will not have enough specialist forces developed, trained and easily deployed. The facilities are not available to get the forces that already exist quickly from one part of the country to another”.

[15/12/2008](#), Paul Keetch and Gordon Brown (the Prime Minister), “EU Council/Afghanistan, India and Pakistan” in the House of Commons:

Paul Keetch - “The Prime Minister says that there are more helicopters on the way, but may I ask him the same question that I asked him on 21 November 2007? **When will the dedicated Chinook helicopters that were ordered by John Major for our special forces and delivered to Tony Blair in 2001 be fully available to be deployed by UK special forces in Afghanistan?**”.

Gordon Brown (the Prime Minister) - “I agree that we have set aside a huge amount of money for additional helicopters. The timetable for their introduction depends on re-equipping many of

them and, at the same time, training the forces to do so. **I shall write to the hon. Gentleman specifically about the Chinook helicopters, but I can tell him that the money and the resources have been provided for the additional helicopters**".

[14/01/2009](#), Adam Holloway and Harry Cohen, "Iraq: Future Strategic Relationship" in the House of Commons:

Adam Holloway - "After the start of the Shi'a insurgency and increasing militia control of Basra and Amarah, we built a new police force. I suppose that it could be argued that it made sense to go to the existing groups of armed men, but unfortunately they were the militias, so almost from the off, we took away the pre-existing structures and put in post people whose first loyalty was not to Iraq, but to their own factions. The police were really just militias in uniform. The best example of that was Basra's so-called Serious Crimes Unit, which was packed with people from the Jaish al-Mahdi—the JAM militia—who conducted their terrorist operations in police uniforms with police vehicles and weapons. **They kidnapped the British CBS journalist Richard Butler last year, and they took two of our special forces people, who had to be rescued from a police station in Christmas 2006.** As a senior Iraqi general was later to say, the police were, at the time, the cause of our security problem".

Harry Cohen - "There are still unanswered questions about Britain's role in Amarah, about Camp Breadbasket and about complicity in the air strikes. In January last year, 40,000 lb of explosives were dropped on southern Iraq in one day, with a rate of four bombings a day. Then there was the Hercules crash. Questions have been asked about the machinery being brought in. **I agree with those asking such questions, but they hide a deeper question: what were those special forces troops who died doing?** There had been an election, and it is believed that they had ballot boxes, but they were well outside their area. Just what were they doing? There should be an answer to that [...] I think that that is atrocious. Another point relates to the special forces. **Our troops that are going to remain in Iraq will be special forces,** again taking action and interfering, I suspect, in the election".

Harry Cohen [quoting a statement by Jock Stirrup] - "The UK made repeated attempts to deal with extremist militia violence in the south east. **We planned and sought to execute numerous Special Forces operations**".

[26/02/2009](#), Baroness Neville-Jones, Lord Lee of Trafford, Lord Tunnicliffe, Lord Elton, and Lord Tunnicliffe, "Armed Forces: Detention" in the House of Lords:

Baroness Neville-Jones - "These alleged operations would have taken place outside Multinational Division (South East). **Ben Griffin** made a significant charge against the UK. Before he was injuncted by the Government, **he said: 'Throughout my time in Iraq I was in no doubt that individuals detained by UKSF'— UK special forces— "and handed over to our American colleagues would be tortured'**. He made allegations that they had witnessed brutal interrogations that involved the use of torture by such methods as drowning and the use of an electric cattle prod. These are serious allegations which the Government must be prepared to answer".

Lord Lee of Trafford - "**I ask the Minister whether it covers those detained in Iraq by our special forces.** The Statement says: 'It is essential that our Armed Forces are able to detain people who pose a real threat either to our troops, to those of our allies or to the local population we are seeking to protect'."

Lord Tunnicliffe - "**As I said earlier, it is not our policy to reveal any details about operations of our special forces. However, our troops, be they special forces or regular forces, operate to the highest standards and obey international law.** We are confident that, in our relationships with our allies, where individuals are apprehended by ourselves but handed over to the US authorities, the Memorandum of Understanding is honoured and that the

standards under which they are detained are to the levels of international law. With regard to these individuals the International Committee of the Red Cross was able to give that kind of support [...] In general, we are absolutely clear that, where our own forces are involved with other coalition partners, we shall not be complicit with torture or involved in any situation where we believe there will be torture. **We have taken on board all the allegations made by the Special Forces individual, which have been repeated by both noble Lords. They have all been thoroughly investigated where he has provided evidence. My understanding is that there is limited evidence and that none of the allegations has been proven**".

Lord Elton - "My Lords, there is another question that troubles me slightly. **The noble Lord said, making a perfectly respectable defence of his position, that we do not discuss the operations of Special Forces.** Your Lordships do not want to hear about the operations of Special Forces, but about the treatment of the people who may have been captured by them. Will he tell us anything about that?"

Lord Tunnicliffe - "**My Lords, I will simply give the straightforward commitment that our forces are not involved in operations which would lead to the abuse of individuals captured by them in these joint operations.** That is a commitment both for conventional and non-conventional operations. I cannot go into any more detail than that. All our operations are compatible with international law and our humanitarian obligations. That is an essential part of our policy. The reason for peacekeeping, and for being in Afghanistan and Iraq, is about those standards and our forces maintaining them. They are not complicit in any operations that offend those standards".

[26/02/2009](#), John Hutton (the Secretary of State for Defence) and Ben Wallace, "Records of Detention (Review Conclusions)" in the House of Commons:

John Hutton (the Secretary of State for Defence) - "The hon. Gentleman referred to the injunction against Ben Griffin as though it were some constitutional outrage. Every member of the special forces agrees a confidentiality deal when they sign up, and **if the hon. Gentleman ever has the responsibility of standing at the Dispatch Box to deal with such matters he will find that that is for a very good reason: it preserves the safety and security of special forces operations, and it must not and should not be challenged in the way that the hon. Gentleman challenged it.** That is a mistake and he will rue the day if that is the view he takes into government, should he be given that opportunity."

John Hutton (the Secretary of State for Defence) - "I want to make it clear that we briefed the ISC pretty fully on a range of issues to do with rendition and the involvement of the two individuals in that wide sweep of operations. That evidence was brought to the ISC's attention as it prepared its report on rendition, which was pretty thorough and comprehensive, and the right hon. Gentleman would have read it very carefully. The ISC has looked very carefully at these issues of rendition, and we have not withheld information. The review that we have instigated in the light of Mr. Ben Griffin's allegations has been thorough and comprehensive. So we are doing all that we possibly can to expose problems when they have arisen, to provide a very strong justification for **UK forces—whether special forces or otherwise—to have the ability, the power and the means to detain people who mean us serious harm and have the intention to do so.** In that, I have been completely honest and frank with the House today".

Ben Wallace - "We should not forget that some of the individuals who have been captured pose a very significant and dangerous risk to our armed forces and British interests. **Can the Secretary of State confirm that, when special forces go in to capture a target, they do so only after intelligence is analysed and upholds a standard to suggest that those individuals pose a serious threat to our country's and our forces' interests?** Does he not recognise that, if such a muck-up is to be avoided, the best way forward is to have an Intelligence and Security Committee that has a proper ability to investigate our agencies and to drill into such requests, so that our agencies do not go freelance and that our forces are better protected in future?"

[11/03/2009](#), Lord Bew, “Northern Ireland Bill” in the House of Lords:

“There is genuine room for disagreement and uncertainty about the political context in which those officers might operate. However, there can be no doubt at all, in the light of the past few days, that the operational integrity of the chief constable could come under challenge. **We saw a bitter debate, before the tragic murders of the past few days in Northern Ireland, when the chief constable made his decision to call in Special Forces**, and it is to be remembered that the anger expressed over that came from one of the key parties to the agreement we are moving to implement today. It is therefore vital that we do what we can to underline the operational integrity of the chief constable. In this case, it is not a matter of speculation or debate”.

[23/03/2009](#), James Gray, “Coroners and Justice Bill” in the House of Commons:

“The inquest I have in mind is that into the tragic loss of Hercules XV179, which was on its way from Baghdad into northern Iraq, flying at an extraordinarily low level. It went down with 10 soldiers and airmen on board, all of whom were lost. Many of them were my constituents, or were at least based in my constituency. There are all sorts of peculiarities about XV179. **The plane was flying at remarkably low level and it was on special forces duties**. That has been made plain but a number of things about the special forces duties in the evidence given to David Masters were redacted, and perfectly happily so. Indeed, there were all sorts of secret things we never got to know about because they were secret and that is fine”.

[26/03/2009](#), Julian Brazier, “Defence in the UK” in the House of Commons:

Julian Brazier - “There is terrific tension in the MOD between people who recognise that and those who see the TA simply as a feeder to pad out regular units. The Royal Marine Reserve, which has had some outstanding people, including Corporal Matt Croucher, who received the George cross, has chosen to go entirely down the latter route. That is why the RFCA identified the RMR as having serious trouble in retaining officer and NCO structures—its fabric is under threat. Ironically, some other units that one might think comparable, such as 21 and 23 SAS—I was privileged to serve with 21 SAS some years ago—and 131 Commando squadron, the sapper unit that supports the Royal Marines, have all gone down the route of sending formed sub-units commanded by volunteer reserve officers, and they have all done exceptionally well. **One of 131 Squadron’s more ambitious operations in the Gulf got on to the front page of The Times. I cannot give more detail but the special forces regiments have taken decorations, as the Minister knows”**.

[29/04/2009](#), Alan Simpson and Gordon Brown (the Prime Minister), “Afghanistan and Pakistan” in the House of House:

“I welcome the list of initiatives that the Prime Minister mentioned in relation to development, democracy and diplomacy in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. **Does he accept, however, that the line that cannot be crossed would be one that saw any involvement of UK troops, either conventional or special forces, in Pakistan?** Does he agree that that would inevitably lead to a civil war in Pakistan, and to wider hostility to the presence of western forces in the region as a whole? Will he assure the House that under no circumstances will UK forces be given a remit to cross that frontier?”.

Gordon Brown (the Prime Minister) - “I think that my hon. Friend is finding difficulties where they do not exist. The issue is not that but how we can support and back up both the Afghan and Pakistan army and police forces, and we will continue to do that. If we are to fight terrorism, co-operation will be necessary. As the former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. and learned

Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) mentioned, Afghanistan and Pakistan must learn to work together to deal with their common problems. We can assist in that, but I believe that there is a will from Presidents Karzai and Zardari for that co-operation to happen”.

[30/04/2009](#), Lord Judd, Lord Burnett, Lord Gilbert, and Lord Attlee, “Armed Forces” in the House of Lords:

Lord Judd - “In this our Special Forces are clearly particularly well designed to meet the needs that confront us. It is good to see that the Government are **concentrating on the future of our Special Forces in the way our services are organised**”.

Lord Burnett - “Finally, on the matter of manpower, our Royal Marines and soldiers, with limited numbers, are doing far more tours on active service than should reasonably be asked of them. They joined to fight; morale, I understand, is high. We need more troops. I suspect that the Army needs at least another infantry brigade with supporting arms and the Royal Marines need another commando unit. **If the Government wish to expand Special Forces, we need a larger pool**”.

Lord Gilbert “Parenthetically, I want to say how much **I welcome the Secretary of State’s renewed emphasis on the Special Forces and his intention to deliver some resources to increasing their size and capability**”.

Lord Attlee - “Before getting into my main speech, I would like to pick up on the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Burnett, about Special Forces. **The simple fact is that only a small proportion of our Armed Forces are suitable for Special Forces**, whose skill set is so remarkable. It is also worth remembering that, by the standards of many countries, our Royal Marines Commandos are Special Forces”.

[30/06/2009](#), Lord Tunnicliffe, “Coroners and Justice Bill” in the House of Lords:

“The rule-making power contained in Clause 36(2)(e) is intended to deal with a specific concern that has been brought to our attention by representatives of UK Special Forces personnel and their families, including bereaved family members of UK Special Forces personnel who have died on active service. This power will enable rules to be made allowing a coroner to give a direction that the names or other details will not be disclosed as part of the investigation or inquest, except to people specified in his or her direction. **The intention is to make rules enabling the names of UK Special Forces personnel who have died to be withheld. This will allow them and their families to retain their anonymity and it repays the duty of confidentiality imposed on UK Special Forces personnel during their period of service.** This measure has been introduced as a result of approaches from representatives of UK Special Forces personnel and their families, including bereaved family members. This power might also be used to enable a name to be withheld in circumstances when a bereaved family or a witness’s safety would be jeopardised if their identity were made public. I understand that taken together, Amendments 134A and 136A would mean that a coroner could disclose the deceased’s name not only to persons specified in the direction but to a bereaved family. I believe that that is unnecessary as the bereaved family would know the identity of the deceased member of the UK Special Forces. In other cases, it may not be appropriate for the bereaved family to know the identity of a person subject to a coroner’s direction, for example, if the person was a witness who was in fear of their own or their family’s safety. If it was appropriate for the bereaved family to know the identity of such a witness, the coroner could specify them as persons to whom the identity should be disclosed”.

[04/06/2009](#), Anne Winterton and Bernard Jenkin, “Defence in the World” in the House of Commons:

Anne Winterton - **“When the procurement of the Jackal—or M-WMIK, as it was initially known—was announced, it was agreed that it would be good for special forces.** Too much emphasis, however, was placed on the David Stirling, world war two concept when equipment acted as the predator, whereas the Jackal, by being used for general duties, has now become the prey. I remember a discussion on Radio 1 in which a young Territorial Army private infantry soldier who had just returned from Iraq took on a sergeant who was extolling the Jackal’s brilliance by explaining the faults with the vehicle. What listeners were not aware of was that the TA private soldier was in civilian life an engineer working in force deflection, and in the TA he was a “pioneer” dealing with explosives. The 200 Jackals in service, and a further 110 Jackal 2s, have again highlighted the failed concept of bolting on armour, as proved by the American Humvee vehicle. Can the Minister confirm how many Jackals have been lost, because some reports suggest the number is as high as 20 per cent. of those deployed in Afghanistan?”

Bernard Jenkin - **“I do not know what special forces may or may not be doing in Pakistan, and that is not something that I intend to ask the Minister about.** However, what we are providing, in terms of our official armed forces personnel in Pakistan, our diplomatic mission and our overseas aid effort, and in our military-to-military relationship, is pitifully small. Pakistan is a friendly country, but what is coming out of Pakistan is the main threat to our country today, and we are spending a pitifully small amount on confronting that threat”.

[06/11/2009](#), Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots, “Armed Forces: Future Defence Policy” in the House of Lords:

“Secondly, I address the question of helicopter lift capacity, and here I associate myself with the remarks of my noble friend Lord King of Bridgwater, and I want to address the points made by the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes of Cumnock. **While we were there we were told that six Chinooks were available, but when you inquired more closely, there were not six available because two were permanently tasked to Special Forces use, so there were four.** One of those four was tasked, quite properly, to casualty evacuation, and another was on permanent rotational maintenance because of the hostile environment in which they have to operate; so that left two to provide heavy lift capacity for the British Army. It means that more visits have to go by road with a consequent increase in the vulnerability of our soldiers”.

[23/11/2009](#), Andrew Mackinlay and Malcolm Rifkind, “Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Defence” in the House of Commons:

Andrew Mackinlay - “But in reality we have not tested the military advice. People have been told that when General McChrystal arrived, he said, “Will somebody tell me what we’re doing in Helmand?” From a military point of view, we have to be realistic: there are things that we can do, and things that we cannot. It is not just politics that is the art of the possible. Helmand is not winnable in the military sense, and the sooner we realise that, the better. **We can then focus special forces on getting the bandits and the people who are undermining things.** We should do that, rather than spread our resources, with enormous loss of life and maiming, given that we are talking about something that cannot be won”.

Malcolm Rifkind - “The third component has to be that we recognise that, even at that stage, the Afghan Government will not have full control over large parts of the country, particularly in the south. Therefore I hope the international community will reach a treaty agreement with the Afghan Government that even thereafter, if there is evidence of al-Qaeda or other terrorist activity going on in any of the areas of Afghanistan that the Afghan Government still do not control, **we will have a treaty entitlement to send in special forces or military operations to eliminate that terrorist presence and thereby ensure the safety of the world and of our own international interests”.**

[30/11/2009](#), Baroness Royall of Blaisdon (the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster), “Afghanistan and Pakistan” in the House of Lords:

“With the three conditions now met, I can confirm that we will move to a new force level of 9,500. The extra troops will deploy in early December to thicken the UK troop presence in central Helmand and, from late January, they will make the transition to the partnering role that we envisage for them. For understandable reasons of operational security, **we shall continue to withhold information about their deployment and the nature of activities of our Special Forces.** But at this time of increasing international effort, it is right to give a more comprehensive account of our total military commitment to the Afghanistan campaign. I believe that the British people have a right to know and deserve the assurance that our highly professional, widely respected and extraordinarily brave Special Forces are playing their full role not only in force protection but also in taking the fight directly to the Taliban, working in theatre alongside our Regular Forces. I want the whole country to pay tribute to them. **Taking into account these Special Forces, their supporting troops and the increases announced today, our total military effort in Afghanistan will be in excess of 10,000 troops**”.

[01/12/2009](#), Andrew Mackinlay and David Miliband, “Afghanistan-Pakistan” in the House of Commons:

Andrew Mackinlay - “The Foreign Secretary made reference just now to our contribution to counter-insurgency, as did the Prime Minister yesterday. **Can he tell the House whether a D notice was in existence prior to yesterday’s announcement by the Prime Minister of the numbers of special forces deployed to the region and if so, why it was in existence before that statement and why it was no longer necessary after it?**”.

David Miliband - “To make sure that there are absolutely no mistakes in this often tangled territory, I will write to my hon. Friend with an answer to his question and ensure that there is a full understanding in all parts of the House”.

[15/12/2009](#), Baroness Taylor of Bolton (the Minister for International Defence and Security) and Lord Astor of Hever, “Future Defence Programme” in the House of Lords:

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (the Minister for International Defence and Security) - “However, my decision to fund these enhancements from the core defence programme reflects our determination to ensure that defence is supporting the current campaign and our belief that we expect such capabilities to feature in a range of future conflicts our forces may face. The enhancements total some £900 million over three years. They include: an improved dismounted close combat equipment package, making equipment such as state-of-the-art body armour and night-vision goggles available to 50 per cent more troops, so that they can train with them before deploying to Afghanistan; more Bowman tactical radios and patrol satellite systems to improve communications between troops and their commanders; **an additional £80 million for communications facilities for our Special Forces; increased funding for our intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance—or ISTAR—capabilities, doubling REAPER capability, and, as the Prime Minister announced yesterday, further improvements to our counter-IED capabilities, particularly intelligence and analytical capability to target the networks.** The enhancements also include an additional C-17 aircraft to strengthen the airbridge, and improvements to defensive aids suites and support arrangements for the Hercules C130J fleet to maximise its use. There will be 22 new Chinook helicopters, with the first 10 arriving during 2012-13, as set out in the Future Rotary Wing Strategy which I also announced today”.

Lord Astor of Hever - “**We welcome the additional £80 million for communications facilities for the Special Forces, ISTAR and the doubling of Reaper capability, as well as a new C-17 to strengthen the air bridge, which is absolutely vital for the morale of our Armed Forces.** To

succeed in Afghanistan we must win the counter-IED fight, and I declare an interest as the honorary colonel of a TA regiment with a speciality in this field”.

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[07/07/2010](#), Mr Edward Leigh and The Secretary of State for Defence, “Afghanistan Volume 513: debated on Wednesday 7 July 2010”, House of Commons, Columns 380-381:

Mr Edward Leigh: “We now know that al-Qaeda has moved most of its operations to Pakistan, and that most of the Taliban whom we kill die within 20 miles of where they were born, so why are we there? Is it to hold territory, which nobody has ever succeeded in doing in Afghanistan—not even the Soviets with 240,000 people? **If it is to fight a dirty war and keep heads down, why do we not place more reliance on special forces**, rather than let the British Army carry on bleeding to death?”

Dr Fox: “My hon. Friend knows that **we never comment whatsoever on special forces and what they do**, but we are in Afghanistan to give the Afghan Government space to develop the skills in governance and security, so that when we do leave we do not leave behind an ungoverned space into which, as a security vacuum, elements of transnational terrorism are once again drawn.”

[11/10/2010](#), Yvette Cooper The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (William Hague) and Phillip Hollobone, “Linda Norgrove Volume 516: debated on Monday 11 October 2010”, House of Commons, Columns 25-28.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs: “With permission, Mr Speaker, it is with great sadness that I make this statement about the tragic death of Linda Norgrove, the British aid worker taken hostage in Afghanistan, who died during the course of a rescue attempt by US forces on the night of 8 October...

...From the very start Cobra assessed that Linda’s life was in grave danger, which is why **I authorised from the beginning a rescue attempt to be made in the right circumstances**. Linda’s captors were assessed to be representatives of a local Salafist group allied to the local Kunar Taliban, who have links higher up the Taliban chain of command to al-Qaeda and other insurgent groups operating in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas. **We had information from the outset that the objective of Linda’s captors was to pass her further up the Taliban command chain and perhaps move her to yet more inaccessible terrain....**

...Linda was captured in the US area of operations in Afghanistan. We agreed at the outset that **this operation would be US-led**. The US has had forces in Kunar since 2006 and has excellent knowledge of the region. **US special forces were therefore held on 30-minute standby to mount a release effort** from the day Linda was captured.”

Yvette Cooper: “...could the Foreign Secretary tell us more about the Government’s role in the planning and authorisation of the operation? When we spoke, I asked him to tell the House as much as he could about his assessment of the risks to Linda’s life that made the rescue operation the best opportunity to save her life, and I am grateful for the additional information that he has provided to the House today. Could he also tell us **about the nature of the authorisation that he gave the rescue operation**, and say how much information he was given

about the rescue attempt before it began and the **level of UK involvement** in the planning of the rescue operation?”

Mr Hague: “The specific authorisation to take such action was given by me on that first day, within a few hours of her being taken hostage. That authorisation was supported by the Prime Minister, who was of course kept informed throughout.

The **role of the British special forces was to supply a liaison officer**. Contrary to some media reports that I have seen this afternoon, it was **not to take part in the planning—and certainly not in the execution—of the operation**. The operation was planned by the US special forces, and it was carried out by them. We must remember that, after their experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan in the past nine years, the US and UK special forces are now extremely well practised in their operations and extremely skilful at what they do. That does not mean, however, that every mission succeeds.”

Mr Phillip Hollobone: “**What protocols are in place** involving our military and the US military in terms of the nationality of any captive? For example, were an American aid worker taken captive in territory in which British forces predominate, **would it be our decision to go in to rescue them**, or would it be the Americans’ decision? At what level are these decisions taken?”

Mr Hague: “Decisions about what can happen militarily are taken by ISAF command. The commander of ISAF is General Petraeus, the US general. The deputy commander is a UK commander, so these decisions are taken together. They require the political authority of the Government of the national concerned. In the case of a US citizen who is held hostage, the **US Government would have to give their authority for such an operation. Could it involve British special forces? Absolutely. We would treat an operation involving a US citizen as if they were one of our own**, just as the US in this case treated Linda Norgrove as one of their own.”

[19/10/2010](#), The Prime Minister, “Strategic Defence and Security Review Volume 516: debated on Tuesday 19 October 2010”, House of Commons, Column 801:

The Prime Minister: “The immense contribution of our highly professional special forces **is necessarily largely unreported, but their immense capability is recognised across the world**. We are significantly increasing our investment in our special forces to ensure they remain at the leading edge of operational capability, prepared to meet current and future threats, and maintaining their unique and specialist role. This enhanced capability will allow them to remain at “**extremely high readiness**” for emergency operations.”

[12/11/2010](#), Lord Guthrie of Craigbank and The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Hever), “Strategic Defence and Security Review Volume 722: debated on Friday 12 November 2010”, House of Lords, Columns 498-507.

Lord Guthrie of Craigbank: “It is certainly right to increase the effectiveness of our Special Forces, the SAS and SBS. **Their successes in Iraq and Afghanistan have been remarked on**. Having been to Baghdad when I was colonel commandant of the SAS and seen them working alongside the United States special forces...I am completely convinced that we need to give more modern technology...

... I hope that the Minister can assure me—I know that he wants to assure the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert—that the introduction of the A400M will not affect SAS and SBS operations.”

Lord Astor of Hever: “As far as the A400M is concerned, the Royal Air Force had a number of concerns about it, but it now tells me that it is delighted that it is coming into service. The noble Lord raised some very important points about the A400M today. **I cannot comment on the Special Forces issue, but I have offered the noble Lord a meeting to discuss the A400M.**

[02/12/2010](#), The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (William Hague) and Yvette Cooper, “Linda Norgrove Volume 519: debated on Thursday 2 December 2010”, House of Commons, Columns, 987-992.

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs: “I shall inform the House of the outcome of the investigation into the tragic death of the British aid worker, Linda Norgrove...how the investigation was conducted, the conclusions it reached and what action will now follow....

... it is a matter of concern that the facts of how Linda Norgrove died were not made clear immediately after the operation was carried out....Although the US soldiers did report their own use of a grenade, it was not immediately reported up the military chain of command.”

Yvette Cooper: “Will the Foreign Secretary tell us more about the grenade that was thrown, including **about the practice of using such grenades in a rescue operation of this nature?** Was that covered by the investigation, or will it be dealt with in the US forces’ subsequent consideration of such cases? Again, will lessons be learned?”

Mr Hague: “We should be clear that **it is not normal practice for special forces of the United States or the United Kingdom to use grenades—to employ explosive munitions—in a hostage rescue operation.** Nevertheless, there are issues in this case about when a hostage rescue operation begins, because the troops involved believed that Linda Norgrove was being held in a different set of buildings from those around which they were fighting at the time a grenade was thrown.”

[14/02/2011](#), The Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Liam Fox), “Afghanistan Volume 523: debated on Monday 14 February 2011”, House of Commons, Column 733:

Secretary of State for Defence: “The previous Government announced on 30 November 2009 that they had increased the endorsed UK force level to 9,500. It will not surprise the House to hear that that core number of 9,500 does not fully account for the actual force numbers we have deployed, given the complex and highly dynamic current situation on the ground. As the previous Government acknowledged, **a sizeable contingent of our highly effective special forces operates in Afghanistan. In accordance with long-standing practice, we do not specify the scale or nature of their activities, but, if we take them into account with the enabling support that they need, we see that they take our numbers to more than 10,000.**”

[28/02/2011](#), The Prime Minister, “Libya and the Middle East Volume 524: debated on Monday 28 February 2011”, House of Commons, Column 23:

The Prime Minister: “Clearly, the most challenging part of the evacuation has involved those British nationals scattered across more than 20 locations **in the oilfields deep in the desert.** On

Friday evening, **I authorised a military operation to bring as many of them as possible out of the desert.** On Saturday, **two RAF C-130 aircraft flew into the eastern desert and picked up 74 British nationals and 102 foreign nationals at three different locations. A second mission took place yesterday,** bringing out a further 21 British nationals and 168 foreign nationals. **One of the aircraft involved in the second mission suffered minor damage from small arms fire.** That underlines the challenging environment in which the aircraft were operating.”

[Guardian shared multiple reports confirming special forces were on these aircraft and performed the rescues:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/28/rescue-oil-workers-libya-home>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/27/sas-evacuation-british-workers-libya>

Confirmed by Hague in Parliament, see 17/03/2011

[07/03/2011](#), Foreign Secretary William Hague: *"The team [of UKSF and MI6] went to Libya to initiate contacts with the opposition. They experienced difficulties." - Guardian]*

[07/03/2011](#), “Libya and the Middle East Volume 524: debated on Monday 7 March 2011”, House of Commons, Columns 643-656:

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs: “Last week, I authorised the dispatch of a small British diplomatic team to eastern Libya in uncertain circumstances, which we judged required protection, to build on these initial contacts and to assess the scope for closer diplomatic dialogue. I pay tribute to that team. It was withdrawn yesterday after a serious misunderstanding about its role, leading to its temporary detention. This situation was resolved and it was able to meet council president, Mr Abdul-Jalil. However, it was clearly better for this team to be withdrawn. We intend to send further diplomats to eastern Libya in due course.”

Mr Douglas Alexander: “The Foreign Secretary has confirmed today that he personally authorised this mission. Given the outcome of the effort, will he now tell us whether he discussed the merits or demerits of the proposed course of action with senior officials? Did he discuss alternative means of achieving the mission’s aim with his senior officials ahead of his decision being taken? In particular, **did he discuss the mission with the Prime Minister in advance of his decision to authorise it?**”

... Perhaps the Foreign Secretary has read the question asked by a spokesman for the opposition forces in today’s edition of The Times. Let me quote his words directly:

“If this is an official delegation why did they come with a helicopter?””

Mr Hague: “...As I explained, **I authorised such a mission to be made to put a diplomatic team into eastern Libya with protection.** Of course, the timing and details of that are operational matters decided by the professionals, but Ministers must have confidence in their judgments, as I do, and must take full ministerial responsibility for all their actions and judgments, as, of course, I do...”

Tony Lloyd: “The Foreign Secretary does not need me to tell him that when we engage in the kind of operations that took place over recent days, there is risk to serving British service people, as well as to those with whom they come into contact. That must be proportionate. In this case, is the right hon. Gentleman confident that what appears to have ended in farce could not have ended in tragedy?”

Mr Hague: “The hon. Gentleman points to an important fact. There are risks involved in many of the things that we have to do in such situations. **There were risks involved in what happened the previous weekend in the rescue of oil workers from the desert. One of those flights was engaged with small arms fire when it landed in the desert,** so yes, there are risks involved, and it is precisely because there are risks involved in the deployment of our staff in such situations that we act on professional and military advice to give them protection.”

Barry Gardiner: “Who, if anyone, did the diplomatic mission believe it had arranged to see, what did it think was the agreed agenda, and **why were the missionaries issued with multiple identities and passports?**”

Mr Hague: “As I have explained, the missionaries were to make contact with opposition groups in Libya in order to assess the humanitarian situation there, and it will be necessary to have further diplomatic presence and diplomatic contact in order to do that. **I am not going into further operational details about that for entirely obvious reasons: other missions sometimes take place in other parts of the world.** The mission under consideration met the president of the national council that the opposition have formed, and that is the basis for further contact between the United Kingdom and those opposition groups.”

Duncan Holmes: “I wonder whether the Foreign Secretary could elaborate on that point. I am keen to know what direct contact either our embassy or his other officials have established with the chair of the national Libyan council, Mustapha Abdul-Jalil.”

Mr Hague: “The diplomatic team that was there at the weekend did have a meeting with him, and we have had a range of contacts with other figures in the opposition. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that several figures have defected from the Gaddafi regime to the opposition, and I have spoken to some of them myself, **including General Younis, one of the Ministers who took some of the special forces over to the other side in Libya, so our contact has been with Mr Jalil, that particular general and other figures among the opposition forces in eastern Libya.**”

[14/03/2011](#), Toby Perkins and Secretary of State for Defence (Dr Liam Fox) “Libya Volume 525: debated on Monday 14 March 2011”, House of Commons, Column 15:

The Secretary of State for Defence: “My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have already paid tribute to the members of the armed forces and the diplomatic service and all those who put themselves in harm’s way to help our people to leave safely. I would like to add my thanks to all those involved, in particular the members of the armed forces and civilian personnel, who demonstrated courage and professionalism in the co-ordinated effort to rescue British and other nationals from the crisis. The Ministry of Defence **utilised a range of assets to support the Foreign Office-led operation to recover UK and other citizens from Libya. We successfully transported 926 entitled persons, of whom 286 were British nationals.**”

Toby Perkins: “I would like to associate myself with the Secretary of State’s comments on the work done by our armed forces in Libya. **Will he tell the House who in the Ministry of Defence authorised the use of special forces in the operation that started on 2 March, and what advice led to that decision?**”

Dr Fox: “The Foreign Secretary has already set out the circumstances in which—[Interruption.] **I have no intention of commenting further on special forces.**”

Topical Questions Volume 525: debated on Monday 14 March 2011

Tom Greatrex: “T3. I am not sure that the Secretary of State’s earlier answer was entirely clear, so perhaps he will try again. Will he tell us who specifically in his Department authorised the involvement of special forces in Libya on 2 March? (45723)”

Dr Fox: “I have already made it clear that **the Foreign Secretary set out the exact details, as far as we are able to disclose them, on that particular operation.** When force protection is to be offered to the sort of diplomatic mission that was undertaken, it is quite usual for the Ministry of Defence to be asked and to agree to do it.”

[17/03/2011](#), Jim Sheridan and The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (William Hague), “North Africa and the Middle East Volume 525: debated on Thursday 17 March 2011”, House of Commons, Column 507:

Jim Sheridan: “Notwithstanding the bravery of the diplomatic corps and, indeed, the military in Libya, may I share with the Foreign Secretary the experiences of my constituent James Coyle, who was eventually brought back to Britain from Libya? **He and his family, and indeed his employer, experienced great difficulty in communicating with the Foreign Office and obtaining information.** Has the Foreign Secretary had time to reflect on what lessons have been learned, and on how we can best deal with such circumstances in the future?”

Mr. Hague: “It is important for the hon. Gentleman to remember that, **thanks to the commendable organisation, immense bravery and skill of the Royal Air Force and the special forces, people such as his constituent were lifted out of the desert in Libya and brought safely home.** That is **something of which we in the House should be proud,** rather than trying to find fault with the way in which the exercise was carried out. I am sure that people who are rescued in those circumstances will be grateful for what the United Kingdom did for them. Certainly **the people of 43 other nationalities in whose evacuation from Libya we assisted are very grateful for our assistance.**”

[24/03/2011](#), Geoffrey Robinson and The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (William Hague), “North Africa and the Middle East Volume 525: debated on Thursday 24 March 2011”, House of Commons, Column 1124:

Mr Geoffrey Robinson: “Will he take that opportunity to make it quite clear that, in so far as we know what the end game will be for this complex situation [in Libya], the commitment of British ground troops will not be part of it?”

Mr Hague: “As I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr Leigh), we will stick very strictly to the terms of the UN resolution. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, that rules out any occupation force in any part of Libya. He can be absolutely assured that there will be no invasion of Libya. To give a fuller answer, **there have already been occasions on which we have sent special forces into Libya, for instance to rescue the oil workers in the desert three weekends ago.** We can neither exclude such necessary, small-scale things, nor anticipate what might come up, but we are not preparing for a ground invasion of Libya and will not be doing so.”

[30/03/2011](#), Mr Mike Weir and The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (William Hague), “North Africa and the Middle East Volume 525: debated on Thursday 24 March 2011”, House of Commons, Column 359:

Mr Mike Weir: “My colleagues and I fully support resolution 1973, but the reinterpretation of it in respect of arms to the rebels does suggest mission creep and is in danger of shattering the political consensus. It has been suggested in some quarters that the rebels have also asked for British troops to help with training. Can the Foreign Secretary give us a cast-iron assurance that there will be no British troops on the ground in Libya in any circumstances?”

Mr Hague: “Let me reassure the hon. Gentleman somewhat on that point. He knows that the UN resolution is clear that there must be no occupying force in Libya or any part of Libya. Let me give him further reassurance: in my meetings with the interim transitional national council, the opposition in Libya, they have not asked for our troops to go to train them, and we are not doing that at the moment. For the reasons that I gave in the House last week, I will not exclude our ever having any forces of any kind anywhere, in small numbers, on Libyan soil, because we have already had to do that: **in order to rescue our nationals from the desert a month ago, we had to send the RAF and special forces into desert locations.** Circumstances can arise in which such limited operations have to take place, but there will be no ground invasion of Libya and no occupation of Libya, and the request to which the hon. Gentleman refers certainly has not been made to me.”

[26/04/2011](#), Chris Bryant and The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alistair Burt), “Escape of Taliban Prisoners Volume 527: debated on Tuesday 26 April 2011”, House of Commons, Column 30:

Chris Bryant: “I wholeheartedly support the calls that have been made this afternoon for redoubling the political effort in Afghanistan, but is not one of the most depressing facts about this event that in many cases **it will have been British special forces who captured those people in the first place, and it may well be British special forces that have to capture them all over again? I do not expect the Minister to comment on operational matters,** but is it not depressing that at this stage we are cutting 650 troops from the Royal Marines—precisely **where those special forces are largely drawn from?**”

Alistair Burt: “...Of the 476 detainees who escaped from the prison, as far as we are aware **between three and five of them were captured and transferred into the system** by United Kingdom forces: as the hon. Gentleman makes his distinction, I have to make that distinction back. **A very small number of the total were involved with and detained by British security forces**—but that does not avoid the main point, which is that of course there are 476 detainees who should be inside the prison today, not outside. The **situation affects all the forces that have been engaged,** and we do not draw a distinction as to who detained the prisoners.”

[13/03/2012](#), The Secretary of State for Defence (Phillip Hammond), Bob Ainsworth and Julian Brazier, “Hostage Rescue Operation (Nigeria) Volume 542: debated on Tuesday 13 March 2012”, House of Commons, Columns 141-148:

The Secretary of State for Defence: “With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the attempted rescue of Chris McManus and his colleague, the Italian national Franco

Lamolinar, who were, very sadly, killed by their kidnappers during the operation on Thursday 8 March...

...The Nigerian security forces, **with UK support**, launched the assault on the compound last Thursday at 10.58 am London time. **UK personnel encountered and killed one armed kidnapper almost immediately on entering the compound.** As the assault teams moved into the compound, **UK personnel found the bodies of Chris and Franco, already dead, in a room at the rear of the compound.** Early indications are clear that both men were murdered by their captors with automatic gunfire before they could be rescued. Three further guards of the hostages were killed by Nigerian forces during **an operation that lasted approximately an hour and a half in total. None were taken alive.**”

Mr Bob Ainsworth: “Our condolences must go to the families of the two men, and our profound thanks must go to our **special forces, who acquire and are then prepared to use skill and bravery to carry out operations of this kind.** We must be enormously grateful to them for doing so. May I return to the issue of the unfortunate discord between us and the Italian Government?”

Mr Hammond: “...I am assured that information was continually being transmitted between intelligence agencies, as is the norm between allied agencies, but that **there was not enough time for the discussions at Government-to-Government level that we might have had if a further day, or even 12 hours,** had been available to us.”

Mr Julian Brazier: “As my right hon. Friend and others have said, this was an extremely difficult operation, and one in which the odds were increasingly stacked against us. Does my right hon. Friend agree that while we commend the courage and professionalism of our special forces, **it is extremely important that any examination of the details of what took place does not in any way compromise the necessary secrecy of the methods that they employ?**”

Mr Hammond: “My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The operational security of our special forces remains paramount at all times, **which is why we never comment on their operations and, indeed, never confirm or deny their involvement in any particular operation.**”

[11/06/2012](#), Jeremy Corbyn and The Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (William Hague) “Syria Volume 546: debated on Monday 11 June 2012”, House of Commons, Column 45:

Jeremy Corbyn: “Obviously we all condemn the human rights abuses, wherever they are occurring, all over Syria. Will the Foreign Secretary be more specific about which opposition groups the UK Government are supporting either financially or with logistical equipment or training, and about **whether there are any British arms or British special forces in the area,** which can only exacerbate what is already a very serious set of divisions within the opposition in Syria?”

Mr Hague; “The groups outside Syria that we are supporting—the kind of groups that I have been meeting in Istanbul—include the Syrian National Council, which is the largest of these groups, although some of the minority ethnic communities are not yet affiliated to it, and we want them to come together. **All our support is non-lethal.** Our assistance takes the form that I described in my statement—communications equipment, training, and human rights monitoring. No armed intervention is being practised or sanctioned by the United Kingdom at the moment.”

[27/06/2012](#), Jesse Norman and The Prime Minister, “Engagements Volume 547: debated on Wednesday 27 June 2012”, House of Commons, Column 304:

Jesse Norman: Q12. Hereford is the home of the SAS, and 19 July will be the 40th anniversary of the battle of Mirbat, in which nine SAS soldiers fought off more than 300 heavily armed guerrillas. During the battle, Sergeant Talaiasi Labalaba was shot while single-handedly operating a 25 lb field gun—a weapon designed for a six-man team. **Successive Governments have declined to recognise the extraordinary nature of his sacrifice.** The SAS has many heroes, but will the Prime Minister finally put this matter to rest and give his support to the campaign to award Sergeant Labalaba the posthumous Victoria Cross that he so clearly earned? (113869).

The Prime Minister: “My hon. Friend is right to speak up for the SAS, which, as he says, is based in his constituency, and the extraordinary fight that those soldiers had in Oman all those years ago. **We are not allowed to speak a lot on the record about what they do,** but it is worth putting on the record the immense gratitude of all Governments and, I think, the entire British people for the risks they take on our behalf. **Thinking of the recent hostage rescue,** I would like to do that personally. Regarding my hon. Friend’s question, these sorts of decisions are not for politicians to make, but let me once again pay tribute to the heroic actions of that man and everyone involved on that day.

[20/11/2012](#), Julian Brazier and Solicitor-General (Representative), “Sergeant Nightingale Volume 553: debated on Tuesday 20 November 2012”, House of Commons

Mr Julian Brazier: “The facts are as follows: [special forces] Sergeant Danny Nightingale was **presented with a Glock pistol in Baghdad in 2007 by grateful Iraqi colleagues. He returned early to this country from operations, accompanying the bodies of two comrades killed in action.** A comrade packed his kit and it was returned to the UK under the supervision of the military police...This is a man who has served bravely for 17 years—the bulk of that time in the special forces—risking his life for his country again and again...”

Solicitor-General: “Sergeant Nightingale was interviewed by the police and explained that he had **brought the pistol back on conclusion of operations in Iraq in 2007.** He said that he had taken it from secured premises at his base to his home in January 2011. He accepted that he had obtained the ammunition in the **course of his duties as a training officer** and that he had not got around to handing it in, describing his administration and working practices as poor. It is right that he explained that the Glock **came as a present from local nationals,** that it was his intention to have it deactivated and mounted, and that he had not intended to keep the item in its present form.”

[18/01/2013](#), The Prime Minister, Bob Stewart and Philip Davies, “Algeria Volume 556: debated on Friday 18 January 2013”, House of Commons, Columns 1163-1179:

The Prime Minister: “I would like to make a statement on the hostage crisis in Algeria and the tragic events of the past three days... I offered UK technical and intelligence support, including from experts in hostage negotiation and rescue, to help find a successful resolution; and I urged that we and other countries affected should be consulted before any action was taken....

...During the course of Thursday morning, the Algerian forces mounted an operation. We were not informed of this in advance...A rapid deployment consular team is en route to Algiers, together with other specialists..."

Bob Stewart: "May I ask him **whether our specialist experts in kidnap and ransom and hostage negotiation are still on stand-by** to help in the event of this operation being ongoing, as it seems to be for a small group of terrorists who are holding nationals from this country and other allies?"

The Prime Minister: "**The answer is yes, hostage negotiating experts are on stand-by with other sorts of technical expertise that we can provide...** While we in this country can be hugely proud of the **technical expertise and the brilliance of our security forces and special forces**, one can have the ultimate degree of planning and still find that these events end unhappily. We should bear that in mind when thinking about the actions the Algerians have taken."

Philip Davies: "...There might be some **concern that the Algerian Government did not take up my right hon. Friend's offer for the use of British special forces**. Does he know why that offer was not taken up, and what assessment have the Government made of the expertise and capability of the Algerian forces...?"

The Prime Minister: "...We have **expertise and pride ourselves on the brilliance of our special forces, but clearly the Algerians felt that they had to make decisions very quickly** and felt that there was an urgent threat to life, so decided to act as they did. As I said, I regret that **we were not informed in advance**, and of course **the offers to help were, and still are, there**, but we have to understand that it was about the danger they faced and they felt they had to act."

[25/02/2013](#), Mr James Clappison and Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Phillip Hammond), "Non-equipment Budget Volume 559: debated on Monday 25 February 2013", House of Commons, Column 10:

Mr James Clappison: "Although Ministers rightly never comment on funding for our special forces, does my right hon. Friend agree that the current operational capability of our special forces, in terms of both equipment and manpower, is a huge national asset?"

Mr Hammond: "Our special forces are a huge national asset, and **their capability has been expanded very substantially in response to the needs of Operation Herrick in Afghanistan**. It follows that as we draw down from our operations in Afghanistan we will want to review some of the supporting infrastructure put in place for that specific operation. As my hon. Friend will know, however, the **MOD never comments publicly on the details of special forces numbers, funding or disposition**."

[04/02/2014](#), The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. William Hague) and Mr. Adam Holloway, "Sri Harmandir Sahib Volume 575: debated on Tuesday 4 February 2014", House of Commons, Columns 139, 153:

(Column 139) Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. William Hague): "The House will recall that on 13 January concerns were raised regarding two documents released to the public in the National Archives. The documents relate to the painful events that

followed the occupation of the temple site by Sikh dissidents in December 1983, which led to a six-month stand-off with the Indian authorities. In June 1984, a three-day military operation by Indian forces known as Operation Blue Star took place. Official Indian Government figures estimate that 575 people died. Other reports suggest that as many as 3,000 were killed, including pilgrims caught in the crossfire.”

...[The documents] indicate that in February 1984, in the early stages of the crisis, the then British Government sent a **military officer to give advice to the Indian Government on their contingency planning**... Within hours of the documents coming to light, the Prime Minister instructed the Cabinet Secretary to carry out an urgent investigation...

...We have taken that step because the whole investigation has been based on a commitment to the maximum possible transparency. We want to be as open as possible with the British public, **in so far as that does not undermine the principle, upheld by successive British Governments, of not revealing any information relating to intelligence or special forces.**”

(Columns 142-143) Mr. Douglas Alexander: “I **regret that the Government have so far refused to accept our call that all relevant documentation relating to the incident that can be should now be made public.** I welcome the publication of five further documents as part of today’s report, but, given that the report itself cites “officials interviewed” over the course of this investigation, will the Foreign Secretary now commit to publishing a list of those officials, and will he confirm whether any surviving Ministers who served at the time were interviewed as part of the investigation? Will he also confirm whether these testimonies will be made public?”

...Turning to the substance of the findings, the report states that the UK military adviser in India from 8 to 17 February 1984 advised the Indian Government that “this type of operation should only be put into effect as a last resort when all other courses of negotiation had failed”.Based on the documents that he has seen, but for understandable reasons may not be able to publish, **will the Foreign Secretary set out what type of operation was referred to in that case?”**

Mr. Hague: “The right hon. Gentleman asked certain specific questions about the process. He asked whether we would publish a list of officials. **No, I do not think that that would be appropriate. It is important to protect the anonymity of some of the officials and military personnel involved...**

...The relevant documents—those that can be published **while, as I have said, upholding the publication principles that all British Governments have always observed**—that relate specifically to Operation Blue Star have been published.”

[no specific answer to question of operation type given]

(Column 153) Mr. Adam Holloway: “As a former Army officer who represents a constituency with a large number of Sikhs, I thank the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister for the serious and rigorous way they have approached this issue. **Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that had the distinguished SAS Major’s advice been taken, there would have been a much lower level of violence?** Indeed, if that advice had been taken in full, there would have been no violence at all, rather than the—to my mind—appalling behaviour of the Indian Government in the assault in Operation Metal, and the weeks and months that followed. We must remember that, for the victims of that, justice remains in very short supply.”

Mr. Hague: “Of course, **we can never know for sure what would have happened under different circumstances or a different plan.** It is clear from the Cabinet Secretary’s report that **the UK military adviser gave advice about using negotiations and using force only as a last resort,** and the military advice he gave was partly based on the desire to reduce casualties all round. It is important that those points are fully brought out and understood, as my hon. Friend suggests.”

[08/12/2014](#), The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood) and Keith Vaz, “Yemen (British Nationals) Volume 589: debated on Monday 8 December 2014”, House of Commons, Columns 643-646:

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs: “As the Foreign Secretary said on Saturday, the death of Luke Somers and Pierre Korkie at the hands of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was a terrible crime... We know from our own experience the difficulty of resolving hostage cases.”

Keith Vaz: “**Were British security services involved in any aspect of this raid?** Was the British Government consulted before the raid took place? Did we supply the Americans with any information? Could we have done any more to assist the US and Yemeni forces?”

Mr Ellwood: “The right hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions, but, as he will appreciate, **I am unable to answer many of them in this House owing to the operational complexity of the matter...**The right hon. Gentleman asked about British hostages. Again, he will be aware that it is the **long-standing policy of successive Governments** not to discuss such matters.”

[This appears at odds with precedent set by PM and Hague when discussing hostage/rescue missions in 2011 and 2012.]

[13/07/2015](#), Derek Twigg and The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Julian Brazier), “Reserve Forces: Recruitment Volume 598: debated on Monday 13 July 2015”, House of Commons, Column 574:

Derek Twigg: “The Prime Minister has said today that **he wants an increase in the number of special forces.** Given our armed forces’ greater reliance on reservists, what are the Minister and the Government doing to ensure that we still have a good pool from which to pick our special forces?”

Mr Brazier: “As a former Defence Minister, the hon. Gentleman will know that **Ministers of the Crown never talk about special forces in the Chamber.** On his wider point about the size of the pool in the armed forces as a whole, our commitment, as shown most recently by the 2% announcement, is to outstanding armed forces in quality and equipment.”

[14/07/2015](#), “Topical Questions Volume 598: debated on Tuesday 14 July 2015”, House of Commons, Column 728:

Ms Gisela Stewart: “In response to the increased threat from ISIL and the situation in Syria, the **Prime Minister tells us that he wishes to use drones more extensively and expand our special forces. Has the Foreign Office made an assessment of the speed at which we can expand the special forces, which would make that promise meaningful?**”

Mr Ellwood: “The hon. Lady is a learned Member of this House. **She should be aware that what she reads in the papers about what the special forces will be up to is not subject to discussion** in this Chamber. I am afraid we will have to leave it at that.”

[20/07/2015](#), Vernon Coaker, Ms Gisela Stewart and The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon), “Counter-ISIL Coalition Strategy Volume 598: debated on Monday 20 July 2015”, House of Commons, Column 1240-47:

Vernon Coaker: “We read in the papers of the Prime Minister’s **plans to expand special forces and to procure more drones specifically to take on ISIL**. How will that expansion in special forces be achieved from the current pool of regular forces? Can we expand special forces without an expansion of the pool of regulars? **Will he be clear with the House and rule out any downgrading in the standards** that we expect our special forces to meet?”

Michael Fallon: “...I am certainly not, on the Floor of the House, going to go into details of those defensive and recovery measures. Nor will I comment on his question about special forces—as you know, **Mr Speaker, we do not discuss details of the operation of special forces**. The provision of more unmanned aircraft and the training of the pilots we need to operate them will of course be matters for the strategic defence and security review.”

Ms Gisela Stewart: “I know that it is the **tradition of this House not to make any statement about the operation of the special forces**. However, **in the light of the Prime Minister’s statement about expanding those forces, the Secretary of State needs to tell the House how he intends to expand them, how that will affect the regulars, and what the cost will be**.

Michael Fallon: “**Yes, we do not discuss on the Floor of the House the operation of special forces**, but I can tell the hon. Lady that we will use the opportunity of the strategic defence and security review that is now under way to look overall at our force structure. The Prime Minister has already made it clear that the **size and shape of the special forces and the equipment available to them is one of the areas that he would like the review to focus on**.”

Johnny Mercer: “When I was serving, one of the most frustrating things was an almost uninformed debate about our military action. Does my right hon. Friend agree that questions about embeds, and **asking special forces capabilities to be raised on the Floor of the House of Commons, belie a fundamental misunderstanding of how our forces operate**, and that in interoperability it is vital we have embeds to ensure we take part in the international fight against terrorism?”

Michael Fallon: “My hon. Friend brings his very direct military experience to our debates, and I **absolutely agree with him**.”

[17/11/2015](#), Richard Drax and The Prime Minister, “G20 and Paris Attacks Volume 602: debated on Tuesday 17 November 2015”, House of Commons, Column 538:

Richard Drax: “To counter the appalling slaughter that was faced by all those in Paris, we will need armed police on the spot within minutes. Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that we have sufficient armed police in all our cities to do just that?”

The Prime Minister: “My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this. **Following the Mumbai attacks and the intelligence we had after that about potential attacks in this country, a lot of work was done to make sure that our armed response vehicles have a sufficient number of people to meet the challenge in any of our major urban areas.** We keep this under review. We are studying what happened in Paris. We are looking at the numbers that we need. I do not think the idea of routinely arming all the police in our country is the right approach, but certainly increasing the number of armed police that are available is something that we are looking at very carefully and something that, if necessary, we will do. **While we do not talk about the role of our special forces, they are also available to help in these circumstances.** We will do everything we can to make sure that they can be brought to bear at the right moment and can help with our overall effort in dealing with what are extremely challenging problems thrown up by what happened in Paris.”

[18/11/2015](#), Jesse Norman and The Prime Minister, “Engagements Volume 602: debated on Wednesday 18 November 2015”, House of Commons, Column 672:

Jesse Norman: “Q13. In that spirit, I warmly congratulate the Prime Minister on the new **funding that has been announced for special forces equipment**, but may I draw his attention to the plight of David and Maria Summers, in my constituency, who have struggled to obtain permanent residency for Maria despite having been married for 45 years? May I ask the Prime Minister to encourage officials to look at the case again? (902144)”

The Prime Minister: “I shall be happy to look at the case again, but, given the constituency that my hon. Friend represents, **his question gives me an opportunity to say something about a group of people we say very little about because we do not comment on the amazing work that they do.** Hereford is a **very important part of the nation’s security, both domestically and overseas. Very, very brave people work there,** and we should all give credit to them.”

[21/03/2016](#), Angus Robertson and The Prime Minister, European Council Volume 607: debated on Monday 21 March 2016”, House of Commons, Column 1251:

Angus Robertson: “Last week, in Prime Minister’s questions, I asked about UK plans to send troops to Libya. The Prime Minister chose his words very carefully. **He said that he had no plans to send “conventional” forces to Libya.** Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that he has a **policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of special forces?** Will he also confirm that **operations conducted by special forces are not subject to parliamentary oversight** by either the Intelligence and Security Committee or the Defence Committee?”

The Prime Minister: “On special forces, **let me confirm the long-standing policy, which is that all Governments have exactly the same approach,** and we have not changed that at all.”

[23/03/2016](#), Angus Robertson and The Prime Minister, “Engagements Volume 607: debated on Wednesday 23 March 2016”, House of Commons, Column 1567:

Angus Robertson: “A defining characteristic of a democratic society is our trust in our institutions and democratic oversight by parliamentarians of those who work so hard to keep us safe. We have that oversight with our police and with our security services, but **we do not yet have it with UK special forces under the Intelligence and Security Committee or the Defence Committee.** Will the Prime Minister address that?”

The Prime Minister: “I am afraid that I just part company with the right hon. Gentleman on that one. We have put in place some of the most extensive oversight arrangements for our intelligence and security services. Our services do a remarkable job, and the police are regularly called to account both locally and nationally. **The work that our special forces do is vital for our country. Like everyone else in this country, they are subject to international law, but I do not propose to change the arrangements under which these incredibly brave men work.**”

[13/07/2016](#), Emily Thornberry and The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Phillip Hammond), “Report of the Iraq Inquiry Volume 613: debated on Wednesday 13 July 2016”, House of Commons, Column 332

Emily Thornberry: “It is important that we look to tomorrow’s problems. **Special forces are likely to be used increasingly.** On the idea that we will send, for example, **special forces into Libya in a training capacity**, I agree with the hon. Gentleman about how that **might end up a quasi-combat role.** Presumably, if the training forces are in Libya, they will be in a camp. They may be in a part of Libya that is allegedly safe, but they will need to be guarded. Who will guard them? We can see how it is possible to slide down a slippery slope. At the moment, although it would be inappropriate in the case of a decision to send special forces or trainers into an area, **if we can have parliamentary scrutiny of our secret service**—if the behaviour of MI5 and MI6 is at least answerable to a Committee of this House—**it is not beyond our wit to allow there to be similar accountability over special forces.** I have written about this issue.”

Phillip Hammond: “It is important to point out that the oversight that the Intelligence and Security Committee, prominent members of which are present, exercises over the intelligence community is always post the fact. The **only kind of meaningful oversight over special force deployment** of the type that the hon. Lady is talking about **would have to be before the fact.** That would be a very different proposition.”

Emily Thornberry: “...I do not expect special forces, before they are used, to have to go before a Committee of Parliament and get permission, but I do think that there should be some form of accountability and some explanation. It was embarrassing, and it demonstrated the democratic deficit in relation to hybrid warfare, to read in the papers that the **King of Jordan was gossiping with Congressmen in America about our special forces, when nobody in this House had officially been told about it.** That highlights the democratic deficit in this country.”

[30/06/2017](#), Dan Jarvis, Martin Day and Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mark Lancaster), “Topical Questions Volume 627: debated on Monday 10 July 2017”, House of Commons, Columns 20-22.

Dan Jarvis: “The Secretary of State will have seen the recent coverage in The Sunday Times relating to alleged **incidents that took place in Afghanistan** and the subsequent Royal Military Police inquiry. Will he tell the House **who took the decision to shut down Operation Northmoor** [investigation into alleged Special Forces War Crimes]? Why was that decision taken, when was it taken and was **the Prime Minister kept informed?**”

Mark Lancaster: “Our armed forces are rightly held to the highest standards, and credible, serious allegations of criminal behaviour must be investigated. Op Northmoor has discontinued more than **90% of the 675 allegations received because there was no evidence of criminal or disciplinary offence**. To date, no case has been referred to the Service Prosecuting Authority, but **investigations continue**.”

Martyn Day: “Will the Minister reverse the decision to shut down Operation Northmoor, given the recent report in The Sunday Times on **possible criminal behaviour by an SAS unit in Afghanistan?**”

Mark Lancaster: “**It would be absolutely wrong for there to be ministerial interference in that operation**. I am quite confident that Op Northmoor is appropriately resourced, both through personnel and finances, and I can only refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago.”

[03/07/2018](#), Martin Docherty-Hughes and The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson), “Counter-Daesh Update Volume 644: debated on Tuesday 3 July 2018”, House of Commons, Column 196.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: “...The Secretary of State spoke about the number of forces who are deployed to fight against Daesh, but what he neglected to mention was that many of those will be **special forces whose operational assignments almost always escape adequate scrutiny from the House**. Can he tell us, therefore, how the House can hold the Government to account in future when so many of the day-to-day operations are carried out in this way?”

Gavin Williamson: “As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government do not comment on the activity of special forces, but we are absolutely committed to keeping this House regularly updated on our operations in Iraq and Syria.”

[25/03/2019](#), Martin Docherty-Hughes and The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster), “Topical Questions Volume 657: debated on Monday 25 March 2019”, House of Commons, Column 19:

Martin Docherty-Hughes: “I am sure that the entire House was distraught yesterday to hear press reports of **injuries sustained by UK special forces in Yemen** and will join me in wishing a speedy recovery to those affected. **I appreciate that the MOD does not comment on special forces operations, but the news certainly illustrates the engagement of UK forces in that part of the Arabian peninsula**. Will the Secretary of State make a statement to the House to ensure that we and our constituents can know more about the UK’s ongoing role in that desperate, devastating conflict?”

Mark Lancaster: “As the hon. Gentleman knows, **we neither confirm nor deny the use of our special forces**.”

[26/03/2019](#), Emily Thornberry, Paul Sweeney and Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field), “Yemen Volume 657: debated on Tuesday 26 March 2019”, House of Commons, Column 186:

Emily Thornberry: "...for the past three years, that phrase has been used time and again by Ministers to explain that it is impossible to assess alleged individual violations of international humanitarian law in Yemen because we are not a party to the conflict. Yet this weekend we read reports in The Mail on Sunday that members of **British special forces had been engaged in gun battles with the Houthi rebels in Yemen while providing support to the coalition forces.**

I am not for a second expecting the Minister of State to comment on the activities of our special forces—something that the Government never do—but I want to ask him two important questions of principle. First, in the light of these reports, do the Government still stand by their long-standing statements that Britain is not a party to this conflict?

Mark Field: "I thank the right hon. Lady for the tone of her contribution. She will appreciate—indeed, she expressly appreciated—that **in relation to special forces we do not comment either to confirm or deny any involvement.** Clearly, she is well aware that we have **liaison officers who are based in Saudi Arabia,** and have been routinely. I am very keen not in any way inadvertently to mislead the House on this matter, and therefore I will, if she will forgive me, ensure that she has a written response, liaising with the Ministry of Defence, about the issue of other engagement or involvement of British personnel in Yemen at the moment. **We still hold to the firm view that we are not a party to the conflict.** Clearly, we are supportive of Saudi Arabia, which has been a long-standing ally, as she is aware. There is no military solution to this matter."

Paul Sweeney: "I am sure that the best wishes of the whole House will go out to those members of the **British Special Forces who have been reported injured in Yemen.** I do not expect the Minister to comment on the details of the operations that they might have been involved in, but **can he say whether any members of the British armed forces operating in Yemen have observed, or been witness to, the use of child soldiers by the Saudi Arabian side?**"

Mark Field: "I refer to my earlier answers. I do not wish to fob the hon. Gentleman off. Some serious allegations were made in the Mail on Sunday article. I am sure that they are well sourced, so I would be interested to know more about those sources. **There will be an investigation on the matter.**"

[01/04/2019](#), Lord Collins of Highbury and The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon), "Yemen: Giving Peace a Chance (International Relations Committee Report) Volume 797: debated on Monday 1 April 2019", House of Lords, Columns 59-60:

Lord Collins: "Last Tuesday, my right honourable friend Emily Thornberry, shadow Foreign Secretary, asked an Urgent Question in the other place, following press **reports at the weekend that members of British Special Forces were engaged in gun battles with the Houthi rebels in Yemen while providing support to the coalition forces.** One disturbing allegation in the Mail on Sunday report was that **our forces were providing support to locally recruited, Saudi-funded militia and that many of the fighters—**up to 40%, it was alleged—were children as young as 13 years old. If these allegations are true, it would confirm that our forces were not just party to this conflict but witnesses to war crimes. In response, Mark Field said in the other place:

"I am keen that we get to the bottom of those allegations".—[Official Report, Commons, 26/3/19; col. 187.]

...Have the Minister or the Government been given evidence of breaches of international humanitarian law by Saudi coalition forces from British sources?"

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office: "Before I go into the report itself, I shall first address the concerns raised by the noble Lord, Lord Collins, in particular, regarding recent media reports of the involvement of UK military personnel in Yemen and the use of child soldiers in conflict. I hope noble Lords will recognise that I cannot comment in detail on specific deployments, but **I can clarify that a small number of British personnel are working in a liaison capacity in Saudi headquarters. They are not, as some have suggested, based in so-called command centres. British personnel have no role, to repeat what my right honourable friend said in the other place, in setting coalition policy or executing air strikes in Yemen.**"

[07/01/2020](#), Stewart Malcolm McDonald, The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer), "UK Special Forces: Iraq and Afghanistan Volume 669: debated on Tuesday 7 January 2020", House of Commons, Columns 353-361:

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: "I should say at the outset that there is absolutely no joy in bringing this debate before the House this evening, but it is important. It follows, as the Minister knows, the joint investigation of The Sunday Times and "Panorama" of the role of **special forces and UK personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan. The investigation contained some of the most serious allegations, including allegations of war crimes that have been committed and subsequently covered up by members of the armed forces and perhaps even Ministers themselves.**"

[354]...There is also the case of the shooting of three boys and one young man in Afghanistan—shot in the head. The premise was that they were Taliban insurgents, but the joint investigation has told us that no such evidence was ever produced. That information was passed to the Service Prosecuting Authority, and a recommendation of war crimes charges was made. A cover up by military officials then ensued. Serious, serious questions about why these allegations appear to have been whitewashed in that way need to be addressed...

[355]...Parliament's broader ability to hold special forces operations to account...is woefully lacking in this country, and we are being outdone by the United States—the United States!—on the oversight of special forces. In this modern age, the public expect there to be proper parliamentary scrutiny and parliamentary oversight. The system needs updating."

Johnny Mercer: [360]"The House will be aware of the **long-standing policy of successive Governments not to comment on the activities of our special forces. This "neither confirm, nor deny" policy is an essential element in enabling this strategic asset to operate effectively.** I am therefore unable to speak in any detail about the vital role that our special forces played in Iraq and Afghanistan, and **will have to confine myself to making observations about the allegations more generally.**

On the basis of five specific incidents—two from Iraq and three from Afghanistan—The Sunday Times and the BBC make four broad allegations: first, that we operated death squads in Afghanistan; secondly, that there has been a systematic attempt by the MOD not to investigate

allegations; thirdly, that the MOD has applied pressure to terminate investigations prematurely; and fourthly, that the MOD has sought throughout to ensure that war crimes in Iraq go unpunished. The BBC wrote to the Ministry of Defence prior to broadcast setting out these and other allegations that were not repeated in its “Panorama” programme....

[361]...let me deal with the allegation that our armed forces **operated so-called death squads in Afghanistan**. This is simply not true. Our armed forces did conduct many daring operations to capture Taliban insurgents. However, **these were not “kill or capture” operations; rather, they were carefully planned “capture” operations with the object of capturing known Taliban insurgents and their associates**. While every effort is taken to minimise the risk to any civilians who are present during such operations, it is simply an unfortunate fact that the risk of civilian casualties in war cannot be eliminated altogether.

Irrespective of the unit involved in any operation, **civilian deaths were reported to, and have been independently investigated by, the Royal Military Police**. All three of the incidents cited by The Sunday Times and the BBC have been investigated. The RMP referred one case—the **shooting of Fazel Mohammed and three Afghan minors, to which the hon. Gentleman referred—to the Service Prosecuting Authority**, which, having obtained independent legal advice outside the Ministry of Defence from senior external counsel, decided that the evidence did not establish a realistic prospect of conviction. In the other two cases, the RMP concluded that there was insufficient evidence of wrongdoing and did not refer any soldiers for any offence.

It is simply not credible to suggest, given the scale of resources expended by the MOD on investigating alleged criminal behaviour in Iraq and Afghanistan, that this demonstrates that there could have been a systematic cover-up. Over £40 million has been spent to date on the Iraq criminal investigations, while £10 million has been spent on **Operation Northmoor, which is the RMP’s investigation into 675 allegations from Afghanistan**. At their height, **the Iraq Historical Allegations Team and Operation Northmoor each involved over 100 investigators who have collated and reviewed vast numbers of documents** and interviewed large numbers of alleged victims, families, witnesses, service personnel and veterans.”

21/09/20, Dave Doogan, Margaret Ferrier and Secretary of State for Defence (Ben Wallace), “Special Forces: Independent Oversight Volume 680: debated on Monday 21 September 2020”, House of Commons, Columns 615-616:

Dave Doogan: “If he will make an assessment of the potential merits of **establishing an independent body to oversee the operations of the UK’s Special Forces**. (906264)”

Margaret Ferrier: “If he will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing an independent body to oversee the operations of the UK’s Special Forces. (906283)”

The Secretary of State for Defence: “It has been the **longstanding position of successive Governments not to comment on the operations activity of the UK special forces**, as to do so would put personnel and operations at risk. **All military operations are overseen and scrutinised by Ministers, who are accountable to this Parliament.**”

Margaret Ferrier: “The current Government’s adoption of a **“no comment” policy prevents any parliamentary scrutiny of the role of UK special forces in defence and security**

strategy, even when their involvement in operations becomes the subject of media coverage. **Will the Secretary of State commit to a review of the “no comment” policy for UK special forces**, and enable parliamentary oversight of their activities, placing them on a similar footing to MI5, MI6 and GCHQ?”

Mr Wallace: “As I say, it is a long-held policy of many Governments not to comment on special forces. **They are accountable to me and to the law, and where we see any issues, Ministers will of course intervene. I will not commit to a further review; that is a longstanding policy.** Our special forces do an absolutely amazing job saving lives around the world and protecting our citizens. They operate in the covert world to achieve that effect and make sure their lives are not put at risk.”