# Ministry of Defence bans support for SAS veterans’ petition amid murder prosecution controversy



Defence chiefs are facing intense scrutiny for their intervention in the ongoing controversy surrounding the prosecution of SAS veterans accused of murder for their actions during the Northern Ireland Troubles. Recent reports indicate that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has explicitly instructed military personnel and regimental headquarters not to support a public petition advocating for legal protections for these veterans. This petition, which has gathered over 100,000 signatures, calls for an end to potential prosecutions stemming from actions taken in the early 1990s, where several SAS operatives were involved in lethal engagements with IRA terrorists.

The MoD's directive has raised alarms among veteran communities and military advocates, suggesting an attempt to stifle dialogue surrounding the historical treatment of soldiers who served in Northern Ireland. In an email sent across military channels, officials advised that all communications related to the Northern Ireland Troubles Act and associated petitions be removed from official social media. This move is seen by many as an extraordinary intervention, described by one Army source as an effort to "gag serving members of the Armed Forces." The source emphasised a belief that advocating for veterans facing prosecution should not be viewed as a political act.

The backdrop to this situation includes a series of legislative changes and political dynamics that have left many veterans feeling vulnerable. Recently, Labour's decision to abandon the Legacy Act, which historically provided certain protections for soldiers, has angered veteran groups. Critics argue that this decision demonstrates a lack of commitment to safeguarding those who served during a tumultuous period in British history. Tory MP David Davis expressed concern in Parliament, arguing that many British soldiers fell victim to violence during The Troubles, yet their sacrifices are overshadowed by bureaucratic challenges that effectively lead to "politically motivated trials."

This controversy also connects to historical perceptions of justice and accountability during the Troubles. In a notable example, an inquest recently concluded that SAS soldiers used unjustified lethal force when they killed several IRA members in 1992, stating that the victims were not directly threatening the soldiers at the time of the incident. Such findings have invigorated calls for prosecutions and have further polarised opinions on the treatment of veterans compared to other groups involved in the conflict.

Moreover, political machinations at the highest levels complicate the narrative. Following promises from the Prime Minister to legislate on legacy prosecutions, concerns have been raised that the inclusion of protective measures for veterans could jeopardise broader discussions about reconciliation and justice. Lord Dannatt, a former Army Chief, has suggested that political considerations have unduly influenced governmental actions, hinting at an atmosphere where veterans' rights are sacrificed for expediency.

As this situation unfolds, the implications for veterans and their families remain uncertain. While the MoD asserts the need for impartiality and neutrality, the sentiments echoed by many in the veteran community indicate a profound sense of betrayal and neglect. With the potential for criminal charges looming over former soldiers and the absence of robust legal protections, the debate surrounding justice for those who served during the Troubles is far from over.

In an era where the legacy of military engagement continues to be scrutinised, the balance between accountability and the protection of those who bore the brunt of conflict remains a contentious topic. The need for a clear and fair policy that respects the sacrifices of service members while addressing past injustices is more crucial now than ever.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746509/Ministry-Defence-order-Army-SAS-veterans-murder-charges-IRA.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-50034001)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746509/Ministry-Defence-order-Army-SAS-veterans-murder-charges-IRA.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/05/25/end-prosecutions-northern-ireland-troops-say-former-military/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/feb/06/sas-soldiers-used-unjustified-lethal-force-against-ira-members-inquest-finds), [[6]](https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/crime/the-government-intends-to-challenge-a-ruling-that-sas-soldiers-were-not-justified-in-killing-four-ira-members-5046474)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/05/18/revealed-theresa-may-betrayed-northern-ireland-veterans-facing/), [[7]](https://nationalsecuritynews.com/2025/02/one-law-for-them-are-the-sas-victims-of-a-witch-hunt-brigadier-retd-phil-mcevoy-obe-a-former-head-of-operational-law-in-the-british-army-gives-his-view/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746509/Ministry-Defence-order-Army-SAS-veterans-murder-charges-IRA.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-50034001> - An ex-Army chief, Lord Dannatt, claims that the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) influenced the exclusion of legislation protecting military veterans from prosecution in the Queen's Speech. He suggests officials were concerned that such legislation might prejudice other discussions. The Prime Minister had previously promised to end the pursuit of soldiers over historic allegations from operations during the Troubles, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The government responded by stating their determination to legislate on legacy prosecutions.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/05/18/revealed-theresa-may-betrayed-northern-ireland-veterans-facing/> - A private memo reveals that Theresa May personally blocked proposals for a statute of limitations on historic prosecutions of military personnel. The memo, sent on her behalf, instructed that a government consultation on addressing unsolved murders during the Troubles should not include such proposals. The document also emphasized that veterans should receive equal treatment compared to other groups affected by the consultation, including terrorists. This decision has been criticized by military leaders and MPs advocating for legal protections for veterans.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/feb/06/sas-soldiers-used-unjustified-lethal-force-against-ira-members-inquest-finds> - An inquest found that SAS soldiers used unjustified lethal force when they killed four IRA members in 1992 in County Tyrone. The coroner determined that the soldiers' claims of self-defense were false and that the victims were attempting to flee when they were shot. The ruling has led to calls for criminal prosecutions against the soldiers involved and has intensified debates over the Legacy Act, which offers immunity for Troubles-era crimes.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/05/25/end-prosecutions-northern-ireland-troops-say-former-military/> - Senior Army officers have called for an end to the threat of 'disgraceful' and 'politically motivated' criminal prosecutions of British soldiers who served in Northern Ireland. Commanders who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have accused the British Government of continuing to allow veterans to be hounded through the courts for events that took place in the province decades ago. They expressed their anger after revelations that Theresa May personally blocked ministers from proposing a new law that could have protected Northern Ireland veterans from facing murder charges.
6. <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/crime/the-government-intends-to-challenge-a-ruling-that-sas-soldiers-were-not-justified-in-killing-four-ira-members-5046474> - The Government intends to challenge a ruling that SAS soldiers were not justified in killing four IRA members in a 1992 ambush in Co Tyrone. Last month, coroner Mr Justice Michael Humphreys found that the soldiers did not have an honest belief in the necessity of using lethal force. Four Provisional IRA members were shot dead by the soldiers minutes after they had carried out a gun attack on Coalisland RUC station in February 1992. Conservative MP James Cartlidge confirmed that the Government would challenge the findings.
7. <https://nationalsecuritynews.com/2025/02/one-law-for-them-are-the-sas-victims-of-a-witch-hunt-brigadier-retd-phil-mcevoy-obe-a-former-head-of-operational-law-in-the-british-army-gives-his-view/> - Brigadier (Retd) Phil McEvoy OBE, a former head of Operational Law in the British Army, discusses the recent inquest ruling that SAS soldiers used unjustified lethal force against IRA members in 1992. He highlights the mixed reactions to the ruling, with families of the deceased welcoming it, while Unionist politicians have criticized it. McEvoy emphasizes the lack of formal response from the Ministry of Defence or the servicemen involved, and notes that former Veterans Minister Johnny Mercer described the finding as 'absurd' and a 'farce'.