

A new campaign, **Shoulder to Shoulder**, has been launched by senior former military leaders and veterans to encourage Parliament to modify the 'Troubles Bill' draft legislation dealing with Northern Ireland legacy cases.

The campaign website includes a suggested message to send to your MP, and also gives the opportunity to sign up for future updates.

The website is at: [Shoulder to Shoulder campaign](#).

Among those supporting the campaign are very senior former military commanders including General Sir Peter Wall and General Sir Nick Parker, who argue that veterans should not continue to face repeated investigations many decades after the events concerned where there is no genuinely new and compelling evidence.

As the campaign puts it:

"This is not about immunity. Those who break the law should always be held to account. The issue is whether veterans who acted lawfully, under Government authority and in accordance with the Rules of Engagement, should continue to face repeated investigations and legal proceedings decades later, even where there is no genuinely new and compelling evidence."

Many BAFF members and supporters who served on **Operation Banner** are following these developments closely. Most were never likely to be involved in a legacy investigation, yet many feel a strong sense of solidarity with former colleagues who continue to face uncertainty decades after their service.

Repeated investigations

BAFF has long taken the view that service personnel should not be subjected to repeated investigations where there is no genuinely new evidence to justify reopening a case. At the same time, allegations of criminal conduct should be investigated properly, independently and fairly. Those principles are not inconsistent.

It is also important not to conflate the Northern Ireland legacy debate with allegations arising from operations outside Northern Ireland, including Iraq and Afghanistan. Although clearly there are common issues concerning fairness, delay and the welfare of those under investigation, the legal frameworks and factual circumstances and timelines are all different. Each should be considered on its own merits.

Legal and factual issues

Unfortunately, social media and online comment sections sometimes blur these distinctions. Understandably, emotions run high, but simplistic claims that "all investigations are lawfare" or, conversely, that every historic case should be pursued regardless of previous inquiries, do little to help understanding of what are often highly

An important point frequently raised by veterans is that members of our Armed Forces remained available to investigators, cooperated with inquiries and, in many cases, were investigated at or close to the time of the events. That contrasts with many historic cases in which suspects from terrorist organisations were never identified, could not be located or were otherwise beyond the reach of investigators.

Without going into the history or denying the pain of all who have lost loved ones in conflict, there is also, of course, a crucial difference between those carrying out their lawful duties to defend the peace, and those who engaged in a terrorist campaign.

Support

Whatever Parliament decides, BAFF believes that anyone approached by investigators about such matters should seek, and be entitled to, independent legal advice at the earliest opportunity.

We welcomed improved Ministry of Defence provision for fully funded legal support to Northern Ireland veterans facing investigation as suspects, as well as improved witness support.

Previously we ourselves arranged for any BAFF member approached by the **IHAT** (Iraq) and **Op Northmoor** (Afghanistan) inquiries – even simply as a witness – to be able to access basic initial legal advice from an outside solicitor.

We remain committed to offering whatever confidential assistance we can, although that inevitably depends on continued member support and participation beyond the current ongoing BAFF reorganisation.

Like BAFF's consistent position over all these years, the Shoulder to Shoulder campaign crucially avoids the false choice between "*never investigating veterans*" and "*keep investigating indefinitely*".

This latest campaign is therefore one that many BAFF members will wish to (at least) follow with interest. While reasonable people will differ on aspects of the proposed legislation, the questions it raises about fairness, finality and the treatment of those who served on behalf of the United Kingdom deserve careful and informed debate rather than slogans.