

UK Loaned Military Adviser to British UN Envoy in Yemen

The Ministry of Defence seconded a military officer to work with UN special envoy Martin Griffiths while British special forces were involved in the Yemen war, *Declassified* has discovered.

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The UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) secretly seconded a military officer to Yemen in 2019, it can be revealed. The officer was attached to the office of the then UN special envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths.

Declassified has [shown](#) that Griffiths' is a founder of, and adviser to, a private conflict resolution company, Inter Mediate, that works with the UK's Secret Intelligence Service, also known as MI6.

The MOD has told *Declassified* the military officer "works directly with and provides advice to the UN Special Envoy for Yemen regarding security and military issues relevant to the conflict in Yemen."

The MOD added: "The military officer is not based in Yemen but has visited with the UN Special Envoy."

The officer visited the Yemeni capital Sana'a on nine occasions, *Declassified* was told. But the UK government did not publicly announce the secondment, and there is no mention of it on the government website. Sana'a is currently under the control of Iran-backed Houthi rebel forces.

Griffiths, a British expert in conflict mediation, was appointed as UN special envoy in 2018 after a [campaign](#) by the UK government. He held the position until August 2021 when he became the UN's Under-secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs.

The secondment of the military officer raises [further questions](#) about the undermining of the appearance of impartiality crucial to the role of the UN special envoy. UK special forces are

believed to have played a role in the war while the British military is [maintaining](#) the Saudi [warplanes](#) which have long operated over Yemen.

‘UN request’

The information was obtained by *Declassified* following a freedom of information request. It is not known if the military officer had a relationship with British special forces in Yemen or UK military personnel based in Saudi Arabia.

The defence section at the British embassy in Sana’a was evacuated to its embassy in the Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh, in March 2015 as the Saudi air campaign—which has been paused for several months in 2022 due to a truce—began.

An MOD spokesperson told *Declassified*: “The UN requested a military adviser in order to support the planning and negotiation of a ceasefire in Yemen. The UK filled this role as part of our efforts to support the peace process.”

The MOD added that since 2015 the only other UK military personnel who had been in Yemen was the Defence Attaché, who accompanied the then foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt on a visit to the southern city of Aden in March 2019.

However, the MOD refused *Declassified*’s request for a list of the locations of Defence Intelligence personnel around the world, and special forces are not covered under freedom of information laws.

In July 2021, *Declassified* [revealed](#) that Britain has a secret detachment of up to 30 troops at Al-Ghaydah airport in Mahra province of eastern Yemen, where they are training Saudi forces.

Maritime Security Adviser

Declassified has also found that the UK military created a “Maritime Security Advisor” position in Yemen in 2015. Costing between £80,000 and £90,000 per year, [some](#) of which comes from the aid budget, the postholder was based [temporarily](#) with the UK Yemen Office Network at the [British embassy](#) in Riyadh.

The government [states](#) that this role focused on “improving Maritime Security to sustain humanitarian access and legitimate trade into key ports, as well as service delivery and improved governance”.

The position raises questions in light of Saudi Arabia’s naval embargo on Yemen’s Red Sea coast, which UN experts have described as [violating](#) international humanitarian law. [Human Rights Watch](#) says the blockade has “severely restricted the flow of food, fuel, and medicine to civilians” during the war.

The UK is a strong supporter of the Saudi navy and has provided training on naval tactics that could be used for blockading Yemen, *Declassified* previously [revealed](#).

The first Maritime Security Advisor was [Kevin Stockton](#), who served from October 2015 to May 2016 in “Defence Section Yemen”, based in Riyadh. Stockton took up the position directly from being an advisor to the Saudis, as the Royal Navy’s Liaison Officer to the Saudi

Naval Forces headquarters.

The government [stated](#) that “the maritime position in particular has been an excellent value add for the UK Government”. It added, “There should be strong consideration by MOD to transition this from a six month deployment to 12 months to build on access and influencing opportunities.”

The Royal Navy’s current Maritime Security Advisor to Yemen is [Commander James Edwards](#), who is also based in Riyadh. He describes his role as involving “Delivery of timely maritime security advice, guidance and analysis to the FCDO and MoD on the maritime security of the southern Red Sea, Bab al Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden”.

An MOD spokesperson told *Declassified*: “A Maritime Security advisor provides the UK government with analysis and advice on threats to maritime security in the Gulf, helping promote regional security and the protection of UK shipping in one of the busiest commercial shipping lanes in the world.”

UK special forces in Yemen

The UK government maintains it is not a party to the war in Yemen but the British military and arms corporation BAE Systems, which works under contract to the MOD, maintains Saudi aircraft that have conducted thousands of airstrikes against Houthi forces.

The Yemen Data Project [documents](#) that these air raids have contributed to nearly 9,000 civilian deaths.

Britain is also [training](#) Saudi pilots on Typhoon fighter jets and UK military personnel are [based](#) in the Saudi Air Operations Centre.

In 2019, it was [reported](#) that “at least five British special forces commandos had been wounded in gun battles as part of a top-secret UK military campaign in Yemen”. The men were from the Royal Navy’s special forces, the Special Boat Service (SBS), and received the injuries following battles in the Sa’dah area of northern Yemen, where “up to 30 crack British troops are based”, it was claimed.

The SAS has also operated inside Yemen. In January 2019, a 12-man US/UK special forces task force, comprising the SAS and the US Green Berets, was reportedly [flown](#) into Yemen from Djibouti, ostensibly on an “humanitarian mission”.

Martin Griffiths did not respond to *Declassified*’s request for comment.

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