

Britain's Military Chiefs Say More Troops Needed in Afghanistan

Army must recruit more than 100,000 soldiers to continue Afghan fighting

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[Army](#) chiefs insist that thousands more soldiers need to be recruited if Britain is to continue fighting in operations such as Afghanistan.

The force, a senior army source said yesterday, should be increased by 7 per cent to around 108,000 troops. It has been acknowledged for some time that the British Army's commitment in Helmand province, as well as previous operations in Iraq, has left it overstretched.

The army currently has 101,330 recruits, including full-time reservists, almost 1,000 short of its target. "There is an argument that it should be increased to 107,000 or 108,000," a senior source said yesterday.

"Manpower is a key capability for land forces. We need to make sure we invest properly in it. [Technology](#) and equipment cannot compensate for manpower. The Territorial Army needs to be much more integrated into the regular army than it is now," he said.

There are 9,500 servicemen and women in Afghanistan, with two other brigades training in preparation for deployment and another in a recovery period. Thousands more troops are committed to other overseas postings, such as Cyprus and the Falklands, to training facilities or are attached to the Royal [Navy](#) and RAF. Thousands more are injured or cannot be deployed because of medical reasons.

With the first Strategic Defence Review for 13 years approaching after this year's general election, the Army, RAF and Navy have all been putting their case for a larger slice of a limited defence budget. Despite saying that they are "80 per cent in agreement", recent public comments by the heads of the Army and Navy have indicated a struggle developing within the military over whether the constrained finances in the coming year should be spent on getting "boots on the ground" in places such as Afghanistan or investing in expensive equipment, such as aircraft carriers, to prepare for any conflicts that could lie ahead.

Yesterday, the former head of the Army, General Sir Richard Dannatt, said: "[Afghanistan] has predominantly been fighting by our land forces... It is logical to say there should be an uplift in those resources we need to be successful in Afghanistan." A senior officer added: "We can't be strong everywhere. It would be very nice if we could but we are forced by circumstances, as is every nation in the world including America, to put our money where it

will be most relevant. We are investing too heavily in warfare of the 20th century and not enough in what we are doing every day and what we are going to continue to be asked to do.”

The senior source said that fighting on operations such as Afghanistan also needed investment in Istar (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance) capability and teams to counter the increasing threat of IEDs (improvised explosive devices) and with expertise to train up local armies and security forces – long seen as the key to an exit strategy.

“The army is not saying the next war will be Afghanistan II but what we are saying is the recent conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon 2006 provide important signposts. We are emphatically not saying state-vs-state conflict is dead but we are saying it will look very different from the cold war we were planning to fight. Going on as we are is simply not an option,” the source added: “We have to invest in capabilities that are relevant for 21st-century warfare.”

*Yesterday, a committee of MPs criticised the MoD for administrative failings which resulted in hundreds of millions of pounds being wrongly paid out and led to officials losing track of sensitive equipment. The Commons Defence Committee said it was “unacceptable” that the National [Audit](#) Office (NAO) had “qualified” the MoD’s accounts for the third year in succession because of the continuing problems.

The NAO previously disclosed that the MoD could not account for £155m of [secure](#) Bowman radio systems, that the computerised joint personnel administration system had wrongly paid out £268m in specialist pay and allowances and it was unable to produce evidence that errors which led to £83m being wrongly deducted from service personnel in food and accommodation charges had been rectified.

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