



Ministry  
of Defence

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[REDACTED]

Date: 31 January 2019

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email received by the Ministry of Defence on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2018 requesting the following information:

**“How many British children (under 18) have been sent to Afghanistan and Iraq by the Ministry of Defence for the following periods:**

**Afghanistan: April 2007 to present**

***Iraq: April 2007 to present”***

We have now completed a search for the information you requested, and I can confirm that all information in scope of your request is held.

In dealing with a similar PQ in 2013, a total of seven, service personnel under the age of 18 were identified as having been deployed in the period 2007-10 in Iraq and Afghanistan. Upon closer inspection of the information, only two out of the four service personnel were actually deployed to Iraq before the age of 18.

Therefore, between April 2007 and April 2010, a total of five service personnel under 18 were deployed, all of which were aged 17; three were deployed to Afghanistan and two to Iraq. Of these five Service personnel, two were within two days of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, and two were identified on their arrival in theatre and returned to UK; they redeployed after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. The fifth individual was not identified until after they turned 18.

No such deployment has occurred beyond March 2010.

Further information regarding Ministry of Defence policy on the deployment of under 18s can be found on page 40 of the JSP 822, published at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/750260/JSP822\\_Part1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/750260/JSP822_Part1.pdf)

The relevant section can be found below:

**10.** Service personnel U18 are not to deploy to any operations outside of UK, except where the operation does not involve personnel becoming engaged in, or exposed to, hostilities. U18s are not to be deployed on UN peacekeeping operations in line with UN policy. In addition to general safeguarding principles, the following steps are to be taken to ensure that members of the Armed

Forces who have not reached the age of 18 do not take a direct part in hostilities or are not put at risk from exposure to hostilities. In particular, when a unit is about to deploy to a potentially hostile situation and an individual U18 cannot be retained as part of the Unit Rear Ops Group, they are to be removed from such unit unless:

- a. it is not practicable to do so; or
- b. to do so would undermine the operational effectiveness of that individual's unit and put at risk the successful completion of the military mission and/or the safety of other personnel.

**11.** Decisions on the removal of U18s from units will be made whenever the appropriate Service commanders, in concert with the Chief of Joint Operations, consider there is a greater than low probability of members of the unit having to take a direct part in, or be put at risk by, hostilities. The decision to retain U18s in units which having been deployed in benign circumstances, find themselves in a rapidly worsening operational scenario, lies with the CO, but must be based on the same criteria as above, i.e. an immediate presumption of removal if feasible. COs are to adhere to single Service rules on deployment and posting of U18s overseas. (RN regulations, QRRN 0829; Army regulations, AGAIs Vol 2 Chap 060; RAF regulations, AP3392 Vol 5, Leaflet 120).

**12.** The Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child. This Protocol strengthens the rights of children by increasing the protection afforded to them by prohibiting their participation in armed conflict. The UK was involved fully in the negotiation and drafting of the Optional Protocol, and signed at the UN Millennium Summit on 6 Sep 2000. The UK ratified the Optional Protocol on 24 Jun 2003, and every five years it is required to present evidence to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the implementation of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The main effects of the Optional Protocol are that it:

- a. requires all feasible measures to be taken to ensure that members of the Armed Forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take part in hostilities;
- b. prohibits the compulsory recruitment of those who have not attained the age of 18 into national Armed Forces; and,
- c. requires safeguards to ensure that recruits U18 must be genuine volunteers; have the informed consent of their parents or legal guardians; be fully informed of the duties involved in such military service; and provide reliable proof of age prior to acceptance into military service.

**13.** At the signature of the Optional Protocol, the UK entered the following declaration with the UN Secretariat:

*'The UK will take all feasible measures to ensure that members of its Armed Forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take part in hostilities. However, the UK understands that Article 1 of the protocol would not exclude the deployment of members of the Armed Forces under the age of 18 to take a direct part in hostilities where: there is a genuine military need to deploy their unit or ship to an area in which hostilities are taking place; and by reason of the nature and urgency of the situation it is not practicable to withdraw such persons before deployment; or to do so would undermine the operational effectiveness of their ship or unit, and thereby put at risk the successful completion of the military mission and/or the safety of other people.'*

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance

If you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail [CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk](mailto:CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk)). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Would you like to be added to our contact list, so that we can inform you about updates to our statistical publications covering **Military Personnel** and consult you if we are thinking of making changes? You can subscribe to updates by emailing [DefStrat-Stat-Tri-Enquiries@mod.uk](mailto:DefStrat-Stat-Tri-Enquiries@mod.uk)

Yours sincerely,

Defence Statistics (Tri-Service)