



Ministry
of Defence

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Ref: FOI 2021/09811
[REDACTED]

29 September 2021

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email dated 3rd September 2021 requesting the following information:

As per the Ministry of Defence's study into the causes of death of military personnel who deployed on combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, please can you provide me with:

- a. The total number of veterans who served in the UK Armed Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014.
- b. Of those veterans, the total number who have died since leaving the Armed Forces - categorised into individual years.
- c. Of those veterans who died since leaving the Armed Forces, the number of deaths that have been recorded as suicides - categorised into individual years.

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that some of the information in scope of your request is held. Information on part b and part c of this request, on causes of death amongst former service personnel who served in Iraq or Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014, is not held by the Ministry of Defence.

Of the service personnel who left the Armed Forces before 30th June 2021, a minimum of **169,505** served in Iraq or Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. For further information, please see details provided below under section 16.

Under Section 16 (advice and assistance) you may wish to note the following:

Personnel include all UK armed forces regular and reservist personnel who left service on or before the 30th June 2021. This does not include any personnel who are still serving or any civilians or non-UK military.

Individuals are considered to have served in Iraq or Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014 if they were deployed to Operation TELIC (March 2003 – May 2011), Operation VERITAS (September 2001 – July 2002), or Operation HERRICK (June 2002 – December 2014).

Person level deployment data for Afghanistan was not available between 1 January 2003 and 14 October 2005. Therefore, it is possible that some UK Armed Forces personnel who were deployed to Afghanistan during this period, and have subsequently left service, have not been captured in this figure.

Cause of death data for all personnel deployed on combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is not currently captured by the government. The MOD has commissioned a study to investigate causes of death, including suicide, amongst all those who served in the UK Armed Forces between 2001 and 2014, covering combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2019, the Secretary of State for Defence directed that the study be extended to include all veterans who served after 2014, now and into the future. MOD will therefore be able to track the effects of deployment on the health of Service personnel, to understand the long-term impact of military service. MOD officials are continuing to develop this work and are hopeful that the initial report will be published next year. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-calls-for-veteran-led-support-to-be-at-the-heart-of-mental-health-services>.

The government is committed to ensuring that all veterans who may be struggling are able to access dedicated support. Achieving this depends on a good understanding of where support is needed, including a more comprehensive understanding of veterans who tragically take their own lives. The UK Government is working to develop a new method for recording and reporting cases of suicide within the veteran community. This will allow for the first publication of statistics of veterans who die by suicide each year in England and Wales, and the Office for Veteran Affairs (OVA) will continue to explore ways this can be replicated across the UK in the future.

In 2023 the ONS will undertake analysis to compare the health of the veteran population, including the number of veterans with long-term health conditions or disabilities, with the general population. This analysis will also include suicide-related deaths of veterans. In the interim, the OVA will be working with ONS and the MOD to conduct a 10 year look back at veteran deaths by suicide. In the Strategy for our Veterans, the Government committed to improve the collection and analysis of data on veterans to inform future policy. This new work will ensure we are meeting that commitment to better understand the tragic issue of suicide, understand its prevalence, and better inform future policy and interventions in support of the veteran community.

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.gov.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/>.

Yours sincerely

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