

The Government has responded to the following urgent question asked by Dr. Liam Fox MP, Shadow Defence Secretary concerning the Territorial Army.

"The Government has previously said that they 'always finance our military commitments overseas out of the reserve.' The Secretary of State stated that: 'we are adjusting the core defence budget to reprioritise Afghanistan.' Some of us are surprised that it's not already the No.1 priority, but if it is fully funded from the Reserve, why are they cutting the core budget of the TA by £43m?"

"We know that due to the recession and the major recruitment drive in the past year there are more recruits in the Regular Army than there is money to train them. The Government have demanded savings from other places within the Army to fund this. Why did the Government not plan to fund its own target numbers for

"Does the Government really understand the ethos of volunteering or the effect this could have on future available numbers? For many the TA is a habit: break the habit, break the TA."

"Pre-deployment training is only of use if you have the numbers to start with. Is it not the case that pre-deployment training is meant to augment and not supplant routine TA training, so routine training is just as important as pre--deployment training?"

Bill Rammell, the Armed Forces Minister's response:

Mr Speaker,

Can I apologise on behalf of the Secretary of State for being unable to come to the House as he is on Departmental business overseas.

Mr Speaker, the Territorial Army and the UK Reserve Forces make a vital contribution to keeping our country safe.

544 are currently deployed on operations in Afghanistan.

When we have forces in the frontline putting their lives on the line for us they have to be the priority.

Afghanistan is the main effort for Defence.

It gets the first call on money, the first call on equipment and the first call on training and support.

Over £3bn has been drawn from the Treasury Reserve to support operations this year - but we need to re-prioritise the core Defence Budget as well.

And that means tough choices need to be made.

Recruitment to the Army has experienced a significant boost this year, with over 1,000 more recruits expected to complete training this year compared to last year.

Extra money cannot be drawn from the Treasury Reserve for this.

The Army has therefore decided they would reduce the amount spent on the Territorial Army this year, alongside other measures.

After discussion, the Secretary of State has endorsed the approach taken by the Army.

We have done so being clear that we will not allow any risk to the Afghanistan campaign in the future to materialise.

No TA soldier will be deployed on operations unless the Army is satisfied that he is properly trained and prepared.

And pre-deployment training is emphatically not being cut back.

Our initial proposal was to suspend the remainder of non-deployment training this financial year of TA activity with a saving of £20m.

But as a Government we do listen.

Therefore, the Secretary of State has decided on a small adjustment compared to original proposals.

All TA personnel will now receive at least one training day per month in this financial year.

This measure reduces the in-year savings by £2.5m.

I realise that the reductions in normal activity are disappointing for TA members.

I believe they will understand the reasons behind these reductions and the exceptional circumstances in which they are being made.

Tough choices cannot be made without consequence.

Let me be clear, the media and the Opposition have been calling for more focus on the current operations.

But you cannot will the ends and oppose the means.

These measures are sensible, they are proportionate and they ensure that we make Afghanistan the main effort.

I believe these measures should be supported across the House.