

Britain forced to send more troops to Iraq

By [Global Research](#)

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In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

- Beckett admits very slow progress on security
- President claims all UK troops could leave in 2007

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Britain is to reinforce its military presence in Iraq in a move that reflects increasing concern about the threat to its troops and the inability of local forces to take over responsibility for the country's security.

The decision was announced by the Ministry of Defence as the foreign secretary, Margaret Beckett, on her first visit to Iraq, warned that it was making "very slow" progress on security. Separately, a leading international thinktank warned that the conflict in Iraq was producing highly trained and motivated jihadists ready to commit terrorist acts in Europe and elsewhere.

The 360 extra British troops will be deployed in southern Iraq to reinforce the 19 Light Brigade which takes over from the 20 Armoured Brigade, at present based in Basra, later this year, the MoD said. They will include soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, based in Cyprus, Royal Engineers, Royal Marines and Military Police.

The MoD said the engineers would help counter the threat from improvised explosive devices, which have killed 19 British soldiers patrolling in "snatch" Land Rovers over the last 16 months. A Royal Marine boat troop will be deployed to step up security on the Shatt al-Arab waterway, which borders Iran. The extra military police will train local Iraqi forces.

At a joint Baghdad press conference, Mrs Beckett distanced herself from comments by the Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, who said all 7,200 British troops in Iraq could be gone by the end of 2007, by which time Iraqi security forces would have taken over their responsibilities.

She said the president was only offering a personal opinion and "not setting a deadline". Withdrawal would depend on the capability of Iraqi forces to take over from British forces.

She said: "Coalition forces can't go now because that would create a security vacuum." She added that Iraq was making "very slow" progress on security, describing it as "two steps forward, two steps sideways".

A Foreign Office official said one of the biggest concerns was the growing involvement of

Iran, which was pouring billions of pounds into Iraq, extending its influence there. Tehran enjoys a close relationship with some of the leading parties in the Shia-led Iraqi government coalition.

British officials also say Iranian elements are backing Shia militia which have infiltrated Iraqi security forces in the south of the country and are supplying equipment for increasingly sophisticated improvised roadside bombs.

In London, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, warned of the threat posed by jihadists experienced in fighting foreign troops in Iraq.

“The fear is that some jihadists will survive US-led counter-insurgency efforts and relocate to Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Europe, and possibly the United States, better trained and motivated to perpetrate and direct terrorist operations,” it warned in its latest annual strategic survey.

It added: “Events in Iraq [have] also prompted jihadists to refine and propagate urban warfare techniques, and they may choose to apply them robustly to cities elsewhere.” The institute concluded: “In taking stock of counter-terrorism five years on from September 11, a grim picture emerges.”

One of two British soldiers killed near Basra on Monday when a roadside bomb hit his Land Rover was named yesterday as Gunner Stephen Wright, 20, of the Royal Artillery. His father, Stephen Leigh, from Leyland, Lancs, said: “I don’t want to get into why the army are there or whether they should be ... but it’s hard that he’s a victim of this conflict”.

Meanwhile, a British soldier killed on Monday by a suicide bomber in the Afghan capital, Kabul, was named as Private Craig O’Donnell, 24, of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. His parents said he was looking forward to setting up home with his girlfriend Jessica and to the birth of their first child at Christmas.

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