

Interview: shadow defence secretary liam fox slams mod contractor policy

Shadow Defence Secretary, [Dr. Liam Fox](#) responded to [ContractorCalculator's exclusive](#) on the MoD's rule that contractors who are sourced from agencies may only work for 11 months.

Fox told ContractorCalculator that the rule is part of a general policy of underfunding the Ministry of Defence. "We have said all along that the Ministry of Defence is undermanned and under resourced for its current tasks," Fox insists. Fox points out that the lack of funding and resources for our troops in Afghanistan has led to deaths and injuries for servicemen and servicewomen.

Clearly, MoD is under budget pressure on one hand, and is being pushed to produce results on the other hand. So it is extraordinary that bad legal advice should be accepted as it leads to delays and increased costs, as Fox notes.

Role of Civilians Underestimated

Contractors are used extensively at the Ministry of Defence, but contractors who have been engaged through agencies are unable to work for more than 11 months, because the MoD believes that any longer would ensure that they qualify for employment rights. Although we pointed out that this is not the case at all under UK law, MoD confirmed that they would continue the policy.

So contractors are being kept from working on important projects while MoD is embroiled in disputes with agencies over how to re-engage them. Attempts have been made to bypass the agencies and to work with the contractors directly, but this is clearly unfair to the agencies and breaches their contracts.

For Fox, this is typical of the way in which the role of civilians is under rated in our defence services.

"There is no doubt that civilians play a key role in supporting our Armed Forces and the on-going operations in Iraq and Afghanistan," Fox points out. So it is not clear why the MoD cannot formulate a coherent policy in its use of contractors. Skilled personnel of the type of these contractors is very hard to come by--indeed some of them were trained in the Armed Forces to help develop projects and maintain equipment that they are still working on. There are not hundreds of contractors who can build components for a Harrier, or programme guided missiles.

Misguided Policy

Fox points out that a misguided policy of belt-tightening is behind all this pseudo-legal temporising. "This policy has budget restraints written all over it," Fox says.

Fox has already committed a future Tory government to maintaining current spending levels on the Armed Forces, and to improving support for them.

In an interview given the first week in March, Fox insisted that it would be "inconceivable" that the defence budget could be cut while the forces were still fighting a war in Afghanistan. Fox made this commitment despite the indications of ongoing disputes within the shadow cabinet over commitments to NHS funding.

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Dr. Liam Fox - Conservative
Shadow Defence Secretary

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