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**HOW 400 SOLDIERS QUIT THE ARMY EVERY MONTH: FIGURES LEAP 20% AS WITCH-HUNT OVER IRAQ 'CREATES A STATE OF FEAR'**

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The Army is losing 400 soldiers a month amid concerns the Iraq war legal witch-hunt is damaging morale and creating a state of fear.

Shock figures reveal that 4,770 soldiers quit in the 12 months to April □ 6 per cent of the total force and an increase of 20 per cent from six years ago.

Defence Secretary Michael Fallon, who led the charge against spurious claims being made against soldiers, raised concerns about the impact on morale.

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Former soldiers have spoken of how they were treated like murderers and made to feel ashamed of their years of service after facing multiple probes into front-line incidents that happened a decade ago.

But Whitehall sources said it was hoped the news that Public Interest Lawyers □ the main law firm hounding soldiers - is to close this month, will boost morale.

Overall, 7,850 personnel left the Army, Navy and RAF in the year 2015-16 □ the equivalent of 654 each month. This was an increase of 240 from the 7,610 voluntary departures in the previous year, the figures uncovered by the Liberal Democrats show.

It comes as this years Armed Forces Attitude Survey found that 76 per cent of personnel feel proud to be in the military - down 11 per cent from 2011.

Baroness Judith Jolly, defence spokesman for the Lib Dems, said: The success and capability of our Armed Forces is dependent on having the best soldiers, sailors and airmen, and the steady increase in resignations is deeply concerning. It follows concerns on the damage mounting legal cases against soldiers has had on the morale of troops.

In January, David Cameron chaired a National Security Council meeting to address the issue of law firms hounding soldiers following a series of revelations by the Mail.

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A serving Army officer said last night that ambulance-chasing law firms had created a state of fear. He added: Soldiers come back from a stressful operation and are confident they have done everything by the book.

But with firms seeming to randomly accuse soldiers, they have a fear hanging over them.

Most of the accusations seem to be completely unfounded with questionable evidence, but as soon as a soldier is accused, they are tarnished in the same way as someone who is accused of rape.

The long-term effect of this is that soldiers will start doubting what they can and cant do.

Those who are guilty should be punished, but the blame culture creates a genuine state of fear and doubt that is detrimental to the Army as a whole.

The expectation of fewer deployments and brightening prospects in the civilian world are said to have also contributed to the rise in the numbers wanting to quit.

Major Charles Heyman, a defence analyst, said: It is something the MoD needs to keep an eye on. The figure is not excessive but there is a trend, and if that trend gets worse that could be really dangerous.

In a bid to boost numbers earlier this year, defence minister Penny Mordaunt announced a shake-up of the rules for Commonwealth recruits wanting to serve in the military. Under previous rules they could join the military only if they had lived in the UK for five years but she waived the residency requirements.

Campaign group UK Veterans  One Voice, which helps serving and former personnel, said: We hear on a regular basis that our troops no longer feel confident in doing their jobs for fear of prosecution years down the line.

It added: The news of Public Interest Lawyers closing should give some confidence back to our Armed Forces.

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Kaynak/Source: