

More helicopters for Afghan operations

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Secretary of State for Defence, Des Browne has announced the purchase of eight Chinook helicopters for use in Afghanistan.

The £62m contract with Boeing will supply much needed transport and lift capability to a region where British and NATO forces are badly overstretched.

Speaking at the contract's announcement, Browne said: Helicopters play a vital role in supporting our operations. We are taking measures to make more helicopters available to operations as quickly as possible."

The US company is expected to have completed and delivered the helicopters sometime in 2009.

While the addition of the helicopters will ultimately benefit British forces, they need relief from the overstretch now. Having to wait up to two further years for additional helicopter support could prove to be a difficulty for British forces. Commanders have consistently said that the main thing they need in Afghanistan are more helicopters. The aircraft served as the lifeline for British forces stationed in remote areas. They help to deploy and evacuate troops as well as the wounded and also drop in supplies and equipment. In October it was alleged that a helicopter shortage had led to soldiers in the field going without fresh food for several weeks.

Questions will be raised as to why the military did not order additional Chinooks in the Spring of 2006 when British forces were first deployed en-masse to Afghanistan.

Chinooks are known for being the workhorse of the British Armed Forces. They can carry up to 55 troops or a payload equivalent to its own weight.