

By Nigel Green

A military expert has voiced his support for the SAS commander who has reportedly resigned over the lack of armoured vehicles in Afghanistan.

Dr Richard North accused the Government of "murdering" more than 50 soldiers, who have now been killed in lightly-protected Land Rovers in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Dr North, a House of Commons researcher, has campaigned for nearly four years for the Ministry of Defence to provide tougher vehicles.

Today he praised Major Sebastian Morley, the commander of D Squadron, 23 SAS, who has reportedly written a letter accusing the MoD of "chronic underinvestment" in equipment.

Four members of Major Morley's unit were killed when their Land Rover hit a landmine in Helmand in June.

Corporal Sarah Bryant died alongside Corporal Sean Reeve, Lance Corporal Richard Larkin and Paul Stout.

Reacting to the resignation, Dr North said: "It's a shame that it should have to come to this.

"It's outrageous that a good man should have to resign to make his views known.

"If it wasn't for men like him, we wouldn't get anywhere. It's just a pity he left it so late.

"But he is not alone. I have spoken to many officers who are appalled that they have to send their men out to die in Land Rovers."

Dr North, who served in the RAF and is editor of the Defence of the Realm website, is a House of Commons researcher working for Conservative MPs.

He claims soldiers he is in touch with are desperate to get more heavily-armoured equipment, such as the American Cheetah vehicles.

Dr North said: "The MoD has always claimed that the soldiers out in Afghanistan prefer to use the Land Rovers because they're lighter and faster.

"Major Morley's resignation shows this isn't true.

"What is happening is nothing short of murder.

"The Government is sending soldiers out to their deaths and it is inexcusable.

"These men and women would still be alive today if they had been traveling in heavily-armoured vehicles, rather than flimsy Land Rovers.

"We warned in the House of Commons in 2006 that the Taliban would change their tactics from confrontation to ambush.

"Sadly, there are going to be more deaths like this. How many more soldiers have to die before they do something ?

"The British are the only country that uses such poor equipment.

"The Australians and Dutch used to patrol in Land Rovers but they withdrew them and replaced them with properly-protected vehicles called Bushmasters.

"The French and Italians also use armour-protected vehicles – and they patrol a relatively safe area in the North.

"Even the Estonians are using mamba armour-protected vehicles that we sold them a few years ago.

"Only the British seem to think it's a good idea to patrol in lightly-armoured Land Rovers."

An MoD spokeswoman said Land Rovers are used for a number of reasons, including the fact they are less "intimidating" to local people and better for winning "hearts and minds".

The vehicles are also used because they are quicker and offer soldiers better visibility than heavily-armoured vehicles.

She added: "The safety of our personnel is a prime concern.

"We have done a lot in the last two years to ensure that commanders have a variety of vehicles at their disposal. It isn't a case of a single vehicle being suitable for every task.

"Sometimes we need to use the speed, agility and low profile of the Snatch Land Rover which is suitable for the difficult terrain in Helmand, while at other times the additional protection offered by vehicles such as Mastiff is called for.

"We are continuing to invest heavily in programmes to increase the protection of our vehicles against all threats, including explosive devices.

"The procurement of over 150 Ridgeback vehicles, announced in December 2007, represents a further spend of more than £150 million on protection for our forces."