

Minister Considers Proposal for British Sikh Regiment

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The Ministry of Defence is reportedly exploring the possibility of establishing a Sikh regiment in the British Army move that would hark back to historic formations of the colonial era, while raising fresh debate over modern diversity and cohesion.

Ministers indicated that the idea has “merit” and that preliminary talks are underway. The proposal would involve creating a specialised Sikh infantry unit, similar in structure to the Brigade of Gurkhas, a predominantly Nepalese formation that remains a respected, ethnically based regiment within the British Army. Supporters, including former Defence Minister Mark François and veteran Conservative MP Sir Nicholas Soames, argue that a Sikh regiment would honour the valour of Sikh soldiers in the First and Second World Wars, filling what they describe as a symbolic gap in the Army’s current composition.

However, concerns of division and potential breaches of equality law have been raised previously. In 2007, plans for a Sikh unit were shelved after the Commission for Racial Equality advised against any military formation based strictly on religion. More recent defence ministers have echoed such reservations. Former Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon stated he is “a little wary” of religiously defined regiments, affirming that diversity efforts should focus on integration within existing structures rather than separate units.

Proponents counter that Sikh service records, marked by numerous Victoria Crosses and distinguished battle honours, demonstrate both the capability and cultural fit. They argue that a Sikh regiment would resonate with younger recruits, particularly in urban Sikh communities, fostering both recruitment and representation.

Any formal plan would require consultation with the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) and compliance with the Equality Act, the legislation that prohibits discrimination based on protected characteristics, including religion and race. For now, officials describe the idea as under review,

with some suggesting it could begin with a Sikh-designated company within the Army Reserve rather than as a full regiment.