

The latest report from the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee contains a striking observation about the Army's troubled Ajax armoured vehicle programme. It concludes that the Ministry of Defence is placing "unrealistic expectations" on soldiers operating the vehicle safely while underlying noise and vibration issues remain unresolved.

Anyone who has spent any time in an armoured vehicle – which I have – will know that a certain amount of 'track bashing' and other maintenance is involved. So this quote from the report really caught my attention:

The Department now expects soldiers to do maintenance checks every time they stop the vehicle...

Anyone who has spent any time in an armoured vehicle – which I have – will know that a certain amount of 'track bashing' and other maintenance is involved.

But the idea of having to hop out and go through a check list every time the vehicle stops is frankly ludicrous.

There are many planned variants in the Ajax family, but they are all potentially for use in the combat zone.

The Public Accounts Committee's criticism goes to the heart of a principle which BAFF has long supported: our people deserve equipment that is safe, effective and fit for purpose.

The Ajax programme has already suffered years of delay, escalating costs and repeated technical concerns. The latest controversy follows Exercise Titan Storm in late 2025, during which 33 soldiers reported symptoms associated with noise and vibration exposure after operating Ajax vehicles. Five personnel were still under medical review when MoD officials gave evidence to Parliament in March 2026.

The MoD maintains that Ajax is safe when operated and maintained within its approved parameters. However, the Public Accounts Committee questions whether those parameters are themselves realistic. MPs highlighted concerns that crews are expected to conduct maintenance checks every time the vehicle stops and questioned whether such restrictions would be practical during prolonged operational activity.

This raises an important issue. Military personnel routinely accept risk. They understand that operations, training and combat can never be entirely risk-free. But there is a difference between accepting operational risk and being expected to work around unresolved design or engineering shortcomings.

History shows that soldiers are often remarkably adaptable. Faced with imperfect equipment, they find ways to make things work. That adaptability is one of the strengths of the Armed Forces. Yet there is a danger when organisations begin to assume that human ingenuity can permanently compensate for technical deficiencies.

Ajax: The equipment must fit the soldier, not the other way round

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If safe operation depends on increasingly complex restrictions, procedures or workarounds, it is legitimate to ask whether the underlying problem has truly been solved.

The [Public Accounts Committee \(PAC\)](#) is therefore right to seek a clear explanation from the Ministry of Defence as to why the current operating restrictions are realistic and appropriate. Parliament, the Army and service personnel themselves deserve confidence that any vehicle entering service can be used in the demanding conditions for which it is intended.

BAFF does not take a position on the technical merits of Ajax itself. Those questions are properly matters for engineers, safety investigators and military specialists. The procurement process is also beyond our scope, although vitally important.

However, we do take a strong interest whenever the welfare, safety and long-term health of service personnel are involved.

The Armed Forces ask much of their people. In return, those people should be able to expect equipment that is genuinely fit for purpose. The burden of making a flawed system work should never fall disproportionately on the men and women expected to operate it.

*Douglas Young*