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PATROL: An SBS unit on London's Thames this week

## Top secret Army unit needs you!

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BRITAIN'S most secret Special Forces unit is operating on only three-quarters of its strength because it has been so successful at staying underneath the radar.

The Special Boat Service usually operates four squadrons of 100 regular and specialist support troops each, plus a reserve force of 80. But it is 120 people down at present. One of the issues, insiders said, was that it was not as well known as the Special Air Service. "We have a lower profile than the SAS and though that's been by choice, until now, it is a problem," said an SBS source.

"How many people really appreciate we were at the forefront in the hunt for Bin Laden in Tora Bora and were the primary special forces unit in Afghanistan?"

"Our job now is to put ourselves forward and attract young soldiers from units such as the Paras who currently see the SAS as their first choice."

This week's news that women, who represent 10 per cent of the Armed Forces, can join frontline and special forces units is also, MoD insiders say, aimed at filling some of the gaps. Privately Army chiefs believe it is unlikely it will make significant short-term changes.

Military lawyer Rhicha Kapila at Bolt Burdon Kemp also warned: "The real issue is retention. The Army suffers horrendous levels of harassment. Surveys have identified that most women have suffered harassment, sexual or otherwise, during service. The SAS and SBS have opened their doors to women, but until women are happy in their roles there'll always be a retention issue."