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UK government military spending for Ukraine reaches almost £3 billion

Britain's Conservative government is ramping up military spending for NATO's proxy war against Russia.

Last week Prime Minister Boris Johnson addressed Ukraine's parliament by videolink, pledging the dispatch of an additional £300 million of military equipment. Within days that has been increased by a further billion pounds to £1.3 billion.

This followed the previous week's announcement that, in one of the largest deployments since the Cold War, it was sending, from May, 8,000 army troops across Europe to participate in a slew of military exercises.



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Tanks uploaded on military truck platforms as a part of additional British troops and military equipment arrive at Estonia's NATO Battle Group base in Tapa, Estonia, Friday, Feb. 25, 2022. (AP Photo/Sergei Stepanov)

The new funding brings the UK's financial commitment to nearly £3 billion. It comes on top of the existing £1.5 billion support to Kyiv, which included at least £200 million of military equipment, around £400 million in aid and grants to the Ukrainian government and unlocking over £700 million in additional World Bank lending through loan guarantees.

Announcing the funding in a *Mail on Sunday* article, Chancellor Rishi Sunak said, “We are unwavering in our support for the people of Ukraine—and this extra £1.3bn will ensure we continue to provide the necessary military and operational support they need to defend themselves against Putin.”

Speaking for one of the main powers enabling the 30-year NATO encircling of Russia which provoked the war, he added cynically, “we are working tirelessly to bring an end to this conflict.”

With millions thrown into poverty after over a decade of austerity, and a cost-of-living crisis fuelled by the pandemic and war in Ukraine, Sunak offered no respite. The priority was militarism and the defeat of Russia. Sunak boasted, “This new funding means that the scale of our support for our Ukrainian friends is now second only to the United States. It also means that the rate of our spending on a military conflict is now as high as it was in 2009 at the height of Iraq and Afghanistan when we had 43,000 troops actively deployed in combat.”

Over a million people were killed in those wars, as well as hundreds of UK military personnel. According to the Ministry of Defence, by 2015 these illegal adventures had cost over £21 billion—paid for by crushing austerity measures, the slashing of health and education budgets and gutting of public services.



Prime Minister Boris Johnson (left) listens as Chancellor of Exchequer Rishi Sunak briefs the Cabinet at the Prime Minister's weekly Cabinet meeting before delivering his Spring Statement to the House of Commons. 23/03/2022. (Picture by Andrew Parsons/No 10 Downing Street/Flickr)

The UK's arms firms are licking their lips in anticipation of war profits. Sunak announced, "The funding will also help drive a major boost in the UK's cutting-edge defence industry, creating high-quality jobs across the country." He continued, "The Prime Minister and Defence Secretary will host a meeting of arms manufacturers this month to discuss ramping up production in response to the increased demand created by the conflict."

The vast upscaling of spending on the war follows concerted lobbying by MPs.

This week the *Times* revealed that Defence Secretary Ben Wallace demanded that Sunak increase the military budget in his March "spring statement". It reported, "Wallace told Sunak earlier this year that inflation and the expense of sending arms to Ukraine meant that Britain risked falling short of its Nato spending commitments by 2025, according to a leaked letter. Sunak did not treat Wallace's letter as a formal request for additional defence spending."

This prompted Tobias Ellwood, chairman of Parliament's defence select committee and one of Johnson's main Tory critics from the right to intervene in the pages of the newspaper. Last Friday, just days after Johnson announced the additional £300 million in Ukraine war spending and before Sunak announcing the extra £1 billion, Ellwood told the *Times*, "It should not take a memo from the Ministry of Defence to appreciate how

European security is deteriorating... The swathing cuts made to our troop numbers as well as our tanks, fighting vehicles, ships and planes need to be reversed if we are to play any serious role in bolstering Nato's eastern flank."

Ellwood, along with Wallace and other senior Tory figures closely connected to the military top brass, have demanded that Johnson increase defence spending to 3 percent of GDP from the current 2 percent.

Wallace's and Elwood's interventions were a barely disguised bid for Johnson's job, should he be forced to stand down prior to the Tory Party's conference in October. Another leadership contender, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, declared that the 2 percent target should be a "floor, not a ceiling".

These concerns are shared throughout the ruling elite. A *Financial Times* reporting team asked in March, "Does the UK need to change its defence strategy after the Ukraine war?" They noted, "The army is set to lose its entire fleet of more than 700 Warrior infantry fighting vehicles earlier than planned and a third of its Challenger II main battle tanks. Operationally, British land forces are now their smallest since the 18th century, with just 72,500 regular soldiers."

The *Times* reported, "Johnson is said to have spoken repeatedly to Wallace about the letter and argued that it was the wrong time to increase defence spending. He highlighted the fact that the Ministry of Defence had received a significant settlement in the spending review five months earlier."

Sunak has already handed over £24 billion over four years in extra military spending, the largest increase by any government since the end of the Cold War. Johnson is also committed to building four new submarines to carry the UK's nuclear weapons at a cost of £31 billion.

When Sunak announced his spring statement with no new military spending, it was amid speculation that he had as much as £10 billion in spending reserves being primed for the military. The WSWS noted, "With the corporate media and retired senior figures in the armed forces demanding a rapidly expanded military force, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the Tories are preparing for a seismic uplift in money spent on preparations

for war in Europe with Russia in the immediate future.” This assessment has been confirmed.

Those within government circles insisting that militarism and war must be prioritised find their foremost allies in the Labour Party. Advancing itself as the “party of NATO” Sir Keir Starmer’s MPs stand in alliance with the Tories as a single party of war. Last week Labour’s Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey told the *i* news web site, “When [Labour MP] David Lammy and I went to Kyiv, ahead of the Russian invasion, we were able to say there is united UK support and solidarity for you in the face of this build-up of Russian aggression.”



John Healey, Labour’s Shadow Defence Secretary, tells the RUSI think tank in March 2021, “Labour’s support for nuclear deterrence is non-negotiable. The matter is settled. From Kinnock to Corbyn—with Blair, Brown and Miliband in between—this has been, and will remain, Labour policy.” (Credit: John Healey-Facebook)

Healey, wrote the *i*, “is calling for a rapid rewrite of [the governments’] defence and foreign policies known collectively as the Integrated Review (IR) that was published only last year.” The IR was now getting in the way of Russia’s defeat said Healey, “It was meant to be threat-led but made no mention of the Taliban taking over in Afghanistan or of the Russian threat to Ukraine. It largely overlooked Europe. And it got carried away with itself, with Boris Johnson trumpeting this tilt to the Indo-Pacific...

“It’s fine to send a new aircraft carrier on a gap-year tour of the Pacific. But its real job has got to be in the Atlantic and in the Med. It’s marginal to any balance of power in the

Indo Pacific, in the Atlantic, in the Arctic, as far as the northern European security is concerned it's pivotal," Healey stated.

He boasted of Tony Blair's Labour government, "We delivered the largest sustained increase in defence spending for two decades after the Twin Towers. [The Ukraine invasion] requires that sort of response from government. If they're willing to do that they will have our support."

The *i* commented, "Labour is also writing the Government what amounts to a blank cheque on political support for new defence spending if the review that he wants to be completed by July identifies a need for it."

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