

Britain seeks to make up lost ground with US over Ukraine

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Lord Dannatt, the former chief of the UK's general staff between 2006 and 2008, has called for an increase in the number of Britain's Armed Forces. The retired Army officer, writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, said the change was necessary in response to events in Ukraine.

A 2010 review of military forces undertaken by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition had taken place in the "midst of an economic crisis", he wrote, so as to "prioritise equipment over manpower." Nonetheless, doubts remained as to "whether a regular Army of just 82,000 is sufficient for our needs..."

"[S]trategic shocks happen," he continued, citing Ukraine and what he described as the "Russian takeover of Crimea." Faced with a "resurgent Russia, this is a poor moment for the US-led West to be weak in resolve and muscle."

Dannatt's article turns reality on its head. It was the US and the European Union that orchestrated the putsch in Kiev, installing a gang of fascists and oligarchs as part of their encirclement of Russia.

This was spelled out by President Barack Obama on his tour of Europe Tuesday, when he set out what his foreign policy adviser described as a "strategic pivot" towards confrontation with Russia. At the centre of this is an aggressive policy of expansion on the part of NATO.

This strategy was underscored by Dannatt's comments, particularly his suggestion that Britain should maintain an additional brigade of 3,000 troops in Germany.

It is not clear whether Dannatt has asked Germany's opinion on such a scenario. British troops have been stationed in Germany since the end of the Second World War as an integral part of the Cold War buildup against Moscow. Numbers have been steadily reduced since German reunification and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and were due to be withdrawn completely by 2019.

Dannatt was proposing a reversal in this policy, as part of a new military buildup against Moscow. And while Prime Minister David Cameron said such a move was "unnecessary", he made clear that Britain intends to play a lead role in bolstering NATO's provocative moves against

Russia, centering on the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

Europe Minister David Lidington was touring Latvia and Lithuania earlier this week, as part of what Cameron described as the UK's "very clear message to our NATO partners and allies that we believe in NATO and we believe in their security."

The *Guardian* described his comment as a reaffirmation of the "collective defence" principle of NATO, under Article 5 of which, "all NATO members agree that an armed attack against one member is an attack against all."

Given that Russia has made no moves whatsoever against the Baltic states, the actions of Britain and other Western powers are a clear provocation.

NATO currently patrols the air space of the Baltic states from the Siauliai Air Base in Lithuania. The US took charge of the air policing operation at the start of this year, running four F-15C Eagles. These are to be joined by six F-15s from RAF Lakenheath, England along with a Typhoon Eurofighter combat aircraft.

Earlier this month the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia signed a military pact creating a unified combat unit, called the Visegrad 4, which will operate under the auspices of NATO and EU. The US had sent 12 warplanes and 300 personnel to Poland following the Crimea referendum on joining Russia. Last week, NATO announced E-3 AWACs surveillance aircraft would begin patrolling Poland and Romania from bases in England and Germany.

The UK has confirmed that an undisclosed number of British forces are to join the Rapid Trident 2014 exercise in Lviv, Ukraine near the Polish border in July. The exercise, planned for some time, consists of 1,300 mainly US troops, along with units from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Canada, Georgia, Germany, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Ukraine.

The UK's aggressive military response contrasts with its seemingly more cautious, although supportive, response to the Western-orchestrated coup. So much so that many

commentators complained that London had been sidelined, with events and responses largely coordinated between Washington, Berlin, Paris and Warsaw.

More damaging still was the leaking of a secret prime ministerial briefing document, stating that the “UK should not support, for now, trade sanctions . . . or close London’s financial centre to Russians.”

Coming at the time when Washington was pressing the EU for harsher sanctions against Moscow, the briefing highlighted the degree to which Britain’s ruling elite appeared hugely reliant on Russian oligarchs who have crowded into the capital.

London is home, for example, to Alisher Usmanov, Russia’s richest man, worth an estimated \$18.6 billion, and Mikhail Fridman, Russia’s second-richest worth \$17.6 billion. In addition, 113 Russian companies are now quoted on the London Stock Exchange.

Not all the oligarchs are sympathetic to Russian President Vladimir Putin, and British support for some, like Boris Berezovsky, had upset relations between Moscow and London. So too had the 2006 assassination of former Russian security agent, Aleksandr Litvinenko, in London with polonium. When the UK moved to charge another former agent, Andrei Lugovoi, who had dined with Litvinenko before he was taken ill, Russia refused extradition, sparking a diplomatic row.

One result was that British capital lost out in the Russian market in comparison with its German and French competitors. The UK has just 600 companies doing business in Russia, compared to more than 7,000 German. France has concluded major arms deals.

Cameron had worked to rebuild relations. Following talks with Putin in 2012, it was agreed to launch “strategic dialogue” between British and Russian foreign and defence ministries. The two countries embarked on a series of deals, including on military cooperation. Britain’s Ministry of Defence confirmed to the *Telegraph* in January, “Work is ongoing on a Military Technical Cooperation Agreement (MTCA) between the UK Ministry of Defence and Russian Federal Service for Military Technical Cooperation, which will provide a framework for Russian and UK defense companies to cooperate at an unclassified level.”

It was due to be signed in the spring.

At the same time, the government backed off on any further action over the Litvinenko killing, refusing a coroner’s ruling that a public inquiry should be held.

The disclosure that London was dragging its feet over Washington’s intended economic sanctions was gravely damaging. Writing in the *New York Times*, Ben Judah complained that England’s “old imperial elite has become crude and mercenary.”

“Any moralizing remnant of the British Empire is gone”, he wrote; “it has turned back to the pirate England of Sir Walter Raleigh.”

Accusing Britain of damaging Washington’s intended united front over sanctions, he railed, “It boils down to this: Britain is ready to betray the United States to protect the City of London’s hold on dirty Russian money. And forget about Ukraine.”

Judah’s complaints were echoed by the British media and sections of the ruling elite, alarmed at any further diminution of the supposed “special relationship” between the two countries—especially in the wake of last August’s parliamentary vote against joining a war against Syria.

Writing in the *Independent*, Steve Richards complained that while President Barack Obama was posing with Francoise Hollande at the White House, and Germany’s Angela Merkel was making all the EU’s running on Ukraine, Britain no longer “has a foreign policy.”

Cameron has very quickly reverted to type. Having apparently been reassured that financial sanctions will not damage the City of London, he is echoing Washington’s demands for greater European trade and military sanctions against Russia—measures that will, however, impact on Berlin and Paris.

Former defence minister Gerald Howarth has boasted, “Only 1.6 percent of our exports go to Russia, and only 1.7 percent of our imports come from Russia, and we are dependent on Russian energy for only 1 percent of our natural gas requirement,” while senior Tory right-winger Charles Walker asserted, “Russia is not the power that it once was. It is riddled with corruption, and with a population of only 143 million, it has a failing demographic.”



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