

UK government steps up its role in NATO warmongering

Harvey Thompson
26 July 2016

Last week's vote by Britain's parliament for the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system had a dual significance.

Newly installed Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May used her first high profile appearance in parliament to reiterate the UK's readiness for war against Russia in alliance with the United States and NATO—and to solidarise herself with the 140 Labour MPs who voted with the government in opposition to party leader Jeremy Corbyn.

The Brexit vote to leave the EU referendum has accelerated the global financial crisis and the disintegration of the EU—presenting a direct threat to the strategic interests of the ruling elite in Britain and the US. This was a central factor in the near seamless coronation of May and the ongoing attempts to depose Corbyn as Labour leader, which has the backing of the majority of Labour MPs.

Corbyn has stated that he would not authorise the use of nuclear weapons, leading to senior figures in the British military threatening a mutiny against him if he came to power. Those in the highest echelons of the British state, in conjunction with the US State Department and the CIA, will not countenance any such vacillation over the preparation of war with Russia, and have played a key role in activating the move against him.

To underscore this agenda, in response to a question from the Scottish National Party's George Kerevan, "Is she personally prepared to authorise a nuclear strike that could kill 100,000 innocent men, women and children?" May replied, "Yes."

Trident renewal was essential, she insisted, as "there is the threat from existing nuclear states such as Russia."

No British prime minister has previously given such a

direct answer.

The vote to renew Trident came just 10 days after the NATO summit in Warsaw. At the summit, the soon-to-be replaced Prime Minister David Cameron also made clear Britain's full commitment to NATO military aggression against Russia.

In his last foreign appearance as prime minister, he said, "This summit is a chance for us to reiterate our strong support for Ukraine and our other eastern allies to deter Russian aggression. Actions speak louder than words and the UK is proud to be taking the lead role, deploying troops across Eastern Europe. It is yet another example of the UK leading in NATO."

He concluded by threatening, "Russia must be in no doubt that the NATO forces are lined up in Europe and we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with each other."

In his own effort to counter fears that last month's Brexit vote for Britain to leave the European Union (EU) will diminish the UK's role in NATO's military buildup on Russia's border, Cameron announced a "three-pronged" commitment. This will see 500 British soldiers sent to Estonia, 150 to Poland and 3,000 placed on call as part of a rapid-response unit.

Four multinational battalions are to be deployed by early 2017 to Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia—led by the US, the UK, Germany and Canada respectively. UK troops have previously been deployed in the Baltic States for military training exercises, but this is the first time they will be based there permanently. Britain is also to extend the deployment of four Royal Air Force Typhoon fighters with the Baltic Air Policing Mission.

In addition, Britain is to take over the leadership of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) from 2017—with 3,000 troops in the UK and Germany on standby to move with as little as five days' notice. The 20th Armoured Infantry Brigade will

provide land headquarters, and there will be an armoured infantry battle group from the 1st Battalion the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment. This will include Challenger 2 tanks, Warrior armoured fighting vehicles and a light infantry battle group from the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards.

At the end of June, British personnel joined NATO's largest ever war games exercises in Ukraine, near the Polish border. The exercise saw 2,000 soldiers, helicopter gunships and armoured fighting vehicles take part in simulated battle scenarios.

The official rationale for NATO's military aggression is that the alliance is responding to the territorial ambitions of Russian President Vladimir Putin, following Moscow's annexation of Crimea in March, 2014. British Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said UK deployments were aimed to "deter Russia from any further aggression. ... This is something NATO's been planning for a while, that countries like Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia have made clear that they want."

In reality, the annexation of Crimea was a desperate move by Moscow in response to the fascist-led putsch in Kiev on February 22, 2014, orchestrated by Washington and Berlin.

At the Warsaw summit, US President Barack Obama also sought to address the impact of the Brexit vote on the military alliance—following calls, led by Germany, for a foreign and military policy, with the assistance of France, Italy and other Western European powers, that is more aggressive and more independent of Washington.

"The vote in the United Kingdom to leave the EU has created uncertainty about the future of European integration. And unfortunately, this has led some to suggest that the entire edifice of European security and prosperity is crumbling," Obama said. "There have been those who have been questioning 'what does this mean for the transatlantic relationship?' Let me just say, as is often the case in moments of change, this kind of hyperbole is misplaced."

Obama later wrote in a *Financial Times* column that "the special relationship between the US and the UK will endure."

The summit was also the occasion to reiterate Britain's commitment to NATO's target of spending 2 percent of GDP on the military, a pledge Cameron adopted after last year's general election, following US

pressure. "There can be no backsliding on this issue," said a UK official.

The UK is a critical political and military component of NATO's geopolitical machinations. It has the second largest budget in NATO, the largest in the EU, and the fifth largest in the world. It is one of only five countries that meets the 2 percent GDP target on defence.

UK armed forces are already deployed in more than 80 countries across the world, including 450 soldiers in Afghanistan and more than 275 military training personnel in Iraq. An additional 50 troops are to be deployed to Afghanistan due to the worsening security situation in the country and in line with the slowing and reversal of the drawdown of US troops.

On April 1, the UK defence budget went up in real terms for the first time in six years. In last summer's budget, the government committed to increasing defence spending by 0.5 percent above inflation every year until 2021. It is also committed, under conditions of projected economic turmoil following Brexit, to continue to meet NATO's target of 2 percent of GDP spending on defence for the rest of the decade.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact