

UK Defence Secretary accuses Russia of planning to kill “thousands and thousands and thousands” of Britons

Robert Stevens
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Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson has ratcheted up Britain’s threats against Russia.

In an interview with the *Daily Telegraph*, published as its main front-page story Friday, Williamson said that Russia was spying on Britain’s critical national infrastructure and claimed, “The plan for the Russians won’t be for landing craft to appear in the South Bay in Scarborough, and off Brighton Beach.

“What they [Russia] are looking at doing is they are going to be thinking ‘How can we just cause so much pain to Britain?’ Damage its economy, rip its infrastructure apart, actually cause thousands and thousands and thousands of deaths, but actually have an element of creating total chaos within the country.”

The newspaper wrote, “Gavin Williamson told *The Daily Telegraph* that Moscow had been researching the UK’s critical infrastructure and how it connected to Continental power supplies with a view to creating ‘panic’ and ‘chaos.’”

Williamson added that Russia was willing to take actions “that any other nation would see as completely unacceptable.”

Without citing any evidence, he posed the question, “Why would they keep photographing and looking at power stations, why are they looking at the interconnectors that bring so much electricity and so much energy into our country.”

The newspaper noted this was a reference to “energy lines that link the UK to continental supplies and allow Britain to trade and share electricity and gas with neighbours.”

The UK, it said, “has four undersea interconnectors for electricity and three for gas, which provide energy to three million homes—a figure which will rise to eight million when further connections are built.”

Williamson’s comments come just days after General Sir Nick Carter, the chief of the general staff of the armed forces, declared that Britain must actively prepare for war with Russia and other geo-political rivals.

Williamson’s interview was aired the day after British Prime Minister Theresa May met US President Donald Trump at the Davos summit for talks, after which they held a joint news conference. After stating that the media were circulating “false rumours” about their relationship, Trump said he and May “like each other a lot.”

Trump emphasised above all that the US and Britain were at one on military issues: “We are working on transactions in terms of economic developments, trade and maybe most important, the military. We are very much joined at the hip when it comes to the military. We have the same ideas, the same ideals.”

Looking directly at May, he continued, “There’s nothing that would happen to you that we won’t be there to fight for you. You know that.”

May, who had been signalling general agreement with Trump’s views, by that point resembled a nodding dog as Trump spoke in favour of the US/UK military alliance. She responded, “We continue to have that really special relationship between the UK and the United States. We stand shoulder to shoulder because we face the same challenges around the world. And as you say we are working together to defeat those challenges.”

On Tuesday, General Carter declared that virtually any activity carried out by another state in defence of its political, economic and military interests could now be deemed an act of war.

No longer were there “two clear and distinct states of ‘peace’ and ‘war,’” said Carter. “[A]ll of these states have become masters at exploiting the seams between peace and war...”

“What constitutes a weapon in this grey area no longer has to go ‘bang.’ Energy, cash—as bribes—corrupt business practices, cyber-attacks, assassination, fake news, propaganda and indeed military intimidation are all examples of the weapons used to gain advantage in this era of ‘constant competition.’”

Williamson’s *Telegraph* interview came after his lobbying secured, this week, a delay in defence spending cuts due to be discussed in the Cabinet as part of the National Security Capability Review. Instead, a five-month review into military spending was announced by the government—which will be led by the Ministry of Defence itself.

Williamson’s push for increased military spending was backed by senior serving generals, including Carter and the chief of the general staff, Sir Stuart Peach, who is the senior military adviser to the government. In November, Peach claimed, without citing any evidence, that Russian naval forces were developing a capacity to sever undersea fibre optic cables.

Williamson was also backed by his predecessor as defence minister, Sir Michael Fallon. In a major intervention, Fallon used his first public speech since his resignation two months ago, amid allegations of sexual misconduct, to demand a substantial military spending increase. Speaking Monday to the Defence and Security Forum think tank, Fallon demanded that the defence budget be allocated an extra £1 billion immediately and proposed that the UK move to spending 2.5 percent of its GDP on defence, as opposed to its current 2 percent—the minimum recommended by NATO.

Failure to do so would mean a “retreat from our vision of a confident, outward looking Global Britain standing up for our people, our values, our allies; then we will drift downwards to being a bit-part world player, a part-time champion of democracy and freedom.”

It “would mean walking away from our international obligations, letting down our allies, and in the end leaving us less safe.”

Fallon upped the ante in a *Daily Telegraph* opinion piece on Thursday, the day before Williamson’s interview with the same newspaper. He wrote that he warned May a year ago that “depreciation of sterling and cost escalation in nuclear were putting severe pressure on the budgets for 2017-18 and 2018-19. If we wanted to play a leading role in NATO, with our troops and Typhoons defending its eastern flank; to counter the Russian submarine threat to our deterrent and our cables in the North Atlantic; to go on bearing the second biggest

load of air strikes and army training in Iraq... then we had to put the defence budget onto a more sustainable footing.”

He added, “The new review must recognise that the threats to our country have significantly increased. Before the invasion of Crimea, Russia seemed innocuous. Now we see its threat to western democracies. And Russia is spending not 2 percent but 5 percent of GDP on modernising its conventional and nuclear forces, on hybrid and electronic warfare.”

The Labour Party is playing a critical role in escalating tensions against Russia. In response to Williamson’s comments, Lord West, a former chief of the naval staff and Labour government security minister, said he was “absolutely certain Russia was looking at how to get into our critical national infrastructure.”

On January 11, Parliament debated a motion, introduced by Labour backbencher Vernon Coaker, demanding that the size, equipment and training of Britain’s armed forces be maintained at least at current levels and that no further cuts to defence spending and capabilities be imposed.

In another debate just four days later—in response to Conservative chair of Parliament’s Defence Committee, Julian Lewis, raising concerns about possible cuts under the National Security Capability Review—Labour Shadow Defence Secretary Nia Griffith insisted on defence spending increases.

Labour MP Luke Pollard reminded everyone where the main threat to the UK was coming from: “With Russia on the rise, our allies under threat and our northern flank vulnerable from Russian naval power, the threat from the Russian great bear is clear. Does the Defence Secretary understand that there is no support from any part of this House for any further cuts to our Royal Navy and our Royal Marines or for mergers that reduce the capabilities of our armed forces?”



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