

UK's new military policy: More nuclear missiles, more wars, targeting China and Russia

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Prime Minister Boris Johnson presented the UK's Integrated Review of foreign and defence policy this week, pledging stepped up military aggression against Russia, China and other rivals, crowned with a pledge to increase Britain's stock of nuclear warheads by a massive 40 percent.

The Integrated Review (IR) is a nakedly warmongering document. Amid the social devastation wrought by the coronavirus pandemic, with the government insisting that there is no money to fund nurses' and doctors' pay, slashing vital social services and ramping up workplace exploitation, Johnson pledges billions for weapons of mass destruction.

Not satisfied with the horrific death toll and human suffering resulting from their "herd immunity" agenda, the Tories openly plan for wars all over the globe, even nuclear conflicts, that would produce a mountain of human corpses and threaten the survival of humanity itself.

The IR commits to an increase in the UK's stockpile of nuclear warheads from "no more than 225" to "no more than 260," breaking a 2010 commitment to get to "no more than 180 by the mid-2020s" and marking the first increase since the end of the Cold War.

The government is replacing the existing warheads used on Trident nuclear submarines and is committed to building four new Dreadnought Class submarines to replace current Vanguard class vessels by the early 2030s. Reductions were declared "no longer possible" because the UK must meet "the full range of state nuclear threats", a euphemism for targeting China and Russia. The IR even threatens the use of nuclear weapons if the UK is faced with an attack using cyber or other "emerging technologies", breaking with past commitments to reserve nuclear weapons for retaliation against another nuclear power, or in response to extreme chemical or biological threats.

Britain will also deploy "more of our Armed Forces overseas more often and for longer periods of time."

The document pledges an increase in defence spending of over £24 billion over four years, exceeding the 2 percent

GDP commitment of NATO powers, with the boast that this makes the UK "the largest European spender on defence in NATO and the second largest in the Alliance". There are commitments to maintain troop levels above 100,000 (a response to criticisms from within the military of declining personnel levels), develop the next generation of naval vessels, and progress aircraft carrier strike group capabilities, with at least 48 F-35 combat jets ready by 2025.

There will be a shift in focus towards the Indo-Pacific region, involving military and commercial alliances, to establish UK interests in what is "increasingly the geopolitical centre of the world" and its "growth engine."

Becoming "the European partner with the broadest and most integrated presence in the Indo-Pacific" is framed as a response to "China's increasing power and international assertiveness... by far the most significant geopolitical factor in the world today."

To meet China's "systemic challenge", the UK will deploy the HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier and supporting carrier strike group into the Indo-Pacific later this year—"the UK's most ambitious global deployment in two decades." This will be matched with plans to "forward base" personnel and assets, including warships, in the Middle East and Pacific regions, in Japan, Australia and Singapore, as well as confirmed plans to triple the size of the Royal Navy's presence on the coast of Oman.

Moves against China are made in direct collaboration with the Biden administration in the United States, which is ramping up its military forces in the Asia Pacific, including stationing missile systems in Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines at a cost of \$4.7 billion. The US is described as "our most important bilateral relationship... trading partner and inward investor."

The thinking behind this orientation was spelled out by defence analyst Con Coughlin, who wrote in the *Telegraph* that the UK was now "free of the EU's restrictive shackles... Another significant advantage the Government has is that

the more dysfunctional the EU becomes, the more the new Biden administration will be inclined to ally itself with London, rather than Berlin, Paris or Brussels.”

There was, nevertheless, significant Tory disquiet at the government’s attempt to square this aggressive shift with a continued commitment to lucrative trade with Beijing, with the IR noting, “Open, trading economies like the UK will need to engage with China and remain open to Chinese trade and investment”.

Intelligence Committee Chair Julian Lewis complained of “grasping naivety” regarding Beijing, while Defence Select Committee head Tobias Ellwood said that Johnson should have called out China for the “geo-strategic threat it is.”

As a counterweight to such criticism, the UK pledges to lead diplomatic and military aggression against Russia, described as the “most acute threat to our security.” Militarily this means the UK placing itself “at the forefront of implementing NATO’s new Deterrence and Defence Concept” across the Euro-Atlantic region and supporting “others in the Eastern European neighbourhood and beyond to build their resilience to state threats. This includes Ukraine, where we will continue to build the capacity of its armed forces.”

According to a report in the *Daily Telegraph*, the arms commitments outlined Tuesday are only a down-payment. A Defence Command Paper will be published March 22 detailing a modernisation plan “to get the Armed Forces ready for the wars of the future.” The *Telegraph* describes this as an “£80 billion upgrade... over the next four years. The total over the next decade could amount to close to £200 billion.”

Global military aggression will be accompanied by domestic political and social repression. The IR couples references to “the intensification of competition between states” with “non-state actors” (including “large tech companies”), used as “proxies in conflict” by hostile states targeting “the vulnerabilities within democratic systems... and the testing of the boundary between war and peace.”

Claims of foreign state interference in domestic political and social life frame proposals to create new spying and propaganda institutions, including a National Cyber Force to “detect, disrupt and deter our adversaries” and develop cyber weapons; a Counter-Terrorism Operations Centre; and a Situation Centre in the Cabinet Office.

This repressive apparatus goes far beyond measures to supposedly combat foreign interference. The document refers obliquely to the decline of “democracy and pluralism, accelerated by Covid-19” and to an increase in “social and political dissatisfaction,” before warning, “Governments may struggle to satisfy popular demands for security and prosperity...”

The response is a further assault on democratic rights. The threat from “terrorism” domestically is described as coming not only from Islamist and Northern Irish groups, but also “far-right, far-left, anarchist and single-issue terrorism.” This catch-all definition provides for state repression of all forms of political and social dissent, above all from the newly designated threat from “the left.”

It is a measure of the poisonous political atmosphere generated by the crisis of British and world imperialism that there is not a shred of genuine opposition to the Tory war criminals. The mealy-mouthed criticisms of the opposition Labour Party focus on complaints that anti-China measures do not go far enough, and that military spending must be ramped up still further.

The Labour Party’s few criticisms of the IR were largely indistinguishable from the Tory right. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer questioned the rationale for increasing nuclear weapons, but only after stressing that Labour’s “support for nuclear deterrence is non-negotiable.”

When Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab urged against adopting a “Cold-War mentality” towards China, Starmer replied that the Conservatives had turned “a blind eye to human rights abuses while inviting China to help build our infrastructure.” He also accused the Conservatives of overseeing an “era of retreat,” with armed forces cuts “every year for the last decade.”

The declaration that nuclear war is not only an option but is actively being planned as the pinnacle of “defence” and foreign policy is a warning to workers of the fundamental dangers they now face.

Capitalism has transformed the entire world into a tinderbox, while its politicians seek by the constant whipping up of chauvinism and xenophobia to condition the world’s people to the necessity for unchecked militarism and wars of conquest.

The lessons of history must be learned. The drive of the imperialist powers towards a third global conflagration must be answered with the unification of workers the world over against imperialism and war and for socialist revolution.



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