

UK Tory Party threatens war against Russia, prepares class war at home

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Warning Russian President Vladimir Putin of “what could be a very, very bloody war”, UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace announced yesterday evening that Britain would be sending anti-tank weapons and military training personnel to Ukraine.

He prepared the move with an opinion piece in the *Times* published that morning accusing the Kremlin of planning “at best, the subjugation of Ukraine and, at worst, the forced unification of that sovereign country.”

Wallace’s actions followed a series of anti-Russian statements by leading Conservative MPs. Foreign Secretary Liz Truss claimed last week, “Russia is waging a disinformation campaign intended to destabilise and justify an invasion of its sovereign neighbour Ukraine.”

Tobias Ellwood, the Conservative chair of the House of Commons defence select committee, told the *i* newspaper on Sunday that a Russian invasion of Ukraine is “inevitable and imminent and we have allowed this to happen.”

Saying the UK and NATO “had the opportunity to place sufficient military hardware and personnel in Ukraine,” he complained, “we failed to do so.”

Claiming the US under President Joe Biden was “distracted” from “international events other than China,” the former Royal Green Jacket captain argued, “there’s an opportunity for Britain to step forward and provide greater influence on the international stage”.

He welcomed Wallace’s deployment of UK troops and weapons on Monday, repeating his allegation that Russia is “trying to redraw the map of Eastern Europe” and that “Putin is all ready to go.”

The truth is that the US and NATO are intent on forcing a military confrontation with Russia and the UK is jostling for a leading role in this war drive. Wallace and Ellwood’s comments are the most pronounced expression of the sharp lurch to the right taking place in the British ruling class while the media is fixated on the Tory “partygate” scandal over drinking sessions in Whitehall during national lockdowns. Plans for military aggression abroad are being rolled out alongside an authoritarian offensive at home to

impose the government’s policy of letting the pandemic rip.

Johnson is preparing a slew of policies. Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries already announced Sunday that the government would be freezing immediately, then in 2027 scrapping the BBC license fee, the source of funding for the state broadcaster. Undermining the BBC has been a long-term goal of the Tory party, who want to shift the UK media landscape even more rapidly and openly to the right.

The government is also committed to removing on January 26 the minimal “Plan B” public health measures currently in place—a red line for a growing number of Tory backbenchers demanding the end to restrictions on profits. Johnson reportedly intends to scrap all remaining legal requirements relating to the pandemic, including the requirement to self-isolate after a positive test, as early as March.

In addition, plans are being drawn up to deploy the military to the English Channel to prevent migrant crossings, and, longer term, for migrants and asylum seekers to be sent to other countries for processing, with Ghana and Rwanda cited as possibilities.

These policies are described in the media as Johnson’s personal effort to salvage his political career through a dog-whistle appeal to the Tory electoral base. They followed the *Times*’s original report that the prime minister was launching a “string of ‘red meat’ policies” to “save his tottering premiership.” In the *Guardian*’s words, “Boris Johnson prepares a populist offensive to save his skin.”

But whatever Johnson’s political calculations, his right-wing agenda is popular with the entire Tory Party and would have been implemented even if the Downing Street parties had remained a closely guarded secret. A frequent critic of Johnson, far from his inner circle, Ellwood’s call for stepped-up aggression towards Russia is the rarest of “red meat” policies on offer.

The trigger for this reactionary onslaught is only in the narrowest sense the scandal swirling around Johnson. The Tories’ political agenda is driven by a raging crisis of British and world imperialism that has been deepened immeasurably by the pandemic.

After utilising COVID-19 to pump billions into the coffers of the major corporations and banks, the ruling class is driving the working class back to work and forcing children into unsafe classrooms so that the necessary profits can be generated to pay for this ram-raid on the economy.

The sole concern of the government is for British imperialism to be able to compete effectively in a cut-throat fight for global market share. This means the working class must “learn to live with” COVID-19. As Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi explained last November, “Ultimately our plan, we will, I hope be the first major economy to transition from pandemic to endemic.”

By aggressively driving through an end to public health measures and shutting down discussion of the pandemic, the Tory government hopes to steal an economic and geopolitical march on its competitors. Health Secretary Sajid Javid gloated in the *Daily Mail* on January 1, “we have welcomed in 2022 with some of the least restrictive measures in Europe.”

The same imperative drives the militarist agenda being pursued by all the major imperialist powers, targeting resource-rich Russia and China, their major strategic competitors.

Divisions among the Tories are subordinated to this agenda and confined to disagreements over the most important tasks and the best people to see them through. It is worth noting that Ellwood criticised Johnson’s reported plans to deploy the Royal Navy against migrants as a “massive distraction” and not “what our navy should be doing” at a time of such high tensions with Russia and China. He tweeted earlier this month, “Why the Defence Committee argues we need a BIGGER Navy,” in reference to Admiral Sir Tony Radakin’s warning of a “Russian threat at sea.”

Johnson may go because he is not considered up to the task at hand, and something of an electoral liability. But the Tories will continue and deepen their Thatcherite offensive under whoever replaces him.

After Britain’s chief Brexit negotiator Lord Frost resigned last month citing his desire for a more “lightly regulated, low-tax” economy and differences with the government’s “coercive” COVID measures, Ellwood told Times Radio, “I think this is what perhaps unites more and more of the wider party... We need an, almost like, a wartime leader, we need a strong No 10”.

The war Ellwood and the Tories expect to have on their hands is a class war. Their sabre-rattling against Russia, threatening catastrophic consequences, has no popular support whatsoever. And their assault on democratic and social rights takes place in conditions of a devastating crisis driven by the pandemic and the sharp upturn in the cost-of-

living, fuelling broad popular hatred of the government. Having witnessed a rash of strikes in the second half of last year, only temporarily restrained by the trade unions, the Tories know they face an explosion of working-class struggle.

The task of pacifying this resistance falls to the Labour Party and its police force, the Trades Union Congress. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has directed all his fire at Johnson’s moral character, rather than the Tory government which has overseen the COVID deaths of more than 176,000 people in less than two years.

Former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell spelled out the purpose of this approach last week, with the call to his “Conservative colleagues” to remove Johnson in favour of “a prime minister who people have confidence in,” because, “Once they lose trust in a prime minister, they start losing trust in the whole political process as well.”

Former “left” leader Jeremy Corbyn also refuses to advocate any action outside of that “political process,” in which the Tories have a commanding majority, giving them carte blanche to do as they please in parliament.

However, the class struggle will not be held back for long by the efforts of these tired and discredited forces. The crisis in the Johnson government is exposing the Labour Party as much as it is rattling the Tories, with Starmer and Co. seeking to advance their own right-wing pitch to big business in response, unequivocally endorsing the end of public health measures. Mass opposition will develop in the working-class and will do so through its own independent organisations, the rank-and-file committees fought for by the Socialist Equality Party.



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