

Johnson lays out UK military offensive against Russia

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The February 7 *Times* featured an opinion column by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, laying out Britain's plans for a military escalation in Eastern Europe and Ukraine, targeting Russia.

The *Times* led with the headline, "Britain will not flinch over Ukraine, says PM. Defiant message to Putin as Marines and Typhoon jets prepared for deployment."

Johnson was cited saying UK support to Europe and Nato will remain "unconditional and immovable." The *Times* lists as immediate measures sending 350 Royal Marines to Poland, adding that "Johnson says that he is prepared to go further and is considering sending Typhoons [fighter jets] and warships to southeastern Europe. Plans have been drawn up to deploy jets to Romania and Bulgaria and send warships to the Black Sea."

The troops bound for Poland from 45 Commando were being diverted from cold weather exercises in Norway. They will join 100 Royal Engineers already in Poland, where they will carry out contingency planning, including "working up responses to threats they could face" and joint exercises.

Johnson's opinion piece, misleadingly titled, "Diplomacy can prevail", threatens, "British sanctions and other measures will be ready for any renewed Russian attack." He stresses that "Nato allies are agreed that we are willing to send more forces to guarantee the security of our allies on the eastern flank. The foreign ministers of Latvia and Estonia have called for extra support due to the Russian military build-up in Belarus. We stand ready to provide it".

As well as preparing to "reinforce the British-led Nato battlegroup in Estonia", he lists the possibility of "deploying RAF Typhoon fighters and Royal Navy warships to protect southeastern Europe. And HMS Prince of Wales, our newest aircraft carrier, is now the command ship of Nato's Maritime High Readiness

Force."

Turning directly to Ukraine, Johnson boasts, "Since 2015, the UK's Operation Orbital has trained 22,000 Ukrainian troops. Last month we sent 2,000 anti-tank missiles, causing God Save the Queen to trend on Ukrainian twitter, and placing Britain among the handful of countries to have supplied lethal aid. When I met [Ukrainian] President Zelenskyy last week, I announced another £88 million of UK aid to strengthen Ukraine's energy independence."

Addressing Russian President Vladimir Putin, Johnson warns, "If he launches another invasion, he will force the West to bring about much of what he seeks to prevent. In fact, this is already happening. Because of his build-up, America, France, Italy and other allies are deploying forces to Nato's southeastern flank, just as the UK reinforces the northeast."

Johnson fails to list the most provocative move yet carried out during the military build-up against Russia. Last week the UK sent more than 100 special forces (Special Air Service, Special Boat Service, Special Reconnaissance Regiment and Special Forces Support Group) to Ukraine to train its armed forces, focusing on counter-insurgency tactics, sniping and sabotage. 'They have a wide skill set which will no doubt be very useful to the Ukrainian forces,' a military source told the *Sun*, February 6. The United States already has a force of 200 Rangers stationed in Ukraine, which is still not a NATO member.

Just how deliberately inflammatory the UK's moves are was underscored by the *Mirror* reporting February 7 that the planned deployment of troops to Poland is part of a joint operation with the US. It writes that "defence chiefs are thrashing out plans for a dramatic UK-US parachute jump into Poland as a massive show of force against Moscow.

"UK military chiefs at Permanent Joint HQ in

Middlesex have been going over plans to project British military strength as a gesture of solidarity with Ukrainian forces. One plan under discussion is to parachute members of 2 Para and 82nd Airborne into Poland as a dramatic signal of defiance towards Russian President Vladimir Putin.

It adds, “It is believed members of 2 Para will be asked to join US airborne troops in demonstrating what the Army calls a Joint Forcible Entry, dramatically dropping into Poland. They are part of 16 Air Assault Brigade—the UK’s high readiness troops mostly made up of Paratroopers, with signallers, medics and engineers attached.

“After jointly parachuting into Poland they would then launch a 14-day wargaming exercise—as a huge two-finger gesture to the Kremlin, whose troops are currently exercising in Belarus.”

The *Mirror* continues, “The plan is to jump with the 82nd Airborne who have already arrived, but there is concern and confusion at senior level that any drop will be seen as aggressive and we are waiting for a decision.”

This is not an improvised move. The *Mirror* reports, “The Paras are listed as the UK’s Global Response Force, are already part of an operational readiness capability which was formed with US forces in 2015. More than 200 British Paras dropped into Ukraine in September 2020, in a joint exercise with local forces and witnessed by the Daily Mirror.”

The newspaper also notes, “More than 120 members of 2 Para’s B Company are already in Estonia on winter warfare exercises with NATO units including soldiers from the Yorkshire Regiment.”

Johnson’s actions point to the right-wing forces being unleashed by the crisis of British imperialism, with his factional opponents no less committed than he to military aggression and warmongering. One of the first Tory MPs to publicly call for Johnson’s resignation was Tobias Ellwood, chairman of the defence committee and a former captain in the Royal Green Jackets.

In a February 5 interview with the *Times*, Ellwood complained that on Ukraine, Johnson could not provide “the statecraft that’s necessary for Britain to make its mark and bring together a very timid, risk-averse West.” His task was to rally “other nations to stand up to Putin, to stand firm in Ukraine and make this our Cuban missile crisis moment.” This would mean emulating Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan. The sanctions discussed by Johnson with President Zelensky of Ukraine “is no threat,” said Ellwood. He wanted NATO to put a division

of 15,000 troops into Ukraine—“That would be ample to make Putin think twice” with a four-star general “put in charge of the Downing Street operation.”

For its part Labour is intent on positioning itself to the right of Johnson. Welcoming the dispatch of troops to Poland, it complained again that he “has been preoccupied by protecting himself rather than protecting our national security”. Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey added, “With threats increasing and growing Russian aggression, ministers must halt their plans to cut the Army by another 10,000 troops in the next three years.”

As the Socialist Equality Party explained in its statement, “The working class must mobilise to bring down the Johnson government!”, the policies of austerity, militarism and war pursued by the ruling elite and all its parties and factions are dictated by an escalating global crisis of the profit system, characterised above all by an unprecedented polarisation between the broad mass of the working class and a super-rich and socially criminal oligarchy.

“Like the Biden administration, [Johnson] is responding to a desperate domestic crisis by seeking to channel discontent outwards, against an external threat, with Putin’s regime a convenient scapegoat. Johnson’s diversion has assumed the most dangerous form imaginable—a provocation against a military power with close to 4,500 nuclear warheads.

“The war drive is fully supported by the Labour Party, which combines declarations of common purpose with the Tories with an attack on Johnson’s ability to lead an anti-Russian offensive.”

Opposing this drive to war demands the independent political mobilisation of the working class on an anti-capitalist, internationalist, anti-imperialist and socialist perspective.



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