

UK: RUSI military think tank details Liz Truss's warmongering agenda

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The defining feature of Liz Truss's stint as British Prime Minister is her focus on militarily confronting nuclear armed powers Russia and China, with disastrous implications for the global population.

Just two weeks before winning the Conservative Party leadership contest and taking office on September 6, Truss was asked in an interview if she was prepared to "unleash our nuclear weapons" even though "It would mean global annihilation". She replied coldly, "I'm ready to do that."

During her campaign Truss announced that as prime minister she would sanction an increase of Britain's military spend from the 2.5 percent of GDP by 2030 already committed to by outgoing prime minister Boris Johnson. She would increase military spending to 3 percent from its current 2.1 percent.

The pledge means a enormous ramping up of arms spending. This is the conclusion drawn by the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) in its occasional paper, "From Famine to Feast?: The Implications of 3% for the UK Defence Budget."

The 29-page study is authored by Malcolm Chalmers, RUSI's Deputy Director-General. RUSI plays a major role in the formulation of government policy, describing itself as "the world's oldest and the UK's leading defence and security think tank."

According to RUSI, Truss's commitment represented a 60 percent real terms increase in military spending (a staggering £157 billion.) The report's summary notes, "An increase in service personnel numbers of 25–30% is likely to be needed to support an overall 60% increase of defence spending. This would increase total numbers of regular personnel from 148,000 today to around 190,000 in 2030."

The report calculates that "the plan would require a 5p in the pound increase in the standard and higher rates of income tax by the end of the decade, or an increase in the standard VAT [sales tax] rate from 20% to 25%. Alternatively, it would require a significant cut in the GDP percentage spent on other public services and/or other international spending commitments."

RUSI is aware of the explosive societal implications of such an enormous surge in military spending. It warns Truss that the population must be confronted with the need for sacrifices. The

summary states, "If the government is to raise defence spending to 3% of GDP, it will need to argue the case for doing so in the context of wider fiscal priorities. In contrast to the funding of spending increases for the NHS [National Health Service] and social care under the last government, there has been very little attempt to ready the British public for the sacrifices that will be needed for a similar level of increase for defence."

The reports concludes in a similar vein, but makes sure to put Truss on notice that there can be no turning back on her commitment and that the government must impose the "sacrifices" necessary on the working class.

It reiterates that "savings might be made by reducing the share of GDP taken by other public services. Yet this would require a reversal of the Johnson government's approach in SR20 [Spending Review 2020], which saw significant real-terms increases in most major domestic departments. To achieve a reduction in the GDP percentage, it would also likely require real-terms cuts over the next eight years in several of the big spending areas – health and social care, education, police and prisons, business, energy and transport."

RUSI warns, "There has been little indication, so far, that a Truss-led administration would be prepared to make the difficult decisions that cuts in these areas would require". It states, "The credibility of the new government's commitment to spending 3% of GDP on defence by 2030 will depend on whether the [November 2022] Spending Review sets out a plan for financing this increase."

The £157 billion in extra military spending is equivalent to the annual spending on the *entire National Health Service* (NHS). To fund the wages of more than 1 million NHS workers cost £56.1 billion in 2019/20.

The £157 billion dwarfs the £96.1 billion spent on the *entire education budget* in 2021/22, including the £51.3 billion on school aged secondary education; £32.9 billion on primary and pre-primary education; and £4.9 billion on tertiary education.

Describing the situation facing the British ruling class as hurtling towards "major power conflict" with Russia and China, RUSI states that Truss's pledge "would be a step change in the priority given to defence, with no peacetime

parallel since the late 1930s.”

The only historical parallels for the escalation in military spending proposed were in the decades immediately prior to and after World War Two. RUSI notes, “The last time that increases of this magnitude took place was in the early 1950s, when the Korean War led to increased concerns over Soviet aggression in Europe. In response, UK defence spending increased from 6.6% of GDP in 1950 to 9.6% in 1952, before falling back to 5.9% by 1960. Comparisons can also be made with the mid-1930s, when defence spending increased from 2.5% of GDP in 1934, the year after Adolf Hitler came to power, to 3.5% in 1936 and then to 6.5% in 1938.”

RUSI’s appraisal of Truss’s military spending pledge calls it “the end of the peace dividend.” It states, “Since the mid-1950s, the UK has been able to fund the growing share of its national income devoted to the NHS and state pensions through cuts in the GDP share spent on defence...”

“The reduction in the defence burden was made possible by the relaxation in tension between the major powers, both during and after the Cold War. The UK’s peace dividend was paralleled by similarly sharp reductions in defence spending as a proportion of national income in its main NATO allies, as well as in China and, after 1991, in Russia.”

This was all in the past. “In contrast, the subsequent period has seen a marked increase in concern over possible major power conflict (especially after the 2014 invasion of Ukraine), alongside a slowdown in economic globalisation after the 2008 financial crisis. For the UK, this has opened the prospect that both of its post-war ‘dividends’ may begin to be eroded, although the magnitude and pace of these shifts remain uncertain.”

RUSI complains, “In the November 2021 Spending Review (SR21), the government confirmed that defence spending was due to increase, in real terms, by an average of 1.5% between 2019/20 and 2024/25.” But “since the defence spending settlement was front-loaded into the first two years of the Spending Review period, Ministry of Defence (MoD) spending was due to fall in real terms in both 2023/24 and 2024/25....”

“By comparison, most other government departments were awarded larger real-terms increases”, including, “Health and Social Care 3.5%; Justice 4.1%; Education 2.4%; Transport 5.5%”.

This is no longer acceptable! Nothing must be allowed to cut across prioritised military spending. The surge of inflation past 12 percent, a level not seen in four decades, means that even more tax revenues had to be shovelled into the Ministry of Defence. RUSI argues, “There is now a very strong case for revisiting the core budget allocation, both because of inflation and because of the wider case for a longer-term war-related uplift.”

This will require billions of pounds to be seized from the workers’ pay packets and the funding of essential services to be handed over to the MoD.

Over the last five years London has junked the Cameron Tory government’s declaration that Britain was entering a “Golden Era” in relations with China. Handed ever sharper ultimatums from Washington, successive prime ministers have fallen into line with the demands of US imperialism that China be confronted along with Russia.

In March, Truss in her role as foreign secretary visited Washington for talks with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. At a press conference she was asked that as she had demanded of “NATO Allies to invest more” in military spending, “Does that mean we can expect that you will push for more defence spending in the UK?”

Truss replied that “the reality is across the West, we haven’t spent enough on defence for a number of years... we need to be making sure from every possible front – whether it’s conventional defence, whether it’s technology, or whether indeed it’s information – we are able to outcompete our adversaries”.

RUSI states that the Johnson government’s 2020 “Integrated Review identified Russia as the ‘most acute direct threat’ to the UK’s security, and the Euro-Atlantic area as the main focus of its defence efforts. But it also signalled an increased focus on the Indo-Pacific region, in part as a consequence of increasing ‘systemic competition’ with China, seen as ‘the biggest state-based threat to the UK’s economic security’”.

The report includes a section, “The China factor”, which warns that escalating conflict with Beijing must be urgently planned for: “Most of the UK’s military capabilities (nuclear and conventional) are relatively ‘geography-agnostic’ and ‘adversary-agnostic’, in the sense that forces required to deter Russia in Europe – for example – could, with some tweaks, be repurposed to deter China in the Pacific...”

“Naval and long-range air capabilities... may become more important if China becomes the pacing threat for the UK, for example in the wake of a successful annexation of Taiwan.”

RUSI and those in ruling circles know that Truss’s 3 percent commitment is only a down payment as British imperialism enters uncharted territory. The report warns under the heading, “Gearing Up the Machine” that “if the threats worsen and political support for increased spending grows, the government could start to plan for further increases, above 3% of GDP, in the years after 2030.”



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