

UK Defence Secretary warns of war with Russia and China by 2030

Thomas Scripps
17 July 2023

Outgoing UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace has lifted the lid on discussions being held in government over war with Russia and China.

Wallace told the *Sunday Times* this weekend he would stand down as defence secretary at the next cabinet reshuffle, and as an MP at the next election.

His departure this year was long planned, though Wallace had hoped he would be moving onto fresh pastures rather than into political retirement. He declined to run for leadership of the Conservative Party last year, despite significant popularity among its MPs and membership, on the expectation of being made NATO Secretary General. But this was torpedoed by the Biden administration due to a risk of alienating Germany and France, with Jens Stoltenberg persuaded to stay on for another year.

He told the *Times* bitterly, “Why do you not support your closest ally when they put forward a candidate? I think it’s a fair question.”

The interview article was titled, “Why I’m quitting politics—and my fears we’ll be at war by 2030.”

Wallace was unusually candid. He warned, “Towards the end of the decade, the world is going to be much more unsafe, more insecure. I think we will find ourselves in a conflict. Whether it is a cold or a warm conflict, I think we’ll be in a difficult position.”

Russia and China are cited as the biggest dangers, with Vladimir Putin having the ability, “in the next three or four years, to lash out” and having “a doctrine for the use of tactical nuclear weapons.” Of course, Britain’s chief ally the United States also reserves the right to a nuclear first strike.

Wallace’s timeline could well be optimistic. Britain is already deeply involved in a military conflict with Russia, supplying ammunition and equipment including advanced and heavy weaponry, training, intelligence,

and special forces assistance to the Ukrainian army in a war fought under the direction of the NATO alliance. It contributes significant forces to NATO wargames in other countries on Russia’s borders.

But in the absence of broad popular enthusiasm for a war with the largest nuclear power in the world, the British ruling class relies heavily on the media and entire political establishment portraying a situation in which the UK is somehow at sufficient distance from the war in Ukraine to be immune from the consequences.

Wallace is the first cabinet politician to publicly raise the reality that Britain and the whole NATO alliance are on a path to direct war with Russia and even China. His comments are an admission that the population of the UK is being dragged into a potentially cataclysmic conflict by the ruling elite.

He is in a position to know. Wallace is the longest continuously serving Government minister and the longest-serving Tory defence secretary since Winston Churchill in a period of extraordinary political turmoil, including faction fights over Brexit and the replacement of two prime ministers in as many months. A former Captain in the Scots Guards, he is extremely close to the leadership of the armed forces.

Despite the recent snub of the secretary general position at NATO, he has been considered a vital point of connection and stability in the UK by US imperialism. Amid the wreckage of Liz Truss’s brief premiership, Wallace was called to a last-minute secret meeting in Washington for discussions his junior minister James Heappey described as “beyond belief”.

The US Pentagon press secretary, explained, “He’s here today to discuss the Ukraine situation and the US and UK joint efforts to support Ukraine, as well as to, again, reaffirm the transatlantic ties and co-operation

that our two countries share when it comes to issues like Russia.”

It is likely Wallace was told on that visit not to stand in the upcoming Tory leadership election in order to keep a figure the US could count on at the head of Britain’s armed forces with the transition to a new cabinet. Little wonder his anger at being thwarted in his ambition to lead NATO.

The *Times* editorialised Monday: “Amid crises at home and abroad, he has served effectively and enabled Britain to play a crucial role in the defence of the West. Had things been only slightly different he might now be holding a still more senior post. As it is, he leaves public life with Britain’s reputation burnished and transatlantic security stronger...”

“Rather than seek some mythical common ground for a negotiated settlement that would reward Russian aggression, he has waged the struggle on the plane of ideas and ideology.”

This is why, as the *Times* cites favourably, Wallace has been such an ardent campaigner for increased military spending. As closely familiar with NATO’s war plans as anyone in the UK, he is painfully aware of the enormous resources that must be mobilised to make British imperialism fighting fit, and of the attacks which must therefore be mounted on social spending and the working class.

There were rumours of his resignation this February over not securing a commitment from Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Chancellor Jeremy Hunt to commit 3 percent of GDP to defence, and an £8-11 billion uplift in defence spending over the next two years. He ultimately contented himself with a pledge to increase defence spending to 2.5 percent, which he called “a path in the right direction, and of course it couldn’t be needed quicker.”

In Sunday’s interview piece announcing his pending resignation, Wallace told the *Times* that “his proudest achievement is the war he waged in Whitehall for defence. ‘I’ve coupled all that with a £24 billion budget increase, reform of defence and investment in army modernisation,’ he said.

“I took over a department that had suffered 30 years of cuts and conceded that the whole of government was about health and education, while defence was just a discretionary spend. What I hope I’ve managed to do the last four years is unlock genuinely new money and

win the argument that defence is core.”

Wallace continued, said the paper, that defence spending could “be a dividing line at the general election. ‘At the moment, I see Labour entirely avoiding the issue of funding for defence,’ he said.”

In fact, there is no daylight whatsoever between the Tories’ and Labour’s position on the military and war in Ukraine, with Labour even more jingoistic. Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey criticised the Tories’ defence spending in a speech in the House of Commons last Friday: “It was 2.5% of GDP in 2010. We have got nowhere near that in any of the 13 years after 2010.”

He challenged the government to “pick up Labour’s plans to conduct a NATO test of major defence programmes to ensure that we meet our NATO obligations.”

If Labour has not made any commitments on defence spending, then this is in line with party leader Sir Keir Starmer’s insistence that he will not make any spending promises prior to taking office as the party of “fiscal responsibility”, as well as being “the party of NATO.”

Nonetheless, Wallace’s comment points to how political “debate” between the two main parties will increasingly be dominated by the need to find more money for war through attacks on wages and social services like healthcare. This will inevitably be coupled with new waves of repressive legislation targeting strikes, protests and free speech.

The war plans of the ruling class are far advanced. They must be matched and beaten by a socialist strategy, basing itself on the opposition which will develop in the working class to the hardships demanded of it by the warmongers.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact