

Britain's snap general election: A prelude to direct NATO war against Russia

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UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's announcement Wednesday that a snap general election will be held July 4 was a shock even to his own Conservative MPs.

Ministers and backbenchers spoke of the decision as "madness," with the Tories 20 points behind the opposition Labour Party in the polls. Sunak's closest ministerial allies were kept in the dark until a cabinet meeting, called less than an hour before the prime minister stood outside Downing Street in the pouring rain to make his announcement.

However, Sunak's decision and the speed and secrecy of its implementation are bound up with calculations of the British ruling class and its imperialist allies in the US that snap elections are needed to preempt growing opposition to war and create a political framework for a massive escalation of the conflict with Russia.

In his announcement, Sunak made clear that foremost in his considerations is the rapid escalation of NATO's de facto war against Russia in Ukraine. "This election will take place at a time when the world is more dangerous than it has been since the end of the Cold War," he declared. "Putin's Russia is waging a brutal war in Ukraine and will not stop there if he succeeds."

He added, "In the Middle East the forces of Islamist extremism threaten regional and ultimately global stability," while "China is looking to dominate the 21st century by stealing a lead in technology, and migration is being weaponised by hostile states to threaten the integrity of our borders."

Focusing the general election on war and national security is dictated by the advanced preparations for a new stage in the Ukraine conflict involving the use of NATO weaponry to directly target Russia and even the sending of NATO troops to the war zone.

The UK is the central military ally of US imperialism and has been in the forefront of every single escalatory move in Ukraine, including sending special forces and training thousands of Ukrainian troops. It was under the premiership of Boris Johnson that the conflict first erupted on February 24, 2022. Johnson wanted British backing for the war to

define his government.

But Washington has been forced to rely throughout on a deeply unstable government in Britain, beset by bitter factional conflicts and hatred by millions, especially for the murderous herd immunity agenda pursued during a pandemic that claimed over 230,000 lives.

Johnson was forced to resign as Tory party leader on July 7, 2022, becoming the first head of a major imperialist power to fall from office during NATO's proxy war against Russia.

A July 8, 2022 Perspective column on the *World Socialist Web Site* noted:

The political fear animating a leadership challenge that almost led to the meltdown of the government is that Johnson is such a divisive and discredited figure that he could not be entrusted with the next stage of the ruling class offensive against the working class or with prosecuting NATO's war in Europe.

His forced resignation, the WSWWS explained, "unleashed a leadership contest dominated by former military figures" that was eventually won by the rabid warmonger, Johnson's Foreign Secretary Liz Truss—who during her leadership campaign boasted of her readiness to use nuclear weapons against Russia.

But, after taking office in September 2022, Truss was swiftly deposed on October 20, under pressure from the global markets for having announced large and unfunded tax cuts.

Since then, any hope that her replacement by Sunak would finally bring political stability has been dashed by the constant growth of social and political opposition to the Tory agenda of austerity and war—opposition that first erupted in the strike wave in 2022 and then took political form in the mass movement in opposition to Britain's support for Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Sunak's efforts to rescue his premiership have, therefore, focused on attempts to meet the demands of Washington to place war at the centre of the government's agenda.

On April 23, at a military base in Warsaw, Poland, he announced that Britain would increase military spending to 2.5 percent of GDP, "ensuring the UK remains by far the second largest defence spender in NATO after the US."

He said he was putting the UK's "defence industry on a war footing," and would be sending Ukraine "the largest-ever package of UK military equipment," including "more than 400 vehicles, 4 million rounds of ammunition, 60 boats and offshore raiding craft, vital air defences, and long-range precision-guided Storm Shadow missiles."

On May 3, while meeting Ukrainian President Zelensky, Foreign Secretary David Cameron gave the green light for Ukraine to use British Storm Shadow cruise missiles against targets within recognised Russian territory.

Finally, in a May 13 speech setting out the Tory general election campaign, Sunak warned, "The world is closer to a dangerous nuclear escalation than at any point since the Cuban missile crisis," blaming this on "an axis of authoritarian states like Russia, Iran, North Korea and China."

He declared that "war has returned to Europe, and our NATO allies are warning that if Putin succeeds in Ukraine, they might be next."

He threatened a savage clampdown on anti-Gaza genocide and anti-war protests, denouncing them as an abuse of "our liberal democratic values."

But neither Washington nor the British ruling class can tolerate a government unable to rule effectively and bereft of all legitimacy to stay in office a moment longer. Sunak was therefore forced to go to the country, even if this meant almost certain defeat for his government.

Media commentary makes clear that Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party is now seen as a reliable and more effective instrument for waging war overseas, imposing the austerity measures to pay for war and repressing the opposition in the working class this will provoke. His government will not bring a change in Tory policy, but its continuation, while leveraging the services of the trade union apparatus.

He and his front bench began their preparations for office by expelling Jeremy Corbyn and many of his main allies from the parliamentary party to prove that Labour was not only the most business-friendly party, but the "party of NATO," committed to waging war against Russia, and the party of Zionism, ready to back genocide in Gaza and a wider war in the Middle East.

Starmer told the *Daily Mail* in April that his pro-NATO policy—backed by repeated declarations of his willingness to use nuclear weapons—was being advanced in the "face of

rising global threats and growing Russian aggression. ... The changed Labour Party that I lead knows that our national security always comes first."

Should Labour win the election on July 4, Starmer's first international trip will be to the NATO summit in Washington on July 9-11, where plans will be discussed for stepped-up aggression against Russia.

The great political danger facing the working class is that there is presently little understanding of how advanced the preparations for a wider war are.

Millions of workers and young people have taken to the streets internationally to oppose Israel's genocide in Gaza. Among the protesters in the UK, Sunak and Starmer are jointly hated.

Yet the leadership of these movements, such as the Stop the War Coalition, have made no serious attempt to explain that what is taking place is an attempt by the imperialist powers to redivide the world and its resources between them—in which the war against Russia in Ukraine, support for the mass murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians and the targeting of Iran and China for escalating provocations—are various fronts of a single global conflict.

The disarming of the working class now centres on efforts to limit opposition to Labour to a harmless protest vote in mainly Muslim constituencies and against the more right-wing MPs, while insisting that Labour must otherwise be backed as a "lesser evil" to the Tories that can be pressured to the left.

This political betrayal is being fought by the Socialist Equality Party. We are standing candidates in this general election in opposition to the Tory and Labour parties. We warn that a Starmer government would be a mortal enemy of the working class, committed to war abroad and class war at home. Our aim is the organisation of a mass movement of workers and young people against the genocide in Gaza, the war in Ukraine and the plans for war against Iran and China and to build the socialist leadership required for this life-and-death struggle.



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