

# Retiring UK army head urges “whole-of-nation effort” preparation for World War III

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The outgoing head of the British Army, Sir Patrick Sanders, used the 80th anniversary commemoration of the D-Day invasion of Normandy by the Allied forces to declare that preparation must be made to fight a military confrontation on the scale of World War II.

Sanders’ comments were published in a *Times* article, “Britain isn’t ready for Third World War, says outgoing army chief” after he spoke to the newspaper at a D-Day event in Portsmouth. Referencing D-Day he told the newspaper, “For lots of the young it feels like ancient history, but it’s not—it happened in people’s lifetime.

“And so warfare on this scale, if that’s within living memory, there is every prospect, if you look at the pattern of history, that it could happen again... I think the importance of this event is it’s a reminder that preparedness is absolutely critically important and to do things at this scale, there’s a whole-of-nation effort.”

The *Times* added that “he said the only way to prevent a repeat of the past was to have a “credible, strong armed forces”.

The *Times* has led a hawkish media in opposing cuts in the British Army’s numbers, which have been reduced from above 100,000 to below a projected target of 73,000 in the space of 14 years under Conservative-led governments. It has given a platform to senior military figures to advocate for greater military spending. *The Times* noted with dismay new Ministry of Defence figures revealing that British Army numbers were now down to 72,510, with more departures than recruits, “leaving its ranks below a low target that was already a 200-year low.”

The *Times* notes that Sanders’ latest comments “will be viewed as criticising the government decision to reduce the army by 10,000 soldiers.”

Sanders boasted he had done an “awesome amount to mobilise the army so that we are ready to fight with what we have”. Last month he visited UK soldiers in Poland,

who were part of “16,000 British soldiers deployed across ten countries in Europe. That is the largest deployment the British Army has done with Nato since the 1980s. So we are unquestionably more ready, but there is more to do.”

Sanders is being replaced this month after barely two years as head of the British Army by Sir Roly Walker, a former major of the Special Air Service (SAS), and former Director Special Forces—the senior Armed Forces officer responsible for the Britain’s Special Forces. Such is the politically charged nature of his departure that the government felt it necessary to say that he was standing down and not being removed. But there is no doubt that the departure is bound up with Sanders’ persistent criticism of falling troop numbers, and constant warnings that Britain is unable to raise a land army capable of confronting Russia on this basis.

Sanders, aged just 58, was only handed the post in June 2022, and within a year it was reported that he would be standing down in 2024. His predecessor, Sir Mark Carleton-Smith, had just over four years in the post. Sir Nick Carter (June 2018 to November 2021) held the position of Chief of Defense Staff for more than three years.

Last June, Sky News reported Sanders would be leaving in 2024, “after an unusually short term, removing a key voice who has warned about the need to rebuild the UK’s land forces after decades of cuts.”

The *Times* gave as much prominence to the general’s parting intervention as possible, publishing his comments on page two with an introduction stating, “Britain should be better prepared for a war so large that it could kill tens of millions of people, the outgoing head of the army has said.”

What can be called the “Sanders doctrine”, an insistence that the UK population must be ready for mass warfare with land forces playing the critical role, was mapped out from the moment he took on the role as Army

chief. The WSWS drew attention to his keynote speech in June 2022, just four months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to the Royal United Services Institute's (RUSI) annual Land Warfare Conference.

The immediate task was "mobilising the Army to meet the new threat we face: a clear and present danger that was realised on 24th February when Russia used force to seize territory from Ukraine, a friend of the United Kingdom."

Opposing forces within the military who demanded that the Navy be allocated more resources, not the Army, he insisted that the "war in Ukraine also reminds us of the utility of Land Power: it takes an army to hold and regain territory and defend the people who live there. It takes an Army to deter. And this army, the British Army, will play its part alongside our allies."

The speech concluded with an insistence that "The British Army must be prepared to engage in warfare at its most violent."

Every intervention made by Sanders since then has been based on the same premise, with his most significant speech made at the International Armoured Vehicles Conference in London in January calling on the government to make the necessary preparations to "mobilise the nation" for war, including a plan for conscription.

Russia could not be defeated without a huge expansion in troop numbers to 120,000 within three years (a force that required regular soldiers, reserves and a "strategic reserve" of retired military personnel. Central to the expansion, he proposed, would be the creation of a "civilian army... Regular armies start wars; citizen armies win them".

Under conditions of mass opposition to the genocide in Gaza, which had seen millions of people on the streets of London and with no popular support for the war in Ukraine, the crisis-ridden and widely hated Conservative government of Rishi Sunak and top military figures distanced themselves from a demand for conscription. The *Times* reported in February that "Sanders was called into [Armed Forces chief of staff] Admiral Sir Tony Radakin's office for a dressing down over remarks last month that infuriated No 10," with Sunak's office claiming there were "no plans" for conscription.

The WSWS noted, "The reason for Sunak's intervention is clear: nothing must be done to alert the British public to the catastrophic consequences of the government's escalating military operations with US and NATO powers across the globe."

However, it was not just Sanders warning that the UK could no longer function as a capable military force with its present resources. Given Britain's role as a leading provocateur against Russia and its status as a nuclear armed power, senior military figures in the United States have demanded a reversal in UK army cuts.

A year earlier in January 2023, it was leaked to Sky News that a senior US general "privately told [then] Defence Secretary Ben Wallace the British Army is no longer regarded as a top-level fighting force". Nations with tier one militaries included the United States, Russia, China and France, whereas "You haven't got a tier one. It's barely tier two."

*Sky News* commented, "Tier two would describe a more middling power with less fighting capability such as Germany or Italy." It cited defence sources who warned that Sunak "risked failing in his role as 'wartime prime minister' unless he took urgent action given the growing security threat posed by Vladimir Putin's Russia." This required "increasing the defence budget by at least £3bn a year; halting a plan to shrink the size of the army even further; and easing peacetime procurement rules that obstruct the UK's ability to buy weapons and ammunition at speed."

Under this pressure, after announcing last month a £70 billion uplift in military spending to 2.5 percent of GDP by 2030, Sunak called a snap general election for July 4 centred on the issue of national security and war. This was accompanied by a watered down plan for conscription—that Sanders was criticised for only months previous.

Sanders' comments reveal what the government is desperate to conceal from the population—that the NATO powers waging a direct war with Russia would lead to many millions of deaths, even if a nuclear confrontation was avoided.

The gravity of the situation must be understood. After July 4, the UK faces a government, likely led by Sir Keir Starmer's Labour "party of NATO" tasked with implementing the "Sanders doctrine", with all its horrifying implications.



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