

House of Lords lays out plans to make UK fully war ready

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The House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee has issued its report, “Ukraine: a wake-up call”. Published September 26, it proposes measures by which the UK and Europe can take the additional steps needed to take on “Putin’s Russia” and its ally, China.

It cites the war in Ukraine as an “illegal and unprovoked invasion” that is supposedly a product of a failed deterrence strategy, rather than deliberate provocation by the NATO powers. The committee then warns that “our Armed Forces lack the mass, resilience and internal coherence necessary to maintain a deterrent effect *and sustain prolonged conflict*” [emphasis added].

Lord De Mauley, who chairs the committee, welcomes the incoming Labour government under Keir Starmer’s promised Strategic Defence Review, but insists that the government “must commit to spending more on defence and spending better.”

Noting that Labour has not yet committed to increasing military spending to 2.5 percent of GDP, the committee makes clear that even doing this is not enough. What is required is an increase in “Army size and readiness”, a plan for “Homeland defence” to prevent Russia targeting “critical national infrastructure”, “Defence industry preparedness” requiring an end to “years of underinvestment” and “Public engagement” in national defence, learning from models like the Scandinavian “total defence” approach.

The report proposes a global effort to “counter Russian (and Chinese) influence”, especially in the Global South. It invokes the need for European security, welcoming Sweden and Finland assuming NATO membership. But this is declared inadequate given “a geopolitical shift, with China, Iran and North Korea providing support to Russia, thus raising the prospect of increased collaboration between countries who are in competition with or outright hostile towards the international order and the West.”

Under the designation “global insecurity” the report identifies the war in Ukraine, “Hamas’ terrorist attack on Israel and the war in Gaza (which could yet spill over into a wider regional conflict)” alongside “China’s assertive behaviour in the South China Sea”.

The Lords’ report complains: “President Putin has been

given, until recently, free rein to control the escalation narrative by invoking the spectre of nuclear war” and “attempt to divide NATO and deter Western support for Ukraine.” This, the report states, is not “just empty rhetoric,” but must be met not by retreats but re-establishing “credible deterrence in the UK and across Europe. This includes both nuclear and conventional deterrence.”

Under the heading “Building Mass”, the report leads with the imperative for the ruling class to increase the size of the British Army. Decades of defence cuts have reduced the army to under 73,000 troops, with plans “not reversed following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine... While size is not the only measure of capability, we are concerned that the Army cannot, as currently constituted, make the expected troop contribution to NATO. We therefore question whether the British Army is prepared to meet the growing threat posed by Russia to European security.”

The report calls for “involving the whole of society in the UK’s security and defence, given the heightened threat environment.”

Politicians and military figures must avoid mention of conscription as a part of this process due to its arousing popular opposition, “which happened to the former head of the British Army, General Sir Patrick Sanders, when he introduced the idea of a ‘citizen army’ in January 2024.”

An alternative model is provided by Finland and Sweden’s concept of “total defence ... which involves all sectors of the government, the economy and civilian population in defence planning” and is “well embedded in the national psyche.”

“Finland, for example, has a small regular armed force, but can mobilise a large number of troops quickly due to its comprehensive national defence strategy, which includes significant civilian involvement, including from a large pool of reserves... Sweden has a wide range of voluntary defence organisations linked to this effort.”

Mobilising the civilian population involves proselytising for “the emotional aspects of national defence.

Calling for strengthening “the defence-industrial complex,” the report states: “A resilient industrial base underpins Defence’s credibility as a fighting force. Our evidence consistently showed that the UK’s defence industry is unprepared for high-intensity, prolonged conflict due to

decades of budget cuts and reduced industrial capacity since the end of the Cold War.”

The production of munitions must be massively scaled up, with the report citing “an eight-fold increase in artillery ammunition by BAE Systems” but complaining that this was “from a low base.” A key area for stepped-up production is of “high-end weapons,” insisting that “precision-guided munitions and advanced drones offer significant advantages in terms of accuracy and effectiveness.” In Crimea what really “made a difference” were “British Storm Shadow and French SCALP cruise missiles.”

Among other measures to strengthen the armed forces is the chilling recommendation that “While the UK does have a maritime missile capability in the Tomahawk land attack cruise missile, further investment is required to enable the Royal Navy to be deployed offensively and better project lethality.”

There is an extended section on the need for military cooperation with Europe post-Brexit, but also with non-EU allies such as Japan and South Korea. This appeal is made citing Russia’s relations with Iran and North Korea, but above all “the role of China as a key decisive enabler of Russia.”

The report warns that those abstaining on UN resolutions against Russia “were countries in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia—i.e., within what is often referred to as the ‘Global South’.”

It rails against Russia’s exploiting “grievances against the West” and relying on “the Soviet Union’s historical support for decolonisation to forge closer partnerships” as a narrative that “resonates particularly in Africa and Asia, where the central story explaining the past couple of centuries is the struggle of national liberation against colonial power and exploitation.” It cites Russia’s new Foreign Policy Concept, adopted in March 2023, for devoting “a distinct section to Africa for the first time and talks about a polycentric world in opposition to Western ‘neo-colonialism’.” Moscow also hosted its first Russia-Latin America conference last year.”

But the chief concern is clearly “the deepening Sino-Russian relationship,” with Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping declaring that “their countries’ friendship had ‘no limits’ and there were ‘no ‘forbidden’ areas of co-operation’. The war has only brought these two countries closer together, particularly in the economic sphere... hitting record levels in each year since the invasion of Ukraine.”

The UK warmongers are pleased that “The threat of an increasingly prominent Sino-Russian strategic alignment has been recognised by NATO members. In a NATO communiqué published at the Washington Summit in early July 2024, member countries labelled China a ‘decisive enabler’ of Russia’s war against Ukraine through its ‘no-limits partnership’ with Russia and its large-scale support for Russia’s defence industrial base.”

The committee boasts that the UK has pledged £12.7 billion in support to Ukraine, of which £7.6 billion is in military

assistance, and has provided “both lethal and non-lethal weaponry, including tanks, air defence systems and long-range precision strike missiles” as well as training “close to 40,000 Ukrainian troops.”

Various examples are cited of military cooperation with Europe, but this is not seen as enough.

The great fear of the British imperialist ruling class is that the US “is increasingly pivoting to the Indo-Pacific to counter its main competitor, China,” raising concerns of a pivot away from Europe “at a time when war has returned to the continent. There are also uncertainties over what a potential Trump or Trumpian administration would mean for European security, with fears it could result in disengagement and embolden Russia. Questions on US support extend beyond the situation in Ukraine, with broader implications for the future of the [NATO] Alliance.”

Refocusing the UK’s security priorities towards Europe “has acquired a new urgency to mitigate against the risk of a less Europe-focused US—In the very early days of this Government, the new Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon David Lammy MP, met with key European counterparts in Germany, Poland and Sweden. Prime Minister Keir Starmer made rapprochement with Europe a priority at both the European Political Community Meeting in Oxfordshire and at the NATO Summit in Washington. At the NATO Summit, President Joe Biden welcomed Starmer’s intention to establish closer relationships with Europe.”

There is praise in this regard for the Joint Expeditionary Force, the coalition of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, led by the UK, focused on “security in the High North, North Atlantic, and Baltic Sea region” which is designed to “complement NATO.”

But a far more drastic turn may be necessary as part of developing “a comprehensive strategy that takes account of the potential for a deepening Sino-Russian relationship, particularly in critical areas for UK security, such as the Arctic...”

“The United States has long been a cornerstone of European security, but it is also reasonable to expect a gradual shifting of US priorities, regardless of the outcome of the forthcoming US election. The trajectory of a re-focus towards the Indo-Pacific region is clear. As we continue to rely on the vital yet evolving partnership with the US, the Government and its European allies must visibly increase their preparedness by committing more resources—both human and financial—towards our collective security.”



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