# Starmer announces UK military spending increase to appease Trump prior to Washington talks

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**26 February 2025**

After almost eight months of delay, Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government was forced this week to set a target date for increasing Britain's military spending to 2.5 percent of GDP.

Starmer's announcement Tuesday in Parliament was dictated by his meeting Thursday with US President Donald Trump in the White House. Trump has demanded that Europe's NATO powers drastically raise military spending to as much as 5 percent of GDP.

Labour came to office last July pledging that a Strategic Defence Review to be published this spring would set a "pathway" to lifting military spending to 2.5 percent of GDP from its current 2.3 percent. But Trump's demands, as Starmer was forced to acknowledge, have blown any such planned delay out of the water.

The UK prime minister was left with no option but to raise military spending to the bare minimum required of him, as he prepares to kiss Trump's ring as the obedient junior partner of US imperialism.

In a hastily arranged debate on "Defence and Security", Starmer announced that military spending would increase to 2.5 percent of GDP from April 2027 and "subject to economic and fiscal conditions… we will also set a clear ambition for defence spending to rise to 3 percent of GDP in the next Parliament [after 2029]".

This matched, and brought forwards three years, the opposition Conservative party's commitment to spending 2.5 percent of GDP on the military. Starmer declared, "Let me spell that out. That means spending £13.4 billion more on defence every year from 2027." He added that "we will recognise the incredible contribution of our intelligence and security services to the defence of our nation, which means that, taken together, we will be spending 2.6 percent on our defence from 2027."

To pay for this hike, Starmer announced that spending on development assistance would be reduced "from 0.5 percent of GNI [gross national income] today to 0.3 percent in 2027, fully funding our increased investment in defence."

Taking from Britain's oversees aid budget to fund the military indicates how far to the right Labour has shifted. The measure is specifically designed to appeal to Trump—who has already shut down the USAID agency ($44 billion budget)—and also to the constituency of the far right-Reform UK party who are challenging Labour and the Tories in the polls.

Speaking to *Sky News*, Starmer said of Trump's talks over Ukraine with Russia and demands for an increase in European military spending: "The last few weeks have accelerated my thinking on when we needed to make this announcement." He added that he had been "arguing for some time" that Europe and the UK "needed to do more" on military spending.

Starmer claimed his announcement represented "the biggest sustained increase in defence spending since the end of the Cold War," but the increase is modest, even more so than Starmer suggested.

Institute of Fiscal Studies economist Ben Zaranko noted, "An extra 0.2 percent of GDP is around £6 billion, and this is the size of the cut to the aid budget. Yet [Starmer] trumpeted a £13 billion increase in defence spending."

Defence Secretary John Healey admitted, "What Keir Starmer was talking about yesterday was the increase in hard cash that will be spent on defence in two years' time compared to what's being spent today…

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"In real terms, taking in inflation, it would be something over £6 billion."

Starmer's hastily assembled proposal paid for with the low-hanging fruit of overseas aid does not allay the demands of the military chiefs who met with him earlier this month in Downing Street to demand an increase to at least 2.65 percent of GDP. It is dwarfed by the €200 billion increase in military spending being discussed by the incoming Christian Democrat government in Germany.

Tuesday's announcement has only fuelled demands for further military spending hikes.

Concerns have been raised that Britain's standing as a power on the world stage—since the loss of its Empire—relies almost exclusively on projecting "soft power" through its overseas aid budget.

But the biggest gripe is that Starmer has ducked the savage attacks on social spending that are the only way to fund the massive military spending hikes demanded by Trump's "America First" policy and refusal to any longer prioritise or fund European security.

Lord Richard Dannatt, a former British Army chief, told *Times Radio* that targeting the aid budget was a "soft touch, and actually, frankly, it's a poor one."

Prior to Starmer's announcement, Dannatt warned that "Unless Keir Starmer and [Chancellor] Rachel Reeves can look at themselves in the mirror and look at their priorities and say, yes, health, education, roads, infrastructure are important, but actually defence and the security of this nation are more important, and find ways of producing more money well beyond 2.5 percent towards 3 or 3.5 percent for starters on our defence budget, then this strategic defence review is going to be hollow, it's going to be a failure. And, frankly, it'll consign Keir Starmer to the bin of history."

The *Times* presented a shopping list to the Starmer government, noting that the Royal Navy alone required at least 12 warships "equipped with advanced new air defence systems" costing an estimated £1 billion each.

Former British Army intelligence officer Philip Ingram was cited in the right-wing *Mail* Wednesday complaining: "It is too little, too late. He needed to say 2.5 [percent] immediately with the current strategic defence review looking at 3 to 5 percent if necessary and identifying a realistic time frame while working with other departments to identify where funding can be found. Otherwise, it is a pathetic sop to try to placate Trump who will eat him alive on Thursday."

The ruling class have concluded that the "peace dividend" which lasted a few decades following the end of the Cold War in 1991 is over. They are preparing to seize not just tens of billions, but the hundreds of billions of pounds presently allocated to the National Health Service (£190 billion), public education (£116 billion), and welfare benefits (£285.7 billion).

This agenda requires a savage war against the working class. The government is already planning cuts of up to 11 percent in department budgets ahead of the spending review to be announced in June, with every penny to be handed over to the Ministry of Defence. But this is merely scratching the surface.

In the debate following Starmer's announcement, Tory MP Dr. Ben Spenser said, "In response to an earlier question, the prime minister said that the peace dividend is gone. Does he agree that we also need to look at welfare spending, given that in the current circumstances, no serious country can spend more on welfare than on defence?" Starmer replied, "I do agree with that. The last Government let welfare spending spiral by an additional £30 billion."

Ingram's appraisal is accurate. Not only will Trump be unimpressed by Starmer's minimal spending hike when he is demanding a rise to 5 percent by the European powers. He will likely humiliate Starmer even more than he did French President Emmanuel Macron this week by insisting that the UK and Europe pick up the tab for a deal in Ukraine that exclusively benefits US imperialism.

Trump is boasting of being on the cusp of a peace deal with Russia and an agreement with Ukraine for the US to seize the lion's share of Ukraine's rare earths and other strategic assets. And when asked if he was willing to make security guarantees to Ukraine as part of the deal, Trump replied: "We're going to have Europe do that, because Europe is the next door neighbour."

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