

NATO chief Rutte says Europe's social spending must be gutted to pay for war

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NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte spoke at Britain's leading foreign policy think-tank Chatham House Monday to advocate for a vast rearmament by the European imperialist powers to prepare for war with Russia.

In a Q&A session, *Telegraph* Editor Danielle Sheridan asked if “we should see the Chancellor raise taxes in [this week's Spending Review] in order to cover the defence spending that you think is required?”

Rutte was blunt, replying that “it's not up to me to decide, of course, how countries pay the bill,” but “if you do not do this, if you would not go to the 5 percent, including the 3.5 percent core defence spending, you could still have the National Health Service, or in other countries their health systems, the pension system, etcetera, but you had better learn to speak Russian.”

The budget for NHS England is £192 billion for 2024/25. Pensions account for around 55 percent of all social security spending and are projected to cost almost £175 billion for £2025-26. To pay for war these are now considered luxuries that Starmer's and governments of every stripe are setting out to destroy.

Rutte was in London to meet Prime Minister Keir Starmer following the Labour government's Strategic Defence Review (SDR) published last week. He accompanied Defence Secretary John Healey on a visit to a pivotal weapons factory, Sheffield Forgemasters, which makes components for nuclear-powered submarines and has £200 million of contracts under the AUKUS [Australia, UK, US] military alliance programme.

He utilized his Chatham House speech and a Q&A session to trail the massive increase in military spending set to be adopted at NATO's June 24-25 summit in The Hague. Rutte, at the insistence of the Trump administration, is demanding that minimum

military spending as a condition of NATO membership is hiked from 2 percent of GDP to 5 percent. This consists of 3.5 percent on pure military spending and 1.5 percent on “defence and security related investments, including infrastructure and building industrial capacity.”

The largest military buildup since 1945 was largely signed off by the NATO powers at a meeting last week, though the UK and Spain, in particular, held off on concrete commitments to meet deadlines.

For most NATO countries, including Britain, this will require a doubling of current military spending within the next decade, necessitating a war on the living standards of the working class without precedent since the 1930s. The Starmer government currently spends 2.3 percent on the military and, despite the commitments in the SDR, is still only formally committed to reaching 2.7 percent of GDP by 2027-28 and 3 percent at an unspecified point during the *next* parliament (ending in 2034).

Britain is one of the two nuclear-armed powers on the continent—alongside France—so Starmer's commitment to the increase is key to Rutte's plan. Asked in the Q&A about his discussions in Downing Street's White Room, Rutte only said that there was “near consensus” on the 5 percent proposal among the NATO powers. This was after saying in his speech, “At the summit in The Hague, I expect allied leaders will agree to spend 5 per cent of GDP on defence. It will be a NATO-wide commitment. And a defining moment for the alliance.”

He praised Starmer's SDR as “It will strengthen and modernise Britain's armed forces and enhance NATO's collective defence. Commitment has a cost. And I welcome that the UK government will spend significantly more on defence in the future.”

The upcoming summit would create a “better NATO.

One that is stronger, fairer and more lethal. So that we can continue to keep our people safe, and our adversaries at bay. Because of Russia, war has returned to Europe.”

NATO also confronted “fierce global competition” as “Russia has teamed up with China, North Korea and Iran. They are expanding their militaries and their capabilities.”

Rutte stated that “Five percent is not some figure plucked from the air, it is grounded in hard facts. The fact is, we need a quantum leap in our collective defence. The fact is, we must have more forces and capabilities to implement our defence plans in full.”

Russia had to be confronted and defeated as “danger will not disappear even when the war in Ukraine ends. Our decisions on defence spending are driven by NATO’s battle plans and capability targets.”

Moving to a war footing in every country was existential as “Russia could be ready to use military force against NATO within five years.” He repeated one of the usual imperialist talking points, denouncing: “Russia’s unprovoked war against Ukraine.” He made no mention of the expansion of NATO to Russia’s borders, leading to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Defeating Russia would require a rearmament whose “exact details are classified,” Rutte continued, but it required “a 400 percent increase in air and missile defence,” “thousands more armoured vehicles and tanks” and “millions more artillery shells.” NATO powers will also “invest in more warships and aircraft... To give just one example, America’s Allies will procure at least 700 F-35 fighter jets in total.” These are made by US defence manufacturer Lockheed Martin and cost between \$82.5 million to \$109 million each.

Conflict with Russia required wholesale “societal preparedness,” said Rutte, praising Norway and recent NATO members Finland and Sweden for “what they are doing in terms of having the whole of society to understand what their role will be, be it active, or at least not getting in the way of the military people if war breaks out...”

One main conclusion followed from Rutte’s Chatham House intervention: The ruling class must immediately step up the attacks on the working class to pay for military rearmament and war.

Bronwen Maddox, director and chief executive of

Chatham House, asked Rutte, “How would you explain to people who are running a government now, a democratic government, how to explain to their voters why so much money is suddenly needed on defence?”

Rutte replied that the idea that “after the Berlin Wall came down ... we would have a sort of pleasant, peaceful living together with the Russians is gone.”

Putin “is on a total war footing” and NATO must do the same and more. “NATO’s [collective] economy is 25 times bigger than Russia. It’s \$50 trillion, and the Russian economy is \$2 trillion. That \$2 trillion economy is producing four times as much ammunition as the whole of NATO is producing at the moment.”

He added that “you can ask any general, and he will tell you, yes, drones and AI, etcetera, but Mark, the core of every war will always start with stockpiles of ammunition... We need five times as many systems to defend ourselves against missiles and an air defence in general, that’s a 400 percent increase. It’s huge investments. Our manoeuvrable land formations, we simply do not have enough. The UK, Germany, all over Europe, we do not have enough. Our command and control centres, our long-range weapons.”

The European NATO powers constructing a “defence industrial base” and raiding treasuries was the only way that rearmament could take place. Starmer’s SDR was a step forward “but you still also need to make sure that you can produce the classic big-ticket items.”



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