

UK Defence Secretary John Healey pledges troops on the ground in Ukraine

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On the morning of the Alaska summit between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Britain's Defence Secretary John Healey reiterated that the UK was ready to "put boots on the ground" in Ukraine to reinforce a ceasefire.

Healey was asked on *BBC Breakfast* if Britain's role was to "watch and wait". He replied, "No, the UK's role is to stand with Ukraine on the battlefield and in the negotiations, and prepare, as we have been, leading 30 other nations, with military planning for a ceasefire and a secure peace through what we call the coalition of the willing."

Speaking of a group of roughly 30 mainly European countries, Healey added that more than 200 military planners from the Coalition of the Willing have been involved in "detailed planning for the point of a ceasefire," meaning they were "ready to act from day one."

"The military plans are complete," he added. "We are ready to put UK boots on the ground in Ukraine in part to reassure Ukrainians. But also in part to secure the safe skies, safe seas and to build the strength of the Ukrainian forces, because in the end the best deterrence against Russia... re-launching their aggression against Ukraine is the strength of Ukraine to stand for itself."

Aware of the gravity of what was being suggested, his interviewer asked what would happen if British troops were attacked by Russia. Healey insisted that British forces would have "the right to defend themselves if attacked".

Healey chose this moment to reiterate a proposal made jointly between UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron, the instigators of the "coalition of the willing", in mid-February. Starmer declared at the time that the group was ready to put "boots on the ground and planes in the

air."

This proposal was necessitated by the European governments' fear that NATO's proxy war in Ukraine was endangered by the election of Trump the previous November. There was widespread concern in Europe's capitals that Trump was less committed to the Ukraine war than the outgoing Biden administration, considered the conflict to be Europe's problem, and felt it was preventing America from pursuing other geopolitical interests—in the Middle East and above all against China.

From January, governments in London, Paris and Berlin concocted a plan for preserving their stake in Ukraine based on a European peacekeeping force to be deployed to Ukraine, only requiring Washington to provide a "backstop": the continued supply of US satellite data and intelligence without which the war could not continue, and a guarantee of a US response if European troops were attacked.

They hoped this would prevent their exclusion from commercial deals surrounding the exploitation of Ukraine's natural resources which are now being discussed unilaterally between Trump and Putin in Anchorage. And that it would either sabotage the possibility of a ceasefire altogether—since Russia has declared the presence of NATO troops in Ukraine a red line—or, if accepted, place them in a position to sabotage any peace in the future. There was open talk that dead NATO soldiers would make it impossible for Trump to ignore the Article 5 commitment to collective defence.

These plans were thwarted in the short-term by a combined refusal on the part of the European powers to collectively stump up the proposed 30,000 troops, and the flat-out rejection of the plan by the Trump administration.

Bloomberg reported in June, according to people familiar with the matter: “European allies have concluded during discussions with their American counterparts that President Donald Trump won’t provide the guarantees they have sought to back the Europe-led ‘coalition of the willing’”. This was not altered by the recasting of the provocatively named Coalition of the Willing—a deliberate callback to the war against Iraq—as a “reassurance force”.

As the possibility of a deal between Washington and Moscow, excluding the Europeans, became more probable, efforts to animate the coalition of the willing escalated, still led by Britain and France. During Macron’s state visit to the UK in July, a Franco-British summit was organised to discuss the formation of a pan-European force of 50,000 troops. Also discussed, according to Healey, was nuclear cooperation and “deterrence in the face of extreme threats that our countries in Europe may face.”

The ambitions of the European powers still far outrun their capabilities, however. According to the *Times* this Wednesday, “British military chiefs have given up on the idea of a 30,000-strong contingent to protect Ukraine’s ports and cities.

“They are now said to be proposing a more ‘realistic mission’ involving air reassurance over western Ukraine, training support to the Ukrainian military and the clearance of mines from the Black Sea.”

According to the *Times*, “some European nations feared a deployment of tens of thousands of troops to protect important Ukrainian sites was too risky and were unwilling to provide sufficient numbers to deter President Putin from an attack, leaving others frustrated.”

These divisions were indicated in the Statement of the Co-chairs of the Coalition of the Willing released the same day, announcing in heavily caveated fashion that the group was “ready to play an active role, including through plans *by those willing* to deploy a reassurance force once hostilities have ceased.” [emphasis added]

Nevertheless, the Europeans are continuing to press for the policy in the hope of preventing their being sidelined by Washington. This continues to be shrouded in cynical proclamations of their sacred duty to defend Ukrainian sovereignty, and even invocations of the supposed symmetry between the war against fascism in 1939-45 and the Ukrainian war against

Russia.

Healey’s comments demonstrate once again that the European imperialist powers would far rather that the Ukraine war continue, at the costs of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian and Russian lives, than a peace be agreed which impinges on their predatory global ambitions. They confirm that should some form of ceasefire emerge from the talks in Alaska or later, then London, Paris and Berlin would see this as a setback to be reversed at the earliest possible opportunity.



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