

Britain seizes Russian tanker as drumbeat for more military spending grows louder

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Royal Marines, two Royal Navy ships and multiple Royal Air Force (RAF) aircraft took part in a six-hour mission to seize an oil tanker sailing through the Channel under a Cameroonian flag, alleged to be part of Russia's "shadow fleet". The *Smyrtos*, en route from Russia to India, was seized in the early hours of Sunday morning.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer celebrated by posting a video of the operation to TikTok, gloating in infantile terms, "Another bad day to be Vladimir Putin."

Although the Ministry of Defence claims the action was planned for weeks, this is clearly Starmer's attempt to mollify critics of his Defence Investment Plan. The military brass, and Starmer's own Defence Secretary John Healey and armed forces minister Al Carns, all publicly declared the funding came up short.

Healey and Carns resigned their posts in protest, publishing letters accusing Starmer of having failed to find the money necessary to "meet the threat" they claim the UK faces—namely Russia. Their stepping down was the latest stage in a right-wing campaign demanding much more rapid and extensive military spending increases than Starmer and Chancellor Rachel Reeves have yet agreed to.

The Trump administration is an ally in this war drive. US Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby reposted Healey's resignation letter on X with the comment: "There is again a great need for more British military strength in this critical time. We urge the UK to meet that need with urgency, scale, and determination..."

"Our purpose now must be to... restore our home fronts that can, once again, supply overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions."

Starmer has responded to this pressure by repeatedly

raising his commitments and authorising military actions to prove his readiness to confront Russia. Prior to the broadsides from Healey and Carns, he had already promised to hike defence spending to 2.68 percent of GDP by 2030. The Defence Investment Plan shaves 1 percent off the capital budgets of multiple other government departments to free up an additional £13.5 billion for the armed forces over the next four years.

Now more will be forthcoming. The seizure of the *Smyrtos* was followed by new Defence Secretary (and former paratrooper) Dan Jarvis promising to help "reprioritise" military funding. Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy told the BBC discussions were "ongoing".

Jarvis, who gave his first interview in the job to the right-wing *Daily Telegraph*, told the paper, "I am absolutely determined to make sure that we deliver for defence." He added that he had "a responsibility now to them [British soldiers] to make sure that they get what they need... "Obviously that is the challenge that we have at a point of constrained fiscal resource, and I will be working with my colleagues across Government to make sure that we're in a position to do that."

The gap to be made up immediately, according to the *Times* speaking on behalf of military officers, is £28 billion over the next four years.

If Starmer does not succeed in meeting the demands of the warmongers, then replacements are waiting in the wings to implement their agenda. Prospective Labour leadership challenger Andy Burnham told the *Times* last Friday he was "not squeamish about saying that the plan would be to reduce the welfare bill". The other main contender, former Health Secretary Wes Streeting, said the same this April.

Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch published an open letter to Starmer, Burnham and Streeting

declaring, “We cannot have our military inadequately funded at a time of growing threats. The funding must also not be backloaded when the pressures are urgent.”

She added, “I have made several offers to work with you in the national interest to reduce benefit spending so we can invest more in our defence. Sir Tony Blair, the longest-serving Labour prime minister, has urged you to accept them.”

In particular, she said, “the support of the Conservatives” would “be critical to delivering substantive reforms that will reduce the benefits bill,” against the opposition of “your left-wing MPs”.

Badenoch added in a press conference Monday that her main “test” for offering support would be “to get to 3 per cent [GDP spending on the military] by 2030, but as a minimum the funding must deliver the additional £28bn over four years that the Chief of Defence Staff has asked for.” Her two other tests were the readiness to deliver this spending immediately and to “equip Britain with more lethal and operationally effective armed forces”.

If Starmer was “unable to provide the leadership within his Cabinet to deliver a defence investment plan that meets these three tests, then he should resign now and make way for a leader who can.”

The Tory Party leader has more or less spelled out the ruling class’s terms for the rest of the Parliament, to be met by a Labour government in power with the support of just a fifth of eligible voters—backed by even less popular parties if needed.

The scale of what is being demanded, and therefore the implications for the working class, must be understood. The *Times* is blunt, comparing the UK’s 8,000 drones procured since 2024 with the 200,000 used by Ukraine—a country at war—every month. It compares the 73,000 soldiers in the British Army with the 1.3 million in the Russian.

Lamening the state of the Royal Navy and the RAF, it adds: “Of the UK’s 107 advanced Typhoon fighter jets, only four are armed and ready to scramble at any one time. There are no missile interceptor batteries in the UK and the government began purchasing small numbers of drone interceptors only this spring...”

“The UK has five active hunter-killer nuclear-powered submarines designed to track and attack enemy subs, yet all of them are held up in port receiving maintenance...”

“The UK’s plan was also supposed to fund the creation of a new class of Type 83 destroyers, but the government is reportedly planning to scrap the scheme to save money. Meanwhile, older Type 23 frigates are being retired faster than newer ships can be built...”

“[F]or now the bulk of Britain’s fighting fleet comprises six Type 45 destroyers and two aircraft carriers. However, only half our Type 45s are operational, with one, HMS Dragon, on deployment to the Gulf and another, HMS Duncan, in the High North.

“In contrast, Russia’s northern fleet, stationed just over 1,200 miles from the UK in the Arctic Ocean, comprises about 30 submarines, two cruisers, three destroyers, three frigates, seven corvettes and multiple support vessels.”

The *Financial Times* adds that “No area illustrates the problem more clearly than Britain’s nuclear deterrent... Some estimates suggest nuclear spending could approach a quarter of the defence budget within 10 years with a new class of Dreadnought submarines taking over from the older Vanguard boats.”

What the *Times* and the FT present is a shopping list for a major war, which would demand far more of British workers—in blood as well as money—than the low tens of billions being discussed this week. The ruling class sees the Defence Investment Plan as a government downpayment on its readiness to lead terrible confrontations with the working class at home and the opponents of British imperialism abroad.



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