UK-Russia conflict escalates after Burnham's provocations in Ukraine

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The UK prime minister was the sole leader of the "Coalition of the Willing" to visit Ukraine for a meeting with President Volodymyr Zelensky on Monday. France's Emmanuel Macron and Germany's Friedrich Merz took part virtually.

The event coincided with the anniversary of Ukraine's 1991 breakaway from the Soviet Union—part of the Stalinist bureaucracy's nationalist carve-up of its territory between what became obscenely rich capitalist oligarchies.

Burnham used the occasion to compare Ukraine's war effort with the fight against the Nazi armies in the Second World War. "My nation kept the flame of European freedom alive in the 20th century, you hold that flame in the 21st," he told Zelensky.

Given that Zelensky's dictatorial government has honoured the leading figures of Ukrainian fascist organisations which fought *with* the Nazis, helping to kill millions of Soviet citizens, this was not just a lie but a provocation. It rubbed salt in the wound of Burnham announcing more British aid to fuel the Russia-Ukraine bloodbath.

Having already supplied Ukraine with long-range Storm Shadow cruise missiles, the UK has now shared classified blueprints with Kyiv to allow the country to eventually manufacture its own. France has done the same—the missile is an Anglo-French product—and raised the idea of helping to build factories in Ukraine.

In return, the Ukrainian government has shared with the British an enormous trove of AI data supplied from battlefield monitoring systems. According to the UK, the first use of the technology will be as a surveillance tool "rolled out at a UK defence site to protect bases from protestors and hostile actors trying to gain intelligence."

Providing Ukraine with missiles is vital to sustaining its war effort. The country is currently seriously outmatched by Russia in this area, offensively and defensively.

Since the beginning of the year, Russian forces have launched at least 130 missiles a month, peaking in February (288) and July (376). An increasing proportion of these are finding their targets, as Ukraine runs low on interceptors.

According to Zelensky, Ukraine received 675 such missiles in 2023 compared to 364 in 2025, with 264 planned for 2026. He said 300-360 were needed for the winter. Global supply is around 600, with the war in Iran having heavily drained stocks.

Though Ukraine has recently been able to regularly hit Russian targets with drones, of which it expects to produce some 10 million this year, its missile strikes have been limited. The British-French plans are part of an effort to change that.

Oleksandr Merezhko, head of the Ukrainian parliament's foreign affairs committee, told the *Guardian* he hoped it would be a matter of "months, not years," before Ukraine could start production. The country already has its own Fire Point missiles in development.

Burnham is also expected to play a role in advocating for more air defence resources from the US, meeting with Trump next month after the UN general assembly in New York. He told Bloomberg after meetings in Kyiv, "Leaving today, I'm quite clear what I need to do in the next few weeks," stressing the need for missile interceptors.

Merezhko said of the UK, "You are an important bridge and have rectified the situation whenever we have a crisis in our relations with the US. Your king is a valuable diplomatic tool and puts in a good word for us with Trump."

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The “situation” the UK is working to maintain is a war chewing through tens of thousands of casualties a month. The primary myth of NATO’s support for Kyiv is that it is provided for Ukraine’s defence, rather than for Russia’s defeat and the collapse of its government—at whatever cost to the Ukrainian working class.

Downing Street hopes levelling the playing field in the air will put more pressure on the Kremlin, as the death toll mounts on both sides. Burnham’s refrain—inherited from Keir Starmer, Rishi Sunak, and Boris Johnson before him—that Britain will back Ukraine for “as long as it takes” means “as long as it takes” to achieve these imperialist ends.

Russia has been clear about how it views and might respond to British actions. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday that Britain was “involved ?in this war” and “regularly adds fuel to the fire… to prevent even the slightest progress in the peaceful settlement process.”

On Thursday, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters the UK was “one step ?away” from becoming complicit in “terrorism” against Russian ?civilians. She warned of “catastrophic consequences” if it continued its “hostile, aggressive line, which can only ... create the risk of the conflict escalating to an entirely new level”.

Zakharova specifically mentioned “British military installations and equipment in Ukraine and beyond its borders” as potential targets.

NATO’s military leaders know these risks. Burnham referred in Kyiv to “Russia’s outrageous threats to my country”. A UK defence source told the *Daily Mail* an attack of some kind was “inevitable, based on our high-profile support for Ukraine.” Macron stated bluntly, “Russia will try to escalate against European countries in order to deter them from assisting Ukraine.”

But there is still an effort to dismiss these dangers as Russian “sabre rattling”. The British government walks a line between using Russian threats to encourage a sense of wartime national unity and minimising them to hide the real extent of the danger from the population.

This is the second key myth of NATO’s war in Ukraine: that the alliance can continue to place pressure on the Russian government without the conflict escalating, becoming ever more likely to spark a catastrophe.

It is becoming harder to keep this fact suppressed, however. Multiple newspapers carried headlines on Wednesday announcing government plans to warn the population to stockpile food and water in preparation for state attacks or environmental crises.

According to the original article in the *Financial Times*, “a social media campaign is being prepared to tell households how to prepare for severe disruption, whether caused by hostile state action, extreme weather or cyber attacks.”

The *Daily Telegraph* reported, “Officials fear the public is not sufficiently attuned to the potential risks and plan to launch an information campaign on ‘national resilience’ this autumn, with guidance on stockpiling food, water and candles.”

It added, “As part of the preparations, Operation Albiston Shadow, the largest-ever national home defence exercise run by COBR, will be carried out in 2027.”

That these are serious risks was confirmed by CIA director John Ratcliffe’s unplanned visit to Moscow on Tuesday. According to sources, Ratcliffe travelled to warn the Russian government against attacks on NATO states, focussed on the Baltics. Media reports prompted by the visit also cited the danger of a response to the UK and Germany.

Triggering the alliance’s Article 5 collective defence clause would start a war between the world’s largest nuclear powers.

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