

UK press demand Burnham delivers a war budget targeting Russia

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1 September 2026

Just six weeks since he took office, the major press mouthpieces of the ruling class have united to demand that Labour Prime Minister Andy Burnham fund the rearmament of the military in preparation for war.

Last week, Burnham deepened Britain's direct involvement in the proxy war with Russia in Ukraine. Britain had already supplied Kyiv with long-range Storm Shadow cruise missiles used to strike deep inside Russia, but Burnham authorised arms manufacturer MBDA to release classified blueprints for British-made components, allowing Ukraine to build the weapon itself.

Following Burnham's visit to Ukraine August 24, Moscow responded with its sharpest warnings yet, threatening "inevitable catastrophic consequences" unless Britain abandoned its "hostile, aggressive line."

In response, Tobias Ellwood—a former Royal Green Jackets officer, Conservative MP from 2005 to 2024, defence minister for veterans and reserves and chair of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee declared in the *i* newspaper:

"Our global order is deteriorating fast. Authoritarian states are growing bolder, old alliances are being tested and conflicts are multiplying. Most consequentially, America is increasingly going its own way, questioning the alliances and responsibilities that have underwritten Western security for eight decades."

He went on, "Little wonder there are uncomfortable echoes of 1937. Yet Britain still seems to be in denial. As our Nato allies increase defence budgets, consider the return of national service and prepare seriously for a new era of insecurity, the UK remains dangerously exposed."

The references to 1937—with World War Two breaking out in 1939—and national service are the clearest indications of what is being demanded of the

government. In that year, Neville Chamberlain, who came to be reviled as the advocate of appeasing Hitler, replaced Stanley Baldwin as prime minister. Chamberlain was replaced by Winston Churchill in May 1940 to conduct the war against Germany.

Within 24 hours of Ellwood's op-ed, Chancellor John Healey told Sky News that Burnham's government was the "continuity" of Keir Starmer's as he insisted "fiscal discipline" is "the first priority" for any chancellor. He refused to name a date for reaching even 3 percent of GDP on military spending by 2030—repeating what the military see as the unpardonable crime that led to the fall of Starmer and his Chancellor Rachel Reeves.

Burnham was installed as Starmer's replacement on the basis of his declared support for military spending and confrontation with Russia, and his boast—made in the pages of the *Times*—that he would not be "squeamish" about imposing the vicious welfare and public spending cuts required to pay for it.

Healey's resignation as defence minister was pivotal in Starmer's fall, with his resignation letter stating, "I am certain that a headmark date for 3 per cent of GDP on defence in 2030 is what Britain must set." Burnham's promotion of Healey to chancellor was seen by military chiefs as a commitment that his government would set a date for 3 percent and reach the required 5 percent of GDP spending on core military and related infrastructure by 2035, as demanded by NATO.

Within hours, Healey was being torn apart by the same forces who proclaimed him a hero for resigning less than three months ago.

The August 31 leader in the *Times*, the principal forum for the military's demands, complained, "Andy Burnham is a new compère for the same old Labour show." It added that "Burnham will be found wanting

on radical reform. His chancellor, John Healey, admitted as much on Friday, calling the new regime a ‘continuity’ of the Starmer operation.”

The *Times* denounced a government whose “speciality” is “procrastination born of political calculation,” using “consultations and reviews as excuses to delay vital reforms to the welfare state and the armed forces.”

The paper’s editors complained of a national debt at “almost £3 trillion... equivalent to 94 per cent of gross domestic product” and costing “more than £100 billion a year in interest to service. This mountainous liability must be tackled and that means big cuts to the welfare budget, now running at £334 billion a year, a quarter of government spending and 11 per cent of GDP.”

Burnham “knows that spiralling working-age health benefits and state pension increases guaranteed by the triple lock are unsustainable,” but has “kicked the can down the road.” Despite having resigned over the matter, Healey “intends to dodge the same [3 percent of GDP on military spend] target himself on budget day,” while struggling to find £4.5 billion over three years for a “dangerously inadequate” defence investment plan.

The *Telegraph*, under the headline “The country has no time left for dithering,” reported that the Trump administration “is prepared to reconsider its position on Britain’s claim to the Falkland Islands if defence spending does not increase”—one of a series of “creative measures” under consideration to punish Nato allies falling short of the alliance’s 5 percent pledge.

The beneficiary, it continued, would be Argentina’s fascistic president Javier Milei, a close Trump ally who insists the islands “were, are and always will be Argentine.”

When Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sent a Royal Navy task force to fight Argentina in 1982, noted the *Telegraph*, the UK could mobilise a 127-ship task force. Today the Royal Navy has “just 14 operationally available destroyers and frigates”. The paper’s conclusion was blunt: “if the Prime Minister can expend political capital on slashing billions from the ballooning benefits bill, there will be more money to fund the armed forces.”

The *Financial Times* also insisted that money for the military must be found now, not years hence. It warned that Healey’s budget will address only the equipment funding gap of nearly £5 billion left by Starmer, some

£1.2 billion a year, with everything else deferred to a spending review next year.

The paper pointed out that the Institute for Fiscal Studies calculates that reaching 3 percent by 2030 would cost the Treasury an extra £10 billion annually, and meeting NATO’s 3.5 percent target by 2035—£25 billion a year above existing levels.

The *Sun* denounced Healey as a “chancer”, stating that he “accused the lame-duck” Starmer “of making the country less safe amid ‘rising threats’ and lambasted the Treasury for being ‘unwilling’ to stump up the cash. But three months on he’s changed his tune.” Moreover, “when it comes to tackling the ballooning £334 billion welfare bill, that has been put on hold until next year.”

This coordinated intervention to whip the Burnham government into line will only intensify, echoing a process underway in every major NATO power in Europe. The message is that Burnham and Healey must fund war preparations and impose the savage austerity required, or stand aside and make way for forces prepared to carry it through.

The two main opposition parties, the Conservatives and Reform UK, both flaunted their willingness to front the militarist requirements of the ruling class more ruthlessly than Labour.

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch declared that Burnham’s “honeymoon is over,” warning that if he “won’t make the tough decisions to bring down the welfare bill, strengthen defence and resist the urge to splurge on the taxpayer’s credit card, then he is simply the same old Labour leader of the same old Labour Party.”

Robert Jenrick, Treasury spokesperson of the far-right Reform UK, which is neck-and-neck with Labour in general election polls, stated that Healey’s comments “confirmed what the rest of us already knew... Andy Burnham isn’t a fresh start — he’s just continuity Labour with a new face”.



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