

Defence Secretary Wes Streeting: Britain must be ready for war in “a little over 1,000 days”

Robert Stevens
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Labour’s Defence Secretary Wes Streeting has declared that Britain must be ready to fight a war in 1,000 days. Writing in Sunday’s *Telegraph*, Streeting warned that by 2030 Britain’s adversaries’ “force strength and war economy could put them in a position to attack.” Therefore, “My defining priority... is to make sure that this country is ready to fight and win a war. That is the only metric that counts.”

Streeting continued, “To prevent the worst, we have to prepare for it. In the first instance, that means expanding our capabilities so our adversaries think twice about attacking us. Should that fail, we must ensure that Britain is ready for war.”

The op-ed concluded, “That gives us a little over 1,000 days to complete our mission: to be ready with our allies to fight and win. This Government will make sure it is mission accomplished.”

The only adversary named by Streeting was Russia. He stated that the main threats to Britain were not simply the danger of “conventional warfare, or Russian tanks rolling across our borders”, but “the growing threat of state sponsored terrorism, sabotage and hostile acts designed to disrupt our lives, undermine our security and spread fear in our communities.”

Hardly a day goes by when Moscow is not accused of engaging in “hybrid warfare” against the UK via the means Streeting described.

Three days before Streeting’s intervention, the Cabinet Office published new “Be Ready” advice—kicking off a three-year campaign which urges every household to stockpile at least three days of food, nine litres of bottled water and other items needed to survive without access to supermarkets or electronic payments. The government said that being “emergency ready” was necessary to plan for “severe weather to cyber attacks, emergencies” that

“can disrupt the services you rely on.”

Streeting’s intervention makes clear that the new guidance is really about war, as tensions with Russia are dialled up. The message is: if war starts, fend for yourself. Many households—after 15 years of austerity and a surge in the cost of living—cannot afford to stock up a pantry full of tinned food, water and other supplies.

Similar instructions are already standard across Europe. Governments that have waged NATO’s war against Russia in Ukraine for almost five years are pushing “whole-of-society” preparation for direct conflict with Moscow. In March 2025, the European Commission’s Preparedness Union Strategy proposed that European Union citizens should “adopt practical measures, such as maintaining essential supplies for a minimum of 72 hours in emergencies.”

The demand that the working class pay for rearmament and war is being raised in ruling circles everywhere. It is provoking mass opposition, with hundreds of thousands of young people and workers taking to the streets across Europe against cuts to social spending and escalating militarism. An Ipsos poll this month found that nearly half (48 percent) of adults say there are “no circumstances where they would be willing to take up arms and go to war for Britain.”

Streeting’s comments and the “Be Ready” campaign are calculated efforts to drive this rising opposition to militarism out of the news and encourage instead an “all-in-it-together” patriotism.

Since coming to office, and naming Russia as the UK’s main threat, Prime Minister Andy Burnham has committed £8.4 billion to Dreadnought nuclear-armed submarines, handed Ukraine the Stone Cloak electronic networks jamming technology, and pledged in Kyiv on August 24 to release classified blueprints so Ukraine can

build its own long-range Storm Shadow missiles.

This is despite Moscow warning the UK in August that its increased backing for Ukraine could lead to “catastrophic consequences,” with “British military installations and equipment in Ukraine and beyond its borders” potential targets.

On September 2, at a press conference in Bishkek after the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit, Putin was asked whether British defence-industrial facilities on British territory could become Russian targets in response to UK arms supplies to Ukraine. He replied, “That’s a secret. A military secret.”

Central to the war fever are demands that military spending is ramped up in Chancellor John Healey’s first budget, on October 28, under Burnham, at the expense of welfare and wider social spending. Healey resigned as defence secretary on June 11 under Burnham’s predecessor, Keir Starmer, accusing the Treasury of being “unwilling to commit the resources that the nation needs to defend the country.”

As Burnham has not yet committed to spending 3 percent of GDP on core military expenditure by 2030, Streeter complained that war readiness was “getting lost amidst a fixation with percentages and dates.” He declared himself “100 percent confident” that the NATO target of 3.5 percent by 2035 would be met.

In a speech with the hallmarks of Downing Street co-ordination, the head of the British Army—Chief of the General Staff General Sir Roly Walker—addressed 700 soldiers at Catterick Garrison in North Yorkshire on October 15. “Our nation is going to need you,” Walker said, pointing at the troops, and warning of “extreme jeopardy in the world at the moment. And the business of soldiering is coming back into the nation’s psyche”

Walker said, “There was a time that our nation didn’t want to think of a time when it would need its soldiers to fight in a war”, but “very soon the political leaders of this country will start to have a frank conversation with the citizens of this country, about just what is going on and where the risk lies.”

Citizens “have got to consent to sacrifices to prioritise defence and security”. This meant “ultimately, we’re going to need them to back us, to back you, to do the one thing that you do that nobody else gets to do, and that is to take the fight to the enemy.”

Walker singled out the younger generation. “There is no other environment to my mind where the burden of fighting is placed squarely on the shoulders of our most inexperienced and junior soldiers, than in our land forces.

And I’m looking at you because it’s on you that the defence of this nation will rest, if ultimately, you are called to fight.”

What these sacrifices will be was laid out in Walker’s speech to the annual Land Warfare Conference organised by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) think tank on June 23. He declared then that “in an alliance, blood is the hardest and most precious currency that we can contribute,” as he revealed plans for a “second army” of recalled ex-service personnel for homeland defence.

Ramping up pressure on the incoming Burnham premiership, with Starmer having resigned the day before, Walker told RUSI, “perhaps, who knows, this is just speculation, not a policy position, but you may even need to go to a third army should we find ourselves looking at the long war.”

Conservative opposition leader Kemi Badenoch seized on Walker’s latest speech. “A powerful intervention from the head of the Army,” she posted on October 17. “Something is coming, and government needs to wake up... I have been clear where I would start: cut welfare spending and put the money into defence.”

Military figures have stepped up the campaign leading up to budget day on Wednesday. On October 21, former army officer Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Crawford told the *Express* that the government was “either unwilling or unable to fund defence properly,” demanding 3 percent immediately and 5 percent by the decade’s end. “If defence isn’t funded properly, and push comes to shove, we won’t need a welfare budget,” he said, “because we’ll be under someone else’s rule.”

The *Sunday Times* trailed that Healey would unveil “billions of pounds of new defence spending”, channelled through the National Wealth Fund and British Business Bank and financed by long-term borrowing. The paper considered this a “downpayment” on reaching the NATO targets.

Last Friday’s *Times* editorial insisted, “John Healey must seize the chance to tackle profligate spending” and backed Andy Haldane, former Bank of England chief economist and one-time adviser to Burnham: “He [Haldane] is right that Mr Burnham needs to ‘take the knife’ to spending.”



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