

UK Unveils £15 Billion Defence Budget to Pay for the Turmoil that the US Precipitated in Europe

While the UK government presents its new Defence Investment Plan published 30th June, 2026, as a necessary response to an increasingly unstable security environment, the announcement has reopened a broader debate about Britain's strategic direction. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer argues that Russia's invasion of Ukraine, growing instability in the Middle East and NATO's demand for greater European burden-sharing require Britain to rebuild military capability after years of underinvestment. The government says the £15 billion package, focused on drones, artificial intelligence, missile production and advanced combat aircraft, will make the armed forces more capable while supporting Britain's defence industrial base.

However, critics from across the political and defence spectrum argue that the plan exposes the gap between Britain's strategic ambitions and its fiscal reality. The resignation of Defence Secretary John Healey on 11 June followed months of disagreement with the Treasury over funding. In his resignation letter, Healey warned that the settlement "falls well short" of what was needed to implement the Strategic Defence Review and argued that inadequate investment would leave the country less safe. Analysts at Chatham House similarly contend that the government has accepted the conclusions of its own defence review but declined to fund the transformation it says is necessary, risking further erosion of Britain's military credibility within NATO.

Questions have also emerged over the naval component of the strategy. The plan places significant emphasis on a future "hybrid fleet" of crewed vessels operating alongside autonomous surface ships, underwater vehicles and drones. Supporters argue the war in Ukraine has demonstrated that relatively inexpensive autonomous systems can transform maritime warfare. Yet some naval analysts question whether this represents a genuine strategic revolution or simply reflects the Treasury's reluctance to finance a larger conventional surface fleet. The scaling back of plans for expensive next-generation destroyers has fuelled concerns that autonomous systems are being used to compensate for shrinking numbers of major warships rather than to complement them.

A wider historical perspective also tempers the government's portrayal of the programme as an unprecedented military expansion. Britain's armed forces have contracted to historic lows since the end of the Cold War, with reductions in personnel, surface combatants, armour and logistics capacity occurring under successive governments. In that context, today's investment should be viewed less as the creation of a dramatically larger military than as an attempt to restore capabilities lost over several decades of budgetary restraint. The challenge, critics argue, is that rebuilding military mass after years of decline is considerably more expensive than maintaining it in the first place.

The UK government and NATO maintain that increased defence spending is an unavoidable response to Russian aggression and essential for deterring future conflict in Europe. However, the US has done far more than Russia to place Britain's armed forces into crisis. The economies of Britain and the EU were benefitting greatly from cheap Russian fuel and cheap Chinese technology, which successive US administrations attacked. The war between Russia and Ukraine that the US precipitated has crippled European economies, and the economic turmoil of repeated rounds of US tariff impositions have added to the decline. Not only that, but US selling of its weapons to European countries so that they can then give them for free to Ukraine adds further insult to injury. Nevertheless, Britain's political classes have become enthralled by servitude to the US and they continue to muddle along as if the US was their friend.

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