

# UK Prime Minister Sunak warns of nuclear war

Chris Marsden  
13 May 2024

UK Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak warned Monday, “The world is closer to a dangerous nuclear escalation than at any point since the Cuban missile crisis.”

He did so in a speech launching the Tory party’s general election campaign citing an existential threat “that the next few years will be some of the most dangerous yet the most transformational our country has ever known.”

Speaking at the Policy Exchange think-tank, Sunak attributed all blame for the threat of nuclear conflict to Russian President Vladimir Putin, and of war in general to “An axis of authoritarian states like Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China... working together to undermine us and our values.”

Sunak declared: “War has returned to Europe, with our NATO allies warning that if Putin succeeds in Ukraine, they might be next. War rages, too, in the Middle East as Israel defends itself not only against the terrorists of Hamas but a barrage of missiles fired—for the first time—directly from Iran. Right now in Africa, conflicts are being fought in 18 different countries...”

Sunak turns everything on its head, attributing the escalation of war across continents and its attendant horrors to the states targeted for aggression by the UK, the United States and other imperialist powers as they seek unchallenged control of world resources and markets.

Confirming this reality, however, his speech proposed no measures to lessen the danger of a direct conflict between nuclear armed states. He instead pledged that the Tories were the party to be trusted to wage war at whatever cost.

“The highest priority of a Conservative government is to keep our country safe,” he insisted. “We’ve proudly taken the generational decision to increase defence

spending to a new baseline of 2.5 percent of GDP, by 2030. Yet Labour have refused to match our pledge.”

Sunak raised again the bogeyman of Labour’s brief turn to the left under Jeremy Corbyn, who declared his opposition to NATO and “our nuclear deterrent, the ultimate guarantor of our security”, before he capitulated to his party’s right-wing.

“Labour want to pretend this is all ancient history, but it is not and it should worry us. Because the defence of our country and our values requires seriousness of purpose, moral clarity, and the willingness to make big choices and sacrifices elsewhere to fund it.”

Sunak’s “moral clarity” consisted of linking waging war to an anti-migrant witch-hunt to an assault on democratic rights and the evisceration of essential social services.

After acknowledging that a “world of greater conflict and danger” means that “100 million people are now displaced globally,” he alleged that “Countries like Russia are weaponising immigration for their own ends.” We “can and will protect ourselves against illegal migration,” he said. “That’s why we’re pioneering the Rwanda scheme. And so, when people see that if they come here illegally, they will be swiftly detained and removed... And if the Strasbourg Court make me choose between the [European Convention on Human Rights] and this country’s security, I will choose our country’s security every single time.”

Promising a clampdown on anti-genocide and anti-war protests, he asserted that “People are abusing our liberal democratic values—the freedom of speech and right of protest—to intimidate, threaten and assault others, to sing antisemitic chants on our streets and our university campuses...”

He boasted, “We’ve reformed welfare by capping benefits and introducing Universal Credit to help [i.e.,

force] people into work.”

After hearing this diatribe, Britain’s media reporters rose as one... to question whether the Tories were serious about waging war against Russia to the very end. LBC Radio raised a *Sunday Times* report that Foreign Secretary David Cameron had persuaded Donald Trump to back more funding for Ukraine based on the premise that he could then secure a peace deal after becoming president in November. LBC’s reporter demanded assurances that “the West is not about to force Ukraine into taking a peace deal,” and was backed by Channel 4 asking, “Are we now in favour of a deal?”

Sunak countered that “we have led when it comes to Ukraine,” including “being the first to provide new capabilities whether that was tanks, the decision I made main battle tanks, long-range weapons...”

For Labour’s part, Starmer responded to Sunak’s jibes by telling reporters that the government has no “credible plan” for national security and that he understands “first-hand the importance of national security” from working as director of public prosecutions.

“This government talks about national security, but what’s its record? It’s hollowed out our armed forces,” he countered, “We’re more serious than that. We’re a changed Labour Party which puts our country first and our party second.”

This is only Labour’s initial response. Sunak has thrown down the military spending gauntlet and stressed the Tories refusal to back down from nuclear war. Labour will respond in kind.

Starmer has for months been stressing that Labour is “the party of NATO” as he has backed the bloody slaughter in Ukraine, supporting Israel’s genocide in Gaza and US plans for war against Iran and China. Last month, during a visit to BAE Systems weapons manufacturer, Starmer declared for the third time that he would, in office, authorise the use of nuclear missiles.

There is no real difference between the Tories and Labour on all essential issues. They rail against each other only to prove which is the most pro-business, most ready to impose austerity, has the best policy to clampdown on migration—and who can lead British imperialism in a global struggle for the redivision of the world that threatens disaster.

Millions of workers and young people are becoming aware of this fact, especially those who have taken to the streets week on week to oppose the support of Sunak and Starmer for Israel’s genocide in Gaza. But the essential conclusion that must be drawn is that workers need to build their own party and to determine what kind of party must be built.

Sunak’s speech reveals again how advanced are the dangers facing the working class in Britain and internationally. He speaks openly of nuclear war with Russia, while boasting that his only response is to spend more on weapons and to pledge that there will be no negotiated settlement. And this is the response in Washington, Paris and Berlin and every imperialist capital the world over.

The Socialist Equality Party will stand candidates in the upcoming general election dedicated to the development of a mass independent political movement of workers and young people against the genocide in Gaza, the war in Ukraine and the plans for war against Iran and China. Our party is opposed to the war criminals in the Tory and Labour parties.

We fight for the overthrow of capitalism and for socialism, uniting workers all over the world in a common struggle. We do so in alliance with all our comrades in the International Committee of the Fourth International, including in Germany where our sister party is standing in this summer’s European elections, and in the United States where the SEP is fielding Joseph Kishore as its presidential candidate against Trump and “Genocide Joe” Biden. This is the party that workers and young people must join if a global conflagration is to be averted.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**