

# Starmer pledges to make UK military “fit to fight”

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Sir Keir Starmer has pledged that a future Labour government would make Britain’s armed forces “fit to fight,” with “the rumble of war rolling across our continent.”

In a keynote speech on national security, answering Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Labour leader Starmer addressed an audience including military veterans at the Fusilier Museum in Bury, Greater Manchester. The museum traces the history of the Lancashire Fusiliers, which fought two battles against Russia in the Crimean war. Prior to entering Downing Street, Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and Labour’s Tony Blair—both idolised by Starmer—visited the museum.

Stood behind Starmer, between two Union Jacks on flagpoles, were Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey and 10 of the 14 Labour candidates who are ex-military figures. Several times in his speech and in the Q&A session, Starmer boasted this number was a record for the party.

The candidates, described by the LabourList blog as “Keir’s Army”, are not only frontline soldiers but also high-ranking officers and members of the intelligence sector of the armed forces.

Louise Jones, a former army intelligence officer, was joined by Mike Tapp, another former army intelligence operator, who is standing in Dover. The constituency’s previous, Conservative MP—the anti-immigration agitator Natalie Elphicke—has just defected to Labour citing the party’s pledge to crack down on immigrants.

Healey introduced Starmer by saying, “It was a Labour government after the Second World War that established NATO and our independent UK nuclear deterrent”. He confirmed that Labour “will spend 2.5 percent of GDP on defence to deal with the increasing threats.” Labour’s first-year-in-office defence review would “reinforce homeland protections and deter Russian aggression”.

This was Starmer’s second speech on the issue of

national security in the space of a week. In his first on May 27, titled “Country First, Party Second”, he stated that the “very foundation of any good government is economic security, border security, national security... The definition of service. Can you protect this country?”

Starmer said Monday that the “Tories [had] questioned this Labour Party’s commitment to national security. And I will not let that stand.”

He decried how “We have the smallest army since the time of Napoleon, at a time when other countries are firmly on a war footing.”

When the Berlin wall came down, Starmer understood this as “An end of an era,” but today the world “is perhaps more dangerous and volatile than at any time since then”.

Skipping over the events of the last 30 years—including NATO’s advance to Russia’s borders and the 2014 fascist-led, anti-Russian Maidan coup in Kiev—Starmer declared, “I didn’t think that in my lifetime I would see Russian tanks entering a European country again.”

In language similar to that used by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on the steps of Downing Street in declaring this a war election, Starmer stated, “The post-war era is over and a new age of insecurity has begun”. Therefore, “National security is the most important issue of our times” and “will become our solemn responsibility.”

Referring to the nominally “left” leadership of the party under his predecessor Jeremy Corbyn—who despite keeping Britain’s nuclear bombs as part of his 2017/2019 election manifestos said he did not personally want to order their use—Starmer declared this was “the reason why I said—from day one of my leadership—that the Labour Party had to change.” He added, “With my changed Labour Party, national security will always come first.”

As is standard with NATO’s warmongering leaders, Starmer presented beefing up the armed forces as the job of peacemakers, declaring, “So, even as we work

tirelessly for peace, we have to be fit to fight.”

Explaining Labour’s programme he said, “This Labour Party is totally committed to the security of our nation. To our armed forces. And, importantly, to our nuclear deterrent.”

He boasted how last month, “I was the first Labour leader in 30 years who visited BAE Systems in Barrow-in-Furness and I saw the nuclear submarines being made.”

Labour’s policy is that the “nuclear deterrent is the foundation of any plan to keep Britain safe—it is essential. That’s why Labour has announced a new triple-lock commitment to our nuclear deterrent. We’ll maintain Britain’s Continuous at Sea deterrent 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.” As prime minister he would, “Deliver all the needed future upgrades and we will build four new nuclear submarines like the ones I saw in Barrow.”

The cost of the upgrade is staggering, estimated at up to £170 billion, according to Tory defence procurement minister Philip Dunne.

Starmer said, “I mean look at Ukraine now. Industrial capacity is an absolutely critical part of security”, repeating, “So with Labour, Britain will be fit to fight.”

Having stated previously that Labour would lift military spending from its present 2.3 percent of GDP to 2.5 percent—an increase in the tens of billions of pounds—as economic conditions allowed, he said in this speech, “We’re absolutely committed to spending 2.5 percent of GDP on defence as soon as possible, because we know our security isn’t just vital for our safety today, it’s absolutely central to our success for the future.” A war economy was critical because, “National security and economic security must go hand in hand.”

A significant section of Starmer’s speech centred on the threat “at home”. Stating that he had met Ukrainian leader Zelensky in Kiev and made a “pledge of unwavering British support in the face of Russian tyranny,” he cautioned, “But we have to be resolute, not just in our support for Ukraine but also, in this era, at home.” Labour in office “must face down malign actors who try to attack and weaken our nation, and not just through traditional warfare over air, land and sea, but with hybrid threats—to our energy supply, cyber security, information warfare.”

Given the mass opposition to Starmer, who is seen by millions as leading a single party of war together with Sunak for his unwavering support for Israel’s genocide on the Palestinians, it is clear that anti-war protests and workers’ strikes will be branded as seeking to “weaken our nation” in a time of war.

Corbyn was removed as Labour leader—using false

accusations of antisemitism—not due to the few timid reforms he espoused, but because of his stated opposition to pressing the nuclear button and opposition to NATO. Soon after Corbyn’s taking office, a senior serving military figure said that if he came to power on such a policy a mutiny in the Armed Forces would be organised to remove him.

Ever since, every potential prime minister has been questioned as to whether they would authorise using nuclear weapons even at the cost of millions of lives. Trailing Starmer’s speech, the *Guardian* noted, “We have reached the point in the election campaign cycle where the media are asking people if they would push the nuclear button.”

True to form, the first question put to Starmer in the Q&A was from the BBC state broadcaster, whose reporter asked about his readiness to use nuclear weapons. Starmer replied, “My commitment to the nuclear deterrent is absolute... Of course that means we have to be prepared to use it.”

Asked what he thought of shadow cabinet members including shadow foreign secretary David Lammy and his deputy leader Angela Rayner having voted in 2016—under Corbyn’s leadership—against renewing the Trident nuclear weapons arsenal, Starmer responded that he would be prime minister if elected, and his would be the hand poised over the nuclear button, not theirs.

Moreover, such views were old hat and had been banished from the vocabulary of his pro-war party. Starmer boasted, “This is a changed Labour party and the most important thing is I voted in favour of a nuclear deterrent... I lead this party. I’ve changed this party... I’ve got my whole shadow cabinet behind me on this.”

Asked by the *Telegraph*, what was the number one threat to national security, Starmer replied, “The number one threat to national security is not taking it seriously enough. It’s not appreciating that it has to be the number one priority. The threats are obviously threats in relation to Russia, China, and the Middle East.”



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