

Increasing Nukes and Trimming the Military: Global Britain's Skewed Vision

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Campaigners for the abolition of nuclear weapons had every reason to clink glasses with the coming into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in January. Nuclear weapon states and their allies still persisted in calling the document unhelpful and unrealistic; the self-appointed realists have preferred the go-slow approach of disarmament, a form of moderated insanity.

In March, it became clear that the United Kingdom, one of the opponents of the TPNW, had decided not only to look the other way but walk in the opposite direction. The threshold of British nuclear warheads is to be increased to 260, though the authorities maintain an intentional ambiguity about the exact number. This reverses a decision arrived at a decade ago, which promised to cut the maximum threshold for nuclear warheads from 225 to 180 by the middle of this decade. In the words of the Defence Command Paper of the Ministry of Defence, titled [Defence in a Competitive Age](#),

“Some nuclear-armed states are increasing and diversifying their arsenals, while increases in global competition, challenges to the multilateral order, and proliferation of potentially disruptive technologies all pose a threat to strategic stability.”

Such a direction is very much at odds with public support for Britain joining the TPNW. A [poll](#) conducted in January for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament found that 59% of the public expressed support for signing the treaty, including 50% of conservative voters and 68% of Labour voters. The policy also breaches undertakings made under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to pursue efforts to disarm. Beatrice Fihn, Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, [decried](#) the decision as “toxic masculinity on display”, “irresponsible, dangerous and violates international law.” UNA-UK’s Head of Campaigns Ben Donaldson [remarked](#) that the UK government could best “invest in measures to combat climate change and pandemics, not trigger a dangerous new arms race.”

The push towards more nukes would seem to be a compensation for reducing numbers in other areas of defence. While the nuclear arsenal is slated to increase, the number of

soldiers in service will decline: from the current target of 82,040 to 72,500 in 2025. (Even here, a bit of make-believe is taking hold, given that the Army currently has 76,350 soldiers in service.) Effectively, Britain wants to roar with less, all part of what Defence Secretary Ben Wallace [calls](#) “increased deployability and technological advantage”.

The justifications for doing so, outlined in the Defence Command Paper, are the immemorial ones: new threats, new security environments, and a topsy-turvy world.

“The notion of war and peace as binary states,” [writes](#) Wallace in the paper’s foreword, “has given way to a continuum of conflict, requiring us to prepare our forces for more persistent global engagement and constant campaigning, moving seamlessly from operating to war fighting.”

The review identifies “four overarching trends” of concern for the UK: the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific, China’s assertiveness and “the influence of middle powers”; systemic inter-state competition, including between governments with “democratic and authoritarian values”; the challenge of technology, beneficial “but also becoming an arena of intensifying geopolitical competition”; and various transnational challenges requiring “collective action, such as climate change, biosecurity risks, terrorism and serious and organised crime.”

This sounds much an ominous promise to commit Britain to a state of affairs reminiscent of that most absurd of US policies: the waging of permanent war for permanent peace. But Wallace wishes to be farsighted, urging the dinosaurs to move over and forget “the shield of sentimentality to protect previously battle-winning but now outdated capabilities.”

The theatre for this commitment will not just be the conventional ones centred on the NATO alliance. Officially, Britain is again looking east of Suez, with an eye to drawing in old allies. “Our partnerships with Canada, Australia and New Zealand will be at the heart of our tilt towards the Indo-Pacific, as we work to support them to tackle the security challenges in the region.” Central to the “tilt” will be the maritime partnership with India. The object of the exercise is clear enough. “The rising power of China is by far the most significant geopolitical factor in the world today.” Britain had “to be prepared to push back to protect our values and global interests, while maintaining our ability to cooperate in tackling global challenges such as climate change and the mutual benefits of our economic relationship.”

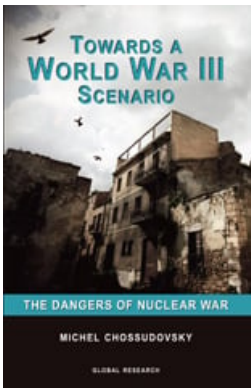
The way this Global Britain vision is going to be achieved is a novel one. Fewer personnel will have fewer tanks (reduced from 226 to 148 upgraded versions). The RAF will oversee the retirement of its older Typhoons (“equipment that has increasingly limited utility in the digital and future operating environment”) and Hercules transport aircraft. The Navy will also farewell its share: two of the oldest T23 frigates. “We will bring Type 31 and Type 32 frigates into service, these new vessels are not just replacements for existing platforms, they will be more flexible than their predecessors.”

The defence paper abounds in the terms of an accountant gone wild, intoxicated by notions of bottom lines and efficiencies. Fleets are to be rationalised or retired; capabilities must be increased; the stress must be on the digital. But on the subject of nuclear weapons, Global Britain’s eyes remain very much focused on the past, shackled to the notion that a greater number of nukes somehow guarantee security. A certifiably barbaric relic of thinking.

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[“Towards a World War III Scenario: The Dangers of Nuclear War”](#)

by Michel Chossudovsky

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Reviews

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–*John McMurtry, Professor of Philosophy, Guelph University*

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–*Denis Halliday, Former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations*

Michel Chossudovsky exposes the insanity of our privatized war machine. Iran is being targeted with nuclear weapons as part of a war agenda built on distortions and lies for the purpose of private profit. The real aims are oil, financial hegemony and global control. The price could be nuclear holocaust. When weapons become the hottest export of the world’s only superpower, and diplomats work as salesmen for the defense industry, the whole world is recklessly endangered. If we must have a military, it belongs entirely in the public sector.

No one should profit from mass death and destruction.

-Ellen Brown, author of 'Web of Debt' and president of the Public Banking Institute



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