



The Defense Budget Is Also a Problem in the United Kingdom - Healey's About-Face and the Conservatives' Prescription

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The debate over national security and **military spending in the United Kingdom is once again at the center of political and media attention**. At the center of the controversy is John Healey, the former resigned Defense Secretary and now Chancellor of the Exchequer in the government led by Andy Burnham.

The former Defense Secretary's change of course

On June 11, John **Healey had resigned as Defense Secretary** in protest against then-**Prime Minister Keir Starmer**, whom he accused of refusing to guarantee an adequate investment plan to raise military spending to 3% of GDP by 2030. In his resignation letter, Healey had issued a stark warning: **the lack of funding would reduce the armed forces' operational readiness, increasing risks to personnel and making the country less**

secure.

Those resignations marked the end of the Starmer government, shortly replaced at the helm of Whitehall by Andy Burnham. **Appointed Chancellor (finance minister) by the new Prime Minister, Healey nevertheless appears to have changed his outlook.**

Despite the determination he had shown just months earlier, Healey has taken no concrete action to unlock the funds needed for Defense. The government is in fact considering postponing the strategic review of public spending until the autumn of next year, delaying all decisions on military investment. A choice criticized as merely a political postponement pending the imminent general election.

The operational and financial crisis at the Ministry of Defence

The postponement of financial decisions risks exacerbating the structural weaknesses of the British Armed Forces. As highlighted by the press and military analyses, the sector's needs are immediate and critical:

- **Budget shortfall:** The Ministry of Defence faces a financial gap estimated at £28 billion in spending plans over the next four years, with an immediate shortfall of £4.7 billion just to cover current costs.
- **Stockpiles and munitions:** UK ammunition stockpiles have been depleted by more than half, while ground-based air defense systems have serious shortfalls.
- **Equipment and maintenance:** Equipment readiness is undermined by a lack of spare parts; currently, none of the Royal Navy's nuclear-powered attack submarines is operational, and only three of the six Type 45 destroyers are available.
- **Controversial strategic choices:** The decision to abandon the Type 83 destroyer project in favor of as-yet unproven drone technologies is viewed by several analysts as a risky spending cut disguised as technological progress.

The Conservatives' proposal: the "Britannia Shield" plan

In the face of the government's uncertainty, **the Conservative Party has sharply criticized Burnham and Healey's hesitation, accusing the government of irresponsibility in the face of growing geopolitical threats from Russia and China.**

At the party's recent conference in Birmingham, the Conservatives presented their prescription for national security:

- **Spending commitment set at 3%:** The Tories reiterate the need to raise defense spending to 3% of GDP by 2030, beginning rearmament immediately.
- **The "Britannia Shield" system:** A £10 billion project has been unveiled to create a missile defense shield inspired by Israel's Iron Dome, designed to protect British territory and overseas bases from ballistic missiles.
- **Preparing for conflict:** Opposition leader Kemi Badenoch and historian Niall Ferguson have reminded the government of the need to "prepare for war if you want to preserve peace," stressing that Britain is now exposed to the threat of long-range missile attacks.

However, doubts also remain about the opposition's proposals: **several military experts point out that a genuine integrated air defense system for the entire United Kingdom would require investment of around £80 billion over ten years, making the Conservatives' estimate significantly understated**