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British Army chief issues call for conscription and “whole of nation mobilisation” for war

General Sir Patrick Sanders, Chief of the General Staff and Head of the British Army, has declared the government must prepare now to “mobilise the nation” for war. He said a “citizen army” would be needed to boost Britain’s armed forces during wartime.

Sanders addressed 1,000 top military leaders, government officials and arms suppliers from around the world at the International Armoured Vehicles Conference (IAVC) in London.



General Patrick Sanders in 2022 [Photo by Open Government Licence v3.0]

He described the civilian population as “a pre-war generation” who must “think like troops” and be “prepared mentally to fight”. This was a “whole-of-nation undertaking”.

Sanders’ speech on Wednesday was framed as a warning that war against Russia could not be won based on the size of the UK’s 74,110 full-time regular army. He called for an expansion in troop numbers to 120,000 within three years, including regular soldiers, reserves and a “strategic reserve” of retired military personnel.

But this expanded professional and reserve army would not be enough. NATO’s war in Ukraine showed that a “civilian army” is needed. “Regular armies start wars; citizen armies win them”.

“Our friends in Eastern and northern Europe, who feel the proximity of the Russian threat more acutely, are already acting prudently, laying the foundations for national mobilisation,” he said. “We need an army designed to expand rapidly to enable the first echelon, resource the second echelon, and train and equip the citizen army that must follow”.

Sanders invoked recent warnings by NATO chiefs and the Swedish government that civilians must be prepared for European-wide military conflict against Russia, up to an including nuclear war.

“As the chairman of the NATO military committee warned just last week, and as the Swedish government has done, preparing Sweden for entry to NATO, taking preparatory steps to enable placing our societies on a war footing when needed are now not merely desirable, but essential.”

Admiral Rob Bauer, chairman of NATO’s Military Committee, told a meeting of top defence chiefs last week that NATO allies must be ready to “find more people if it comes to war”, and consider “mobilisation, reservists or conscription”.

Boris Pistorius, Germany’s defence minister, this week predicted all-out war between Russia and NATO “within five to eight years”. Carl-Oskar Bohlin, Sweden’s Minister for Civil Defence, told civilians they must be war-ready, “Are you a private individual? Have you considered whether you have time to join a voluntary defence organisation? If not: get moving!” Ahead of its entry to NATO, Sweden has recently reintroduced a form of national conscription.

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Media blackout

While Sanders' speech was heavily trailed by the British media, Downing Street intervened to block journalists from obtaining a copy. This sinister prohibition extended to a ban on television networks broadcasting Sanders' speech from the venue.

Sky News Security and Defence Editor Deborah Haynes tweeted Wednesday that "TV cameras weren't permitted to broadcast his speech—unclear why."

The *Guardian* reported the speech had been "released by the British army on behalf of the senior general" but not by the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

But the British Army's press office (run by the MoD) refused to provide a copy to the *World Socialist Web Site*. A press officer confirmed that Sanders' speech "has not and will not" be made available. The MoD refused to give a reason. The *Guardian's* Defence Editor did not reply to our request for a copy of the speech, in keeping with its role as a mouthpiece for the military and intelligence agencies.

By Wednesday night, the *Times*, *Telegraph* and *Independent* were reporting that Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office had intervened to prevent Sanders' speech being aired or published.

Sunak's official spokesperson told media outlets that "hypothetical scenarios" about future conflicts were "not helpful". His office claimed there were "no plans" for conscription.

The *Times* reported, "No 10 has repeatedly blocked military chiefs from speaking to the media and insiders have blamed Rishi Sunak for being paranoid about messaging before the general election."

The reason for Sunak's intervention is clear: nothing must be done to alert the British public to the catastrophic consequences of the government's escalating military operations with US and NATO powers across the globe.

In this election year, with approximately half the world's population going to the polls, capitalist governments are determined to prevent any discussion or debate on the life and death issue of war. No opposition will be brooked, either to imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza, or to an expanding global war by NATO powers extending from Ukraine to the Middle East and by the AUKUS military alliance which is spearheading a military build-up against China.

The opposition of millions of ordinary people toward genocide and war could not be clearer, with mass protests sweeping the globe. As news of Sanders' speech spread

yesterday, #Conscription trended across social media. A poll by actor Ricky Tomlinson on Twitter/X asked: “Would you sign up and fight for King and Country?” It was viewed more than 45,000 times, with 93 percent voting “no” to conscription.

Thousands more angrily denounced the mere suggestion of military conscription. Comments on Twitter/X included, “National service? Rich people asking poor people to die for a country they give zero f***s about”, and: “If they think, for one second that they’re sending my 21 year old son to be cannon fodder for rich idiots who can’t govern, they can f*** right off. Literally, over my dead body.”

Tory-Labour war alliance

Mass anti-war sentiment is colliding not just with the Tories but with a Labour Party demonstrating total commitment to war and domestic political repression. Leader Sir Keir Starmer has openly backed Israel’s genocide in Gaza, branding protests in defence of the Palestinian people as “hate marches” and opposition to Israel’s fascist government as “antisemitism” that must be eradicated.

Yesterday, Starmer posted on Twitter/X that “Labour will always act in the national interest to protect Britain’s security at home and abroad”. It included a video of his speech to the House of Commons backing British air strikes against Yemen, declaring, “Let me be clear, we back this targeted action to reinforce maritime security in the Red Sea... we must stand united and strong”.

Labour and the Tories function as a single party of war. Starmer has provided seamless backing to Britain’s military deployment to the Middle East since October 7, including bombing raids on Lebanon aimed at preparing for war against Iran. British surveillance aircraft are actively supporting Israel’s genocide from RAF bases in Cyprus.

Sunak has no differences with Sanders, he merely wants to keep further British war planning, including plans for conscription, under wraps. His Defence Secretary Grant Shapps delivered a speech last week at Lancaster House in which he declared a historic shift from a “post-war to a pre-war world”.

Shapps described the fall of the Berlin Wall as a “distant memory”, saying the “peace dividend” following the end of the Cold War was over. He repeated the government’s pledge to raise Britain’s NATO military commitment to 3 percent of GDP, warning, “In five years’ time we could be looking at multiple theatres [of war]” and blaming Russia, China, Iran and North Korea for upending the “rules-based order”. It was a narrative belied by three decades of imperialist violence since the first Gulf War in 1990-91 that has killed and maimed millions.

While the government sought to downplay Sanders' call for conscription, Britain's former NATO commander General Sir Richard Sherriff told *Sky News* Thursday that current global challenges and cuts to defence since the end of the Cold War meant, "we need to get over many of the cultural hang-ups and assumptions, and frankly think the unthinkable."

"I think we need to go further and look carefully at conscription," he said.

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