

Who are we defending in the UK?

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Who and what are we defending in the UK? It's a question in need of an answer. As politicians and politicians demand more defence spending, whose rights are we defending, and so who should pick up the bill?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-M6_hEDwwjs&si=Gzy12kMIDDgml-T5

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=t9gb2-18068b1-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

What are we defending?

This is a question which I raised in a radio discussion I took part in with Nicky Campbell on Radio 5 Live. The other participant was Anthony King, a professor at the University of Exeter, and actually, the exchange, including the contributions made by three people who phoned in, were all really good. A half hour radio programme which comes together like that is very rare in my experience because too often radio phone-ins don't work.

But I raised this particular question. If we are going to increase defence spending in the

UK, and that is the demand that Donald Trump is making of us - that is the promise that Labour has made for us - and we just don't know by how far that sum is going to go up - what is it that we are defending, for whose benefit, and how does that influence the decisions that we're going to make about who is going to pay for this, and why?

Now, let's be clear. We are clearly under threat at present. The world is a more dangerous place because of the election of Donald Trump to the US White House than it has been, in my opinion, for quite a long time because inevitably, we are going to see a couple of major world leaders - Xi in China and Putin in Russia - who are going to be emboldened by the presence of Trump, who is saying he is going to walk away from the world stage and leave Europe or wherever else to defend themselves, and good luck Taiwan.

So, we are definitely in a different world, a world where, if we have relied on US support, we can no longer do so. A certainty has disappeared, and that is creating a crisis, not least because there is, of course, an ongoing war in Ukraine, the outcome from which we cannot know, and the consequence of any solution to which is uncertain because we do not know whether, if Putin thinks he's won territory there - which it now seems inevitable he will - he will want to go on and do the same in the Balkan* states, for example, and maybe in Finland, or even Poland. So, these questions are all on the agenda again.

The likelihood of the UK being in the front line is, let's be clear, low. There isn't an obvious capacity for Russia to invade the UK. But it does have a capacity to seriously threaten the UK, nonetheless.

Nuclear weapons still do exist, although I do genuinely believe that most world leaders would never want to use them, but they don't need to in a world where there are drones, which are now capable of flying very long distances with standard weapons, but which are nonetheless deeply lethal, but even more so in a world where cyber warfare is so easy to simply bring the UK down by attacking IT systems, which would be a fairly straightforward exercise. We have seen successful cyber-attacks on the NHS, for example, and on businesses, too, and these could expand. So, there is a need for better defence, particularly if the US was a party to some of the defence systems on those issues that we were previously involved with.

But the question that I also tried to ask during this phone in discussion was, "What are the consequences of spending more on defence?" Because it's not just a matter of money. We do know that governments can always find the money for defence.

We do know, in practice, that the government can always find the money for anything because, as we also know, modern monetary theory makes clear that any government can, if authorised to do so, spend money created by its central bank to fulfil its objectives. It may create inflation as a consequence if it does not appropriately manage the actual, real, physical resources within the economy, but it can always find the

money.

And when it comes to defence, there never seems to be any limit to the amount that is available, particularly in times of stress, which is what we're living through. So, money is actually not the point of debate on defence at present. Money. is a sideshow which follows from the real consequences of increasing the defence expenditure in this country.

And what is the real consequence of increasing that defence expenditure? It means the productive capacity is shifted from other things that people want towards defence, so people who are currently working as teachers or baristas or in the BBC or making videos will instead be marching around army squares, learning how to use a rifle and getting ready to be in the infantry front line. They might also be learning how to fly RAF jets or go to sea or whatever else it might be.

My point is that if we're going to increase defence spending significantly, more people are going to be in the armed forces. They are, therefore, not going to be doing something else. There is a real, physical, tangible, actual cost to this reallocation of resources, just as there will be if we want to increase the amount of armaments that we produce.

And it is an acknowledged fact, I think, amongst almost all commentators, that we have remarkably small quantities of physical armaments available to us in the UK. But what manufacturing capacity do we give up as a result?

Are we going to reduce the number of cars on the road, for example? Are we going to change the use of some of those highly sophisticated factories used for that purpose to make, well, tanks, small armoured vehicles, parts of planes, you name it, whatever they might be able to do with their robots, instead of putting cars that we probably don't really need to replace as often as we do down production lines?

But there's another real consequence of that decision to reallocate resources, and we have to go back and look at what happened in the Second World War. And in that Second World War, the consequence of armaments was that consumption was crushed. It had to be because otherwise, we could not quite simply have beaten Hitler and the Nazis. I don't say we beat Germany; we beat the tyranny of fascism. And the process of doing so required that we gave up substantial amounts of material consumption.

Clothing became hard to secure. Food became rather basic. Cars basically disappeared. Petrol was rationed, and so was much else. And the point was that those who had consumed a lot could no longer do so. In fact, the point was exactly that. We all had the same ration when it came to food, the same ration when it came to petrol, although most people didn't have a car, so that made very little difference, and the same ration when it came to clothing. My mother always told me about the fact that when my parents were getting married, she, her friends, her parents and relatives had to save up

clothing coupons so that she could get a wedding dress. It was that difficult.

The fact is that that was the price that was paid to have a war.

Who is going to pay that price now? Because what I'm reading are questions by people like Andrew Neil, who's saying America is demanding that we increase our defence spending, and we should do so at the expense of the social care budget of the UK because why should America have been subsidising welfare benefits in this country at cost to people in the USA?

Let's ignore the fact that actually, the US didn't pay that cost because actually the USA paid for it on a deficit, which was the consequence of the US having to create the reserve currency of the world, which it put into circulation, increasing its total deficit as a consequence, and therefore the US never suffered any penalty for doing this, but let's also look at the stupidity, and I use the word wisely, of the comments made by Andrew Neil, because if defence is going to work, it has to be for the benefit of everyone. You can't, therefore, punish the poor for it. Because like it or not - and he doesn't seem to realise this - most people on benefits in the UK not only deserve them but are absolutely dependent upon them and are still living in poverty.

Therefore, the price of defence cannot fall on the most vulnerable in this country, who we have a duty to defend as a basic right within the state that we are. If we don't defend their right to survive, what are we trying to defend?

Actually, we are trying to defend the wealthy. Let's be clear about it. The people who are most vulnerable in the UK to attack from outside it are the wealthy, who would find that the assets that they owned would become the property of somebody else. That is what war is always ultimately about. War is always about the desire to control physical resources and the desire to control streams of taxation revenue in a subjugated state.

And at present, the taxation revenues are paid largely by the wealthy, and the control of the physical assets belongs very largely to the wealthy. So, if we are to increase the amount of money spent on defence, it is the wealthy who must pay for it because they are going to get the benefit from it. And it is their consumption that must suffer if we are going to reallocate people and resources into defence personnel and manufacturing.

This is the existential crisis that we have to actually address. The fundamental philosophical, economic, social, anthropological, and basic societal question about a threat from an external force is, who are we defending?

What is it that we're defending that they have?

And why should they pay for it?

And the answer, in every single case in the UK, is the wealthy are being defended. It is

they who should pay for it, because it is they who will lose most if we are under attack. And as a consequence, we've answered that question.

We do need more defence, because undoubtedly we're at risk. But if there's a price to pay, it has to come out of the excess consumption of the wealthy, and it has to come out of the additional taxes that they will be able to pay as a consequence. And I stress that point. They will be able to pay as a consequence because we are going to deny them access to resources to consume in the excessive manner they already have.

And this is the reality we're going to face. War, or the threat of war, and the need for increased defence requires that we ask questions of this sort. And that's the type of analysis that we need to undertake to come up with the answers that are appropriate about the situation that we now find ourselves in, which is going to require us to reframe the whole question of what is the state about in the UK and maybe quite appropriately.

** This should obviously be Baltic states. This video was recorded without a script, notes or very much preparation time. Mistakes happen.*