

# Resisting Rearmament

A Unified Path  
Forwards for the  
British Left



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# Resisting Rearmament: A Unified Path Forwards for the British Left

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## About Climate Vanguard

Climate Vanguard is a youth-led organisation empowering youth movements through radical political education.

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## About Energy Embargo for Palestine

Energy Embargo for Palestine is an anti-imperialist organisation based in Britain responding to the call from Palestinian trade unions to disrupt the flow of energy to Israel.

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Figure 1: Workers for a Free Palestine outside an arms factory in Kent, England. Workers for a Free Palestine.

## Introduction

The crises of late-stage capitalism have caused a historic decline in the living standards of the British working class, with an increasing number of people struggling to afford food, energy, and housing.<sup>1</sup> Rooted in decades of neoliberalism, this general crisis of social reproduction has been propelled by the 2008 financial collapse and the ensuing crises of austerity, Brexit, COVID-19, the NATO-led proxy war in Ukraine, and accelerating ecological breakdown.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of pursuing an eco-socialist transition programme centred on the expansion of universal basic services and a green jobs guarantee, the Labour Government is committing to a strategy of rearmament in order to maintain its vassalage to the US empire.

This brief argues that the British left should unite in resisting rearmament. Diverting public spending from the military to an eco-socialist transition programme would provide material gains for the British working class, weaken imperialism, isolate the far right, and protect the planetary conditions for an eco-socialist future. It is a uniquely powerful intervention that connects anti-imperialism to improved livelihoods in the Global North, enabling higher forms of internationalist class consciousness and political struggle.

This brief begins with an overview of the 'special relationship' between the US and Britain. It then analyses how the British ruling class is camouflaging rearmament as a means for economic rejuvenation, rather than the real purpose of sustained fealty to the US. It concludes with a four-point movement case for resisting British rearmament.

# The 'Special Relationship' of British Subordination to US Empire

Since 1945, Britain's position within the world system has shifted from global hegemon to the sub-imperialist partner of the US. As US hegemony weakens, Britain is only increasing its subordination to the dictates of Washington.<sup>a</sup>

## A Brief History of the 'Special Relationship'

After World War II, a bankrupt Britain signed the 1946 Anglo-American Loan Agreement. Economic reliance on the US paved the way to increased geopolitical subservience. In 1949, the Labour Government joined NATO, the global command architecture of the US military.<sup>3</sup>

Britain went on to assist the US in the opening attacks of the Cold War, including the genocidal war on Korea (1950-1953) and Operation Ajax (1953), which ousted Mohammad Mossadegh as the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran.<sup>4</sup> In 1956, Britain joined the Zionist entity and France in the Tripartite Aggression against Egypt over its nationalisation of the Suez Canal, only to later pull back due to US pressure.<sup>5</sup> This marked Britain's humiliating demotion from imperial hegemon to US geopolitical appendage.<sup>6</sup> Six years later, it signed the Nassau Agreement, which gave the US effective control over its nuclear deterrent.<sup>7</sup>

This 'special relationship' with the US has remained the keystone of British foreign policy during the current neoliberal period, which began after Margaret Thatcher's election in 1979. Successive Conservative and Labour Prime Ministers have supported US-led wars against Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Russia, and Palestine. Today, Britain hosts at least 24 US military and intelligence sites and over 11,912 US military personnel.<sup>8</sup>

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a Following the Tricontinental Institute's analysis on hyper-imperialism, we argue that the US has become progressively weaker since the financial collapse in 2008 ([Tricontinental Institute, 2024](#)).

## The 'Special Relationship' Amidst US Hegemonic Crisis

Like other empires before it, the US has lost or is losing control over the three pillars of hegemony: production, finance, and military power.<sup>9</sup> The Global South (56.3%) now outstrips the US-led Global North (43.7%) in value added from industrial production, while US financial power is under threat from a rising tide of de-dollarisation.<sup>10, b</sup>

The one area in which the US still holds a clear qualitative edge is the military. The US controls 74.3% of annual military spending (over \$2 trillion) through its NATO+ bloc and maintains at least 902 military bases around the world.<sup>11, c</sup> In an attempt to stop its hegemonic decline, the US is leveraging its immense military power to pressure its allies and weaken its geopolitical adversaries.<sup>12</sup>

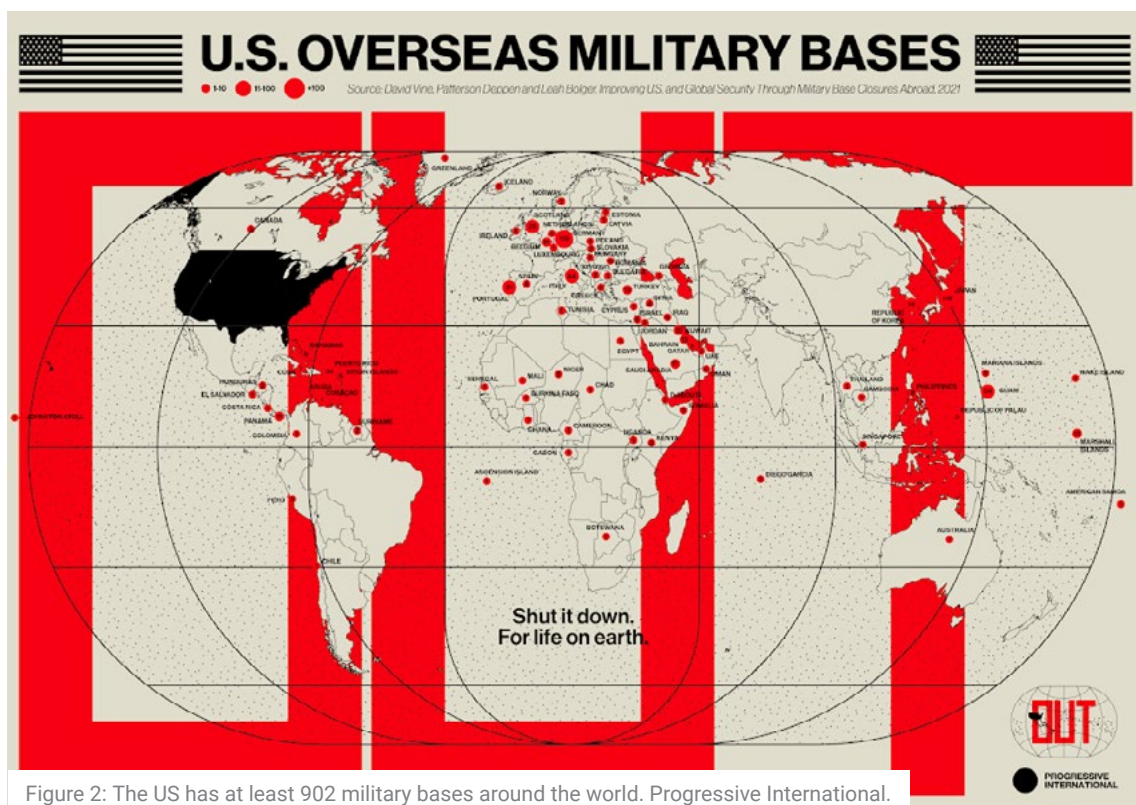


Figure 2: The US has at least 902 military bases around the world. Progressive International.

b Since 1945, the US dollar has been the main currency used for global trade, finance, and central banking. But its power as the global reserve currency has gradually declined. This has been recently evidenced by investors swapping dollar-denominated assets for gold and other currencies like the Chinese renminbi (Roberts, 2026).

c NATO+ includes non-NATO members with formal military ties with the US, such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea (Tricontinental Institute, 2024).

It is within this context that the US has used the 'special relationship' with Britain to extract more economic and geopolitical leverage.<sup>13</sup> The British ruling class has offered no resistance, opting to instead jostle amongst other junior imperialist partners to maintain its status as the premier US vassal state. This has resulted in the Labour Government's pledge to increase military spending from 2.3% to 2.5% of GDP by 2027 and 3.5% of GDP by 2035, following other European countries in meeting US-NATO spending demands.<sup>14, d</sup>

## Camouflaging Rearmament as Economic Rejuvenation

The British ruling class is branding rearmament as a solution to the dire symptoms of late-stage capitalism. However, rearmament does not increase security for the working class. Rather, it is a ruling-class strategy to maintain the 'special relationship' through economic submission to US monopoly capital.

### The Economic Myths of Rearmament

Labour's rearmament plans come amidst a general crisis of social reproduction within the British working class.

One in four adults and over one in three children languish in poverty.<sup>15</sup> People, especially youth, are unable to find stable employment or afford decent housing, with the rate of homelessness in Britain topping all other developed countries.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, councils are facing bankruptcy after a decade of austerity and the NHS is undergoing managed collapse.<sup>17</sup> Underlining this crisis is the fact that England, North Ireland, Wales, and Scotland are the top four countries in Europe with the largest decline in life expectancy improvement.<sup>18</sup>

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d The 3.5% target is part of a larger NATO pledge to reach 5% of spending on "national security" by 2035. 3.5% is earmarked for "core defence," while the additional 1.5% is for "resilience and security" spending (Prime Minister's Office, 2025).

Within this landscape of social immiseration, Labour has attempted to promote military spending as “a new engine for growth” that “will renew industrial communities the length and breadth of our country,” unlocking higher wages and jobs.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 3: Labour Defence Secretary John Healey opens a new arms factory in Sheffield, England. James Robinson.

Empirical evidence suggests otherwise. Since 1980, the British arms industry has shed 241,000 jobs despite military spending increasing in real terms.<sup>20</sup> This is due to a broader shift in the defence sector towards capital intensive and service-oriented production.<sup>21</sup> Manual workers have been increasingly displaced by specialised engineers and IT professionals in the South of England, undermining government claims that defence is an economic boon for de-industrialised communities in the North.<sup>22</sup>

Today, the defence industry is already less economically impactful than other, more socially purposeful sectors. For example, in the 2023/24 fiscal year, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) spent £28.8 billion on defence procurement from UK companies, supporting about 9.4 jobs per £1 million spent. For comparison, Transport for London procurement supports 13.7 jobs per £1 million invested.<sup>23</sup>

## Rearmament in Service of US Empire

British rearmament is not intended to improve the British working class's abysmal standard of living. Rather, rearmament is a form of economic patronage to US monopoly capital in its late-imperial stage.

US monopoly capital dominates the 'British' arms industry. The US asset managers BlackRock, Vanguard, and State Street are the top three shareholders in the British arms sector.<sup>24</sup> BAE Systems, which receives £4 billion in MOD funding each year, is over a quarter-owned by BlackRock and the US investment firm Capital Group.<sup>25</sup> In 2025, BAE paid out £1.5 billion in shareholder dividends, a large portion of which was repatriated to Wall Street.<sup>26</sup>

US tech capital is also behind the MOD's aim to become a "leading tech-enabled defence power."<sup>27</sup> In September 2025, the MOD announced a £1.5-billion partnership with Palantir, a US company that specialises in weaponising data and AI for Western security forces, including ICE and the IDF.<sup>28, e</sup> Labour has also welcomed new production facilities by AI drone manufacturers Stark Defence and Helsing, both of which are funded by US venture capital (VC) firms.<sup>29</sup> This trend will only continue, with Labour aiming to "[close] the gap for venture capital investment into defence with the US by half."<sup>30</sup>

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e ICE is the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency and the IDF is the Israeli Defence Forces.



Figure 4: Labour Defence Secretary John Healey and Palantir CEO Alex Karp agree to a new strategic partnership between the Ministry of Defence and Palantir. GOV.UK.

By subordinating itself to the needs of US monopoly capital, Britain is aligning with the objectives of US imperialism. This is evident in how Britain has supported three key pillars of US grand strategy: the enlargement of NATO, Zionist hegemony in West Asia, and strategic confrontation with the People's Republic of China (PRC):

- 1. NATO Enlargement:** Britain has doubled down on a “NATO First approach” in order to help the US offload geopolitical ‘responsibilities’ in Europe, most importantly by sustaining the NATO-led proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> This has given Washington more freedom to implement its ‘Donroe Doctrine’ in the Western Hemisphere, as was recently shown in the military attack against Venezuela.<sup>32</sup>
- 2. Zionist Hegemony in West Asia:** Britain has been essential in enforcing US-Zionist hegemony in West Asia. It assisted in the US-backed genocide in Palestine by providing intelligence, arms, and diplomatic cover to the Zionist entity, and more recently, joined the US-Zionist war on Iran by providing logistical support to US military planes.<sup>33</sup>
- 3. Confronting the PRC:** Britain is aligned with the US’s main strategic priority: reversing the rise of the PRC.<sup>34</sup> Together with the FBI, MI5 has designated the Communist Party of China as a “threat” to global security.<sup>35</sup> This “new cold war” mentality has legitimised Britain’s membership in AUKUS, a nuclear-submarine partnership designed to project military power against the PRC.<sup>36, f</sup>

## A Four-Point Movement Case for Resisting British Rearmament

Within the growing gap between the material needs of British people and the imperialist needs of the Anglo-American ruling classes, the British left has a great opportunity to build social power and advance the international struggle for eco-socialism. Below, we outline four points to support this argument.

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f AUKUS stands for “Trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.”

## 1. Resisting rearmament can provide material gains to the British working class, while weakening imperialism.

The Labour Government has committed to increasing military spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027, requiring an additional £13.4 billion per year.<sup>37, g</sup> This would increase the total annual defence budget to £80.5 billion from 2027 onwards.<sup>38</sup> To meet its 3.5% target by 2035, the annual defence budget would further balloon to £121.2 billion.<sup>39</sup>

Increased military spending is a direct assault on working-class security. As Ukraine and Iran demonstrate, war drives up the cost of living, especially for energy and food.<sup>40</sup> Military spending also increases the likelihood of a global military confrontation, posing a mortal danger to working-class people who will be forced to enlist.

Alternatively, the vast sums spent on the military could be used to fund an eco-socialist transition programme. For example, a £68 billion public investment, which is the equivalent of about five years of expanded military spending, could create 1.2 million high-quality green jobs in zero-carbon transport, retrofitting, renewable energy, waste treatment, broadband installation, manufacturing, and nature restoration.<sup>41</sup> This is a form of “ecological lightening” that improves working-class life in Britain without sacrificing the land, labour, and lives of people in the Global South.<sup>h</sup>



Figure 5: Solar technicians in the North West of England. Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

g The £13.4 billion figure does not account for inflation.

h The term “ecological lightening” is used by Max Ajl to describe the “Northern face” of eco-socialist transition.

Crucially, the diversion of British military spending would also weaken US imperialism. In the near term, it would increase the military burden on the US, forcing it to over-extend and, ultimately, withdraw from key geopolitical theatres. This would save countless lives in the South from US-led military massacres and ecocidal violence.

Over time, US imperial retreat would create more oxygen for sovereign development in the South, disrupting the value flows that Britain and the wider North depend on for cheap goods and capital accumulation.<sup>42</sup> The resulting contradictions could be seized on by popular political forces in Britain and across the North, pushing a minimal transition programme towards a more maximal eco-socialist horizon.<sup>43</sup>

Resistance to British rearmament presents the left with a unique opportunity to link economic security for the working class in Britain to anti-imperialist solidarity with people in the South. This could raise internationalist political consciousness and help create the material conditions for more advanced eco-socialist struggle.

## **2. Resisting rearmament is a unifying demand that can revitalise and coordinate left social forces through a powerful anti-imperialist coalition.**

Resistance to British rearmament has the potential to re-energise, unite, and direct a scattered left amidst escalating imperialist aggression. As a starting point, we propose that an anti-imperialist coalition should be formed around the demand to divert military spending towards an eco-socialist transition programme centred on universal basic services and a green jobs guarantee. Below, we analyse how this coalition aligns with three different social forces: movements, trade unions, and parties.

### Movements

Over the past two and a half years, the British 'movement left' has been anchored by the struggle against the genocide in Palestine. Much of this organising work has focused on the flow of weapons to the Zionist entity, such as the Palestinian Youth Movement's campaign against the shipping

giant Maersk and Workers for a Free Palestine's repeated blockade of arms factories.<sup>44</sup> Zeroing in on British rearmament fits well within the strategic and tactical repertoires of these organisations.

Other sections of the Palestine movement could also be brought into coalition. For example, Health Workers for a Free Palestine are campaigning against the NHS's data deal with Palantir, which is also playing a key role in enhancing the MOD's tech-enabled "lethality."<sup>45</sup> Similarly, student groups for Palestine could re-focus their organising against university ties with arms companies, a central plank of the MOD's ambition to create a skilled defence workforce.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, resistance to British rearmament has the opportunity to revitalise the climate movement around a more disciplined, eco-socialist politics and strategy. This direction is exemplified by Energy Embargo for Palestine, an anti-imperialist climate organisation targeting BP for its dual role in fuelling the Zionist entity's destruction of Palestine and the Earth.<sup>47</sup> Stop Rosebank's campaigning against Ithaca Energy, an Israeli gas firm exploiting North Sea oil, similarly has the potential to contribute to a new eco-socialist direction for the British climate movement.<sup>48</sup>



Figure 6: The Palestinian Youth Movement protest bloc at the May 17th, 2025 London march commemorating 77 years of ongoing Nakba. PYM Britain.

Lastly, a united movement front against British rearmament could help re-articulate seasoned anti-war organisations like Stop the War and Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament around a more proactive, antagonistic anti-imperialist strategy. In a similar vein, internationalist campaign groups like Cuba Solidarity and Venezuela Solidarity could find strategic depth through more networked anti-imperialist work.

## Trade Unions

Historically, the British trade-union movement has failed to credibly challenge imperialism. This was most recently demonstrated by its inability to materially disrupt the genocide in Palestine, ignoring solidarity calls from Palestinian trade unions.<sup>49</sup> Most British trade unions remain affiliated with the Labour Party despite its role in enabling the genocide.

That being said, there is still potential for a militant rank and file to align behind a workers' demand for 'peace and jobs.' For example, last year, Unite members successfully forced the Executive Council to oppose arms production for the Zionist entity, undermining Secretary General Sharon Graham, who has openly applauded British militarism.<sup>50</sup>



Figure 7: Unite members at a Palestine protest in London. United Left.

With a powerful coalition behind it, rank-and-file struggles could be escalated towards something similar to the 1976 Lucas Plan, a union shop steward proposal to convert military production into “socially-useful products” like wind turbines and heat pumps.<sup>51</sup> From below, workers could model a just transition that divests from capital and war and invests in the wellbeing of people and the planet.

## Parties

The surging Green Party has the opportunity to triangulate movement and trade-union organising against British rearmament within the halls of Parliament. Recently, Green Party Leader Zack Polanski supported the idea of a British exit from NATO and called for a strategic review of military cooperation with the US, including the presence of US military bases in Britain.<sup>52</sup> With additional pressure from eco-socialist formations like Greens Organise, opposition to British rearmament could become the beating heart of an anti-imperialist Greens messaging campaign and policy platform.



Figure 8: Green Party Leader Zack Polanski at a rally in London. Ron Fassbender/Alamy Live News.

Although Your Party has stumbled out of the gates, there is still potential for it to corral its 40,000-plus members into a coalition against British rearmament. Mass listening programmes, social infrastructure, and local campaign work could form the foundation of a longer-term project to develop Your Party and build power against British imperialism.

### 3. Resisting rearmament is a wedge issue that can fracture the far right's coalition.

Far-right forces, led by Reform UK, have stressed the need to “restore Britain’s sovereignty,” which is ‘threatened’ by immigrants, muslims, and ‘globalists.’<sup>53</sup> But its argument for greater sovereignty does not extend to a critique of Britain’s role as a US vassal state. This is because Reform, although posing as an anti-establishment force, is deeply rooted in the British ruling class, with a strong commitment to Anglo-American unity.<sup>54</sup>

Like Labour and the Conservatives, Reform champions the ‘special relationship.’<sup>55</sup> It backs rearmament and is fully aligned with US geopolitical objectives, including the NATO-proxy war against Russia, the genocide in Palestine, the attack on Venezuela, and the war of aggression against Iran.<sup>56</sup>



Figure 9: Reform UK leader Nigel Farage and Donald Trump. Nigel Farage.

There is a real opportunity for the left to expose the far right’s hollow commitment to sovereignty by making the case for sovereign eco-socialism, one that breaks from US bondage in favour of an internationalist foreign policy that strengthens working-class security and wellbeing at home. This could credibly speak to people’s sense of powerlessness and help fracture the far right’s tenuous class coalition.

#### **4. Resisting rearmament is necessary to prevent the two existential threats of our time: thermonuclear war and ecological breakdown.**

According to the MOD's Defence Review, Britain is rearming so that it can be "prepared for high-intensity, protracted war."<sup>57</sup> Recently, Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton warned that British "sons and daughters" must be prepared to fight Russia, which, according to Keir Starmer, "menaces our continent."<sup>58</sup>

This reveals the British and Western ruling classes' dangerous obsession with Russia, a semi-peripheral capitalist country that poses no legitimate threat to Britain or any NATO country.<sup>59</sup> Direct military confrontation with Russia, which has the largest nuclear stockpile in the world (4,309 nuclear warheads), risks thermonuclear global war.<sup>60</sup>

Rearmament also threatens the habitability of the Earth. Since the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015, the US and British militaries have emitted at least 430 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, more than the UK's total emissions in 2022, when it ranked as the 21st largest emitter in the world.<sup>61</sup> The US and Britain's web of 1,047 foreign military bases are also a major source of ecological destruction.<sup>62</sup> Military expansion would place unbearable pressure on the planet, which is already close to a "point of no return."<sup>63</sup>



Figure 10: A plume of smoke rises over Tehran after a US-Israeli strike on March 3rd, 2026. Getty/AFP/Atta Kenare.

## Conclusion

The British ruling class is pursuing rearmament to maintain its golden chains to the US, which is entering its most dangerous imperialist stage. Rearmament will do very little for the British working class amidst a general crisis of social reproduction.

Resisting British rearmament should be a primary strategic focus of the British left. It is a historic opportunity to link material gains for the British working class with the imperative of anti-imperialism, distinguishing the left as a genuine insurgent force as compared to the faux populism of the far right. Moreover, it mitigates the risk of thermonuclear war and ecological breakdown, helping to safeguard the planetary conditions for eco-socialism.

In the process of struggling against British rearmament, the left can build new solidarities with diverse social forces, creating the conditions for higher forms of organisation. If it wins, this stronger left can harness the contradictions of a crumbling imperial order, accelerating the long transition towards eco-socialism.

We encourage comrades within the British left to take this brief as a point of departure, assessing how their own political work could fit into a broader anti-imperialist coalition against British rearmament and, together, take the steps to bring it to life.



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