Global Campaign on Military Spending – UK
Briefing points in advance of the UK government budget announcement

1 March 2021

UK military spending

- In November 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a very large increase in UK military spending.¹
- Total additional spending is approx. £24bn over four years, i.e. an average of £6bn per year (see table and graphs in appendices).²
- The core military budget in 2020-21 was £41.2bn.³ Accounting for inflation, the increase in annual spending averages about 10%.⁴
- This jump is the highest percentage increase in military spending since UK involvement in the Korean War 70 years ago.⁵
- The spending increase is all focused on the ‘capital’ part of the Ministry of Defence’s budget, mainly on military equipment.⁶
- The main elements of the military equipment budget include: submarines and nuclear weapons (the largest); combat aircraft; warships; armoured vehicles; IT; and weapons.⁷
- Newer areas of spending include: armed drones; military artificial intelligence; cyber warfare; military space technologies; and directed energy weapons (e.g. lasers).⁸
- The spending increase is based on a premise that a highly militarised response to international security problems – based on global deployment of offensive weapons technologies – should remain at the heart of the UK foreign and security policy. We contest this view, and argue for alternative spending.⁹
- The core military budget does not include about £6bn per year of additional spending which the UK reports to NATO. This includes military pensions and some peace-keeping activity.¹⁰

Comparisons with other budgets

International development/ overseas aid

- In November 2020, the UK government announced a huge reduction in spending on overseas aid.¹¹
- The budget for overseas aid is determined with reference to an international target, i.e. 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI). The November announcement was that the UK would reduce its aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% GNI.¹²
- The actual monetary reduction from 2020-21 to 2021-22 is £3.3bn (see table and graphs in appendices).¹³ This is on top of a reduction from the previous year due to a number of factors, including the shrinkage of the UK economy due to the COVID-19 crisis and the merger of the Dept for International Development with the Foreign Office. No aid spending figures have yet been published for after 2022.
Reducing UK carbon emissions

- In November, the government announced ‘The ten point plan for a green industrial revolution’, with a budget of £12bn.¹⁴
- On closer inspection, a maximum of only £11bn is earmarked for spending in the next four years, averaging of £2.8bn per year.¹⁵
- In December, the Committee of Climate Change (CCC) published a report which analysed current and future government spending to hit its reduction targets for carbon emissions.¹⁶
- The CCC estimated that government spending in this area for 2020-21 was approximately £5bn. This included £2bn devoted to the Green Homes Grant (GHG) scheme.¹⁷ The latest evidence is that only £0.1bn of the GHG will be spent in this financial year, meaning total spending is only £3.1bn.¹⁸
- The CCC estimated that annual government spending needs to increase very rapidly to between £9bn and £12bn – and that other (non-budget) measures are also needed to help switch/stimulate the rest of the UK economy to spend at least £40bn per year on reducing carbon emissions.¹⁹
- Note that other climate-related spending – e.g. overseas aid for climate projects, climate change adaptation projects – are not included in these figures.

*This briefing note was prepared by Dr Stuart Parkinson, Executive Director of Scientists for Global Responsibility, [https://www.sgr.org.uk/](https://www.sgr.org.uk/)*

Appendix 1 – Table of UK government spending changes relative to 2020-21 (cash terms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spending area</th>
<th>2021-22</th>
<th>2022-23</th>
<th>2023-24</th>
<th>2024-25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas aid</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing UK carbon emissions</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2 – Graphs of key figures

**UK govt spending, 2020-21**

- **Military**
  - £40 billion
- **Reducing UK carbon emissions**
  - £2 billion

**UK govt spending changes relative to 2020-21**

- **Military**
  - 2021-22: +4 billion
  - 2022-23: +4 billion
  - 2023-24: +4 billion
  - 2024-25: +4 billion
- **Overseas aid**
  - 2021-22: -4 billion
- **Reducing UK carbon emissions**
  - 2021-22: -2 billion
  - 2022-23: -2 billion
  - 2023-24: -2 billion
  - 2024-25: -2 billion
References


2 As note 1.


5 As note 4.

6 As note 3.


8 As note 1.


10 Campaign Against Arms Trade (2020) – as note 9.


12 As note 11.

13 As note 3.


17 P310 of: CCC (2020) – as note 16.


19 As note 17.