# Labour’s defence review chaos deepens amid nuclear policy confusion and North Korea’s naval failure



The recent days in Westminster have been marked by a series of blunders surrounding the presentation of Labour's defence plans, which were marred by delays and miscommunication. This fiasco unfolded just as North Korea faced embarrassment of its own, with the capsizing of a warship during its launch. The incident drew sharp criticism from Kim Jong Un, who labelled it a “criminal act,” promising accountability for the officials involved. As North Korea's naval ambitions falter, so too does the confidence in the UK's defence posture, seemingly floundering under the weight of its own bureaucratic missteps.

Labour's highly anticipated defence review became the centrepiece of a chaotic parliamentary session, where MPs expressed outrage at being denied advance access to the document before Defence Secretary John Healey's address. Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle was quick to voice the frustration of backbenchers, resulting in delays that intensified the scrutiny on Healey's presentation. Amidst this turmoil, the contents of the review—leaked to the media prior to the Commons session—undermined any hopes of a coordinated unveiling and raised questions about the government’s nuclear policy, which some MPs believed might breach international accords.

Defence Secretary Healey's assertions of increased military readiness and the government's commitment to upholding the Trident nuclear deterrent provoked pointed challenges from several quarters. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer’s attempt to project competence was compromised by a seemingly confused atmosphere, particularly when he spoke before shipyard workers at Govan, where he struggled to provide clarity on the timeline for increasing defence spending to the promised 3% of GDP. With external pressures mounting, including calls from defence chiefs for a budget rise to 2.65%, the Treasury’s insistence on maintaining a cap of 2.3% has further complicated Labour's commitments. Although Starmer aims to raise spending to 2.5% of GDP, the lack of a clear path forward has led to an air of uncertainty about how the party plans to strengthen its defence policy.

The broader implications of these events touch on a significant shift in the Liberal Democrats' stance regarding nuclear weapons. The party, previously staunchly opposed to nuclear armament, now appears to be more accepting, provided that these capabilities align with certain environmental standards—suggesting a future where strategic discussions may include unconventional energy sources such as “lentil gas.” This evolving narrative among the parties reflects a bigger picture of shifting geopolitical pressures and the ever-complex balancing act of maintaining credible defence strategies while addressing emerging environmental concerns.

As MPs navigated the fallout from these revelations, the Speaker's quips and the colourful critiques demonstrated a growing frustration with the lack of coherence in Labour's messaging. Speakers in the chamber highlighted the absurdity of the situation, pointing to the seemingly chaotic state of UK defence policy at a time when coherence is paramount. The image of ministers grappling with internal dissent and confusion only served to highlight the disarray and the pressing need for robust leadership moving forward.

In the context of these challenges, the Labour government is facing not only the repercussions of its public announcements but also the potential repercussions from voters sceptical of its handling of national security. The meeting of catastrophic failures of North Korea's defence initiatives and the UK's troubled parliamentary process underscores a critical juncture for both nations. It is clear that the realm of defence, characterized by both political missteps and external pressures, remains a complex battleground for truth, accountability, and future preparedness.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/columnists/article-14773785/QUENTIN-LETTS-Lib-Dems-no-longer-against-nukes-long-theyre-fuelled-lentil-gas-perhaps.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/22/kim-jong-un-furious-north-korea-warship-launch-failure)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/columnists/article-14773785/QUENTIN-LETTS-Lib-Dems-no-longer-against-nukes-long-theyre-fuelled-lentil-gas-perhaps.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/fc9d664e-5865-4dd4-b3d5-b18db09c4020), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uks-labour-party-aims-boost-defence-spending-25-gdp-2024-04-12/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/643e1648-9128-46ca-a46a-c09055ab1520), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uks-labour-party-aims-boost-defence-spending-25-gdp-2024-04-12/), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-pares-back-secretive-china-strategy-review-seeking-closer-ties-2024-12-16/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/fc9d664e-5865-4dd4-b3d5-b18db09c4020), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/643e1648-9128-46ca-a46a-c09055ab1520), [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/643e1648-9128-46ca-a46a-c09055ab1520)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/columnists/article-14773785/QUENTIN-LETTS-Lib-Dems-no-longer-against-nukes-long-theyre-fuelled-lentil-gas-perhaps.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uks-labour-party-aims-boost-defence-spending-25-gdp-2024-04-12/), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-pares-back-secretive-china-strategy-review-seeking-closer-ties-2024-12-16/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/columnists/article-14773785/QUENTIN-LETTS-Lib-Dems-no-longer-against-nukes-long-theyre-fuelled-lentil-gas-perhaps.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/22/kim-jong-un-furious-north-korea-warship-launch-failure> - On May 21, 2025, a North Korean destroyer capsized during its launch at the Chongjin Shipyard. Kim Jong Un condemned the incident as a 'criminal act' and vowed to hold officials accountable. The ship, part of North Korea's naval modernization, sustained significant damage, and authorities detained several officials, including the chief engineer and deputy manager. Repairs are underway, with a deadline set before the upcoming Workers' Party meeting in June.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/fc9d664e-5865-4dd4-b3d5-b18db09c4020> - In a recent UK defence review, MPs were upset over not receiving the document prior to Defence Secretary John Healey's announcement. Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle expressed backbenchers' frustration, leading to a delay in the announcement. The review's contents had already been leaked to the press, causing further confusion. The government's policy on nuclear weapons was also questioned, with some MPs expressing concerns over potential breaches of international agreements.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/643e1648-9128-46ca-a46a-c09055ab1520> - Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has engaged in discussions with UK defence chiefs regarding the future of Britain's armed forces. Amidst pressures from geopolitical threats, there's a push to increase military spending. Defence chiefs advocate for a budget increase to 2.65% of GDP, but the Treasury insists on 2.3%. Labour has committed to increasing defence spending to 2.5% of GDP, though the timeline remains unclear.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uks-labour-party-aims-boost-defence-spending-25-gdp-2024-04-12/> - The UK Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer, intends to raise defence spending to 2.5% of GDP as soon as financial resources allow, aligning with the Conservative Party's similar commitment. Starmer emphasized that defence is a top priority, given the increased international threats and volatility. He also affirmed support for the Trident nuclear deterrent system, against the stance of former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-pares-back-secretive-china-strategy-review-seeking-closer-ties-2024-12-16/> - The British Labour government is scaling back a comprehensive review of relations with China to expedite its completion, focusing on enhancing economic ties rather than critically examining security threats. Originally intended to be an in-depth analysis, the audit is now expected to be quicker and less critical, aligning with Prime Minister Keir Starmer's economic growth agenda. The shift comes ahead of a potential change in U.S. leadership, which may pressure Britain to adopt a tougher stance on China.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/643e1648-9128-46ca-a46a-c09055ab1520> - In this episode of the 'Political Fix' podcast, Lucy Fisher and colleagues discuss several major themes in UK politics. Labour's busy second week in government includes the launch of a new strategic defence review, with high-profile external reviewers like Lord George Robertson, Dr. Fiona Hill, and General Sir Richard Barrons. There's a political shift in tone towards China, now described as a deadly threat, reflecting a move to align more closely with US policy.