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Dawn French

I survived grief and heartbreak

Magazine


The ultra processed foods I won't eat

What the scientist avoids

PM readies for battle by focusing on defence

- Starmer to approve an extra £18 billion for MoD
- Ministers want Burnham anointed as successor

Larisa Brown Defence Editor
 Steven Swinford Political Editor
 Oliver Wright Policy Editor

Sir Keir Starmer is expected to approve an £18 billion increase in defence spending as he fights for his political survival.

Senior defence insiders said the investment would enable the armed forces to modernise in readiness for the next war if the prime minister gives it the green light.

Jonathan Powell, the national security adviser, recently wrote to Starmer warning him that Britain would struggle to maintain its position on the world stage without a significant increase in spending, The Times understands.

He warned that the armed forces could not afford the jets, munitions and advanced technology that Britain needed to fight a war without a much bigger budget.

The prime minister is expected to approve the spending boost as soon as next week, bringing an end to months of delays and internal rows after concerns were raised in the Treasury that it would be unaffordable. It is unclear how the increase in spending will be funded, although a Whitehall source insisted it would be "fully affordable".

The prime minister pledged to put defence and security at the heart of his

premiership, given the continuing wars in Ukraine and Iran, including an ambition to reach spending of 3 per cent of GDP in the next parliament. His critics have warned that failing to increase defence spending significantly would undermine that claim.

Other developments:

● Cabinet ministers called for Andy Burnham to be given a "coronation" as Labour's next leader if he could beat Reform UK in the by-election in Makerfield, Greater Manchester, and return to Westminster to challenge Starmer.

● Labour's national executive committee approved Burnham to run in the election, with plans to hold the contest on June 18.

● Government borrowing costs rose to their highest level since 1998 amid fears that Burnham would increase public spending and relax the fiscal rules.

● President Trump said it would be "tough" for Starmer to survive as he renewed his criticism of the prime minister over migration and offshore wind.

Cabinet colleagues expect Starmer to make the defence spending announcement as he attempts to save his premiership after a tumultuous week in No 10.

Powell told Starmer that Britain's allies had committed to spending more on defence than the UK and that the

Continued on page 7



Andy Burnham won the go-ahead from Labour to run in the Makerfield by-election yesterday. He proved willing to show some leg on a jog in Warrington, Cheshire

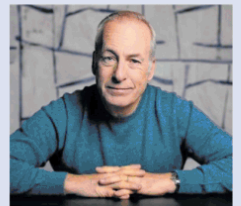
INSIDE TODAY


Your 10-page guide to the Chelsea Flower Show

Weekend

I'm 62. Why shouldn't I wear a bikini?

Magazine



I had a heart attack on set. I almost died

Bob Odenkirk

Saturday review



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Eastern Med escapes for summer

Try Albania, Croatia, Montenegro or Cyprus as beach-break alternatives, says **Sarah Turner**

Tour operators to the Med are (mostly) in agreement. After a slow start to the year there's burgeoning demand for Italy, Spain and Greece. People want the familiar pleasures of tried-and-tested resorts (and, as a bonus, this summer won't see any entry/exit system, EES, queues in Greece). However, head east a bit and demand is significantly lower. This year, this is where the Med bargains are likely to be, whether it's Albania, which is starting to find its feet as a tourist destination, or some of the new hotels that have cropped up in Croatia or Montenegro. The eastern Med has ancient sites, luxury hotels and cuisines that are just as sun-soaked as the classic Med countries, and while superyachts do periodically drop anchor here, they are not the harbour-clogging nuisance they are on the Amalfi coast.

Ionian coast, Albania

Albania, which faces Italy across the Adriatic and is bookended by Montenegro and Greece, is readying itself to hit the holiday mainstream. Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner, may have bought Sazan Island — a former Cold War base — as a development project, but restaurants and hotels are still a bargain; meals don't usually go above £13 and raki flows freely. Thanks to the expansionist zeal of the early Romans, Albania has superb ancient ruins, including Apollonia and Butrint, while the town of Berat on the Osum river showcases its 15th-century Ottoman architecture beautifully. Albania's coastline, which stretches nearly 300 miles, has been seeded with new hotels. On the Ionian coastline in the south, the Sea View Hotel may have a prosaic name but it has Ibiza-style poolside sushi and faces the beach at the cheery resort town of Himare. Regent has been arranging tours for more than 50 years. Its eight-day Albania, Coast and Culture tour includes stays at the Sea View and visits to Berat and Butrint, flying to Corfu, with transfers by ferry and road to the hotel. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £2,230pp, including flights, guides and transfers (regent-holidays.co.uk)

Greece and Turkey by sea

Veering towards the eastern Med also works well with cruises; it's a chance to step away from the classic megaship



Himare, Albania



Lefkara, Cyprus



The Agora, Lefkara, Cyprus

experience to explore places that are historically rich and less crowded. Viking's week-long Ancient Mediterranean Treasures cruise travels between Athens and Istanbul. Explore Turkey's largest city, including the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, before visiting Troy near the Dardanelles and Ephesus. The stops in Greece include the acropolis of Lindos on Rhodes before rejoining the Med mainstream at Crete and docking at Athens.

Details Seven nights' full board from £3,290pp, including flights, transfers, some excursions, wine and spirits (vikingcruises.co.uk)

Easy-access Montenegro

Board one of the new British Airways flights to Tivat in Montenegro (Jet2 and easyJet also have direct flights) and you can be gazing at the Adriatic from the Lustica Peninsula ten minutes after exiting the airport. On what was once a naval base on the Bay of Kotor, the Chedi resort overlooks a yacht-ready marina and has its own private beach, a swimming pool and four restaurants (B&B doubles from £322; www.chedilusticabay.com). Last year the Centrale, a former barracks on the main square surrounded by cafés and restaurants, became a 27-room hotel with a hip restaurant (room-only doubles from £152; angšana.com). Yes, it's early days here (other hotels and villas are being built) but the rates this summer reflect this — and the setting is superb. Hikers can tackle the Vrmac trail through the pine forests, and it's easy to visit the Unesco town of Kotor and the Durmitor National Park, while a short walk brings

you to delightful small coves and beach bars on the Bay of Kotor.

Details British Airways has Heathrow-Tivat flights from £157pp one-way in June (ba.com)

Cycling in Cyprus

At this time of year flights to Mallorca tend to be packed with cyclists. Cyprus offers a similarly challenging set of hills, including climbs up to 2,000m into the Troodos mountains, with cheaper flight and accommodation costs — and fewer cars to contend with. The Danish owners of the distinctly cool Agora hotel in Lefkara, which opened a couple of years ago, have their own cycling club and a fleet of specially designed carbon road bikes to rent (B&B doubles from £191; theagorahotel.com). For those looking for a more relaxing break, the 18-room hotel has a swimming pool with sunloungers and an acclaimed restaurant, Novel (mains from £16), while there are wineries, especially Christoudia (christoudia.com) within an easy cycle — or drive. Governor's Beach is a 25-minute drive away, as is Larnaca Airport. There has been reduced demand for Cyprus because of the conflict in the Middle East, and rates reflect this.

Details EasyJet has Luton-Larnaca flights from £52.99pp one-way in June (easyjet.com)

A new resort in Croatia's Istria

With crystal-clear waters and a party atmosphere, Croatia's coastline is more than a cost-effective alternative to the Balearic islands. At Porec on the Istrian peninsula, north of Pula, there's 2,000 years of history to discover, including from Roman and Venetian occupations but especially the Byzantine basilica, with its gemstone-studded mosaics.

However — let's be honest — the young mostly come for the bars and clubs.

This year the extravagant Pical resort has opened within walking distance from Porec's old town. New hotels tend to start with good opening rates, and Pical has 514 rooms to fill across three hotels, along with 11 pools and three beaches. Families get an all-inclusive resort, and there's a couples-orientated hotel as well as — at the top end of the price scale for Porec's party crowd — a more private set of suites. For recovery purposes, Pical's spa stretches over 1,300 square metres and has Espa treatments. The hotel lies on the Parenzana trail, a 123km walking and cycling route that goes from Porec to Trieste in Italy, and the resort's five restaurants take inspiration from the cuisines along it. **Details** Seven nights' half-board from £1,711pp, including flights (tui.co.uk)

Serene southern Turkey

Turkey's Mediterranean coast still has plenty of small family-run hotels. The Tomanbay family run the 41-room Kalkan Regency with generosity; from the extravagant breakfasts to the large swimming pool and complimentary cruises on the hotel's gulet boat. Kalkan town — a short walk away — has some of Turkey's best beach clubs. Compared with Mykonos or Ibiza these are a bargain, where sunbeds often come free if you decide to eat there, and mains usually come in under £15 (try the bougainvillea-drenched Kalamari or the more minimalist, all-white Yali). Back at the Kalkan Regency, the hotel has an organic farm that provides ingredients for its restaurant. There's also a spa and gym and some rooms now have their own private pool.

Details Seven nights' B&B from £1,085pp, including flights, transfers, complimentary hammam and gulet boat excursion (simpsonstravel.com)