UK Labour's David Miliband joins International Rescue Committee

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David Miliband, older brother of Labour Party leader Ed Miliband and former foreign secretary, is stepping down as the MP for South Shields and taking over the job as head of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in New York.

The IRC website states, "The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people to survive and rebuild their lives. At work in over 40 countries and 22 US cities to restore safety, dignity and hope, the IRC leads the way from harm to home."

The capitalist press in Britain is reporting that Miliband's decision is aimed at relieving the pressure on his younger sibling, who defeated him in September 2010 to win the Labour leadership. It is cited, moreover, as evidence that Labour has moved away from the right-wing social and economic nostrums associated with Tony Blair and New Labour.

It is nothing of the sort. Labour under Miliband junior remains a party of big business, war mongering and anti-immigrant chauvinism. And David Miliband has by no means left the political arena, any more than has his mentor, Blair, in his role in the Middle East and elsewhere. Both continue to play a role in the political intrigues of British and US imperialism.

The IRC's charity status is used as a front behind which Washington pursues its strategic interests throughout the globe. It boasts a board of governors that includes former United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan and no fewer than three former US secretaries of state—Henry Kissinger, Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice. Sponsors come from among the wealthiest and most powerful of the financial elite, including Pepsi, Intel and McKenzie.

The IRC covers many of the geographical areas Miliband became involved with while at the Foreign Office in the UK—South Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Palestinian Authority, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka—where both the US and Britain have extensive business and geo-strategic interests.

At the Foreign Office, Miliband oversaw an organisation employing 14,000 staff across 270 diplomatic offices. The IRC may be smaller, but its international reach is greater. It operates in more than 40 countries and within the US itself, with offices in 22 American cities.

The IRC has an operating revenue of around $390 million. A look at where the majority of its funding comes from gives an indication of whose interests it serves.

According to a report on the IRC from Root Cause, a non-profit research and consulting firm, published in the *Independent*, only 14 percent of its funding came from private sources. Government grants and contracts, in contrast, accounted for 44 percent, foreign government grants and contracts 27 percent and 11 percent from UN agency grants and contracts. As its president, Miliband will receive £263,000 a year (US$400,000) plus £30,000 (US$52,000) from related groups—five times the salary he received as an MP.

The ex-foreign secretary received a fulsome endorsement by his old friend, former US president Bill Clinton, who said, "I have known David almost 20 years. He is one of the ablest, most creative public servants of our time."

There has been criticism over the appointment by those who believe it will risk the IRC being exposed as an instrument of Anglo-American foreign policy. The *Observer* reports Michiel Hofman of *Médecins Sans* Frontières saying it could make dealing with groups such as the Taliban more difficult. "Assertions by humanitarian organisations that they are fully

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independent, there are no hidden political agenda, slowly wither away," he said.

Miliband is married to American-born Louise Shackleton, a professional violinist currently with the London Symphony Orchestra, and has two adopted sons, both born in the US. After Oxford University, he studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a Kennedy scholar and then began his career at the Institute for Public Policy Research. Having returned to London while Labour was still in Opposition, he became Blair's head of policy at the age of 29.

Miliband helped the future prime minister formulate Labour's manifesto for the 1997 general election that brought the party to power. Blair made him head of the prime minister's policy unit from 1997 to 2001, following which he was elected to parliament for the safe seat of South Shields. It was during this period that he met and became friends with Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary.

He occupied various junior ministerial posts until being made the environment secretary in 2006. He was a strident supporter of the Iraq war.

After Blair resigned and Gordon Brown became prime minister, Miliband was promoted to foreign secretary, the youngest since David Owen in the 1970s.

Against all claims that Blair's departure would mark a distancing of the UK from the US in the aftermath of the Iraq debacle, Miliband played a central role from 2007 to 2010 in supporting the diplomatic and military manoeuvres of Washington.

In 2008, he was forced to admit, despite previous government denials, that two US extraordinary rendition flights had stopped on Diego Garcia, a UK territory. When questioned over whether the government had deliberately misled the public over rendition, he was forced to apologise and stated that the government had "made a mistake".

After a trip to India following the Mumbai attacks in 2008, he wrote an article on the dispute over Kashmir that led to an angry response from the Indian government opposing third-party involvement.

His bid for leadership of the Labour Party failed precisely because he was tarnished by his support for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and was never able to distance himself from it and the deaths of hundreds of thousands on the basis of Blair's big lie about Saddam Hussein's non-existent Weapons of Mass Destruction.

His brother was chosen as Labour leader in 2010 primarily because he could claim not to have voted for the war and could be sold to the electorate on that basis by the trade union bureaucracy and marking a break from "Blairism".

In the three years since that defeat, Miliband has rejected several invitations to join Labour's shadow cabinet. The political differences between his policies and those of his younger brother are somewhat unclear, but are bound up with the need for Labour to at least appear to represent some kind of opposition to the austerity agenda of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition.

When interviewed, he appears as a petulant schoolboy waiting for something bigger and better to come along. In the meantime, he has turned his hand to making considerable amounts of money. He has reportedly amassed almost £1 million through public speaking engagements such as the recent lecture he gave in Abu Dhabi, for which he received £25,000. He set up a company, The Office of David Miliband Limited, which right-wing commentator Toby Young has attacked as a tax-avoidance scheme through which his non-parliamentary earnings are channelled.

Last year, in his role as senior analyst for risk assessment company Oxford Analytica, he helped broker an advisory role for Blair's African Governments Initiative (a well-funded charity that claims its aim is to strengthen African leadership and boost economic growth) with the South Sudanese government. In making this move to the IRC, Miliband will be in regular contact with his former boss.

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