

# Miliband lays out Labour's militarist foreign policy for Britain

Robert Stevens  
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In a speech to Chatham House, the Foreign Office think tank, Ed Miliband reassured the ruling elite that should his Labour Party form a government after the May 7 election, it would ensure that Britain would be “more influential in the world.”

The speech was an attempt by Labour to re-establish its militarist credentials, following its role in the defeat of the 2013 vote in parliament that would have sanctioned British military action in Syria.

Miliband's remarks were directed in particular to US imperialism, especially after a recent report prepared by the Congressional Research Service that concluded, “The UK may not be viewed as centrally relevant to the United States in all of the issues and relations considered a priority on the US agenda.”

The Labour leader said that Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative-led government had, in the last five years, “presided over the biggest loss of influence for our country in a generation.” Cameron had “stepped away from the world, rather than confidently towards it,” and this “has shrunk our influence and weakened Britain,” he said.

Labour's election manifesto pledged its support for NATO's aggression against Russia. Britain backed the Western-backed putsch in Kiev and is playing a leading role in the NATO military buildup on Russia's borders. Miliband made clear this would be significantly extended under a Labour government. “Western unity and resolve are essential, as we have seen in the face of Russian aggression in the Ukraine,” he said, stressing Labour's commitment to NATO. It “is and must remain the foundation of our defence and security partnership and we will work tirelessly to ensure its greater effectiveness.”

Miliband continued, “by far the most important cause of our loss of influence is the position of the

government in regard to the European Union.”

The possibility of a British exit from the EU is regarded with great anxiety by the US and European bourgeoisie, as well as by significant sections of finance capital in the UK.

British membership has always been based on the strategy of ensuring no single power—in particular Germany—is able to dominate the continent. But in a bid to win back former Tory supporters from the anti-EU United Kingdom Independence Party, Cameron has pledged a referendum on British membership should he win office.

Miliband made clear there would be no such referendum under Labour. He condemned Cameron for pledging to hold one on “on an arbitrary timetable” and without any “clear goals for their proposed European renegotiation, no strategy for achieving it.”

The Tories were “a governing party riven with internal divisions over our future in the EU,” said Miliband. They had a “Foreign Secretary who has openly advocated leaving the European Union” and “all this poses a grave risk to Britain's position in the world.”

There have been increasingly strident demands from within the political and military establishment for a more “assertive” foreign policy and a commensurate rise in military spending.

On this score, Miliband had been criticised by the Labour-supporting *Guardian*. In February, following growing criticism from leading figures in the Armed Forces establishment that Britain was becoming a “foreign policy irrelevance,” *Guardian* assistant editor Michael White said Miliband had “struck an even more low-key note on foreign policy than Cameron.” He concluded, “Whoever wins on 7 May, it seems likely that, lacking either the will or capacity to intervene, the

‘bit player’ will remain in charge of foreign policy at No 10—and mostly stay indoors.”

Miliband’s Chatham House performance was designed to allay these concerns.

Labour would beef up Britain’s military capacity. “We must maintain our independent nuclear capability, with a continuous at sea deterrent,” he said. While Labour is committed to continuing austerity and imposing tens of billions of pounds in further cuts, Miliband insisted that, “even when times are hard at home we remain committed to our armed forces.” The “extreme spending cuts that the Conservative Party propose... would be truly catastrophic for the future of our armed forces,” he added.

“The prospect of these Conservative cuts alarms our allies abroad and our military personnel here at home,” said the Labour leader, as he promised: “I am not going to sacrifice the defence of our country on an ideological commitment to a significantly smaller state.”

Labour was “much better positioned to find the resources that our armed forces need to maintain our security in the next Parliament.”

A Labour government “must respond at home and abroad,” Miliband continued, as he identified a series of so-called “failed states and civil wars across the entire wider Middle East region—from the western Sahel through to Somalia and Sudan, from Yemen to Syria and Iraq, and in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.”

Miliband did not rule out military action in any of these conflicts, each the creation of imperialist wars and intrigues, merely suggesting, “Any intervention must be carried out with a clearly defined strategy.” Any action “must include a comprehensive transition and post conflict strategy.”

This was a constant refrain, as Miliband used the speech to attack the Tory government for not having a “post conflict strategy” after the 2011 imperialist destruction of Libya. His remarks were made just days after over 1,500 north-African migrants suffered horrific deaths while trying to cross the Mediterranean from Libya to seek refuge in Europe.

Shedding crocodile tears, Miliband referred to “the crisis unfolding in the Mediterranean.” But his complaint was that “David Cameron was wrong to assume that Libya was a country whose institutions could simply be left to evolve and transform themselves” and the “tragedy is this could have been

anticipated.”

This self-serving narrative is filthy. Labour is implicated up to its neck in these crimes. As Miliband was forced to acknowledge, Labour were ardent supporters of the imperialist invasion of Libya, claiming it was a “humanitarian” imperative. Parliament voted to support war in a cross-party alliance that was carried out in opposition to any public mandate—53 percent of British people surveyed opposed the military intervention and only one-third approved.

Labour was in power from 1997 to 2010 and was supportive of numerous “humanitarian wars” for “democracy” and “human rights” alongside its Washington and European allies—in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. These illegal and criminal wars have destroyed entire societies, killed hundreds of thousands of people, made millions of people refugees and left chaos and unending communal strife in their wake.

Editorialising on Miliband’s speech, the *Guardian* noted the belligerent tone of his message from a politician who previously made great play of claiming not to have supported the war in Iraq. “He didn’t talk about the errors of Iraq or the follies of David Cameron’s Syrian plans. He chose instead to talk about the intervention he did support: the Libyan campaign against Colonel Gaddafi...”

A *Financial Times* comment was generally supportive of Miliband’s speech, stating that the “US is likely to be reassured by a Labour leader who says Britain must stay strong in Europe, limit its defence cuts and return to a global role.”

The speech was “unexpected,” as “there has been less debate on foreign policy at this UK election than at any in living memory,” it added. The *FT* felt compelled to note that a large factor in this was the anti-war sentiment that remains entrenched in a population who “remain haunted by the trauma of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts and have no appetite to hear politicians talk about the country’s ‘global role’.”



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