

Is Jeremy Corbyn's foreign policy socialist?

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The ongoing attack on Labour Party leadership candidate Jeremy Corbyn's foreign policy is hysterical in tone and reactionary in content.

It has united the right-wing media with numerous Labour Party figures. John McTernan, a former advisor to Tony Blair, for example, wrote in the pro-Conservative *Daily Telegraph*, "A Corbyn-led Labour government would be a disaster for Britain and would rightly be consigned to electoral annihilation."

The charges levelled against Corbyn are both historical and contemporary. Historically, he is condemned for the fact that:

* He invited Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams to speak in parliament in 1984, in the aftermath of the Brighton bombing of the Tory conference by the IRA. He has held subsequent discussions with former members of the IRA and maintains political relations with Sinn Fein.

* In his campaigning in support of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, he had dealings with Lebanese activist Dyab Abou Jahjah, Paul Eisen, Stephen Sizer and Raed Salah, who have variously made anti-British, anti-American and, more tellingly, anti-Semitic statements about the Holocaust and the "Blood Libel."

* He met with representatives of Hamas and Hezbollah and with the Iranian regime.

More recently, Corbyn is accused of being an apologist for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and for the Russian government of Vladimir Putin. On ISIS Corbyn has said, "Yes they are brutal, yes some of what they have done is quite appalling, likewise what the Americans did in Fallujah and other places is appalling."

On Russia, while stressing his opposition to Putin, Corbyn wrote that the root of the Ukraine crisis lay in "the US drive to expand eastwards," stating that it was a mistake to allow former Warsaw Pact countries to join NATO: "Nato expansion and Russian expansion—one leads to the other, and one reflects the other," he told the *Guardian*.

Corbyn has also faced attack because he opposes the replacement of Britain's Trident submarine nuclear weapons and wants to leave the NATO military alliance. While supporting membership of the European Union, Corbyn was

condemned for saying that if Prime Minister David Cameron negotiated away workers' rights and environmental protection, he would not rule out advocating British withdrawal from the EU.

Corbyn is routinely denounced for holding an anti-American position. McTernan asserts, "From that steadfast view flows his entire foreign policy," while Cameron declared, "[T]he idea that we'll be stronger and more secure by leaving Nato, as Jeremy Corbyn suggests, or by comparing American soldiers to ISIL [ISIS], I think this is absolutely the wrong approach and will make Britain less secure and that will never happen under my watch."

Once again, the problem for the right-wing cabal of Labour and Tory witch-hunters is that they are so far removed from what people actually think that their "bombshells" generally fall flat.

No one would seriously suggest that Corbyn is anti-Semitic. And feigned outrage over his contacts with Sinn Fein and the IRA is not helped by the fact that, less than four years later, the "peace process" that led to 1997's Good Friday Agreement incorporating Sinn Fein into the power-sharing Northern Ireland Assembly was well underway.

Citing this example, Corbyn responded to the same type of attack made on him regarding Hamas and Hezbollah by declaring on *Channel 4 News*, "There is not going to be a peace process unless there are talks involving Israel, Hezbollah and Hamas and I think everyone knows that."

Andrew Gilligan in the *Telegraph* penned what he believes was a devastating indictment of how Corbyn visited Iran in January, "partly financed by Ardeshir Naghshineh," who he described as a British-based Iranian property entrepreneur "at the heart of attempts by Western oil and resource companies to re-enter the Iranian market." His case was not helped by the presence alongside Corbyn of former Conservative Chancellor Norman Lamont, or by Britain having reopened its Tehran embassy that week.

More damaging still for Corbyn's detractors, his stated concern over the danger of war is shared by millions of working people—who view with mounting concern the readiness of the US and Britain to provoke military confrontation with Russia and Britain's plans to participate

in the US bombing campaign in Syria.

That is why Corbyn's pledge to issue an apology for the Iraq war, which he opposed, and his raising of a possible prosecution of former Prime Minister Tony Blair for war crimes has had far greater resonance than the chorus of accusations made against him. Tom Clark of the *Guardian* angrily denounced Corbyn for "low politics" by putting Iraq, which he dismissively cited as "a dead cat," on the table. "There are dangers of picking at an old sore—not least vilifying all those Labour colleagues [including his opponents Andy Burnham and Yvette Cooper] who made the wrong call in 2003..." he added.

For most working people, sympathy will rest with Corbyn. But the crucial issue to be understood is that none of this imparts a socialist character to his policies. Nor does it mean that those looking to him as a means of opposing war will find the answers they are seeking.

Corbyn and those supporting him, such as Ken Livingstone and Diane Abbot, made up a significant layer of the "Labour left" in the 1980s. Their loyal support for the Labour Party, close work with the trade union bureaucracy, promotion of identity politics based on race, gender and sexual preference and insistence on a parliamentary perspective was routinely passed off as socialism. It played a considerable part in maintaining Labour's political grip over the working class.

The promotion of bourgeois nationalist groups such as the IRA, the PLO and African National Congress was an important element in lending their political manoeuvres an internationalist colouration. But subsequent events have proved that these policies, and campaigns based on them, both anticipated and helped prepare for shifts in the official foreign policy of British imperialism.

Today, the IRA's role in the Northern Ireland Assembly is held up as a prime example of how yesterday's "terrorists" can become today's governmental partners.

The ANC is a yet more telling example of the role that the movements once so assiduously promoted by the Labour "left" play today. Having come to power in 1994, it suppressed any revolutionary struggle by the working class and has safeguarded the fortunes of Amplats, de Beers and other major global corporations while systematically impoverishing millions.

Corbyn frames his call to distance the UK from the US, not only regarding Iraq, but over Russia and Syria, explicitly in terms of concern over "our country's standing in the world." Ending Labour's association with the Iraq war, he insists, is an essential prerequisite for any renewal of support for the party.

On Iraq, with outrage mounting over the failure to publish the Chilcot Inquiry, there will be many in the Labour Party

and among trade union leaders who will be receptive to Corbyn's message that Blair, et al. take the heat so that the party itself can survive.

It is not necessary to speculate as to the extent that Corbyn's appeals may find support within ruling circles, as did previous policies such as engaging with the PLO, IRA and ANC. But the "special relationship" has in any event become increasingly strained, with the US turning attention to Germany and France. Britain earned the opprobrium of the US most recently over participation in the China-dominated Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Whatever tactical course future events take, from a strategic perspective, Corbyn's claims that peace is possible though a renewal of "detente", British imperialism adopting a "humanitarian" foreign policy that accepts the authority of the United Nations, only serves to disarm the working class.

In its statement, *Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War*, the International Committee of the Fourth International explained:

"The danger of a new world war arises out of the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system—between the development of a global economy and its division into antagonistic nation states, in which the private ownership of the means of production is rooted."

It noted that "This finds its most acute expression in the drive of US imperialism to dominate the Eurasian landmass, above all those areas from which it was excluded for decades by the Russian and Chinese revolutions."

The statement went on to explain that "the same contradictions driving imperialism to the brink provide the objective impulse for social revolution. The globalisation of production has led to a massive growth of the working class. Only this social force, which owes no allegiance to any nation, is capable of putting an end to the profit system, which is the root cause of war."

This is what a genuinely socialist struggle against war consists of: the independent political mobilisation of the working class in Britain and internationally against the ruling class through the building of a new revolutionary leadership.



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