

Labour MPs side with Tory government against Corbyn on war and repression

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Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn was subjected to an extraordinary attack by senior members of his own party on Tuesday in connection with the Conservative government's policy authorising police to "shoot to kill" as well as the Paris terror attacks and the Syrian war.

Opening a debate in parliament, Tory Prime Minister David Cameron made a statement on the Paris terror attacks and the recent G20 summit in which he called for support for the sweeping police operations put in place in the UK.

One Labour MP, Ian Austin, previously the parliamentary private secretary to former party leader and prime minister Gordon Brown, stared at Corbyn as he solidarised himself with Cameron, saying, "I agree with everything the prime minister said about Syria and about terrorism."

In comments aimed explicitly at Corbyn, he added, "Those that say Paris is reaping the whirlwind of Western policy or who want to say Britain's foreign policy has increased, not diminished, the risks to our own national security are not just absolving the terrorists of responsibility, but risk fuelling the sense of grievance and resentment which can develop into extremism and terrorism."

Corbyn's shadow Europe minister, Pat McFadden, continued the attack by inviting hostile comment from Cameron, saying, "Can I ask the prime minister to reject the view that sees terrorist acts as always being a response or a reaction to what we in the West do?"

"Does he agree with me that such an approach risks infantilising the terrorists and treating them as children, when the truth is they are adults entirely responsible for what they do?"

One of the acolytes of former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair who refused to serve in Corbyn's shadow cabinet, Emma Reynolds, continued the assault, stating, "Full responsibility for the attacks in Paris lies solely with

the terrorists and any attempt by any organisation to somehow blame the West or France's military intervention in Syria is not only wrong, disgraceful, but also should be condemned."

Chris Leslie, the former shadow chancellor, said, "The prime minister is right," adding, "Shouldn't it be immediately obvious to everyone that the police need the full and necessary powers, including the proportionate use of lethal force if needs be, to keep our communities safe?"

The attacks on Corbyn took place despite the fact that he had backed down from criticising the warmongering foreign policies of successive British governments and their responsibility for the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) and other terrorist movements.

On Saturday, Corbyn abandoned plans to make a speech in which he was to have said: "For the past 14 years, Britain has been at the centre of a succession of disastrous wars that have brought devastation to large parts of the wider Middle East. They have increased, not diminished, the threats to our own national security in the process."

Instead, he held discussions on the events in Paris with the shadow cabinet and, as a privy counsellor, was given a national security briefing by Downing Street officials. In response to his retreat, his right-wing opponents in the Labour leadership went on the offensive.

At Monday evening's weekly meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party, a number of MPs lined up to denounce Corbyn over his declared opposition to the government's "shoot to kill" policy. Earlier in the day, a BBC journalist asked Corbyn if he would support a police "shoot to kill" operation if an attack similar to Paris took place in Britain. He replied that he was not "happy with the shoot-to-kill policy in general," adding, "I think that is quite dangerous and I think it can often be counterproductive." Corbyn also reiterated that he was opposed to UK air strikes in Syria.

According to press reports, one Labour MP said Corbyn

was “aggressively heckled” during the parliamentary caucus meeting. Another MP said, “He doesn’t answer anything. He got roasted, he’s a fucking disgrace.”

The internal party attacks on Corbyn seek to magnify Tory and media denunciations of the Labour leader as a threat to “national security.” According to the *Guardian*, Corbyn was asked by Dan Jarvis, a former army officer and ex-shadow justice minister, whether he would authorise drone strikes in support of national self-defence.

Within hours, Corbyn had retreated once again. In a report to the party’s National Executive Committee Tuesday, he stated, “[O]f course I support the use of whatever proportionate and strictly necessary force is required to save life in response to attacks of the kind we saw in Paris.”

The most vicious attack on Corbyn was authored by the Blairite Dan Hodges in the pages of the pro-Conservative Party *Daily Telegraph*. In a piece headlined, “Jeremy Corbyn must pick his side in the war on terror,” he attacked Corbyn’s statement that “it would have been far better for us all if he [British citizen Mohammed Emwazi, aka Jihadi John] had been held to account in a court of law” and not killed in a drone strike.

Hodges wrote, “David Cameron is right. Jeremy Corbyn is indeed a threat to our nation’s security. And whilst he remains leader, so is the Labour Party.”

As prime minister, Hodges said, Corbyn would oversee “Reduced surveillance. Reduced global anti-terror cooperation. No airstrikes against ISIL in Syria or Iraq. No drone strikes anywhere.”

He concluded, “We have heard a lot from Labour MPs about the difficulties of finding a way of removing Jeremy Corbyn. Tough. They will have to find a way.”

Corbyn won election as Labour leader just over two months ago in a landslide vote, supported by hundreds of thousands of Labour members and supporters, on a programme of opposition to austerity and war. Yet, in the name of “party unity,” he has done nothing with that mandate to mobilise against his Blairite opponents—cheerleaders of the war criminal Tony Blair and apologists for illegal wars of aggression that were opposed by millions.

The ruling elite in Britain are in crisis over Syria and are deeply split over the efficacy of British military involvement. A devastating report issued earlier this month by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, a cross-party committee dominated by Tory MPs, advised Cameron not to authorise air strikes in Syria. It stated that any benefits would be outweighed by the risks of “legal

ambiguity, political chaos on the ground, military irrelevance, and diplomatic costs.”

More important still, there is no significant support in the population for UK intervention in Syria. A survey published Wednesday found that even after the Paris attacks and the hysterical coverage in the media, only 15 percent were in favour of the UK launching air strikes against ISIS in Syria.

Yet Corbyn’s response to Cameron’s statement to the House on Tuesday was to politely and defensively ask, “I welcome the prime minister’s commitment to respond personally to the Foreign Affairs Committee report, which has been so carefully presented to the House and the country. Will he confirm that, before bringing any motion [on air strikes in Syria] to the House, he will provide answers, as he has indicated that he will, to the seven questions raised by the Select Committee report?”

The headlong retreat by Corbyn is not simply an issue of personal cowardice. It demonstrates the bankruptcy of his programme and of the claim made by his supporters that it is possible to transform the Labour Party, a tried and tested institution of British imperialism, into an instrument for opposing austerity and war.

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