British Labour MPs lead demands for UK action in Syria

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Britain's parliament held an emergency debate Tuesday, under the heading "International action to protect civilians in Aleppo and Syria." Allotted just two hours in a sparsely attended House of Commons chamber, the debate was the occasion for Labour and Conservative MPs, and others, to war-monger against Russia.

The debate was held against the backdrop of an unfolding debacle for US imperialism and its British ally, as eastern Aleppo fell to Syrian government forces backed by Russian airpower and Shia militias aligned with Iran.

For five years, the imperialist powers and their Gulf despot backers have funded and aided Islamist militias to achieve regime change against Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's government. Aleppo was the last significant "rebel" stronghold. Its loss represents a strategic setback for the US and for Britain, which has functioned as Washington's partner-in-crime in one failed military adventure after another.

The debate was led by Conservative Andrew Mitchell and Labour's Alison McGovern, co-chairs of parliaments' all-party Friends of Syria group. Mitchell made clear their objective when he denounced the British parliament for voting down joining in US-led military action against Assad in August 2013.

At that time some 30 Conservative MPs and nine Liberal Democrats joined with then-Labour leader Ed Miliband and his party to rule out joining US-led strikes against Syria, by 285-272. The shock vote was the result of popular anti-war sentiment and concerns within the military top brass as to its efficacy, especially following the disasters in Iraq and Libya.

Mitchell described then-Prime Minister David Cameron's decision to allow a parliamentary vote on action as "ill-advised", adding, "I hope the Government keep an open mind about putting another resolution before the House [for military action], as is necessary."

Parliament would have to rectify its mistake, Mitchell

and McGovern suggested, by supporting the intervention of British forces today, under the guise of protecting "human rights."

It appears that the UK parliament, like the US State Department, had received no advance notice of the Russian-Turkish ceasefire agreement put into effect yesterday. Rather, with Russia apparently consolidating its position in Syria, those assembled called for a last-ditch effort to try and reassert the interests of US and British imperialism.

Labour MP Ben Bradshaw said, "In August 2013… we had the chance, but we blew it… every political party in this House blew it."

He continued, "When will we realise that Russia's strategy is to weaken and divide the free world and that driving the biggest refugee flows into Europe since World War Two is a deliberate part of that plan?"

Repeating the claims of the US Democrats that they lost the election due to "Russian interference", Bradshaw claimed that Moscow had similarly intervened in the June 23 referendum on UK membership of the European Union! Russia "probably interfered in our own referendum—we do not have the evidence for that yet, but it is highly probable," he said, adding that Moscow "will certainly be involved in the French presidential election" as well as German elections next year.

Labour MP John Woodcock claimed that one of the gravest threats facing the UK was "a tyrannical regime in Russia that has effectively created a global system that has rules but no consequences."

McGovern demanded that the Conservative government help open a "humanitarian corridor" to Aleppo and for the UK to assist in aid drops to Syrian civilians "by whatever means we can."

Once again, this "humanitarianism" is a thin veil for imperialist military intervention, as such "corridors" would require the imposition of a no-fly zone that would

be primarily directed against the Syrian government, Russia and even China. Only a week ago, Russia and China vetoed a US-backed United Nations resolution to impose a seven-day ceasefire. The UN draft was specifically aimed at halting the advance of Assad's troops into eastern Aleppo, so that the US-backed proxy forces—the Al Qaeda-linked affiliates of the al-Nusra Front—could regroup and obtain new supplies of weapons from the US and the Gulf sheikdoms.

McGovern's demand was backed by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who wrote to Prime Minister Theresa May prior to the debate calling for an "urgent and concerted effort from the government to press for an end to the violence and a UN-led ceasefire."

Corbyn made no mention of the role of the US, Britain and other NATO powers in fomenting the war. In his now typical Pontius Pilate manner, he "condemned all attacks on civilian targets, including those by Russian and pro-Syrian government forces in Aleppo, for which there can be no excuse."

This "even-handed" pose is only the means by which Corbyn has taken on board all the demands of British imperialism. "UN-brokered humanitarian corridors" would not only require overturning the Russian/Chinese veto. They could only be imposed through the establishment of no-fly zones, which would be directed against Syrian and Russian forces.

To cover his exposed rear, Corbyn resorted to asking how the government would "boost Foreign and Commonwealth Office resources to aid such efforts engaging all sides, including regional powers such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran?"

His calls for Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran to be involved in a ceasefire paints a picture of all regional powers working together in harmony. The reality is that all are on opposing sides in a conflict sparked by the NATO powers, which bear central responsibility for the tragedy that has befallen the Syrian population.

Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry also backed McGovern's call, while trying to cover up the consequences by suggesting that "unmanned drones or GPS-guided parachutes" could be employed in delivering aid.

Since becoming Labour leader in September 2015, Corbyn has played a critical role in ensuring that Labour retains its character as the party of imperialist war. In November of that year, he capitulated to Labour's right wing by agreeing to their demands for a "free vote" on military action in Syria that was specifically aimed at

reversing the 2013 veto. This gave then-Tory Prime Minister David Cameron the majority he sought, reversing the defeat he suffered two years before.

Corbyn's stance enabled the Tories to insist that never again must military action be vetoed. Former Tory Chancellor George Osborne said that events in Syria were "the price of not intervening."

"The tragedy in Aleppo did not come out of a vacuum. It was created by a vacuum, a vacuum of Western leadership, of American leadership, British leadership," he said.

Tory Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson likewise said that the 2013 vote meant that "we as a House of Commons, we as a country, we vacated that space into which Russia stepped, beginning its own bombing campaign on behalf of Assad."

The hypocrisy and cynicism on display was staggering. As MPs from all parties were wringing their hands over the fate of the people of Aleppo and speaking of being "moved to tears" (Osborne), the indiscriminate bombing and war crimes being carried out in neighbouring Yemen by Saudi Arabia--using British supplied warplanes and munitions--did not rate a mention. The word Yemen was not uttered in the entire debate.

After 18 months of bombardment by US-backed Saudi Arabia—which receives 30 percent of all warplanes, missiles and bombs exported by the UK—over 10,000 people have been killed in the poorest country in the Middle East.

Last month parliament, with the critical backing of Labour MPs, voted to back the war in Yemen.

It should be recalled this is from MPs and a parliament who, just two weeks ago, voted against holding any investigation into former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair, whose lies over non-existent "weapons of mass destruction" led, as a result of the US-UK led war in Iraq, to the loss of more than one million civilian lives.

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