

Leading ministers outline war agenda behind UK's snap general election

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22 April 2017

UK Defence Secretary Michael Fallon made a filthy attack on Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn Thursday, accusing him of being “feeble” and “gutless” on defence and asserting that Russian President Vladimir Putin would welcome a Labour victory.

On the first official day of campaigning for the June 8 general election, Fallon made clear that Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May's decision to precipitate a snap poll is not only aimed at strengthening her government's hand in Brexit negotiations with the European Union (EU). It is an attempt to shape post-Brexit politics based on an agenda of trade and military war.

Fallon was speaking in Estonia, during a ceremony to mark the deployment of 800 British troops in a NATO combined force. This is part of a build-up of NATO forces all along Russia's borders that will see British Typhoon fighter jets sent to Romania and the dispatch of a destroyer to the Black Sea in the summer.

More than 1,200 troops from 12 countries are presently taking part in two weeks of NATO drills in Latvia. Earlier this month, 1,350 NATO soldiers arrived in northeast Poland. In addition, eight US Air Force F-35As have arrived at RAF Lakenheath, England for a month of practicing combat maneuvers with the UK.

Speaking to British journalists, Fallon said, “Russia will be watching Labour's feebleness that Jeremy Corbyn has not supported this deployment. He has questioned it.” Corbyn, he added, has “voted against a stronger defence, including the renewal of Trident last July. Russia will be watching that... Putin would certainly welcome feebler British defence.”

Fallon then turned his attack on Scottish National Party leader Nicola Sturgeon, who he said “was ready to work with Labour to frustrate a Conservative government” and “dismantle our deterrent and would weaken our defences.”

The US and other NATO allies had expressed concern about the impact a Corbyn premiership would have on defence, Fallon said, adding, “NATO is a nuclear alliance and Labour's failure to wholeheartedly back the deterrence is obviously a continuing concern for the US and our other allies.”

Fallon's essentially anti-communist diatribe is in line with a campaign of warmongering that began the moment May made her announcement. That day, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson was asked in the Commons by former foreign minister Alistair Burt if the UK was bound by the 2013 decision against UK air strikes in Syria. Burt referenced UK support for US President Donald Trump's targeting of the Shayrat airbase with Tomahawk cruise missiles on April 7.

Johnson replied, “We were not asked for specific support, but it is my belief, though I stress no such decision has yet been taken... that were such a request to be made in future, were it be a reasonable request in pursuit of similar objectives, then I think it would be very difficult for the United Kingdom to say no.”

Trump had sent an “emphatic” message that the “era when [Syrian President] Assad's barbarism was met with passivity and inaction has finally come to an end.”

Linking US aggression against Syria with the targeting of North Korea, Johnson concluded that, faced with “hereditary dictators” that have “challenged the essential rules that underpin our world peace... The United States has responded with strength and resolve and in accordance with its traditional role--as the guarantor of the rules-based system. And in both cases the US has acted with the full support of the British Government.”

Johnson was himself at the very centre of all the events that led up to May's announcement. On April 9, he announced that he was abandoning a planned trip to Moscow, after being asked to do so by US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Instead, he was to lead efforts at the

April 10 meeting of the G7 in Italy to secure a “clear and coordinated message to the Russians” over Syria.

He failed in this task, as Germany, France and other EU powers refused to agree to a further round of sanctions against Moscow to reinforce demands that Putin pull his troops out of Syria and end support for President Bashar al-Assad.

This was not only an embarrassment for the UK, but a snub for the US. In its aftermath, May, who bases her entire perspective on securing an alliance with Trump, will have been told in no uncertain terms that a UK that cannot swing the EU states behind NATO’s offensive against Russia is of little use to Washington.

This was confirmed by the arrival the next day, as MPs were voting to agree to suspend parliament by May 3, of a bi-partisan delegation to Britain led by Republican US House Speaker Paul Ryan.

Ryan’s meeting with Chancellor Phillip Hammond and his speech delivered to the pro-Conservative Policy Exchange think-tank was the most high-profile engagement in a week-long effort to secure the support of NATO powers for Washington’s anti-Russian offensive, that includes visits to Norway, Poland and Estonia.

The British media focused on the declaration of support for May calling a snap election in Ryan’s speech and the renewed promise of a future bilateral trade deal with the UK. But even here, Ryan stressed the need for May to strike a “lasting agreement” for a “strong UK-EU relationship.”

Ryan’s support for continued UK access to the EU’s Single Market is in fact bound up with demands that Europe’s markets are also opened up to the US--epitomised by his commitment to “work closely with our EU friends” on Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations, stalled as a result of European opposition.

However, the bulk of his remarks were on NATO and war.

Ryan thanked “the British government for backing our recent action in Syria, stressing that “this is not just about Assad.”

“Iran and Russia are complicit in these crimes against humanity”, he said. “Russia is determined to exploit weakness and opportunity wherever it may surface. As they seek to expand their sphere of influence in the Middle East, they continue to challenge the sovereignty of our allies in Eastern and Central Europe.”

Insisting that “We cannot allow a provocateur in Moscow to threaten our allies or interests,” Ryan

explained, “And by ‘we,’ I do not just mean the US and Britain. To truly combat Russian aggression, we need a strong NATO alliance...”

On Thursday, Johnson was closeted in discussion with Ryan for half an hour, reportedly discussing military action in Syria and the threat of war with North Korea.

These events make clear the full import of May’s declaration that a substantially increased Tory parliamentary majority was vital to secure the “strong and stable leadership in the national interest”, overwhelmingly at Labour’s expense, to “get the job done.”

The attack on Corbyn as a Russian stooge takes the campaign waged by senior military figures immediately following his election as Labour leader in 2015 to a far higher level. Then one “senior serving general” warned in the September 20 *Sunday Times* of “a mutiny” in the event of him becoming prime minister.

This threat was never directed primarily at Corbyn, who has time and again retreated on his nominally anti-war and anti-nuclear stance. It expressed concern within the state apparatus at the growth of working class discontent and resistance that found distorted expression in Corbyn’s landslide victory.

One-and-a-half years later, amid an escalating crisis of British imperialism and the relentless drive by Washington for war, May is seeking a majority large enough to impose yet deeper austerity and to drag Britain into a new round of criminal military interventions. To this end, May declares her opponents to be a “coalition of chaos”, while the Tory media bays in fascistic terms for her to “crush the saboteurs” and “kill off Labour.”



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