

War rhetoric dominates UK snap general election

Robert Stevens
29 April 2017

On Friday, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson spoke at the UN Security Council in order to support and ratchet up the threats against North Korea made by US President Donald Trump.

Johnson said, “Britain stands alongside our allies in making clear that North Korea must obey the UN and halt its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes—disarming in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner.”

He warned that the UK “believes it is vital for this council to stand ready to take further significant measures” against Pyongyang.

The previous day, Johnson reiterated his declaration that the UK would be prepared to support further US bombing in Syria, before indicating that the government might not seek parliamentary approval. He told BBC Radio’s “Today” programme, “[I]f they come to us and ask for our support—whether it’s with submarine-based cruise missiles in the Med... in my view—and I know it’s also the view of the prime minister—it would be difficult for us to say ‘no.’”

There is no legal requirement for parliament to authorise military action, but Defence Secretary Michael Fallon recently acknowledged that since the Iraq war in 2003, governments “go to Parliament to seek the authority” for action involving combat troops or aircraft.

Asked if UK military strikes would “need approval from the Commons,” Johnson said, “I think that needs to be tested. How we exactly implement that would be for the government and for the prime minister to decide.”

Earlier in the week, Johnson wrote a comment piece in the pro-Tory *Sun*, owned by billionaire oligarch Rupert Murdoch. While the media concentrated on his bizarre and derogatory description of Corbyn, the

newspaper asked voters “not to feel sorry for ‘mutton-headed old mugwump’ Jeremy Corbyn—because the Labour leader poses an extreme danger to the country.”

Referring to Russia, North Korea and Syria as the “problems Britain is grappling with,” Johnson said Corbyn had “campaigns against NATO for most of his life, and has even said he would like to scrap our armed forces.”

The foreign secretary’s comments followed those of Defence Secretary Michael Fallon, who said Monday on the “Today” programme, “In the most extreme circumstances, we have made it very clear that you can’t rule out the use of nuclear weapons as a first strike.”

Fallon refused to name which countries the UK was considering launching a pre-emptive nuclear strike against, as this would “only give comfort to our enemies and make the deterrent less credible.”

It is unprecedented for a UK defence secretary to declare in public that the UK is prepared to launch a nuclear first strike on another country.

On the first day of the election campaign, Fallon accused Corbyn of being a stooge of Russian President Vladimir Putin. He was speaking in Estonia, during a ceremony to mark the deployment of 800 British troops in a NATO combined force, part of NATO’s encirclement of Russia, to be escalated in the summer with the dispatch of British Typhoon fighter jets to Romania and a destroyer to the Black Sea.

This set the agenda for the series of increasingly hysterical attacks on Corbyn, centred on his being a danger to national security. Last Sunday, the BBC’s Andrew Marr held an interview with Corbyn in which he harangued him and asked repeatedly if he would press the nuclear button as prime minister. At one stage, Marr said, “Can I ask you directly: are there any

circumstances in which you'd authorise a nuclear strike? Any circumstances?"

This was followed Tuesday with the release of an election video by the Tories beginning with the words, "Whoever wins this election will need to keep our country safe." It includes a few seconds of clips from some of Corbyn's speeches and declares that he would close down NATO, stop the replacement of the UK Trident nuclear system, abolish the army and stop the Metropolitan Police's shoot to kill policy. It concludes with banner-sized text covering the screen: "Our security and Jeremy Corbyn—too big a risk."

The attacks on Corbyn were backed up by three ex-military chiefs—former First Sea Lord Alan West, former British commander in Afghanistan, Colonel Richard Kemp, and former chief of defence staff, Lord General Richards.

In response to Johnson's article, Corbyn replied passively that it was "personal name calling," adding, "I've never been involved in that and never will be."

In reality, the Tories and Labour are effectively one party of war, with Corbyn's personal policies on the use of nuclear weapons opposed by the vast majority of MPs, including his own shadow defence minister, Nia Griffith. Asked on the BBC's "Daily Politics" Monday if she agreed with Corbyn's declaration that he would not authorise the launching of a nuclear bomb, Griffith said this was not Labour's policy. "We are prepared to use it, and I'm certainly prepared to use it."

Corbyn had refused to guarantee that the £205 billion renewal of Trident would be in Labour's yet-to-be-released election manifesto, but was again immediately opposed by Andrew Gwynne MP, the party's election campaign organiser. Gwynne said, "The Labour Party is very clear. We're committed to a credible nuclear capability at the minimum end of the scale, delivered through continuous at-sea deterrent."

The Socialist Equality Party placed the struggle against war at the centre of its Third National Congress last October. The Congress unanimously endorsed the February 18, 2016 statement of the International Committee of the Fourth International, "Socialism and the Fight Against War," and adopted a resolution, "For a new socialist movement against militarism, austerity and war."

Point 24 of that resolution reads: "Britain's alliance with the US means it will be drawn inexorably even

further into military conflicts anywhere in the world. In Europe, it places it in the front line of the US build-up against Moscow, raising the prospect of a confrontation with Germany and the re-opening of the fault-lines that led to two world wars."

The reckless comment of Fallon that the UK is prepared to launch nuclear attacks on other countries, and Corbyn's refusal to call for mass working class opposition to these plans, only serves to hasten the descent into a war that threatens humanity.

This was demonstrated by the response of Russia to Fallon's comments. Frants Klintsevich, the deputy head of the Russian Federation Council's Committee for Defense and Security, said that if the UK attacks a nuclear power, then "the UK, which doesn't have vast territory, will be literally wiped off the face of the earth with a counterstrike."

On Thursday, asked to clarify his statements, Klintsevich said, "If the threat is directed against Russia or China, then it is a simple fact that Britain will not be able to withstand an appropriate response from another nuclear power."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact