

# UK: Labour's shadow foreign secretary spells out Corbyn's pro-war "journey"

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Labour Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry used her appearance Sunday on the BBC's *Andrew Marr Show* to declare that party leader Jeremy Corbyn had repudiated his previous opposition to NATO, and was now committed to the US-led military alliance as a bedrock principle.

Thornberry's exasperated declaration of "That is bollocks" has been widely commented on by the press. It was exclaimed in reply to Conservative Defence Secretary Michael Fallon's accusation that Labour was prepared to relinquish the Falkland Islands. Yet her expletive was of a piece with the rightward lurch in foreign policy that she staked out on behalf of her leader.

Her appearance on the show came just two days after Corbyn's first major speech of the election campaign, and one day after the party leadership had approved Labour's manifesto. Corbyn chose Chatham House (The Royal Institute of International Affairs)—a key institution of British imperialism since the aftermath of World War I—to outline Labour's backing for NATO and the Trident nuclear submarine programme. He also attacked the Tories for deep cuts to the armed forces.

"I am not a pacifist," he proclaimed.

Corbyn's speech included pro-forma appeals for nuclear disarmament and multilateralism, explaining that his own political views had been shaped by the "horrors of war and the threat of nuclear holocaust." However, his remarks on the dangers of war are shot through with hypocrisy and deception. Which views would take precedence—his own moral objection to nuclear annihilation or Labour's defence of NATO and commitment to Trident? Thornberry's exchange with Andrew Marr left no doubt as to where Corbyn stands.

Marr's first question to Thornberry was whether US President Donald Trump's planned state visit to Britain

would be cancelled under a Labour government. Corbyn and Thornberry have repeatedly attacked Prime Minister Theresa May's invitation. Thornberry was quick to respond, "No, because he's been invited, and I don't think it's right for us to disinvite him ... it would be to the detriment of our country."

Next, Marr questioned her on Labour's declared "ethical foreign policy"—would this mean, for instance, that questions over human rights abuses would be allowed to interfere with British trade agreements? "Don't take this too far," she replied, "I'm not saying that we're going to boycott China, for heaven's sake."

Marr then moved to the central questions of NATO and Trident. He asked Thornberry whether the nuclear submarine programme, which is reliant on US logistical support, would "still depend upon the Americans under Labour."

"The most important part of our defence is NATO," she replied.

Having established the shadow foreign secretary's loyalty to NATO, Marr played footage taken of Corbyn in 2011 attacking the military alliance. Corbyn said, "We in the radical end of the left of the unions and the Labour Party have got to be realistic that NATO is a major problem and a major difficulty and we have to campaign against NATO's power, its influence and its global reach, because it is a danger to world peace and a danger to world security."

"Are you going to campaign against NATO's world power or not?" asked Marr.

Thornberry responded, "I think that's a quote from six years ago, and Jeremy has been on a journey, to coin a phrase, and there have been a number of discussions and it has been made ... quite clear that the predominance of opinion within the Labour Party is that we are committed to NATO."

Labour's new election manifesto, and Corbyn's Chatham House speech, were repeatedly held up by Thornberry as proof of Corbyn's support for NATO. "The Labour Party's position is a clear one," she said.

Corbyn had been wrong on NATO, but had "changed his mind," she continued. "You'll find that lots of politicians change their minds."

Thornberry then mounted a strident defence of the "responsibility to protect doctrine," utilised by British and US imperialism in 1999 to bomb Kosovo. A Labour government would utilise this principle to justify British military intervention, if it were being blocked by the exercise of veto powers on the UN Security Council.

Marr pointed out that Robin Cook, the late secretary of state for foreign affairs under former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair, had "led the charge for that," while Corbyn "voted and spoke against that involvement. Who was right, do you think, Robin Cook or Jeremy Corbyn?"

"Robin was right," replied Thornberry.

With the position of a Labour government on NATO and "responsibility to protect" clarified, Marr asked, "Do you think a future Labour government would send a task force against the Falklands if there was a crisis there?"

"Yes," replied Thornberry. "So long as the people of the Falklands wish to remain British, they remain British. So that's not going to be compromised."

The significance of this declaration cannot be overstated. Thatcher's dirty 1982 war against Argentina became emblematic of her persona as "The Iron Lady," and her re-election in 1983 was attributed to "patriotic sentiment" whipped up by the media with Labour's backing.

Marr's programme also included a lengthy exchange between Thornberry and Fallon. Marr introduced them by pointing to revelations in Sunday's press that Corbyn had been arrested at a pro-Irish Republican Army (IRA) protest in 1986. "What's your message to patriotic working class people who look at this stuff and think 'I just don't like it?'" he demanded of Thornberry.

Thornberry countered Marr's patriotic appeal by confronting Fallon. In May 2007, he had attended a reception in Syria to celebrate the election victory of President Bashar al-Assad. "Now, I'm not going to

judge you for going to a reception with Assad, and I don't think people should judge Jeremy for talking to people who might be open to a settlement in Northern Ireland."

Fallon was caught off guard: "I was on an all-party parliamentary visit ... a fact-finding visit," he offered. However, he quickly recovered his bearings, telling Thornberry, "There's a huge moral difference here between talking to other foreign leaders ... and Jeremy Corbyn's quite open support for the IRA."

Thornberry made clear that Labour could be relied on to maintain British rule in Northern Ireland. Corbyn's position was "not having open support for the IRA," she replied, "You can't just go around making this stuff up."

"You've just said, for example, that I want to negotiate the future of the Falklands—that is bollocks. ... And it is not right for you to go around slinging dead cats in the way that you do."

Thornberry's reference to "dead cats" speaks volumes. This is how those closest to Corbyn in the Labour Party view the anti-war and anti-imperialist policies with which they were once associated. Opposition to nuclear war, opposition to the British invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas Islands, and protests against the bloody history of British repression in Northern Ireland—all this amounts to "dead cats" and a load of old "bollocks."

Nothing, however, will stop Britain's pseudo-left groups, from the Socialist Party through to the Socialist Workers Party, from hailing Corbyn as the leader of an alleged socialist renewal of the Labour Party. Workers and young people must draw the necessary conclusions. Corbyn's "journey"—from chair of the Stop the War Coalition in 2015 to his declaration of support for NATO as Labour leader—demonstrates that Labour is a party of imperialist war and that Corbyn is its chief defender.



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