

New Statesman's Paul Mason advocates for regime change in Russia

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Paul Mason, who still advances himself as “of the left,” has confirmed his role as an advocate for British imperialism, penning a belligerent article, “Futile airstrikes won’t defeat Assad and Putin,” in the *New Statesman*.

Mason’s argument is that such missile attacks do not go far enough. Instead he advocates a programme for regime change, not only in Syria but above all in Russia, whose population he wishes to subject to cyber warfare, economic sanctions and political offensives, even if this ends up provoking war.

Dismissing airstrikes against the Assad government as “an inadequate and cynical gesture,” Mason suggests the UK “back or re-create a secular-led military opposition on the ground, starting with the Kurds of Rojava.” He laments that “this is not going to happen” because “there is no stomach for regime change wars in the West” due to public opposition after the toppling of Saddam Hussein.

This is a problem for Mason, who asserts, “To defeat Assad you would have to engage in the kind of warfare America did in Iraq, going from house to house in the dark, killing suspected supporters of al-Qaeda, dragging their children and elderly into the dark by flashlight.

“You would have to bomb what’s left of Syria until it looked like what’s left of Gaza. And you would have to do it knowing that into the chaos you create, would move exactly the kind of jihadi groups we are trying to rid the world of.”

Mason, of course, frames his remarks as proof that this is not an option. But his words assume the character of a lament for what would be an effective strategy—providing only that the imperialists first create a “secular-led military opposition” to prevent Islamists from exploiting any power vacuum.

The passage echoes the brutal tracts of Professor Jörg Baberowski of Humboldt University in Berlin.

Speaking about the US-NATO wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria at the German Historical Museum in 2014, Baberowski said, “If one is not willing to take hostages, burn villages, hang people and spread fear and terror, as the terrorists do, if one is not prepared to do such things, then

one can never win such a conflict and it is better to keep out altogether.”

Baberowski is at the forefront of efforts to legitimize the remilitarizing of German imperialism, particularly through a rehabilitation of Hitler and the Third Reich.

Both he and Mason have their political origins in anti-Trotskyist “left” tendencies: Baberowski in the Maoist KBW and Mason in the pseudo-left Workers’ Power. Both now spend their political lives advancing the most reactionary causes of their respective bourgeoisies. In Mason’s case, this centres on support for the British war drive against Russia, as one of “the real powers,” along with Iran, which he says control “Assad’s war in Syria.”

Writing in his *New Statesman* article, he parrots the predatory agenda of British and American imperialism.

Early this April, the *World Socialist Web Site* drew attention to the British government’s security review, geared towards a campaign of aggression against Russia. It outlined plans, under a new “Fusion Doctrine,” to use all Britain’s means, “from economic levers, through cutting-edge military resources to our wider diplomatic and cultural influence on the world’s stage” to “project our global influence.” The BBC World Service was specially referenced as a key aspect of British “soft power.”

As for Mason’s proposals, on the economic front, besides deporting and seizing the property of Putin’s associates in every Western country, he suggests: “make it an offence for law, accountancy and financial management firms to work for Russian entities. And shut off the international SWIFT payments system to Russia.”

“Yes,” he admits, “that means enforcing economic autarky on Russia and its allies and collapsing its banks.”

As part of waging “a political fight against Putin and his United Russia Party,” he argues that Britain “support the Russian NGOs, political parties and cultural groups prepared to resist mafia rule; we extend BBC and other Western media’s foreign language services not just to Russia and Ukraine but to Greece, Turkey, Hungary and the Balkans. We build capacity for democratic institutions across the

whole of Eurasia.”

The reference to Eurasia is significant, following the line of former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski who described the region as “the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played.”

Mason sees Syria as just one arena in a global strategy for British imperialism, centred on a confrontation with Russia. If enacted, these measures would throw tens of millions of Russians into social and economic turmoil. They would bring the already hostile relations between Russia and the West to breaking point.

Mason cynically states that his proposals “would not lead to immediate peace and harmony. They would, for a time, leave the world divided into sealed trading blocs, as in the 1930s. ... But if you want to throw around words like fascism and appeasement, you must also be prepared to contemplate doing what democracies in the 1930s did when they decided to stop appeasing fascism.”

What can possibly be referenced here besides the plunging of the world into the bloodiest war in history in pursuit of imperialist interests? This is the writing of a warmonger.

Mason is articulating the prevailing foreign policy perspective within the Labour Party in particular.

Mason is closely connected with Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership team. His suggestions regarding economic sanctions on Russians in the West and Russia itself inform speeches in the same vein given by Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell to the media and Parliament this March and April.

Moreover, in 2016, in the midst of a conflict within the Labour Party over the renewal of the Trident nuclear missile system, Mason weighed in to insist on the party’s commitment to nuclear weapons and the NATO alliance and a more aggressive posture towards “a newly aggressive and unpredictable Russia.”

His suggestions included establishing “a clear set of conditions for using” nuclear weapons and placing all the forces “we can afford once we’ve paid for the nuclear deterrent” in “new, permanent *non-aggressive* [!] deployments to NATO forces in Europe” (emphasis added).

For all Corbyn’s personal sentiments, the true orientation of the Labour Party, and of many of those close to Corbyn, is revealed in statements like these, in which an “alternative” imperialist strategy is sketched out for a Labour-led Britain.

To support his call to arms, Mason advances every one of the anti-Russian lines being peddled by the Conservative government and the media. He rails against “the manipulation of public opinion by the Kremlin, using all the tools Google, Facebook and Twitter are prepared to hand it.” Meanwhile, “the European Union,” we are told, “is

paralysed by fear of far-right political forces that Putin himself has stirred up.”

Putin is also said to be behind the widespread questioning of the West’s narrative on the alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma, which served as the pretext for the US-British-French airstrikes a week later.

Mason is particularly irate on this point. He even goes to the trouble of citing a source “showing it is likely a regime Mi-8 helicopter dropped a gas container onto a specific building” to make his point. He fails to mention that the source in question is the Bellingcat research collective, run by former Atlantic Council (a US geostrategic think tank) fellow Eliot Higgins.

On this basis, scepticism towards the claims of the war-hungry establishment press, learned through many years’ bitter experience, is dismissed with reference to “crank theories spread by the Kremlin.”

There is nothing but disdain shown for the working class throughout Mason’s article. His approach on this question, along with the attempt to paint Russia as the primary destabilising and aggressive force in world politics, flow from conceptions rooted in Mason’s early history in Workers’ Power. The group split with the state-capitalist Socialist Workers Party in the UK, but declared that the Fourth International was “dead” and dissolved into the Labour Party. They falsely labelled China and Russia imperialist powers following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The reactionary essence of these positions has seen Mason cross the political spectrum to an essentially neoconservative position. In doing so, he follows a well-trodden path.

In the late 1930s, the intellectual progenitors of Workers’ Power, the Burnham and Shachtman tendency, broke with the Fourth International and refused to continue defending the Soviet Union—citing the Hitler-Stalin pact and the Soviet invasion of Finland. This reflected the outlook of a demoralised section of the petty-bourgeoisie in the process of making their peace with US imperialism on the eve of its entry into World War II. Burnham went on to become a Cold War Republican ideologue. In the contemporary pseudo-left, under conditions of a growing war threat, this rotten milieu continues to produce ideological fellow travellers of the neo-con right.



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