

Britain bombs Yemen alongside US with no parliamentary discussion and Labour's total support

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12 January 2024

Four British Typhoon fighter jets took part in Thursday night's US-led strikes against Houthi forces in Yemen, maintaining London's role as Washington's chief attack dog.

Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and Bahrain were also involved and the European governments, with the exception of Spain, have all since endorsed the attack. But the UK was the only other country besides America to have its forces launch missiles. More than sixty targets were hit in total, in 16 different locations across the impoverished country. Five Houthi fighters were killed.

The Royal Air Force (RAF) was deployed without any public discussion or democratic accountability. Workers in the UK went to bed Thursday with the news having broken just a few hours earlier, around 7pm, that a cabinet meeting had been called to discuss military action in Yemen and woke to the news that airstrikes had been carried out around midnight.

That such a deeply unpopular government—the ruling Conservative Party trails by 13 points in the polls—is ready to act so recklessly points to British imperialism's desperate need to cleave to America. That it is able to do so depends on the total support for its war policy provided by the opposition Labour Party.

Especially since Brexit cut the UK off from potential allies in Europe, ending its primary usefulness to Washington as the staunchest pro-US voice within the European Union, Britain has doubled down on staging military provocations to curry favour with American imperialism. It has played a leading role in Ukraine against Russia and is now doing the same in the Red Sea against Iran, which backs the Houthis, where it has deployed two warships, HMS Diamond and HMS

Richmond. Another, HMS Lancaster, is in the Gulf of Oman.

The morning after the bombing raid, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak made a surprise visit to Kyiv to meet with President Volodymyr Zelensky. He pledged £2.5 billion of military aid to Ukraine over the coming year—the UK's largest annual commitment since Russia's invasion in February 2022. Sunak said the support was vital because, if President Vladimir Putin “wins in Ukraine, he will not stop there”.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer and his shadow defence secretary John Healey were briefed on planned action Thursday night. They appeared first thing Friday on the morning news shows to make clear their agreement.

Starmer told BBC Breakfast, “We are supporting this action... We do support this action.” He explained, “When Rishi Sunak became prime minister I had a phone call with him the first day, the first night... We agreed that we would robustly challenge each other on the politics of the day, but when it comes to national security issues of defence of the country that we would seek to cooperate and work together.”

He was even more effusive later in the day, declaring, “I do support, Labour does support, this operation against the Houthi rebels... We support this action... we're fully supportive of the action that's needed”.

Healey told ITV's *Good Morning Britain*, “We back this action,” and used the occasion to raise his concerns about the underfunding of the military. Saying Labour would “always do what's required to defend the country, will always spend what's required to defend the country,” he referenced the fact that military spending under Labour in 2010 was 2.5 percent of

GDP, sustaining a full-time army of over 100,000.

Starmer and Healey stepped in as chief spokespeople for parliament's single party of war. Starmer would not even call for a recall of parliament, saying instead that there should be a debate "at the first opportunity", i.e., when parliament reassembles Monday.

The Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party (SNP) have asked for the recall of parliament so that, in Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey's words, "the government can put their case." Davey was sure to add that his party was "minded to support the government." All that is being requested is the opportunity for a "democratic" rubber stamp.

SNP leader Humza Yousaf was marginally more critical, noting that "the UK's record on military intervention, particularly in the Middle East, is not a good one," before adding, "the correct and appropriate thing to have done would have been to have recalled parliament".

Labour's "left" rump went no further. John McDonnell, the former shadow chancellor under Jeremy Corbyn tweeted Thursday night, "There is a risk of setting the region alight," but only argued, "There should be no military action without Parliamentary approval."

Zarah Sultana MP said, "Parliament must be recalled for a vote before British military action," as did John Trickett, "The Commons should immediately reconvene if we are deploying armed forces."

Jeremy Corbyn, now an Independent, called the failure to recall parliament "utterly disgraceful", but said nothing to criticise Starmer—merely urging all MPs to "learn from our mistakes and realise that war is not the answer."

Diane Abbott, the former shadow home secretary who now also sits as an Independent having been kicked out like Corbyn from the Parliamentary Labour Party, was alone in even noting that "In 2020 Keir Starmer said no more illegal wars. He said that he would only back war if it was legal, had a viable objective and Parliament gave consent. The current military action on Yemen has none of these yet he supports it."

The Corbynites all know full well that the overwhelming majority of MPs, and, most importantly, of the Labour Party, stand in favour of the genocidal assault in Gaza and now military intervention in

Yemen, and that appeals directed to Parliament without any call for independent political struggle by workers and young people are purely for the record. Above all, the starting point of any real opposition to the war in the Middle East is a challenge to Starmer and his shadow cabinet.

British imperialism's rapid shift to the right, and the role played by Corbyn and the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, is clearly marked by the three bombing campaigns planned by the RAF in the last decade.

In 2013, Parliament was consulted on and failed to support Prime Minister David Cameron's participation in US-led strikes on Syria. The vote reflected divisions in the ruling class over the wisdom of such an intervention, heavily influenced by the threat of a backlash in a population deeply affected by the Iraq War and opposed to further imperialist bloodshed in the Middle East.

That popular sentiment was a major factor in the landslide election of Corbyn as Labour leader two years later. But just months into his leadership, he trampled that mandate to allow the pro-war Labour Party a free vote on the Tory government's revived proposal for airstrikes in Syria. The vote went through, and fighter jets were carrying out raids within hours.

This set the tone for Corbyn's period in office and the systematic demobilisation of anti-war sentiment he presided over, completed with the handing of the Labour Party back to its Blairite masters led by Sir Keir "The party of NATO" Starmer.

Starmer's commitment to NATO and the Labour left's capitulation to Starmer have been so total that even the fig leaf of a parliamentary vote has been dispensed with this time around. The rapidly expanding war in the Middle East, with Iran in the imperialist powers' sights, will not be stopped by any political force represented in the House of Commons; that requires the mobilisation of the international working class by a socialist, anti-imperialist party.



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