

UK: Corbyn offers no fight against war with Iran

By Thomas Scripps
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Jeremy Corbyn's cowardly performance during this week's Prime Minister's Questions confirms that the outgoing Labour leader offers no principled opposition to the eruption of imperialist violence.

The debate was the first time Prime Minister Boris Johnson had appeared in public since the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Suleimani by the United States, after he refused to cut short his luxury holiday on the Caribbean island of Mustique.

This was the first opportunity for Labour MPs, led by Corbyn, to oppose a blatant act of war carried out by US imperialism, with Johnson's slavish support, that threatens to set the Middle East aflame.

Year after year Corbyn's numerous political apologists have sought to justify his constant retreats before the warmongers on the Blairite right of his party with the claim that he was seeking to hold the party together so as to form a government that could replace the Tories.

Here at last, after losing the December 12 general election by a landslide and with a contest underway to replace him as leader by April, was an opportunity for the "real" "anti-war" Corbyn to step forward. Instead, it was business as usual, with Corbyn making a series of ineffectual pleas for a general de-escalation and for Johnson, Trump's partner in crime, to "stand by international law, as I am sure the Government do and would want to."

His speech was peppered with references to ensuring the safety of "United Kingdom troops," putting "the interests of this country first" and guaranteeing "the security of the [Middle East] region and of this country."

This followed his request last week for a secret Privy Council meeting to discuss Britain's national security in the US-Iran conflict. The former chair of the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) did not condemn American war crimes or the countless lying justifications churned out by the corporate media. Nor did he reference the millions of Iranians who protested Suleimani's murder and the threat of an American war.

From discussions with the Confederation of British

Industry and City of London, to holding Brexit talks with former Prime Minister Theresa May, offering the same to Johnson, Corbyn's guiding principle is safeguarding the "national interest," that is, the strategic interests of British imperialism. The independent, diametrically opposed interests of the British and international working class are absolutely excluded.

Corbyn articulates the concerns within ruling circles, including Johnson's Tories and the armed forces, that Trump's recklessness can endanger the UK's world position.

On this basis alone, he asked in the mildest possible terms, "What evidence has the Prime Minister got to suggest that this attack on General Suleimani, and his death, was not an illegal act by the United States?" and "Can the prime minister confirm that the British Government will respect any decision made by a sovereign Parliament and Government in Iraq that may make such a request in the future and will respect the sovereignty of Iraq as a nation?"

Johnson responded to Corbyn's entreaties with undisguised contempt. "I think that most reasonable people would accept that the United States has a right to protect its bases and its personnel. ... That man [Suleimani] had the blood of British troops on his hands."

Twice in the debate, Johnson intimated that Corbyn was a supporter of terrorism for opposing the US murder of Suleimani. He attacked what he described as "the baleful role played in the region for a very long time by Qasem Suleimani," going on to say, "I have been interested that, in all his [Corbyn's] commentary, he has not yet raised that matter."

Closing his exchange with Corbyn, Johnson declared, "I am very surprised at the end of these exchanges that the Right Hon. Gentleman has yet to condemn the activities of Qasem Suleimani and the revolutionary guard."

Suleimani was a military and political leader of a sovereign nation travelling on a diplomatic passport on the invitation of Iraq. The real "terrorist" is his assassin, President Trump, the commander in chief of US

imperialism. It is the US, backed by the UK, which illegally invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, sponsored sectarian militias in Iraq and jihadist militias in Syria, spawned ISIS, established torture camps and death squads and flattened entire cities—at the cost of well over a million lives and the destruction of entire societies—and which illegally stations troops in Syria and Iraq, with a president who regularly threatens Iran, a country of 80 million people, with annihilation

Yet on four separate occasions Corbyn offered no reply to Johnson, much to the delight of the Tories and the media. Political capitulation has consequences. Corbyn denies a voice to the anti-war sentiment of millions of workers and provides the Johnson government with a pretext—“terrorist sympathies”—for massive state attacks on workers and youth opposed to the warmongering of the British elite.

These dangers were underscored by the intervention of former British Commander in Afghanistan, Colonel Richard Kemp, who told the *Sun* last Friday, “Corbyn can always be relied on to back our enemies over our allies and that is why he sides with Iran over the US.

“He was previously a paid mouthpiece of the same regime in Iran as Suleimani served by delivering acts of terrorism around the world.”

In 2015, a serving British general anonymously threatened mutiny against a Corbyn-led government. Two years later, Kemp publicly stated, alongside similar comments from Former First Sea Lord Alan West and Former chief of defence staff Lord General Richards, “Quite literally if Jeremy Corbyn as prime minister enacted the policies he describes, he would have blood on his hands ... he must never be elected to lead this country.”

Corbyn ignores these threats not out of some priestly dignity, but out of fear of a genuine mass movement of the working class and youth against British imperialism. He knows that to seriously expose the UK’s predatory ambitions abroad and the threats of the military at home would risk unleashing class forces far beyond the control of his own mealy-mouthed appeals for social harmony.

The only “anti-war” movement Corbyn is interested in leading is one which is a pliant tool of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy—including his own front-bench MPs, who sat silent and arms folded as he was ridiculed by Johnson.

It is in this capacity that Corbyn is attending a STWC demonstration in London today. The STWC claimed the mantle of leadership of the anti-war movement in 2003, when it found itself at the head of a million-strong protest against the Iraq war. Intensely hostile to the class struggle, its leaders systematically demobilised that movement with useless appeals to Parliament and capitalist politicians for restraint. Since then it has championed an anti-American,

not an anti-imperialist, perspective, functioning as an adjunct to that faction of the ruling class favouring a more “independent” foreign policy for British capitalism.

Corbyn echoed this geostrategic line in Parliament on Wednesday, saying, “Is not the truth that this prime minister is unable to stand up to President Trump because he has hitched his wagon to a trade deal with the United States, and that takes priority over everything else that he ought to be considering?”

Corbyn will mount today’s STWC platform as “CND [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament] vice-president,” not Leader of the Labour Party. He is happy to fall back into his long-time role as an in-house critic of elements of UK foreign policy, so long as this does not threaten Labour’s century-old position as a trusted prop of British imperialism.

Under the leadership of Corbyn, the former head of the STWC, and now deputy leader of CND, Labour MPs were allowed a free vote to wave through the bombing of Syria in 2015. War criminal Tony Blair remains a Labour member. The party went into the December 2019 election on a manifesto committed to membership of NATO, at least 2 percent of GDP spending on the military and maintaining the UK’s Trident nuclear weapons arsenal.

The threat of war in Iran poses with renewed urgency the need to build an international anti-imperialist movement against war that is worthy of the name. This can only be done through the fight for socialism in the working class and youth, the only force on the planet capable of overthrowing the capitalist profit system that gives rise to war.

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