

Britain's General Election 2017 - Peace Policies and Foreign Follies

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People in Iraq, Libya and Yemen are desperate for strong and stable government. Theresa May is partly why they don't have it, says Steve Beauchampé.

The General Election campaign has returned after last week's brief hiatus and with it a volley of unedifying Conservative attacks on Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's historic support for a united Ireland and the Palestinian people, highlighting the most tenuous of links and associations.



Yet serious examination of Jeremy Corbyn's (image on the right) activism shows him to have been on the right side of history and ahead of mainstream public opinion time and again, standing up for anti-racist and anti-apartheid causes, refugees and asylum seekers, gender equality, the LGBT community, environmental issues, animal rights and the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and self-expression long before such things gained widespread acceptance. Perhaps not surprising then that when you campaign in support of so many marginalised groups and outsider causes that you will from time to time encounter those whose frustrations and sense of powerlessness has led them to step outside of the law.

As regards Irish republicanism Corbyn's attempts to achieve conflict resolution through dialogue may at times have been naive, but were his actions so dissimilar to the approach adopted around the same time by MI5 and later by John Major, both of whom ultimately realised that a decades-old conflict, whose death toll was inexorably rising, could not be won solely by military means?

But whilst Jeremy Corbyn's peripheral rôle in the republican cause has been (and continues to be) pored over and examined by his opponents half a lifetime later, the record and

judgement of Theresa May with regard to much more recent UK military interventions requires equally forensic scrutiny given her claims to be a fit and proper person to lead Britain.

And frankly, history's judgement on this aspect of Theresa May is unlikely to be generous. After first being elected an MP in 1997, she voted in favour of the 2003 invasion of Iraq (having already supported the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in the frenzied post-9/11 atmosphere). Like so many of her colleagues on the opposition Conservative benches at the time, May failed to hold the Blair government to account despite the widely expressed caution of many experts over both the reasons for going to war and the lack of a post-conflict plan to stabilise Iraq. Instead, May limply and dutifully gave her support.

What followed for Iraqis has been almost fifteen years of societal breakdown throughout large parts of this once architectural, cultural and scholastic gem of a nation, with swathes of land occupied until recently by Islamic State and a fracturing of the country along religious, sectarian and tribal lines in a way that will be hard, if not impossible, to heal.



Tony Blair defends his relationship with Muammar Gaddafi (Source: The Telegraph)

By 2011, and as the then Home Secretary in the Conservative/Lib Dem coalition government, Theresa May backed the Anglo/Franco-led military action in Libya, which despite its billing as merely creating a no-fly zone to protect civilians and rebel fighters, mainly located in the east of the country, quickly escalated into regime change, culminating in the overthrow and lynching of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Again, as a senior government minister Theresa May ignored warnings that historic tribal divisions, the absence of a strong and stable government or a long-term strategic plan would quickly fracture the country.

Six years on and Libya exists in little more than name only. There is no central government, armed militias and feudal warlords hold considerable power, whilst every international Islamist terror group of substance now boasts a flourishing branch office in the country from where they increasingly export their murderous ideologies. And every month, if not every week, scores of desperate migrants, people who long ago lost all control of their lives, drown off the Libyan coast whilst seeking something better than the hell that their lives have spiralled into.

Learning nothing from history and the consequences of her own actions, in August 2013 Theresa May supported Prime Minister David Cameron's unsuccessful attempt to persuade MPs to back UK air strikes against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The absence yet again of a coherent post-conflict strategy was sufficient for Labour leader Ed

Miliband to refuse his party's support to Cameron, who narrowly lost a House of Commons vote on the issue. The main beneficiaries of such an intervention, with its intention to downgrade Assad's military capabilities (if not to remove him from power), would likely have been the plethora of extremist groups engaged in the Syrian civil war, principal amongst them the then nascent Islamic State.



Since becoming Prime Minister Theresa May (image on the right) has continued the supply of British made weapons and military expertise to Saudi Arabia for use in its war crime-strewn bombing campaign in Yemen, a campaign which has killed countless numbers of civilians and is fast creating yet another failed state in the region.

Iraq, Libya and increasingly Yemen: countries where British military interventions have created power vacuums swiftly filled by a combination of anarchy, lawlessness, violence and economic deprivation, with catastrophic consequences and relentless, unending misery for millions of civilians.

Theresa May supported each and every one of these military interventions. Jeremy Corbyn opposed all of them. So whose judgment would you trust?

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