

UK Labour Party Leadership Candidate Jeremy Corbyn Backs Boycott of Israeli Universities Involved in Arms Research

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Global Research, August 03, 2015

[Electronic Intifada](#) 2 August 2015

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Military and WMD](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Palestinian refugees “deserve their right to return home.” Yannis Mendez

[Jeremy Corbyn](#), the surprise frontrunner in the leadership election for the [UK Labour Party](#), says he would impose a two-way [arms embargo](#) on Israel if he were to become prime minister in 2020.

In an interview with The Electronic Intifada, the member of parliament for Islington, in central London, endorsed key elements of the [boycott, divestment and sanctions](#) (BDS) campaign against Israel.

Corbyn is a patron of the [Palestine Solidarity Campaign](#) and is well known as an active supporter of Palestinian rights.

He told The Electronic Intifada his involvement in the movement took off after he entered parliament in 1983. He has visited Palestine nine times, as well as refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria.

Corbyn emphasized that the Palestinian right to return was “the key” to a solution.

He added that [Israeli universities](#) involved in arms research should be boycotted.

Corbyn, whose grassroots popularity has caused [panic](#) in the Labour establishment, said he would scrap the government’s controversial “anti-terror” strategy [Prevent](#). Critics point to its frequent targeting of British Muslims for legitimate speech acts.

Arms embargo

“I think we have to push robustly for the limitation of arms supplies,” Corbyn said, adding that he believed Israel to be “in breach” of the human rights clauses of the [EU-Israel trade agreement](#).

“Israel is after all facing an investigation ... for war crimes, as indeed are the [Hamas](#) forces on a much different or lesser scale,” Corbyn said. “I think we should be very cautious about supplying arms in those circumstances.”

The current [Conservative](#) government recently announced it had ended a review into arms licenses to Israel started during the summer 2014 assault on Gaza.

“Certainly the trajectory of the Conservative government is to approve of continuous arms sales,” Corbyn said.

But he cited ample reasons for action including that Israel is “continuing with the imprisonment of [Palestinian] children, elected parliamentarians, expulsion of [African asylum seekers](#) from Israel, and of course the [siege of Gaza](#), refusing to allow any reconstruction.”

He also cited Israel’s ongoing colonization of the West Bank and that it is “still trying to sell [settlement products](#) as if they’re Israeli products through Western markets, even though that’s been declared completely illegal by the European Union.”

“A peace process will come about when Israel understands that there is not a military solution,” Corbyn said, and such a process would have to include Hamas.

He also called for four subsidiary factories of the Israeli arms firm [Elbit](#) in the UK to be converted to civilian use.

Campaigners [recently blockaded these factories](#) calling for them to be shut down. One of them, [UAV Engines Limited](#), makes [drone engines for Elbit](#). “I’m opposed to the use of drones,” Corbyn said.

Instead of firing workers in arms factories, Corbyn advocates converting them to other purposes, such as civil aviation, with support from a national investment bank.

Academic boycott “complicated”

He also endorsed the boycott of [Israeli settlement goods](#).

On the wider BDS campaign, Corbyn said that the academic boycott was “very complicated” to implement without, for example, preventing Israeli dissidents such as [Ilan Pappé](#) coming to speak in the UK.

“If it is a university that is doing research into drones, taser weapons, or doing research into surveillance of the occupation in Gaza and elsewhere then they should be part of the boycott,” he said.

But he said he supports “dialogue” with “academics.”

However, the [guidelines](#) published by [PACBI](#) – the Palestinian academic and cultural boycott campaign – do not in any way exclude someone like Pappé, who does not represent a boycottable academic institution, from speaking.

Corbyn said he was unfamiliar with the guidelines but that he would study them.

Corbynmania

Corbyn entered the leadership election in June, securing the required number of nominations from fellow lawmakers just two minutes before the deadline.

At first, he was seen as the token left-wing candidate, with his three rivals more identified with the right of the party.

But the last two months have seen an explosion of what media are calling “Corbynmania.”

He has packed meeting halls all over the UK, with fans praising his self-effacing and inclusive style.

Corbyn’s campaign has been boosted by a wave of young people paying £3 (\$5) to sign up as Labour party supporters, giving them a vote in the election which takes place from mid-August. The results will be known 12 September.

There is a touch of the 2008 [Barack Obama](#) about his campaign, something his team has playfully tapped into with the ironic twist on his nickname: “Jez We Can.”

Corbyn has now overtaken his rivals in [recent opinion polls](#).

He has also won the most nominations from local Labour Parties, an indication of grassroots sentiment.

He has been formally endorsed by several trade unions, including the UK’s two biggest: Unite and [Unison](#).

Liz Kendall, the right-wing candidate deemed closet to former Prime Minister [Tony Blair](#), is expected to finish last.

While polls have proven unreliable predictors in recent UK elections, it would be a stunning turn of events for one of Labour’s most left-wing lawmakers to be elected leader, running on policies such as taking the railways and other utilities back into public ownership, abolishing the university tuition fees introduced by Blair and opposition to nuclear weapons.

Talk to Hamas

Corbyn has long argued that the UK needs to talk to Hamas as part of a “peace process.”

Media recently pilloried him for referring to representatives of Hamas and the Lebanese political party and resistance organization [Hizballah](#) who had been refused entry to the UK as “friends.”

“Some of our media prefer not to engage in major and serious issues and prefer instead to throw around emotive language,” he said in response to these criticisms.

“There has to be talks, there has to be negotiations with all the Palestinian forces, as well as with all the Israeli forces,” he said. “That means talking to Hamas, it means talking to Hizballah – does it mean you agree with what they say on social issues, on the death penalty? No it doesn’t, and you can make that very clear to them in the discussion.”

“But the reality is they do represent a very large sway of Palestinian opinion – if you don’t involve them you’re not going to get a deal,” he added.

Corbyn noted that it was also once considered anathema for the UK to talk to Sinn Féin, the political party associated with the Irish Republican Army. He was also attacked in the 1980s for bringing Sinn Féin leader [Gerry Adams](#) into the UK parliament for talks.

Recently, Adams met Corbyn on a return visit to parliament, but this time it was after Adams and his colleagues had [visited 10 Downing Street](#) for talks with Prime Minister David

Cameron.

With Jeremy Corbyn & the comrades @ Portcullis House, Westminster.
pic.twitter.com/A6Vgmaglsa

— Gerry Adams (@GerryAdamsSF) [July 21, 2015](#)

Corbyn points out that even former heads of Israeli intelligence think Israel should negotiate with Hamas – something it has already done, albeit indirectly, over prisoner exchanges and ceasefires in Gaza.

Prevent is divisive

Corbyn also questioned the government’s controversial “anti-terror” strategy Prevent.

Ostensibly a way to steer people away from extremist propaganda and groups like [Islamic State](#) (also known as ISIS or ISIL), critics of Prevent say that the policy is far more insidious, and may even be inadvertently helping groups like ISIS to recruit.

In July, [an Al Jazeera English report](#) revealed that an Iranian British schoolboy had been referred to a Prevent program when only 15 and labelled “extremist” for wearing a “Free Palestine” badge. A [pamphlet encouraging the boycott of Israel](#) was deemed by police to be evidence of “terrorist-like” views.

Prevent “does need a complete rethink,” Corbyn said. “This requirement of surveillance over Muslim children by teachers ... means they are in problems if they don’t report what could conceivably be recorded as anything extreme.”

Corbyn said that a high school student writing a paper on the history of the Middle East might need to look up the word “intifada” because “it’s central to the history of the Palestinian people and their relations with Israel.” But he warned that by “typing ‘intifada’ into their search engine, they’ll be deemed to be possibly a terrorist, because they’re thinking about intifada – this is nonsense.”

Corbyn argues for an approach promoting “cohesion and coherence in our society, absolutely opposed to [Islamophobia](#), [anti-Semitism](#) or racism in any form,” rather than “singling it out and saying it is the Muslim community only that matters.”

One state?

What about the long-term solution? Is some sort of [democratic one-state arrangement](#) inevitable eventually in Palestine?

“I think it’s up to the people of the region to decide what kind of long-term solution there would be,” Corbyn argued.

“At the moment, all that’s on offer is the possibility of a [two-state solution](#),” he said. But “it’s difficult to see how it would operate with the degree of settlements that are there. It’s half a million people Israel would have to move out of the settlements.”

Corbyn has an interesting analysis: “The three areas of Palestine that have got to be

addressed are: one, settlements and occupation of the West Bank; two, the siege of Gaza and three, the issue of now fourth-generation refugees living in camps in Lebanon and some still in Syria. They deserve their rights too, they deserve their right to return home.”

So he supports the right to return of the Palestinian refugees? “Yes I do. Because that’s got to be the key to it. Whether they want to return or not is another matter. The rights have to be there.”

He concluded: “Can there be a settlement? Yes I think there can be.”

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