

## **The Coming Battle: UK Foreign Policy and the rise of Jeremy Corbyn**

Ian Sinclair, a freelance writer and author of 'The March that Shook Blair' about the huge 2003 anti war in Iraq demo in London, returned to Faringdon Peace Group to talk about the importance of this moment in British politics when we could be on the brink of electing an anti-imperialist, anti-war and anti-nuclear Prime Minister in Jeremy Corbyn. He talked about UK foreign policy today with reference to Syria and Yemen, the threat Corbyn would pose to the establishment and what we in the peace movement can do to help change foreign policy.

Since the UK's disastrous and unpopular interventions after 9/11 in Iraq and Afghanistan, foreign policy has shifted to more covert operations; using Special Forces, drones, supporting proxies on the ground and supporting US actions. We are secretly fighting 7 covert wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. It is often claimed that these are humanitarian interventions in support of democracy and human rights, but government files barely mention this.

We have been heavily involved in the Syrian war against the Assad government through sanctions, Special Forces on the ground, air strikes, and arming rebel forces, despite warnings from the UN, ex-NATO generals and Oxfam that it would increase violence, prolong the conflict and empower extremists – all of which have unfortunately proved to be true.

In Yemen, Ian claimed, we are witnessing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today, caused largely by Saudi air strikes, many of them on civilian targets. The British public is mostly unaware that the UK bears a great responsibility for this tragedy: it sells aircraft and missiles to the Saudis; it provides training in their use and technicians to maintain them, and, along with the US, blocked a UN Security Council proposal calling for Saudi to implement a ceasefire. The Saudi Air Force cannot operate without American and British support.

Ian argued that the British establishment, particularly the foreign policy elite, would see a Corbyn government as a massive threat. He has opposed every military intervention since 2001, he opposes Trident (though the Labour Party supports it), he is highly critical of UK's support for Saudi Arabia and is a strong supporter of Palestinian rights. If Corbyn is elected Prime Minister there will be a massive campaign to bring his government down and make sure his foreign policies are not put into practice.

Ian believes that the peace movement has a very important role to play in supporting Corbyn's broadly anti-militarist and anti-imperialist position and in pushing him and the Labour Party to be bolder, particularly around the defence industry and Trident. We have a responsibility to bring the foreign policy issues above out into the open, to inform and educate and to shift public opinion away from militarism. Looking forward, Ian would argue that the size, power and effectiveness of the mass movements behind Corbyn will be the deciding factor in whether he is elected and, more importantly, whether his government will be powerful enough to make radical changes in foreign policy.

While there is no Faringdon Peace Group meeting in August, we will be remembering the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> August.