

Weaponizing Anti-Semitism, Bringing Down Corbyn

Britain's mainstream media, its Army and the Israel lobby all combined to ensure Jeremy Corbyn did not become prime minister, a new book argues.

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Jeremy Corbyn was livid. "You're trying to trivialise the whole discussion about how you bring about a long-term peace process," he steamed at the journalist. It had been a rocky interview, even before they reached the topic of armed Palestinian and Lebanese resistance.

Channel 4's Krishnan Guru-Murthy asked a series of robust questions right out of the gate. But Corbyn wasn't playing by Westminster's usual rules. It was the summer of 2015, and Corbyn's unexpected popularity had electrified a dull leadership contest.

"So you've got no problem with somebody coming from abroad as a migrant with five kids," Guru-Murthy said, "and claiming five lots of child tax credits, five lots of child benefits, housing benefit, no limit on their benefits at all." It was more of a statement than a question.

"Why do you think people who voted Conservative in 2015 would suddenly vote for a socialist in 2020?" And: "Would there be no super-rich people in Britain if you were prime minister?"

Guru-Murthy repeatedly interrupted the MP, refusing to let him finish his sentences. But it was not until halfway that the journalist really pounced. And Corbyn—probably the most left-wing candidate ever to run for the leadership of the Labour Party—lost his cool.

"Let's briefly talk about foreign affairs," the journalist said. "Why did you call Hamas and Hizballah your friends?"

Corbyn's people must have known this was likely to come up. Newspapers had been sniffing around. Corbyn began to answer, but Guru-Murthy interrupted again. "I asked you a question and you're ignoring it," he objected.

"If you'd give me a minute I'll answer it," Corbyn replied, clearly frustrated. Finally, he got out a full sentence: "I spoke at a meeting about the Middle East crisis in Parliament. And there were people there from Hizballah. And I said I welcomed our friends from Hizballah to have a discussion and a debate. And I said I wanted Hamas to be part of that debate."

He continued to explain but was stopped again. "So are they your friends or not?"

"Can I finish?" Corbyn said, exasperated.

"Well you can't if it's a long answer."

Corbyn then accused the presenter of not taking the issue seriously. "Hamas and Hizballah are part of a peace process," he argued. Even the former head of Israeli spy agency Mossad concedes that peace talks should include Hamas, he said.

But the journalist seemed fixed on a particular word: "You calling them 'friends.'" It went against everything the British media's conventional wisdom stood for: Lebanese and Palestinian combatants cannot be brave resistance fighters; rather they are evil terrorists. The word "friends" was tantamount to heresy.

"To bring about a peace process you have to talk to people with whom you may profoundly disagree," Corbyn explained.

Hostile media

A maverick candidate for Labour leader, Corbyn had fought his corner. The next week, Corbyn would cause disbelief as a shock YouGov poll of Labour activists eligible to vote in the election gave the left-winger a massive lead.

But the Channel 4 interview hadn't gone very well. Guru-Murthy's hostile questioning clearly touched a raw nerve. Corbyn seemed genuinely angry. Years later, the former Labour MP reflected bitterly that the anti-Semitism smears against him had been "foul, dishonest and utterly disgusting . . . [it was] designed to be very isolating and distract from our policies."

The terrorist hobgoblin repeatedly came back to bite Corbyn. It was a powerful political weapon that would contribute heavily to his ultimate downfall. The interview was a signal that Corbyn was vulnerable on the issue.

The left-wing MP had seemed hurt at the implication he was an anti-Semite. Hostile media were onto something. This was a bone they'd continue gnawing for the next five years, successfully demonising the Labour leader.

On the video of the full Channel 4 interview, YouTube comments dating from soon after Corbyn's December 2019 leadership downfall give only a taste of the hatred the media had stirred up.

"Didn't the UK dodge a bullet by rejecting this Hamas Communist four years on from this interview?" said one. The propaganda of the right-wing backlash against the Jeremy Corbyn phenomenon ultimately cut through to mainstream voters during that final general election.

“The very sight” of Corbyn “fills me with rage,” another YouTube user posted. “An absolute traitor! I hope he has a horrible death,” came one posting, from YouTube user Avi Oleg, who raged that Corbyn was “a cancer cell in a healthy body.”

But vicious online comments were the least of it.

Army mutiny

Corbyn had barely arrived as Labour leader in September 2015 before a senior serving general in the British Armed Forces warned the *Sunday Times* that there would be a mutiny if Corbyn were elected prime minister.

“There would be mass resignations at all levels and you would face the very real prospect of an event which would effectively be a mutiny,” the general said.

“Feelings are running very high within the armed forces. You would see a major break in convention with senior generals directly and publicly challenging Corbyn,” he said. “The army just wouldn’t stand for it . . . I think people would use whatever means possible, fair or foul to prevent that.”

Years later, in an interview with journalist Matt Kennard, Corbyn reflected that this had been “a sort of shot across the bows, a warning to me.” When a snap election was expected in the winter of 2018, two conservative papers reported that Corbyn had been “summoned” for a “facts of life” talk with the head of MI5 and an “acquaintance” meeting with the head of MI6.

The meetings were supposed to have been completely confidential, but were soon leaked by the two spy agencies—deliberately, Corbyn told Kennard. “It was leaked by them and it was leaked in a way to undermine,” said Corbyn, “that somehow or other I’d been summoned and given a dressing down.”

He denied the spooks’ demeaning characterisation of the meeting, and complained that civil servants had spread rumours that he was mentally unstable.

An investigation by Kennard concluded that during his leadership Corbyn had been the target of 34 major national media stories openly sourced by former or current officials in the UK’s intelligence and military establishment, including MI5 and MI6. The stories all cast him as a danger to British security.

‘We won’t wait for him to do those things’

Other governments were involved too. US secretary of state and former CIA director Mike Pompeo hinted in a private meeting with Israel lobby leaders that the US government could stage its own intervention to stop Corbyn becoming prime minister.

“It could be that Mr. Corbyn manages to run the gauntlet and get elected,” he said in a leaked audio recording obtained by the Washington Post. “It’s possible. You should know, we won’t wait for him to do those things to begin to push back. We will do our level best. It’s too risky and too important and too hard once it’s already happened.”

Over the years there was a constant stream of alarming headlines about the alleged threat Corbyn posed to Jews—despite his decades of anti-racist campaigning.

In July 2018, three pro-Israel, British Jewish newspapers published identical front-page editorials claiming that a Corbyn-led government posed an “existential threat to Jewish life in this country” due to the “Corbynite contempt for Jews and Israel.”

A month later former chief rabbi and BBC radio personality Jonathan Sacks accused Corbyn of “the most offensive statement made by a senior British politician since Enoch Powell’s 1968 ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech” (a reference to a criticism Corbyn had made of pro-Israel heckler Richard Millett, as we’ll see later in this chapter).

‘Sacrifice him’

During the 2019 general election campaign, right-wing columnist Simon Heffer claimed on live radio that Corbyn “wants to reopen Auschwitz”—the most notorious Nazi death camp where Jews were systemically murdered on an industrial scale during the Holocaust.

Prominent Israel lobbyists also spat venom at Corbyn. “I think we should sacrifice him for all the trouble he has caused,” said Lionel Kopelowitz, pointing out the verbal similarity of Corbyn’s surname to the Hebrew word for the victim of a sacrifice.

Kopelowitz was a 92-year-old former president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, whose meeting he was addressing at the time.

The Board claims to represent all British Jews. Yet it also admits in internal documents to having a “close working relationship with the Embassy of Israel in the UK” and strong links to Israel’s semi-covert Ministry of Strategic Affairs, as well as the Israeli military spokesperson.

“Labour MUST kill vampire Jezza,” *Mail on Sunday* columnist Dan Hodges implored. Serving British Army soldiers later filmed themselves using Corbyn’s image for target practice. Increasing incitement against Corbyn had inevitable results.

An attempt on his life came in June 2017.

Terrorist attack

Darren Osborne, a 48-year-old Islamophobe from Cardiff, tried to murder a group of Muslims in Finsbury Park (an area in Corbyn’s constituency). He deliberately drove a hire van into the crowd, killing Makram Ali, a 51-year-old grandfather.

But it emerged in court that Osborne’s original target had been Jeremy Corbyn himself. Osborne admitted he had planned to mow down demonstrators at an annual Palestine solidarity demonstration. “Another reason for [attacking] the Al-Quds [Day] march was that Jeremy Corbyn would be in attendance,” he said.

When security roadblocks thwarted his plan, he drove to Finsbury Park and rammed into a group of Muslims gathered outside on the first day of Ramadan. Osborne was given a 43-year minimum sentence. “This was a terrorist attack. You intended to kill,” judge Parmjit Cheema-Grubb concluded.

Visiting Finsbury Park Mosque, Corbyn became the victim of an unprovoked assault. CCTV footage showed right-winger John Murphy punching the Labour leader in the head, reportedly shouting pro-Brexit slogans.

Murphy was swiftly sentenced to 28 days in jail. But the media downplayed the worrying attack as an “egging” (Murphy had held an egg in the hand he used to punch Corbyn).

In December 2019, Corbyn announced he would step down as Labour leader, after losing the general election. Keir Starmer succeeded him in April 2020 and intensified the party’s purges of Corbynites, saying he wanted to support “Zionism without qualification.”

Then in October 2020 Corbyn was suspended from the party altogether. He had made an objectively factual statement that the scale of anti-Semitism in Labour had been exaggerated by his political enemies.

How did it come to this?

This is an extract from Asa Winstanley’s book, [Weaponising Anti-Semitism: How the Israel Lobby Brought Down Jeremy Corbyn](#), published by OR Books.

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