

## Championing internationalism in the post-coronavirus world Labour CND RESPONSE

### Q1: Labour's internationalist values should include a war powers act

The International Policy Commission consultation document places great stress on Labour values without specifying what these values are. This is a feel-good approach that fails to acknowledge differences of opinion on what they are and how they are to be applied.

The Black Lives Matter movement reminds us of the oppressive colonial legacy that countries like Britain share, and highlights the structural racism that is still ingrained in British society and that successive governments, both Labour and Tory, have failed to root out. Hopefully, BLM also reminds us of the need to respect other peoples and cultures, and to exercise greater caution about assuming we know how global leadership should best be exercised.

The foreign policy section of Labour's 2019 manifesto, 'New internationalism', emphasises the primacy of peace as a foreign policy objective. It notes that 'failed military interventions in countries like Libya have worsened security across North Africa, accelerating the refugee crisis' and promised a Labour government would introduce a war powers act 'so that no prime minister can bypass parliament'.

Campaigning for the leadership, Keir Starmer pledged to make Britain a force for international peace and justice, and reaffirmed Labour's promise of a war powers act. The most basic human right of all, and the starting point for international justice, is the right to life of all peoples.

Speaking at a Chatham House webinar on 28 March, prior to her appointment as Shadow Foreign Secretary, Lisa Nandy argued that Labour must 'win the argument for ethical intervention' and suggested that a 'ban [on] illegal wars' would make it harder to win the argument for intervention.

From the perspective of Labour values, as well as Labour's electoral interests, it is of great concern to note that the Shadow Foreign Secretary wants to shift Labour backwards to the so-called humanitarian military intervention policy of the New Labour era.

Despite Britain's disastrous military adventures in Iraq, Libya and elsewhere, it is still argued in a few Labour circles that 'internationalism' means participating in overseas combat operations. Advocates don't always put it quite so directly of course, preferring to suggest that not participating in these wars is isolationist, or hoisting the 'good wars' flag.

Remember Afghanistan, a 'good war' in which 10,000 British troops participated? By the end of 2014, when the last UK combat forces withdrew, almost 500 UK troops had died, 7,500 had been injured, and violent conflict continued.

From 2001 to the present, a total of 111,000 Afghans are estimated to have been killed. More than 31,000 Afghan civilians have died and 29,900 more have been injured. Brown University's ongoing Cost of War Project estimates that as many as 800,000 people in total may have died as a direct result of the war in Afghanistan and attributes 360,000 more deaths to the indirect consequences of the war.

After 18 years, there's neither peace nor stability in Afghanistan. Exactly *what* is humanitarian or ethical about this?

Putting flesh on the bones of Labour's post-Covid internationalism, starts with reaffirming our commitment to the primacy of peace and justice, and the introduction of a war powers act.

ENDS  
515 words