

Russia Apathetic Over Corbyn Labour Victory

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The new leader of Britain's opposition Labor Party Jeremy Corbyn waves after making his inaugural speech at the Queen Elizabeth Center in central London, Sept. 12, 2015.

The election of Jeremy Corbyn to lead Britain's Labour Party over the weekend barely caused a stir in Russia — despite mainstream media in Britain and political rivals of the opposition party leader dubbing him a friend of Moscow and apologist for President Vladimir Putin.

The news appeared to generate almost no interest in Russia, with even state-owned Russian television channels carrying little or no information on Corbyn's landslide victory.

Corbyn's appearances on Kremlin-controlled English-language television network RT, his criticism of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and his stance over the conflict in Ukraine prompted fears in Britain that he could become the latest object of Kremlin efforts to strengthen ties with radical European political movements — in what some see as an attempt

to exacerbate political divisions in the West as ties with Russia fray.

Left-wing Greek leader Alexis Tsipras built a closer relationship with Moscow after his Syriza party swept to power earlier this year, while France's far-right National Front party received a \$11.4 million loan from a Russian bank in late 2014.

In a dry and factual four-minute piece aired Sunday on the election of Corbyn to the Labour leadership, state-owned Russia 24 merely noted: "Corbyn is an opponent of NATO's expansion to the east and thinks that events in Ukraine were provoked by the alliance."

British newspapers and public figures, on the other hand, have made much of Corbyn's alleged Kremlin sympathies.

Last month, Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper published an article — based on the assertions of one Russian foreign policy analyst — alleging "Russia would welcome Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader," while the Independent newspaper ran a piece on Aug. 11 titled "Jeremy Corbyn hints at warmer relations with Russia" based on an interview with RT in which Corbyn did not talk about Russia.

Corbyn's political opponents have made similar allegations. During a televised debate earlier this month, Labour leadership candidate Andy Burnham accused Corbyn of "making excuses for Putin."

But the longstanding left-winger has actually made very few direct statements about Russia or Putin. He has, however, commented several times on the Ukraine crisis, for which he has blamed NATO.

"[Ukraine] has been put under enormous pressure to come into the EU and NATO military orbit," Corbyn wrote in an article for Britain's left-wing Morning Star newspaper last April — after Russia's annexation of Crimea, but before Russian-backed separatists staged an uprising in the east of the country.

"NATO has sought to expand since the end of the Cold War. It has increased its military capability and expenditure. It operates way beyond its original 1948 area and its attempt to encircle Russia is one of the big threats of our time," Corbyn wrote.

In the same article, Corbyn said that "[Russia's behavior] is not unprovoked, and the right of people to seek a federal structure or independence should not be denied."

Challenged more recently on the topic during a Sept. 1 televised debate, Corbyn appeared to moderate his position. "I'm not a supporter of Putin, Russian expansion or anybody else's expansion. I thought that NATO's excessive and obsessive expansion since 1990 has been a problem," he said.

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