Australian Labor government, Greens hail imperialist assault on Libya

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The Australian Labor government has enthusiastically endorsed the US-led bombardment of Libya. In a joint statement issued Friday, Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd welcomed the UN Security Council resolution that rubber stamped the neo-colonial operation, and boasted that they were "among the first to call for decisive action by the international community, including a UN-mandated no fly zone."

Rudd has been especially keen to take credit for the military intervention, having spent much of the previous fortnight in the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe agitating for action. After a summit of foreign ministers with the Group of 8 (G8) failed to endorse a no-fly zone last week, Rudd publicly accused them of going "weak at the knees on this one."

The foreign minister has emphasised the importance of the Arab League's support in lending a "regional" air of legitimacy to the attack, boasting of his own meeting with the League's secretary general Amr Moussa in Egypt on February 27. "Without their [the Arab states'] support," Rudd declared on Saturday, "we might have found ourselves in the difficult and dangerous terrain of the Security Council deliberations on Iraq in the lead-up to the 2003 intervention, which occurred outside authorisation of the council."

Rudd is now receiving extraordinary praise from the media, most fulsomely in the Murdoch press, which has suddenly made a 180 degree turn in its attitude to the recently deposed prime minister. On Saturday, the *Australian* published a series of adulatory articles, with its right-wing foreign editor Greg Sheridan declaring that the bombing operation over Libya "comprehensively vindicates the high-profile campaign of the Foreign Minister, Kevin Rudd". He added: "No one would suggest Rudd has been a central player in the global diplomacy of this matter, but nor should Australia's influence be underestimated. Rudd certainly helped push the decision over the line."

The Australian military is not directly involved in the intervention. Rudd on Friday made clear that this was because the armed forces were required for other imperialist operations. Explaining that some matters required Australian "diplomatic engagement", whereas others "should directly engage our military assets as well", the foreign minister cited Afghanistan, East Timor and the Solomon Islands in the latter category. With breathtaking cynicism, Rudd also boasted that Australia was the "world's fifth largest contributor to the relief effort in Libya and neighbouring states."

Prime Minister Gillard has emphasised her complete agreement with Rudd's approach. Only last week, there appeared to be signs of division between Gillard and her predecessor. During her official visit to the US, when the Obama administration was still weighing its options in Libya, the prime minister repeatedly stated that a no-fly zone was merely among a "full range" of options that ought to be considered. While Gillard publicly insisted she had no differences with Rudd's statements, one of her advisors told Melbourne's *Age* newspaper that Rudd was "out of control" and "acting on his own".

Since then, the prime minister has been at pains to emphasise her enthusiasm for military aggression in North Africa. Speaking on Sky News on Saturday, Gillard made clear that her government would look favourably on a ground invasion.. "I believe the [UN] resolution has got breadth in terms of what the international community can do, but I believe the Security Council would meet and deliberate again if there was a question of ground forces," she replied, when asked if ground troops operations had been ruled out.

Rudd has likewise described the no-fly zone and air bombardment as a "first step".

The entire political and media establishment has thrown its support behind the drive to oust the right-wing Gaddafi dictatorship and replace it with a client government amenable to the strategic and economic priorities of US and European imperialism. Every major newspaper has editorialised in favour of the reckless intervention. The *Australian*, in its editorial today, openly acknowledged the aim was regime change, not "protecting" civilians from Gaddafi's forces. "After weeks of policy paralysis over Libya," it declared, "allied attacks on Gaddafi's air defences are a welcome development, and the hope must be that they will not cease until the murderous despot is driven from power."

No-one in the press has challenged Rudd's litany of false historical analogies with the situation in Libya. The foreign

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minister has repeatedly invoked the 1937 fascist bombing of Guernica in Spain, the Rwandan genocide, Darfur, and Srebrenica, as examples of what would happen in Libya without a "humanitarian" intervention. These statements were being issued even as Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified before a congressional hearing that the Pentagon had no evidence that Gaddafi's air force had killed or targeted civilians.

Rudd has been among the keenest proponents of the "responsibility to protect" doctrine, which seeks to provide a pseudo-legal fig-leaf for imperialist interventions under the guise of protecting civilian lives. He has also hailed the work of Gareth Evans, former foreign minister under the previous Hawke-Keating Labor government, in promoting the so-called "responsibility to protect" through his work as co-chairman of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty.

Like the US and the European powers, the Australian government is yet to explain the contradiction between its professed concern for the victims of the Libyan regime and its utter indifference to those being killed and oppressed by US-aligned governments in Yemen, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.

Some of the real calculations underlying the bogus "humanitarian" pretext for the UN-sponsored violence against Libya were touched on by Rudd in a speech to the National Press Club on February 22, titled "Australia's Foreign Policy Interests in the Middle East". Rudd explained that, "Australia is by definition a middle power with regional and global interests. And we will engage our allies, friends and partners accordingly." He emphasised that "the radicalisation of governments in key regional countries such as Egypt will have geostrategic impact ... let us be clear: Australia's national security interests, our national economic interests, our international humanitarian interests, together with our most basic consular interests, will be significantly affected by upcoming developments in Egypt."

Rudd explained that Australia's "national economic interests" in the Middle East included keeping the price of oil down.

He also briefly mentioned, in the context of the evacuation of personnel from Libya, the operations of WorleyParsons, a $4 billion publicly listed Australian corporation, which has provided oil engineering services for the Libyan state-owned oil company and BP. There is no doubt that the Labor government's stance on the no-fly zone has been determined with an eye to the maintenance and extension of such contracts with a US-installed post-Gaddafi government. Australia's involvement in the 2003 invasion of Iraq was partly motivated by concern over lucrative wheat export contracts.

In his National Press Club speech, Rudd went on to outline the perspective behind his "activist" role as foreign minister. He cited a recent article by US diplomat Richard Haass in *Foreign Affairs*, which insisted that the world was entering an "age of nonpolarity", a world dominated not by one or two or even several states, but rather by dozens of actors exercising various kinds of power. "In this context, I believe creative middle powers are uniquely placed to bring together major, regional and smaller powers alike to inform and shape solutions," Rudd declared. "Their strength comes from the good offices they bring to bear on regional and global problems and the persuasiveness of their arguments and the coalitions they are capable of building, not the assertion of direct power. Middle powers are nimble in working the 'in-between' of international diplomacy."

The Greens have thrown their enthusiastic support behind the Gillard government's manoeuvres and the attack on Libya. The party, which is in alliance with the minority Gillard government, actively promoted the no-fly zone. Adam Bandt, the Greens' lower house member of parliament, issued a public statement last Wednesday stating that the "dithering" of the UN Security Council was a "worrying sign" and that "the international community needs to get on with it". He added: "The recent media ruckus over the Foreign Minister's and the Prime Minister's positions on a no-fly zone should not be allowed to derail the government's advocacy for the no-fly zone."

Greens' leader Senator Bob Brown declared Friday that the military operation was "the right move to make". He boasted of the Greens' record in supporting imperialist interventions launched under the banner of "humanitarianism", saying, "It was the Greens who first called for Australian military intervention in Timor Leste [East Timor], during the Howard years. We now support UN-backed moves to protect the beleaguered people who are under attack by Colonel Gaddafi in Libya."

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