

Australian government affirms support for Afghan war after bin Laden killing

Patrick O'Connor
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The Australian Labor government has seized on the death of Osama bin Laden on Sunday to again emphasise its commitment to the indefinite occupation of Afghanistan. Having previously stated her intention to keep Australian troops fighting in the neo-colonial war for the next ten years, Prime Minister Julia Gillard has now declared that the “one message we should take from all of this [i.e., bin Laden’s killing] is persistence pays.”

Like their American counterparts, senior figures in the Australian political and media establishment have rushed to glorify the US military, while voicing their enthusiasm for the killing of the Al Qaeda leader.

The Labor government’s response was marked by an open contempt for any consideration of basic precepts of international law. Gillard was interviewed on ABC Radio yesterday and casually referred to bin Laden being “executed.”

While admitting that she was not privy to the details of the US operation, the prime minister condemned bin Laden for using his wife as a “human shield”—an allegation the White House has since admitted was false. “As I understand the report, it is said someone used a woman as a human shield,” Gillard declared. “Whoever did it is, obviously, what a huge moral wrong and what a despicable act.”

Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd was asked if the world was “now a safer place” and replied: “I think the core question is fulfilling our legal responsibilities, to bring to justice those who have committed acts of mass murder ... we have, therefore, together with our friends, partners and allies around the world, a legal obligation

to bring such individuals to justice and his [bin Laden’s] case has taken nearly a decade.”

In reality, the Al Qaeda leader’s killing has nothing to do with “legal responsibilities” or delivering “justice” for the victims of his criminal activities. The US operation in Pakistan was a direct violation of international law—it is clear that the US special forces sent into bin Laden’s compound were on what has been described as a “kill mission.” The terrorist was not even armed when he was shot dead.

The Obama administration had clearly decided that it was not in its interests to capture bin Laden alive, since that would require a trial during which the long record of US intelligence collaboration with Al Qaeda would have been publicly aired. The dumping of bin Laden’s body at sea underscores the Mafia-like character of the operation. Moreover, serious questions remain to be answered about the role of Pakistani intelligence and government officials in sheltering bin Laden, the timing of the US raid, and what American intelligence agencies had known about the terrorist leader’s whereabouts since 2001-2002.

None of these issues have been raised in official circles. Instead, a bloodthirsty euphoria is being promoted.

Rudd stated that his first reaction on hearing about bin Laden’s death was “one of deep satisfaction.” His predecessor as foreign minister in the previous Liberal-National government, Alexander Downer, declared: “It’s exciting. I’m sorry to say that about someone being killed because it’s not a very nice thing to say in a lot of ways, but it is exciting to hear that Osama bin

Laden has been killed.”

Former Prime Minister John Howard chimed in, claiming vindication for his role in the so-called “war on terror.” He insisted: “The top evil man has been taken out. It’s something of a repudiation of the naysayers and the critics and the cynics. It sends a message to the free world and a message to all of those who fight terrorism that the fight can be successful.”

In the Fairfax newspapers, Clive Williams, adjunct professor at Macquarie University's Centre for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, gave voice to fears in Washington about bin Laden potentially revealing unwelcome secrets in the event of a trial. He declared that bin Laden had to be assassinated because “Osama in court gaining international sympathy would be a nightmare.”

The Murdoch-owned *Australian* yesterday published an editorial, “Bin Laden’s killing a triumph for freedom,” which provided a purported history of Al Qaeda that omitted any mention of the CIA’s arming and funding of bin Laden and his jihadist colleagues in the 1980s during the Soviet Union’s war in Afghanistan. The *Australian* also made a tortured attempt to revive the long discredited lies about Al Qaeda connections to Saddam Hussein, asserting that “bin Laden not only triggered the Afghan war but set the pre-conditions for the Iraq conflict.”

Julia Gillard’s central response to bin Laden’s killing has been to reject any suggestion that there would be changes to the conduct of the US-led war in Afghanistan. “We’ve got to get the job done in Afghanistan—and we will,” she declared. “It can take a lot of time to successfully pursue a mission. It took a lot of time to pursue the mission to locate Osama bin Laden. We know that we are pursuing our mission in Afghanistan. We are making progress.”

The real mission of the occupation forces in Afghanistan is to violently crush all resistance to the foreign occupation, stabilise the puppet regime headed by Hamid Karzai, and consolidate Washington’s control of the strategically vital and resource-rich

Central Asian state. Australia’s participation is bound up with maintaining its strategic alliance with US imperialism and ensuring Washington’s ongoing support for its own neo-colonial operations in East Timor and the South Pacific.

After being installed in office last June, Gillard made clear her absolute commitment to the US alliance and to Washington’s war in Central Asia. The prime minister’s response to bin Laden’s killing is consistent with this orientation, as is her government’s involvement in the criminal assault on Libya.

Australian troops or air forces are not directly engaged in the ongoing regime-change operation against Muammar Gaddafi, but the Labor government actively campaigned for the war from the very beginning of the eruption of unrest in the North African state. In the lead-up to the passage of UN Resolution 1973, Rudd played a significant role in lobbying Arab League members to back the UN-approved “no fly zone.”

Now the foreign minister has secured a place on the “Libya Contact Group,” a formation of mostly European and Arab states, chaired by Italy and Qatar, that is effectively tasked with coordinating the imperialist intervention. Rudd was initially invited as an observer, but, according to one report, engaged in “intensive shuttle diplomacy” to “persuade [his] European and Arab counterparts that Australia should become a full participant.”



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