

Australian foreign minister suggests “assassination” of Syrian leaders

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11 October 2012

Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr has suggested that high-level Syrian government figures could be assassinated as part of the US-backed civil war to oust President Bashar al-Assad. Carr's remarks underscore the reckless and illegal character of the US-led regime change operation underway in Syria, taking place with the full support of the Australian Labor government.

Interviewed on Monday on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's "Four Corners" program, the foreign minister expressed concern that the Syrian army had proven a more effective fighting force than the so-called rebels, who have been funded and armed by Washington's allies in the region, including Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

"I think we'd know the conflict has evened up if there is a major defection from the Assad government, especially a defection that takes part of its armed forces with it," Carr continued. "Perhaps—this sounds brutal and callous—perhaps an assassination, combined with a major defection taking a large part of its military, is what is required to get, one, a ceasefire, and, two, political negotiations."

Asked if the prospect of defections and assassinations was merely "hopeful conjecture," Carr replied: "I have no intelligence data, none has flowed across my desk that suggests that this is about to happen."

The foreign minister's casual tone made his remarks all the more chilling. Carr's statements were not, as he subsequently attempted to suggest, those of an outside observer musing on possible scenarios. He is an active participant in the Obama administration's campaign to install a pro-US government in Damascus. Following

on from the Labor government's agitation for the US-NATO intervention into Libya last year, Canberra has become a member of the so-called Friends of Syria grouping. Carr is in regular discussion with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and senior figures among the European powers and the Persian Gulf monarchies.

The foreign minister's "Four Corners" interview confirms that state-orchestrated murder is regarded as a legitimate instrument of foreign policy within the political establishment in Australia, as in the United States.

Earlier this year, the *New York Times* reported that President Barack Obama once a week personally selects targets from a "kill list" prepared by his intelligence agencies. So far at least, there have been no US drone attacks within Syria. But US-backed and Al Qaeda-linked Islamic fundamentalist groups have carried out several attempted assassinations of high-level Syrian government and military figures, including by suicide bombers. Carr's remarks are further evidence that Washington and its allies have given the green light for such operations.

The foreign minister denied any knowledge when asked about Al Qaeda or Islamic fundamentalist involvement in the Syrian civil war. "Nobody knows this," he declared. "I've been at a Friends of Syria meeting in Paris, I've spoken about Syria with leaders from the Gulf, with the president of Egypt, with leaders of Western powers, and nobody can tell you. There's no intelligence because to a large extent, outside Damascus, observation doesn't exist."

This is all self-serving dissimulation. As Carr knows full well, hundreds if not thousands of Islamic fundamentalist fighters have travelled to Syria from across the region. The “Free Syria Army” heavily relies on their fighting experience, knowledge of explosives, and discipline. Underscoring the fraud of the US “war on terror,” Al Qaeda has effectively become an ally of US imperialism in Syria. Turkey, Washington’s NATO ally, has not only set up centres to train and arm the “rebels” on its soil, it has sent its army officers into Syria to direct their operations. The CIA has set up a command-and-control centre in Adana, Turkey, 95 kilometres from Syria’s northern border, to coordinate the influx of arms, foreign fighters, money and supplies to the anti-Assad forces.

The regime change drive in Syria has again shown the Australian government to be the loyal servant of Washington. Prime Minister Julia Gillard devoted much of her speech at the UN General Assembly last month to demanding that member states rubberstamp a military intervention into Syria and an attack on Iran. (See: “Australian PM demands UN rubberstamp war on Syria and Iran”)

Carr told “Four Corners” on Monday that he believed that “the military strength of the Assad regime would militate against intervention.” In other words, Carr’s scepticism is based purely on tactical considerations, not any opposition in principle to a neo-colonial invasion of Syria. If Washington proposed an air war or military attack on Syria, Canberra would immediately fall in behind it. In this, the Labor government enjoys the support of the entire Australian political establishment.

The Greens have been at the forefront of the campaign for imperialist intervention on phony “humanitarian” grounds, moving several motions in federal and state parliaments backing the US-led campaign. As early as June 2011, the Greens passed a resolution through the New South Wales parliament demanding the “international community” move to “create and enforce safe zones” within Syria. In February this year, federal Greens’ leader Bob Brown denounced Russia’s and China’s veto of a US-drafted UN Security Council resolution that would have paved

the way for a military intervention as “reprehensible.” He declared that “the whole world has to act more strongly.”

The political line-up agitating for a military assault on Syria extends to the petty bourgeois pseudo-left organisations. All of them, without exception, have hailed the US-NATO proxy forces in Syria as “revolutionaries.” Socialist Alternative, which has close relations with the US International Socialist Organisation, has seized on the opportunity to repudiate its nominal opposition to previous imperialist interventions, including the 2011 operation against Libya.

The editor of Socialist Alternative’s magazine, Corey Oakley, wrote an article in August, “The left, imperialism and the Syrian revolution,” declaring that “emphasis on the imperialist threat is profoundly mistaken” and “the time for ‘knee-jerk anti-imperialism’ has now passed.” Oakley admitted that “only a fool would deny that the imperialist powers are intervening in Syria, or that there are deeply reactionary elements present among the rebel forces.” But he blithely insisted that these “negative aspects” had been “overstated.” In any case, Oakley concluded, it was entirely legitimate for such forces to be funded and armed by the imperialist powers.

The Socialist Equality Party is alone in seeking to mobilise the working class against the danger of a war against Syria. Washington and its allies are threatening a full-scale intervention, not in order to defend the democratic rights of the Syrian people but to advance their predatory interests across the oil-rich Middle East, following the illegal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in tandem with a possible US-Israeli bombardment of Iran. The recklessness and gangsterism that now characterises imperialist diplomacy threatens the entire region and the world with catastrophe.



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