

# Australian government backs unilateral US attack on Syria

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2 September 2013

In the wake of the British parliament's vote against military action in Syria, the Australian Labor government is one of the few that has openly declared its support for US military strikes on the basis of lies about the Syrian regime's alleged use of chemical weapons.

During a joint press conference on Saturday with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Foreign Minister Bob Carr declared that the US enjoyed Australian support to take action against Syria, but ruled out Australian military involvement. Parroting the line from Washington, Carr claimed that any action would be "limited and narrow" and would not involve "boots on the ground."

Rudd declared that he had "high confidence" that the Syrian government was responsible for the alleged chemical weapons attack near Damascus, but provided not a shred of evidence to back the claim. Having declared on Thursday that the Australian government would work within the UN to ensure agreement on a "robust response," Rudd, proceeding in lockstep with the Obama administration, supported unilateral US strikes.

The Labor government's decision to back US attacks on Syria has been taken completely anti-democratically, in the face of widespread opposition to another US war of aggression like the 2003 invasion of Iraq based on lies about weapons of mass destruction. Despite the support of the entire Australian political establishment for US attacks on Syria, antiwar protests took place in Australian cities on Saturday.

Speaking to the Australian ABC's "AM" program on Saturday, Foreign Minister Carr was at pains to claim that "America in this case [was] not seeking strategic advantage, it is not doing that; not seeking an economic advantage like access to oil." Yet that is precisely what the US is seeking to achieve: to destabilise and remove

the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad, an ally of Iran and Russia, as part of its broader plans to secure American economic and strategic domination in the Middle East.

While backing US strikes, opposition leader Tony Abbott adopted a cautious approach, telling the ABC: "Any punitive strike has got to be targeted, it's got to be proportionate and it's got to be carefully considered." Greens leader Christine Milne did not rule out support for military action, but called for the UN inspectors to complete their work and for work toward a consensus in the UN Security Council.

Just one week from the Australian federal election, the Labor government has provided crucial political support for the Obama administration following the blow to its war plans in the British parliament. France and Turkey are the only US allies to specifically back a war against Syria, with the French government offering military support to American operations in its former colony.

Once again, the Labor Party has proven to be the party of militarism and war. The Rudd government's determination to loyally endorse a criminal new US war in the Middle East, despite public opposition, reflects the needs of Australian imperialism, which has always required the backing of a major power—Britain, then the US—to defend its economic and strategic interests in the Asia Pacific.

The Labor government of Prime Minister Bob Hawke committed Australian military forces to the first Gulf War—the US-led invasion of Iraq in 1990-91 on the pretext of defending Kuwait—that set the precedent for further neo-colonial interventions. In 1999, having supported the NATO bombing operations of Serbia, the Howard Coalition government, with Labor's backing, launched its own military operation in East Timor, to

secure control over oil and gas in the Timor Sea.

In 2003, the Howard government was part of the Bush administration's notorious "coalition of the willing," sending Australian troops to take part in the illegal invasion of Iraq. The Labor opposition repeated all Washington's lies about weapons of mass destruction, insisting only that the war should have the UN Security Council's stamp of approval.

As shadow foreign minister, Rudd emphatically told parliament in 2002 that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was "in possession of weapons of mass destruction, which in the past he has used against his own people as well as his neighbours. None of these matters are the subject of dispute."

Once the invasion proceeded, the Labor Party quickly dropped any criticism and voiced its support for the Australian troops on the ground—that is, the occupation forces.

In the immediate aftermath of the illegal Iraq invasion, the Howard government, again with bipartisan support, intervened with its own "coalition of the willing"—including New Zealand and several small Pacific countries—in the Solomon Islands, taking over key aspects of the island state's administration. In 2006, Canberra sent troops again to East Timor, to engineer the ousting of the Fretilin government that had been strengthening ties with Australian rivals for influence—Portugal and China.

Over the past six years, the Labor government has fully backed the ongoing occupation of Afghanistan, as well as the US-led regime-change interventions in Libya and Syria. Rudd was ousted as prime minister in June 2010 by a handful of Labor and union powerbrokers closely connected to the American embassy. Rudd's attempts to moderate rising US-China tensions in Asia had cut across the Obama administration's plans for an aggressive "pivot to Asia" to undermine Chinese economic and strategic influence in the region.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who replaced Rudd, totally committed the government to support Obama's "pivot" and the US military build-up in the region, including the basing of US Marines in Darwin. Rudd quickly fell into line. As foreign minister in 2011, he played a key role for the Obama administration in securing the backing of Arab governments for the imposition of "no-fly zones" on Libya—the precursor of

the NATO war to oust Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

In what could well be the last days of the Labor government, Rudd has once again proven that the Labor Party is a reliable tool for US imperialism. Over the past week, as the Obama administration has pushed toward US military strikes on Syria, the Rudd government has faithfully mimicked every step.

On the weekend of August 24-25, Rudd suspended his election campaign to deal with the Syrian crisis, urging caution, but nevertheless denouncing the Syria government for allegedly gassing civilians. By last Tuesday, after a personal phone call from Obama, Rudd all but declared the Assad regime responsible, but added that UN inspectors would confirm the facts. By Thursday, Rudd brushed aside the need for a UN inspectors' report, declaring that "overwhelming evidence" existed and a "robust response" was needed.

As with the US invasion of Iraq a decade ago, Rudd's responses have nothing to do with an alleged gas attack on Syrian civilians. Rather they have been determined purely by the political needs of the US administration. When the war—now delayed by Obama's decision to seek Congressional approval—takes place, Rudd, Carr and the Labor government as a whole will bear responsibility for Washington's crimes against the Syrian population.



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