Australian voters oppose US-led war against Syria

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with a wide range of voters—workers, students, youth, retirees, welfare recipients and immigrants—outside polling booths in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia during last Saturday's federal election. The following is the first in a series of interviews with voters on some of the issues the establishment parties refused to discuss during the election.

A major concern of voters was the impending US-led military attack on Syria. The overwhelming majority opposed the planned assault and the Australian government's support for it.

At Meadow Heights, in Melbourne's northern suburbs, **Malik** recalled the "weapons of mass destruction" lies used to justify the invasion of Iraq. "It's just 10 years ago that WMDs was used as a false pretence for the pre-emptive strike against Iraq," he said. "People should not forget."

US President Obama, he continued, "is just a change of face, no real change from Bush, and no real change in policies against war. It's disgusting the decision by [Prime Minister Kevin] Rudd to support a war against Syria. Why should our troops go and intervene in another country with Uncle Sam's policies?... If you go back 60 years, the US has been intervening in Vietnam, Korea and everywhere …

"Why would Syria use chemical weapons on the very same day when the inspectors are there in Syria? Who is America going to attack next?" he asked, and suggested that Iran and China were future targets. "There's gas pipe line that will run from Iran, through Pakistan, to China and the US doesn't want this," he said. "I want to know who is going to stop this war … Who is going to stand up for our democratic rights?"

Kenan, a truck driver and originally from Turkey, said he was "totally opposed" to war against Syria. "War by the US did not help in Libya and it did not help in Iraq. I think these wars are about selling weapons and controlling other countries.

"People from Middle East," he continued, "tell me that America is after Iran. I don't like the government in Iran, but that has got nothing to do with how I feel about the people there. The government should not be changed just because America wants it … Australia is always supporting America and has sent soldiers to Afghanistan and Iraq."

Pece, an 18-year-old science student and casual worker, declared: "I think Obama is the real terrorist, not the people in the Middle East. He's the one causing war and death. He told the military, 'you're coming home,' and initially he brought troops back from Iraq but then announced the [troop] increases in Afghanistan."

Bahri, a retired worker, pointed to some of the economic factors driving US military aggression: "America is going in there because of US capitalism. The world is in deep recession and that's why the superpowers want to suck the oil and petrol out of these countries and to control those countries in the region."

"This capitalism has to be gotten rid of," Bahri added. "I agree with competition, but not this bad side. Capitalism shouldn't rule the world … People need food and education to live. We don't need big profits; we need to share the world's resources."

Many people feared a global war.

Sam, a machine operator and originally from Iraq, said: "Obama is nothing but a puppet for the rich and now World War III could ignite because of Syria. Those who own the banks are the ones pushing this war."

In Dandenong, an outer eastern Melbourne suburb, **Mohammad**, an Afghan refugee, said: "The war in Syria is very bad and it could be the start of World War III. The main problem is the United States … I'm from Afghanistan and the US started a war there to get rid of the Taliban but they are now actually paying the Taliban."

Ismail, a taxi driver from Dandenong, said the problems in Syria were "between Assad and the Syrian people. Why is America there? Why is Turkey there? Why are Saudi Arabia and Qatar supporting the terrorist groups? What for? The US wants to control the world and the oil, everything, and have launched wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya."

Harry, a North Melbourne flour mill worker, said the US campaign against Syria was about oil, "just like in Iraq and Afghanistan and I don't like it. If America wants to stop humanitarian crimes, they wouldn't have used nuclear weapons in Japan. The next step after this war is Iran and then Turkey."

In Perth, **Shatha**, a University of Western Australia student, said the "real reason" the US was targeting Syria, was to "get into the area … and attack Iran ... The US sees Russia and China as competitors so this [war] won't just affect the Middle East.

The US sees everyone as competitors."

In Geelong, **Jason** said he opposed war because, "I'm a father and a worker. If there is a war, my children could be called up, you could be called up or I could be called up, to fight and die. War means death for ordinary people. I think two 'Afghanistans' in 10 years is enough and I don't think we should go near it."

Wollongong student **Matthew**, 20, said the US had used its military to get control of vital resourses for the past century. "They have brought to power dictatorships to control the working class and other people, not only in Syria but other countries like Iraq and Libya."

Several voters drew parallels with experiences in the countries where they were born.

Simon, a teacher, said: "Coming from South Sudan, where war is a big thing, we don't want to see war. I don't agree with the US going to war in Syria. We should seek tools of peace, not war. Innocent people die, that's the big thing. We've seen all the effects of wars of the United States, starting from Bush in Afghanistan and Iraq. What's the impact on those countries? They are already suffering."

Rosa, a former Ford worker and originally from East Timor, said: "Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975, and then after 25 years [in 1999], Australia and America intervened." Australia claimed its intervention was "to help the people … Now fourteen years later, with 'independence,' and look at what has happened. There's malnutrition, people die every day, there's no medicine—even the oxygen masks have not enough oxygen in them."

She added: "In Syria, Iraq and Timor: they wanted control of oil and gas. Timor has a lot of gas reserves. And Australia is still in Timor—they control everything."

In Mt Druitt, in Sydney's west, **Samira**, a TAFE student and a community welfare worker said: "My country [Afghanistan] has seen wars for decades. The US supported the Taliban and creates these wars. They use Islamic fundamentalism as a weapon to divide and conquer. I know the history of colonialism—that's what the British did. They don't care if people are slaughtered."

Many voters rejected US claims that Syria had used chemical weapons and pointed to Washington's backing of Al Qaeda and other jihadist groupings in Syria.

At Meadow Heights, **Abraham** said: "America tells Hezbollah and Iran to stop supporting the Syrian government, but the US is supporting Al Qaeda and Al Nusra. America is giving them weapons to fight and I think they gave chemical weapons to the opposition to provide a justification for war."

Mahdi, a Year 10 student originally from Iraq, is not old enough to vote but said the US should "stop funding Al Nusra and Al Qaeda and giving weapons to the rebels." The US installed Saddam Hussein, he continued, "and then they took him out, all for their interests … They made the terrorists, like Osama Bin Laden—they created him."

The Labor government's support for a Syrian war was widely condemned.

Julia from Bankstown said it "was a knee-jerk reaction by Australia to what America wants to do.…Who is it going to benefit? Only those parties who are going to war, not the Syrian people, who are we meant to be helping? … It's really frightening, especially with all the other unrest in the region. It's like lighting a fuse in a powder keg and is heading toward a major conflict."

In Brisbane, **Shahed**, originally from Bangladesh, said the Labor government's response, and its involvement in Obama's "pivot" to Asia, against China, were "shameful."

"What is going on in Syria right now and what the US is doing is completely a malpractice of power, quite unjustified. Countries like Australia and the UK are supporting these kinds of activities, and that is a matter of shame. They have no right to do this. As a citizen, I cannot uphold this kind of mentality. Now when you tell people elsewhere in the world you are from Australia, they think you are supporting these bad activities."

Obama's and Rudd's defiance of popular sentiment generated disgust.

Simon, a science student and musician, commented: "People are smart; they are not going to fall for another Iraq 2003. But these governments are not going to stop, and if they do go to war, that's when accountability needs to come into play. If America jumps in when 91 percent of Americans are against the war then revolution might result, as you say … Those who are so intent on going to war are the military-industrial complex, not the American people."

At Craigmore in northern Adelaide, **Mark** said: "The American government will go into another country and spend billions on war when they should be looking after their people. Look at Detroit. It's gone bankrupt!"

Also at Craigmore, **Mandy** said: "I'm against a war on Syria. It's going to be worse this time ... There's the danger of a broader war involving nuclear weapons … I'm worried that if they start enlisting people, my son and other young people will get sent to another war ... I think 80 percent, if not 90 percent, of the country is opposed to war."