

Australian government backs Washington's anti-Russian confrontation

Peter Symonds
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The entire Australian political and media establishment has lined up in lock-step behind the Obama administration's intervention into the Ukraine crisis, its support of last month's fascist-led putsch, and its denunciations of Russian President Vladimir Putin for the dispatch of troops into Crimea.

The Liberal-National Coalition government hauled in the Russian ambassador to Canberra, Vladimir Morozoy, on Monday for a dressing down. Speaking in parliament, Prime Minister Tony Abbott declared that the ambassador had been told "in no uncertain terms" what the Australian government thought of Russian "aggression" in Ukraine.

In comments noteworthy only for their staggering hypocrisy, Abbott denounced the "unprovoked aggression" and demanded that Russia "back off," withdraw from Ukraine and allow "the people of the Ukraine... to determine their future themselves." These remarks not only ignore the direct involvement of the US and Germany with fascist Ukrainian organisations such as the Svoboda party and the Right Sector, in ousting the Russian-aligned President Victor Yanukovych, but also Canberra's support for US unprovoked aggression in a series of wars, including in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

Speaking to the media, ambassador Morozoy denounced the "anti-Russian hysteria" being whipped up and defended the Russian intervention into Crimea, saying it sought to protect Russia's interests and those of the Russian-speaking majority. However, Putin's corrupt regime in Moscow, representing the interests of wealthy oligarchs, offers no progressive solution. Its stirring up of chauvinism in Russia and eastern Ukraine only heightens the danger of a descent into civil and ethnic warfare, stoked up by fascist forces in Kiev.

Abbott's comments take their cue from Washington,

as part of its international campaign to wind up threats against the Russian government and force it to accept the right-wing, US-backed regime in Kiev. Abbott announced that a planned visit by the Australian trade minister to Moscow had been called off, along with a trip to Australia by Russia's national security adviser.

Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop reinforced Abbott's remarks, adding that Canberra had used its position on the UN Security Council to send "a clear, unequivocal message" of support for "Ukrainian sovereignty"—that is, for the regime in Kiev. Bishop indicated that the government would "consider what further actions, such as boycotts and sanctions, may be taken."

The opposition Labor Party immediately signalled its unalloyed bipartisanship and loyalty to Washington. Opposition leader Bill Shorten and deputy leader Tanya Plibersek made a point in parliament of formally "associating" themselves with, that is, fully endorsing, the remarks of Abbott and Bishop. Speaking to the media in Hobart, Shorten demanded that Russia "take its nose out of Ukrainian business."

In media comments on Monday, Greens leader Christine Milne repeated the US line, declaring that "the world must take a strong stand to protect the sovereignty of the Ukraine against the Russian invasion." She offered the full support of the Greens for "what the Australian government is doing, and other countries around the world, through the UN Security Council to try to seek a backing off [by Russia]."

The Australian media has joined the international deluge of anti-Putin and anti-Russian propaganda. An editorial in Murdoch's *Australian* today commended the government for its stance as "part of the worldwide response to such unjustified aggression." Well practised in the method of the big lie, the newspaper

went on to declare that there was “no evidence” that Ukraine was in “the hands of Nazi-style extremist nationalists hell-bent on destroying the lives of Ukraine’s Russian-speaking communities.”

The only note of caution in ruling circles was sounded by former Coalition Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, writing in the *Guardian*. After pointing to two decades of US efforts to push the NATO alliance right up to Russia’s borders, he referred to *Guardian* writer Seumas Milne, who had described those fighting to oust Yanukovych as “pro-fascist, pro-nazi and anti-Jew.” Concerned that the US intervention in the Ukraine could backfire, Fraser wrote: “If but a small part of what he [Milne] then said was correct, the West has once again chosen some unsavoury partners and that does not augur well for the future.”

The slavish support of all the major parties for Washington’s aggressive actions in Ukraine is in line with Australian backing for the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia”—a strategy aimed at diplomatically isolating and militarily encircling China. So intertwined are the Ukraine events with the Asian “pivot” that Australian strategic analysts have already begun to debate the implications.

Writing in the *Australian Financial Review* on Monday, Hugh White, who has previously criticised the “pivot” and urged the US to accommodate China’s interests in Asia, concluded that “US impotence” in dealing with “Russia’s aggressiveness” in Ukraine would only raise doubts in Japan about US willingness to defend its claims to disputed islands in the East China Sea against China. “Obviously, the weaker Washington looks in Ukraine, the more boldly Beijing will challenge US leadership in Asia, and the more Japan will look to its own defence.”

Peter Jennings, head of the government-sponsored Australian Strategic Policy Institute, countered yesterday in the *Australian Financial Review*. In a comment entitled “Ukraine’s simple lessons for Asian security,” he argued that the US had strengthened its position in both Europe and Asia because its allies would see the need for Washington’s military backing. “In Asia, Japan will watch Ukraine and conclude that it is a good thing it has a formal alliance with the US and a large American military presence on its soil.”

In fact, the underlying premise of this exchange—Russian and China “aggression”—stands

reality on its head. In its efforts to undermine any potential threat to US hegemony, the Obama administration has deliberately inflamed festering disputes, whether in Ukraine or the East China Sea, in a bid to weaken Russia and China and strengthen its dominance across the Eurasian landmass.

In his *Guardian* comment, Malcolm Fraser warned that the “totally one-sided view” presented by Western leaders and media—it is all Russia’s fault—provided no way out of “the present intractable, difficult and extraordinarily dangerous problem.” Likewise in Asia, he remarked, “the US has embarked on what may regard as a foolish and dangerous policy in the Western Pacific: a policy of containment of China.” He asked whether “the mistaken policies of the US and the unfolding drama in Ukraine... [could] push both Russia and China towards a strategic partnership” and rekindle the Cold War.

However, Fraser’s appeal for greater understanding and international cooperation falls on deaf ears, precisely because behind the Ukraine crisis are powerful economic driving forces generated by the deepening global breakdown of capitalism. In Asia and Europe, the determination of US imperialism to exploit its military might to offset its relative economic decline is leading inexorably, not to a new version of the Cold War standoff, but to confrontation and military conflict.



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