

UN resolution on Flight MH17: Australia the cat's paw for US threats against Russia

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The Australian government's key role in Washington's campaign of threats against Russia over the crash of Malaysian Airlines MH17 was on display yesterday in the United Nations Security Council. Exploiting to the full the deaths of 28 Australian citizens and nine permanent residents in the tragedy, and Australia's temporary seat on the Security Council, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop personally moved a resolution that instructs "all parties" to fully cooperate with a ceasefire around the crash site and demands an "independent international investigation."

Russia, which has veto powers in the Security Council, voted for the resolution, ensuring it passed and gained unanimous endorsement. The document's wording, according to the *Australian Financial Review*, was the subject of "long, drawn-out and fraught" negotiations between Australian and Russian representatives into the early hours of Monday morning. Eventually, Australia agreed to amend "shooting down" to the "downing" of the aircraft to secure Russia's agreement. The fact that the resolution was not moved under Chapter VII of the UN Charter—meaning that it is not automatically enforceable by sanctions or even more severe actions—also facilitated Moscow's acceptance.

The Russian government is well aware of the political minefield represented by Security Council resolutions, especially those enacted under Chapter VII. Time and time again, the actions of a country targeted in the UN by the United States and its allies have been interpreted as violations of the vague wording of such documents. The allegation that a country is "in breach" of a UN resolution has been the basis for everything from diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions and interventions by investigators, to full-scale war. The case of Iraq, from the 1991 Gulf War until the 2003 US

invasion, is a prominent and horrific example.

Russia was not specifically named in the resolution. Bishop, however, defined in her speech the type of conditions that Moscow will have to meet for the US, Australia and the European powers to accept that it has complied with the words "fully cooperate." She stated: "Russia must use its influence over the separatists to ensure this. Russia must also use its influence to bring the conflict in Ukraine to an end."

The implications of such demands are sweeping. They imply Moscow must accept the legitimacy of the Ukrainian regime, which came to power through a US-backed coup in February, in which openly fascist and virulently anti-Russian chauvinist organisations played the central role. Bishop's statements also indicate that Moscow must work to disarm the rebellions against Kiev, under conditions in which Ukraine's military, reinforced by fascist militias and Western mercenaries, is waging brutal operations to repress the minority Russian population in the country's east.

Bishop concluded her speech with a threat: "The message from this Council to those responsible for this atrocity is definitive. You will be held to account for your actions."

Bishop's words were all the more ominous given that every diplomatic action by the Australian government—one of the closest US allies internationally—is carefully coordinated with Washington. Long before any "independent investigation" could begin, the Obama administration stated over the weekend that it had "evidence" that Russian missile systems not only shot down the Malaysian aircraft, but were then moved into Russia to conceal the fact.

Calculated decisions have been made in Washington to utilise the MH17 disaster to demonise Russian

President Vladimir Putin and pressure the European powers, in particular, to join the US in dramatically heightening the economic and military pressure on Moscow. Prime Minister Tony Abbott's government in Australia has proven a convenient and reliable cat's paw for the campaign.

Over the past four years in particular, since the June 2010 political coup that ousted Kevin Rudd as prime minister, any, even limited, criticism within the Australian establishment of unconditional alignment with Washington has been pushed to the margins. Australian imperialism is thoroughly integrated into the US pivot in the Asian region to undermine China—which is paralleled in Europe by the campaign to destabilise Russia. This includes hosting an array of key US communications facilities and military bases.

The previous Labor government played significant roles in preparing the basis for the US air war on Libya in 2011 and attempting to create conditions for a similar onslaught on Syria last year.

In the case of MH17, the hand of Washington can be identified in the Australian response. Abbott's first comment about responsibility, made during an interview early Friday, was "let's not jump to conclusions until we have harder facts than we do at the moment."

Barely hours later, following a meeting of his National Security Committee, which receives intelligence briefings prepared in collaboration with US agencies, Abbott launched a diplomatic offensive against Russia. He declared on national radio that "it now seems certain" that the plane was shot down by a "Russian-supplied surface-to-air missile."

With the exception of the Ukrainian regime itself, the Australian establishment has been arguably the most aggressive in accusing Russia of responsibility. In parliament last Friday, an atmosphere of unrestrained condemnation prevailed. The Labor Party and the Greens amplified the unsubstantiated allegations made by Abbott, Bishop and other government representatives. Over the weekend, Labor leader Bill Shorten and Greens leader Christine Milne declared they would support banning Putin from taking part in the G20 summit in Australia later in the year.

Throughout the media in Australia, Russia's guilt, and the need for retribution, is almost universally presented as fact. With reckless abandon, calls are

being made for not only economic sanctions but a military confrontation by the US and European powers against Moscow—a nuclear-armed state.

In one chilling comment, *Sydney Morning Herald* international editor Peter Hartcher denounced Russia and China as "rising hegemonies" that were "challenging the post-World War II order, the structure America built" and relentlessly using force to expand their territory.

"The destruction of MH17 makes it much harder for Obama and for the EU to pretend that Russian aggression isn't terribly serious," he wrote. "The slap-on-the-wrist sanctions so far have been half-hearted and ineffectual. Exposing Russia's hand in the mid-air massacre of 298 civilians could be, and should be, the end of the pretense."

In a very direct sense, the MH17 tragedy has provided a welcome distraction for the Abbott government and the Australian political establishment. Immense social tensions and class antagonisms are threatening to erupt over the drive to impose austerity cuts to public spending in the 2014 budget, the growth of social inequality and poverty, and the alienation of millions of people from the official parliamentary system.

Such matters have been swept to the side in the avalanche of media coverage of the Australian victims of the disaster. The divisions within the ruling elite over how to implement an anti-working class agenda, without provoking a social explosion, have been supplanted by "national unity" in a campaign of shameless anti-Russian chauvinism.



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