

Australian prime minister lauded over anti-Russian stance and MH17 resolution

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Prime Minister Tony Abbott has been lauded throughout the Australian political and media establishment, as well as by the Obama administration, for his strident allegations of Russian culpability in the crash of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17. Abbott and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop played a pivotal role in agitating for, and pressuring Russia to accept, the UN Security Council resolution 2166 that compels Moscow to “cooperate fully” with an “international investigation of the incident.”

On Monday, the front page of the *Australian Financial Review* proclaimed: “World backs Abbott fury.” It hailed his statement on the weekend that “it is impossible for Russia to wash its hands of something that happened on Russian-controlled territory at the hands of Russian-backed individuals, most likely with Russian-supplied weapons.”

In fact, the aircraft came down in Ukrainian air space, in an area of eastern Ukraine where the Russian-speaking population is refusing to accept the legitimacy of a US- and European-backed right-wing Ukrainian regime that rests on chauvinist and fascist forces and came to power through a coup in February. No investigation has even begun into why MH17 crashed. If it was brought down by a surface-to-air missile, there is no evidence to date as to whether it was fired by Russian-backed separatists or the Ukrainian military, and certainly no evidence that the Russian government had any involvement.

Facts, however, have not stood in the way of the entire establishment rallying around Abbott in issuing a torrent of accusations that Russia, and President Vladimir Putin in particular, are guilty and must be made to pay. A united front exists, from the so-called right of official politics to the ostensible left, in supporting Australia’s blatant role as the point man in

Washington’s efforts to exploit the MH17 tragedy to intensify its diplomatic, economic and military pressure on Russia.

Yesterday’s *Sydney Daily Telegraph* editorial gloated: “Abbott’s moral clarity, directness and sense of purpose has been admirably supported by Labor leader Bill Shorten and Greens leader Christine Milne. It is possible—indeed probable—that Australia’s united strength of will paved the way for other nations to join in the demands for Putin to act.”

Shorten delivered a speech yesterday in the US, comparing the downing of MH17 with the September 11 attacks and hailing America and Australia as “allies in war.” Before doing so, he heaped praise on Abbott and declared: “It is now time for the leader of the Russian Federation, Mr Putin, to now show the rest of the world that he’ll now act on this resolution.”

Speaking for the Greens, Milne continued her calls for Putin to be denied a visa to enter Australia for the G20 summit later this year and for harsher economic and diplomatic sanctions against Russia.

“Left” media commentator and *New Matilda* national affairs correspondent Ben Eltham lauded the manner in which Abbott had “strut the world stage” and dealt with “Russian recalcitrance over the repatriation of the dead and the investigation of who shot down the Malaysian airliner.”

US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Danny Russel highlighted the key role played by Australia over recent days. Speaking to the *Australian*’s foreign editor Greg Sheridan, he praised Abbott’s “decisiveness.” Russel noted: “We [the US] look to major partners on the international stage to engage when circumstances warrant in a coordinated and activist way and that characterises the Australian response.” His comments serve to confirm that every

action by the Abbott government has been taken in the closest collaboration with the Obama administration.

The line-up behind Washington across the political establishment testifies to the consensus that Australian imperialism can only pursue its strategic and economic interests through unconditional support for the US alliance and American intrigues, provocations and wars in every part of the world. There is virtually unanimous support for the complete integration of Australia into the aggressive US pivot against China in Asia, and the use of Australia as a major US communications, spying and military base.

To a great extent, the MH17 tragedy has been welcomed by the establishment as a timely distraction from the political frictions within Australia. Official politics is consumed with divisions over how to impose the austerity measures that are being demanded by the financial and corporate elite. The passage of numerous cuts to public spending in the Abbott government's budget have been delayed by Labor, the Greens and minor parties in the Senate, out of fears they could trigger an eruption of the pent-up anger and opposition in the working class to social inequality and declining living standards.

Now, all the establishment parties can revel in "national unity," based on condemnations of Russia, manufactured sorrow over the deaths of 37 Australian citizens and permanent residents and boasts of Australian prominence in the world arena. In the coming weeks, there will undoubtedly be calls for the same bipartisanship and unity in regard to slashing public spending and attacking the working class.

Under conditions of deepening global economic crisis and rising geopolitical tensions, definite class alignments are taking place. The Abbott government, Labor, the Greens, the media and the "left" milieu are coming together behind a political agenda of US and Australian imperialism that leads inexorably toward war.

With the passage of the UN resolution, any action by Moscow that can be portrayed as failing to "cooperate fully"—such as refusing to admit to responsibility—will be seized upon by the Obama administration, Abbott and the European powers to ratchet up the tensions with Russia to an even higher and more dangerous level.

In a column today, the *Australian*'s editor-at-large Paul Kelly implicitly pointed to one of the highly

possible consequences of the UN resolution—a US-led military intervention into Ukraine. Highlighting Abbott's throwaway remark that he would hold Putin to "his word", Kelly asked: "Who will do this? Who will arrest the pro-Russian separatist leaders who gave orders to shoot down MH17, an act that they deny? Who will enforce the full provisions of Resolution 2166? Abbott is under no illusion. He believes there has been a cover-up."

Abbott has already called for the deployment of troops and police to secure the crash site, which is held by separatist militias whom he accused yesterday of "destroying evidence on an industrial scale." Former Australian Defence Forces chief Angus Houston has been sent to the scene as Abbott's "special envoy," along with a number of investigators and observers. Abbott has left open the possibility of sending Australian military personnel, if they were "requested" by the Ukrainian government.

Having served as Washington's cat's paw in the United Nations, the Abbott government is now at the forefront of the next round of provocations against Russia and the demands that Moscow accept the stationing of foreign troops directly on its border with Ukraine.



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