

Provocative Australian-Dutch push for security forces at MH17 crash site

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In a provocative and reckless move, the Dutch and Australian governments are pressing for the stationing of police and soldiers at the Malaysian Airlines MH17 crash site in eastern Ukraine. Using the pretext of “securing” the site for investigators, an armed force hostile to the pro-Russian separatists who control the area is being planted in the midst of an active civil war close to the Russian border.

There is nothing benign about what Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott described yesterday as “a humanitarian mission” with “one purpose and one purpose only,” which was to “bring our people home.” While declaring that he did not “want to get into the politics of Eastern Europe,” Abbott continued to blame pro-Russian militia for downing MH17. The site, he said, “is controlled by armed men with a vested interest in the outcome of any investigation.”

The Abbott government has been in the forefront of the propaganda war being waged internationally by the US and its allies, which, without producing a shred of concrete evidence, has accused pro-Russian forces of shooting down the airliner. Australia played the key role in pushing through a resolution in the UN Security Council condemning the downing of MH17 and instructing “all parties” to facilitate a ceasefire and an “independent international investigation.”

Having pushed through the UN resolution, Abbott and Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop were the first to raise the demand for an international security force at the crash site, amid a deluge of crude propaganda accusing pro-Russian fighters of contaminating the site, removing evidence and desecrating the dead. In fact, the leader of a Dutch identification team, Peter van Vliet, on Monday had nothing but praise for the manner in which the recovery of bodies had taken place. “I think they did a hell of a

job in a hell of a place,” he said.

Some 90 Australian Federal Police (AFP) personnel were dispatched to Britain and Netherlands earlier this week to prepare for deployment to Ukraine. Yesterday, Abbott announced that an additional 100 AFP officers would be sent. An unspecified number of the AFP personnel would be armed and accompanied by armed Australian soldiers.

Foreign Minister Bishop has been in Europe pressing for the dispatch of police and troops to the crash site. She met with Dutch officials in the Netherlands then flew with her Dutch counterpart Frans Timmermans to Kiev where the two signed a memorandum of understanding yesterday with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on the investigation of MH17. The Dutch government has announced a commitment of 40 military police to the security force, with Britain, Germany and Malaysia also discussing involvement.

Bishop has also reached an agreement with Ukraine Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin to legitimise an Australian police and military presence, but it still requires formal approval by President Poroshenko and the Ukrainian parliament—under conditions in which the government has collapsed. Bishop and Timmermans are nevertheless pressing ahead with their plans, visiting the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv yesterday. Also yesterday, Abbott spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin to insist that the pro-Russian separatists allow the international forces access to the crash site.

The Australian and Dutch-led operation is not about conducting an “independent investigation” or “bringing our people home.” The bodies of most of the dead have already been repatriated to the Netherlands for identification. Both countries have been in the forefront of the US-led campaign of lies and distortions blaming

Russia and pro-Russian separatists for the MH17 crash and certainly have a vested interest in excluding evidence that might point to other causes, including the involvement of the Ukrainian military.

The push for an international security force at the crash site takes place as the right-wing Ukrainian regime installed in a US-backed, fascist-led coup in February steps up its military operations in eastern Ukraine. The Netherlands has been actively campaigning for the European Union to impose tougher sanctions on Russia over its support for pro-Russian separatists.

In this context, the US, which yesterday accused Russia of supplying heavy weapons and being directly involved in the fighting in eastern Ukraine, has been particularly appreciative of the role of the Australian government. Already fully committed to Obama's aggressive US military build-up in Asia against China, the Abbott government, with the complete backing of the entire Australian establishment, is functioning as point man for the US in its provocative moves against Russia in Ukraine. Yesterday, Obama rang Abbott to thank him personally for his leadership on the issue. In reality, Canberra's aggressive campaign has taken place in the closest collaboration with Washington.

The most sinister aspect of the international security force being prepared for Ukraine is that it provides a stalking horse for a US-led military intervention. The contingent will undoubtedly contain intelligence and other operatives who can be relied on to instigate a provocation to provide the pretext for a much larger armed force.

In comments reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* yesterday, Peter Jennings, executive director of the government-funded Australian Strategic Policy Institute, hinted at just such a scenario when he argued that any AFP contingent had to have military back-up. Whatever the make-up, he said, Australia would "have to be prepared to take casualties." Of course, any casualties would immediately be exploited to mount a ferocious propaganda campaign demanding military action.

The US and its allies have already transformed Ukraine into a dangerous flashpoint for war with Russia. The dispatch of police and troops to the MH17 crash site provides one more potential trigger for just such a conflict.



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