

Australian PM backs NATO threats against Russia

Mike Head
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As it did following the still-unexplained downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine, the Australian government is again taking a prominent role in the mounting threats being issued by Washington and its allies against Russia.

As the US-backed Ukrainian regime stepped up its murderous assault on the people of Donetsk and Luhansk, near Russia's border, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott yesterday made a belligerent intervention into the cacophony of denunciations of Moscow by the Western powers.

At a media conference, Abbott declared Russia a "bully," backed NATO warnings of retaliation if Russian forces entered Ukraine, and threatened to increase Australia's economic sanctions after Moscow imposed its own trade bans on Western countries, including Australia.

The Australian prime minister set out a pretext for US-led military aggression against Russia, accusing President Vladimir Putin of "massing" troops on the border with Ukraine. "Any attempt by Russia to move its forces across the border would not be a humanitarian mission, it would be an invasion," Abbott declared. "It would be utterly unacceptable and certainly it will spark a response, including a response from Australia."

Abbott's remarks further highlight the extent to which the entire Australian political establishment is placing itself at the service of Washington as the Obama administration ratchets up its provocations against both Russia and China, and resumes military operations in Iraq.

Abbott issued a list of unsubstantiated accusations and open-ended demands against Russia. "The way to avoid increased sanctions is for Russia to call off what appears to be in preparation, for Russia to respect the independence of Ukraine, to stop interfering in the

affairs of Ukraine, to stop supporting separatists in Ukraine, to stop arming separatists in Ukraine."

In reality, it is the US and other Western imperialist powers that are "interfering" in Ukraine. They backed a fascist-led coup in Kiev in February and have pushed and financed the resulting proxy regime to mount a military onslaught on the Russian-speaking population of eastern Ukraine, where deep opposition to the Kiev government and its extreme right-wing militias has led to widespread support for separatist formations.

Abbott said his government had held back from imposing further sanctions on Russia, while Australian police and other personnel were conducting operations in the MH17 crash site. Canberra had joined earlier US-driven sanctions following the Crimean referendum vote to secede from Ukraine.

The investigations have now been suspended indefinitely, because of the intensive offensives being waged across the region by the Ukrainian military and associated militias. Ukraine yesterday scrapped the ceasefire in the crash zone, making any further recovery and investigative activities impossible.

Last month, the Australian government seized upon the MH17 disaster, which claimed the lives of 298 people, including 38 Australian citizens and residents, to spearhead the swift passage of a UN Security Council resolution sanctioning the deployment of an investigative force and laying the groundwork to trigger possible military intervention against Russia. No evidence was provided, however, implicating Russia in the downing of MH17.

Now that the Ukrainian regime has ended any possibility of further investigation on the ground, there is not the slightest criticism; just stepped-up allegations and threats against Russia.

Abbott spoke after Moscow imposed bans on the

imports of foodstuffs from the US, 28 European Union countries, Canada, Norway and Australia. Australian agricultural exports to Russia, primarily meat, butter and live animals, were worth about \$400 million in 2013. The impact on Australian agri-businesses could be more substantial, however, because of the expected diversion of EU and US food exports into other hotly-contested international markets.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop went further than Abbott, yesterday declaring that “everything’s on the table,” including banning uranium exports to Russia, if Moscow failed to accept responsibility for the downing of MH17.

Bishop also boasted of the leading role that Australia played in the use of the MH17 tragedy to get a resolution through the UN. She said other countries told her that “only Australia” could have achieved that. “We were able to obtain a unanimous UNSC resolution within three days and we were able to obtain a significant legal framework to enter Ukraine and take over the crash site in a middle of a war zone,” Bishop said.

Bishop spoke before departing for this weekend’s East Asia Summit in Burma, which will include foreign ministers from Russia and China, as well as South-East Asian countries, the US and Australia. There she was expected to confer with US Secretary of State John Kerry and then fly back to Sydney with him for an annual AUSMIN meeting of the US and Australian foreign and defence ministers.

On the eve of those talks, which will focus on even closer integration of the Australian military into US war preparations, Abbott underscored Canberra’s unconditional backing for Washington by voicing “strong support” for President Obama’s authorisation of US air strikes in Iraq.

Abbott said the Australian government was “extremely concerned by the threat” of the Islamic fundamentalist ISIS. He said it was a “highly potent insurgent army” capable of holding territory, and imposing its “abhorrent form of government,” making clear Canberra’s endorsement of the resumption of US military operations in Iraq.

Within Australia’s political establishment there is no disagreement with this aggressive orientation. Labor Party opposition leader Bill Shorten sought to outdo Abbott, saying that Russia’s food import bans made

him “sick in the guts” with outrage. The Greens have yet to issue a statement, but Greens leader Christine Milne has in the past criticised Abbott for not taking stronger action against Russia, including by banning Putin from November’s scheduled G20 summit in Brisbane.

Like the previous Greens-supported Labor minority government, the Liberal-National government is intensifying its commitment to Washington, and anxious to display its value to the US. This reflects the Australian ruling elite’s dependence, both economically and strategically, on the United States, which is not only the dominant military power in the Asia-Pacific region and globally, but also the largest source of investment in Australia, despite China being the biggest market for mining exports from Australia.



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