

# Australian government backs renewed US war in Iraq

Mike Head

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The Australian government has wasted no time in making clear its support for, and readiness to participate in, the renewed US-led military intervention in Iraq. Since US President Obama's authorisation last Thursday, the US military has carried out air drops and repeated air strikes on the pretext of helping Iraq's Yazidi religious minority.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott, who is currently in Europe, added to the US propaganda campaign yesterday, describing the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as a "terrorist nation" that posed "extraordinary problems not just for the people of the Middle East but for the wider world." ISIS was spawned by the US occupation of Iraq. Over the border in neighbouring Syria it was part of the US-backed regime-change operation to oust Syrian President Bashir al-Assad.

The Australian government has already pledged two Hercules air force planes to join the operation to drop supplies at Mount Sinjar in northern Iraq, where ISIS militia are besieging thousands of members of the Yazidi religious minority.

Asked about further military support for US operations in Iraq, Defence Minister David Johnston declared that Australia was "ready to assist in whatever way we can should we be asked to assist by the Americans and the Iraqi government."

This open-ended commitment is another demonstration of the unconditional alignment of the Australian political establishment with Washington as it not only renews military operations in Iraq but is engaged in a confrontation with Russia, over Ukraine, and a military build-up in Asia against China.

More than a decade ago, the Howard Coalition government was one of the first in the world to commit troops to the Bush administration's illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003 to oust the regime of Saddam Hussein.

That invasion was based on outright lies and fabrications that Saddam Hussein possessed "weapons of mass destruction," posing an imminent threat to the people of Western Europe.

Now, having devastated Iraq, created a social disaster and fomented sectarian divisions, the US is mounting another intervention, on the pretext of averting a humanitarian disaster. As in 2003, the overriding aim of the new air war is to secure a US client regime in Baghdad and bolster American economic and strategic interests in Iraq and the Middle East.

Justifying Australian military involvement, Johnston declared that "right-minded" countries could not "just sit back and watch atrocities unfold on their nightly television." This professed moral outrage is very selective. The US has just spent a month, fully supported by Australia, backing, financing and arming Israel as it carried out atrocities in the Gaza Strip.

US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel told reporters in Sydney on Monday the air strikes in Iraq had been "very effective" and the US was considering further requests for support from the Iraqi government. "We are working through specific areas of where the Australians can help," he said, adding that the US was co-ordinating a group of partners.

Hagel is in Australia with US Secretary of State John Kerry for annual AUSMIN talks with their Australian counterparts. His comments make clear that Iraq will be high on the agenda, along with the finalisation of agreements on US basing arrangements in Australia, and the further integration of the two militaries.

The Abbott government knows it has the backing of the Labor Party. Opposition leader Bill Shorten declared: "Labor is 100 percent supporting humanitarian relief to innocent civilians caught up in this crazed fighting by this very deadly group of

fanatics in northwestern Iraq.” He said there had been no discussion with the government about recommitting troops to Iraq, but did not oppose such a move.

The Greens postured as opponents of Australian involvement in the 2003 invasion, on the nationalist basis that Australian troops were needed in the Asia-Pacific region to defend Australian interests. Speaking yesterday, Greens MP Adam Bandt did not oppose the renewed US air strikes in Iraq or the Abbott government’s offer of military support. He called for a parliamentary debate to approve any new Australian troop commitment to Iraq.

The media has fully backed the renewed US intervention, justifying it as part of the bogus “war on terror.” The *Australian Financial Review* insisted that “this country has little choice but to support the US in becoming involved, yet again, in Iraq.” It declared that “the US and its allies have a longer-run interest in curbing the scope for ISIS to establish a militant breeding ground for terrorists in the north of the disintegrating Iraqi state.”

The *Australian* claimed that “with the imminent prospect of genocide,” Abbott was “right to pledge firm Australian backing.” It immediately added: “Much more than even that is at stake, with the conflagration spreading across the heart of the Middle East.”

Today, even more than in 2003, the calculation in Australian ruling circles is that unconditional backing for the US, still the world’s pre-eminent military and economic force, is indispensable for the pursuit of Australian capitalism’s own predatory interests, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

This calculation was underlined yesterday by the *Australian’s* foreign editor Greg Sheridan, in a comment entitled “Where the US goes in the Middle East, we will follow.” To underscore the point, he declared: “If the US sends troops to Iraq—very unlikely at the moment but by no means inconceivable—Australian troops are overwhelmingly likely to go with them.”

Sheridan insisted, however, that this was not simply a matter of “Australia blindly doing Washington’s bidding,” but rather it was “in the direct national security interests of Australia.”

Sheridan declared that Abbott’s broader purpose in committing Australian forces to Iraq was “to stiffen the spine of American leadership.” Obama’s failure to

bomb Syria last year, Sheridan claimed, had led to “the erosion of US strategic credibility” in Europe and Asia. “Canberra believes US credibility in the Middle East flows directly into US credibility in Asia. And US credibility in Asia is critical to Australian security,” he wrote.

Sheridan concluded that Abbott would “walk a long mile with Obama, if needs be,” but it would be “in Australia’s interests.” His column was a crude expression of the willingness of the Australian ruling class to go to any lengths to secure American military backing for the economic interests of Australian imperialism in Asia and internationally.



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