

Australia's pseudo-left covers up for US imperialism in Iraq

Patrick O'Connor
18 August 2014

The Australian pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alternative has responded to the deepening political and military crisis in Iraq by trying to cover up the responsibility of US imperialism for the violence and repression being unleashed across the Middle East.

A comment written last month, “Old certainties turned upside down in Middle East,” by the editor of Socialist Alternative’s newspaper *Red Flag*, Corey Oakley, is centrally aimed at arguing that US imperialism now plays no significant role in the region. As for Australian imperialism, Washington’s junior ally with its own mercenary interests in the Middle East, Socialist Alternative is silent. According to Oakley, the powers that should be opposed for their malevolent role in the Middle East are Russia, Iran and other rivals of Washington.

The article underscores the pro-imperialist politics of the Australian middle class pseudo-left. All these organisations have lurched further to the right in the past decade, repudiating their previous nominal opposition to Washington’s and Canberra’s military operations and interventions.

In August 2012, Oakley declared that any emphasis on the “imperialist threat” in Syria was “profoundly mistaken,” adding that “knee-jerk anti-imperialism” was a thing of the past as far as he and his co-thinkers were concerned.

This article was published as part of Socialist Alternative’s enthusiastic support for the US-backed anti-government militias in Syria, which from the beginning were dominated by reactionary Islamic fundamentalist forces that have now seized broad swathes of territory in Iraq and are threatening to topple Washington’s client regime in Baghdad.

While nominally distancing himself from the “reactionary politics” of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in last month’s article, Oakley seeks to invest the broader “Sunni rebellion” with a progressive character. “The stunning speed with which the revolt has swept across Iraq has shaken the entire region to its core,” he writes. Oakley says nothing about ISIS’s brutal treatment of its political opponents, its sectarian atrocities committed against religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria or the terrible dangers facing the working class of the Middle East as a result of the divisive sectarian politics of Sunni and Shiite parties and militias.

Oakley’s article seeks to justify Socialist Alternative’s continuing support for the US-led regime-change operation in Syria by absurdly arguing that US imperialism is no longer a significant factor in Middle East politics. He declares that the

“driving force behind the misery inflicted daily on millions of people across the Arab world, brought to fever pitch in Iraq and Syria at the moment, is not an all-powerful US empire.”

Socialist Alternative’s political line follows that of the State Department. On June 22, US Secretary of State John Kerry declared: “The United States of America is not responsible for what happened in Libya, nor is it responsible for what is happening in Iraq today.” Just over a week later, Oakley’s article was published online, expressing Socialist Alternative’s basic agreement with Kerry’s statement.

Under the subheading, “‘Anti-imperialist’ fantasies unravel,” Oakley describes a “fierce debate on the international left” between “those who backed the uprising against Bashar al-Assad, and those who either defended the regime, or at the very least refused to back the opposition on the grounds that Assad was part of an ‘anti-imperialist bloc.’” The only named representative of the “international left” allegedly backing Assad is a British Maoist writer for the *Counterpunch* web site, Phil Greaves. His positions are only raised as a desperate effort to smear opponents of US imperialism’s regime-change drive in Syria as supporters of the Assad regime.

The real target is the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site*, which alone has opposed the predatory operations of US imperialism and fought to mobilise and unite the working class across the region and internationally in a revolutionary movement for the overthrow of capitalism.

What is the reality of Washington’s responsibility for the militarist violence being unleashed across the Middle East? Since the end of World War II, US imperialism has backed and orchestrated numerous coups, regime change operations, military bombardments, and full-scale invasions and occupations. A full account of the crimes of successive American administrations in the region, in collaboration with Israel, would fill many volumes.

In Iraq, more than a million people have been killed as the direct result of the 2003 invasion, based on lies about weapons of mass destruction and non-existent ties between Al Qaeda and the Hussein regime. Since 2011, the Obama administration has been in a de facto alliance with Al Qaeda and connected Islamist forces, attempting to overthrow other secular bourgeois nationalist regimes, first in Libya and then Syria.

Socialist Alternative now wants this historical record to be forgotten. Moreover, in its zeal to whitewash Washington’s role,

this outfit blatantly falsifies the reality of what it is underway in the Middle East.

Oakley complains bitterly about the political “logic” that supposedly “convinced many to rail against ‘imperialist intervention’ in Syria at the slightest whiff of mostly non-existent aid from the US to Syrian rebel forces, while at the same time explaining away the very real imperialist intervention into the war by Iran and Russia, which has played a decisive role in propping up the Assad regime.”

Who is Oakley kidding? The CIA has been running covert operations along the Syrian-Turkish border since at least mid-2012, while at the same time operating a “rebel” training centre in Jordan. In 2013, the Obama administration was on the brink of launching an air war on Syria in a bid to shore up the faltering anti-Assad militias. Late last month, the US announced it would direct an additional \$500 million to the Syrian opposition forces. This windfall is on top of the enormous funds and crates of arms channelled via Washington’s close allies Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar.

The Qatari sheikhdom alone, according to a conservative estimate published in the *Los Angeles Times* in January, has funnelled more than \$3 billion to the anti-government forces in Syria since the beginning of the civil war. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimated that the Qatari administration organised more than 70 weapons cargo flights into Turkey between April 2012 and March 2013. These gun-running operations have likely escalated significantly in the year since.

Socialist Alternative insists, however, that the only “real imperialist intervention” is on the side of Russia and Iran.

It is simply false to describe these countries as imperialist states, or to describe their reaction to the US regime-change campaign in Syria as “imperialist interventions.” Iran is an oppressed nation that is entirely dependent on energy exports while being subjected to a US economic blockade for more than three decades and repeatedly threatened with military attack in recent years.

Russia is headed by a corrupt oligarchy that enriched itself through the processes of capitalist restoration following the dissolution of the USSR. While desperately seeking an accommodation with US imperialism, the Putin administration confronts a ruling class in Washington that is determined to dominate the entire Eurasian landmass, if needs be through the dismemberment of the Russian Federation.

Oakley does not stop there, however, in his efforts to deny the continuing criminal role of the US and its allies in the Middle East. After referring to an “endless cycle of interventions” in the past, he declares: “But the British, Russian, French and US imperialists are no longer the only independent powers in the region. Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt ... are powerful capitalist states in their own right, playing the imperialist game, not mere clients of bigger powers. Furthermore, the ruling elites of the many small countries fit into the network of alliances and divisions not simply as pawns, but as defenders of their own interests and those of their local capitalist class.”

Oakley stands reality on its head. Of course, every local capitalist class in the Middle East, from Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia down to the petty Gulf States such as Qatar and Kuwait,

prosecutes its own interests, but that does not make them “independent powers,” let alone imperialist. The region remains under the thumb of the imperialist powers, above all the US, which has sought to extend its domination through wars, interventions and provocations over the past decades. Most of the Middle Eastern regimes are directly subservient to Washington through long established alliances. Those that are not, such as Iran and Syria, are anxiously seeking an accommodation with the US.

Oakley points to the contradictions of US policy in the Middle East—its talks with Iran and support for a Shiite-dominated regime in Baghdad that have created tensions with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. However, the incoherent character of US strategy in the Middle East is not the same as helplessness. The US remains determined to dominate the key energy-rich region and, as has been demonstrated again and again, will recklessly use its military might to gain its ends. Obama’s renewal of the US air war in Iraq is the latest effort to stamp its authority over Iraq.

Moreover, Socialist Alternative’s ridiculous pretence that US imperialism is no longer the principal aggressor in the Middle East is fully in accord with its support for Washington as it prepares a broader war against Russia and China. Just as it denounces Russian intervention in Syria and supports the US-led regime-change operation against Assad, so Socialist Alternative invoked the spectre of Russian imperialism as the pretext for its support for the fascist-led ousting of the Ukrainian government earlier this year. In Asia, along with the rest of the pseudo-left fraternity, Socialist Alternative portrays the Obama administration’s aggressive military build-up and diplomatic intrigues against China as a defensive response to “Chinese imperialism” and “Chinese expansionism,” which it, like the US State Department, blames for rising regional tensions.

Socialist Alternative’s embrace of US imperialism reflects a profound shift in class forces as the crisis of global capitalism intensifies geo-political tensions and threatens to plunge humanity into another world war. The entire Australian political establishment, including the layers of the upper middle class for whom the pseudo-lefts speak, is lining up behind US war plans as the means for securing the financial and strategic interests of Australian imperialism in Asia and the world. Oakley’s article is one more signal to the ruling elite at home that Socialist Alternative can be relied upon to play its part in supporting the US war drive.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact