

Australian government ready to join US air war in Middle East

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The Australian government signalled yesterday that it is simply waiting on the word from Washington before escalating its involvement in US-led military operations in the Middle East against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militias.

Australian military transports based in the Middle East have already made so-called humanitarian airdrops in northern Iraq. What is now being planned, however, is an expanded role, including the possible use of fighter jets for air strikes and the dispatch of SAS special forces and other military personnel to Iraq.

While Prime Minister Tony Abbott and his ministers repeat the mantra that “no decision has been made,” preparations are very advanced. Asked on the Australian ABC’s “Lateline” program last night about the commitment of strike aircraft, Defence Minister David Johnston commented: “We’ve got Super Hornets. They’re incredibly capable ... Now, that’s an obvious port of call were we to consider it necessary to participate with our friends and our ally [the US].”

Asked if the Super Hornets were in the Middle East, or ready to go, Johnston declared: “We’re in a high state of readiness.” He even hinted at a time line, saying that before expanding operations, the US wanted “to see a stable government in Iraq and that’s not going to occur until September 10 when the new prime minister takes over.”

As the Obama administration prepares to expand its war against ISIS in Iraq and into Syria, it is building a new version of President Bush’s “coalition of the willing” that launched the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003. Citing administration officials, the *New York Times* reported on Tuesday that “the countries likely to be enlisted include Australia, Britain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.”

While some countries would be asked for intelligence

and financial support, “the [White House] officials ... said they expected Britain and Australia would be willing to join the United States in an air campaign.”

Johnston was hesitant about publicly committing to an air war in Syria, but he did not rule it out. “I wouldn’t want to speculate about what the Syrian situation is,” he said. “We’d want to sit down at length with our ally, discuss the circumstances ... [But] who knows what’s coming over the horizon?”

In the space of less than a month, the Obama administration has expanded its air strikes from a limited operation, supposedly to assist the Yazidi minority in Iraq, to providing air support for Iraqi and Kurdish offensives against ISIS. This week the US air force began reconnaissance flights over Syria to prepare for air operations against ISIS targets in that country.

Just as the 2003 invasion of Iraq was based on lies, so too is the new US-led war in Iraq and Syria. It is not about protecting and providing humanitarian aid to embattled Iraqi minorities. The Obama administration is seeking to refashion and consolidate its client regime in Baghdad, while boosting its regime-change operation to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

As the *New York Times* reported, the White House is seeking to “enlist allies and neighbours in the region to increase their support for Syria’s moderate opposition.” Which of the largely Islamist anti-Assad militias are considered “moderate” at any time depends on whether they fit US strategic requirements. Until recently, Obama, along with the US and international media, conveniently ignored ISIS atrocities in Syria.

As it prepares to join the US-led air war, the Abbott government, supported by the opposition parties and a compliant media, is mounting an increasingly hysterical anti-terror campaign in a bid to swamp widespread

antiwar sentiment. Denunciations of ISIS beheadings and other barbarities are being linked to scaremongering about Australian members of ISIS returning to do the same in Australia. The government is preparing draconian new anti-terror legislation that further undermines basic democratic rights and legal norms.

The opposition Labor Party and the Greens have made it plain they will not oppose Australian military involvement. Speaking on the ABC's RN "Breakfast" program this morning, Labor's deputy leader Tanya Plibersek said the government had to be "very, very cautious" about participation, but declared her support for a "humanitarian mission." She said there was "a humanitarian disaster right now in Iraq and Syria" and the "international community" had a "responsibility to protect."

Likewise, the Greens called for a parliamentary debate, but have not rejected Australian involvement in the escalating US military operations. Greens leader Christine Milne told parliament yesterday: "The Greens have said all along that we support humanitarian assistance, but this appears to be morphing fairly quickly into military engagement." Deputy leader Adam Bandt complained that the Abbott government had yet to make a case for military involvement. Neither opposed the US air war in Iraq.

News Corp Australia reported today that the Abbott government is preparing a dossier "detailing the atrocities committed by ISIS against civilians across Syria and Iraq to make the case for applying maximum force against ISIS." In coming days, no doubt, lurid details from the dossier will be amplified in the media to provide the pretext for Australian military engagement.

The article further reported: "Top-secret plans have also been drawn up for Australian SAS troops to be deployed inside Iraq to provide targeting information for the air strikes. The elite troops would establish stealthy observation posts in high-risk locations to identify targets and guide coalition aircraft onto enemy positions."

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop announced yesterday that the government was considering a request received yesterday from a representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq for military assistance and supplies. Plibersek, who is meeting the

KRG representative today, indicated her support, declaring that the Kurdish peshmerga fighters were "the most effective fighting force in northern Iraq."

Behind the backs of the Australian people, the Abbott government, with the support of the entire political establishment, is committing to an open-ended US war, which, like the 2003 invasion, is aimed at securing Washington's dominance in the energy-rich region. Moreover, by extending the war into Syria, the US and its allies are recklessly heightening the danger of drawing in other countries and triggering a broader regional conflict.



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