

Australian military aircraft to supply arms to Iraqi Kurds

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The Australian government is rapidly escalating its involvement in US-led military operations inside Iraq with the announcement yesterday that Australian military aircraft will transport arms and ammunition to Kurdish peshmerga militias in northern Iraq. Australia joins Germany, Italy, France, Canada, Britain as well as the US, in shipping military hardware to the Iraqi Kurds.

As the Obama administration steps up military action in Iraq and extends its spying operations in Syria, Prime Minister Tony Abbott has signalled Australian support for a wider war against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militias. While Abbott declared that Australian combat troops would not be involved, Fairfax media reports this morning that elite SAS forces will accompany the arms shipments.

Australian military aircraft have already been involved in so-called humanitarian airdrops, the latest yesterday to the largely Turkmen Shiite town of Amirli, as part of an offensive by Iraqi and Kurdish forces backed by US air strikes. American war planes have now conducted more than 100 air attacks in northern Iraq under the guise of aiding Yazidi, Turkmen and Christian minorities threatened by ISIS forces.

Last week Defence Minister David Johnston made clear that the government was prepared to send Australian Super Hornet fighters to join the US air war as soon as Washington gave the word. “We’re in a high state of readiness,” he declared. According to the *Australian* on Saturday, Australian early-warning and control aircraft could also be sent.

The Fairfax media reported that SAS troops could be based in Iraq if Australian war planes begin carrying out air strikes. The stated rationale is to rescue the crew of any downed Australian aircraft. However, the SAS were extensively used for assassinations and other clandestine work in Afghanistan and during the US-led occupation of Iraq. SAS forces would undoubtedly join US Special

Forces and CIA operatives in the dirty covert operations, which, in all likelihood, are already underway in Iraq and neighbouring Syria.

While the Obama administration is weighing up options amid a foreign policy fraught with contradictions in the Middle East, not to speak of Eastern Europe, Abbott has provided Washington with a blank cheque. As in 2003, the Australian government is prepared to commit military forces to an open-ended war in Iraq behind the backs of the Australian population on the basis of lies. Preparing the ground for Sunday’s announcement, Abbott denounced ISIS, declaring: “We have seen the beheadings, the crucifixions, the mass executions. This is pure evil and it does need to be dealt with as best we can.”

Like the US, the Abbott government has turned a blind eye to similar atrocities carried out by ISIS and other reactionary Islamist militias over the past three years inside Syria. Washington and its allies in the Gulf States have funded, armed and trained various Sunni-extremist groups including ISIS, as part of the regime-change operation to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The international media spotlight was turned off when it came to beheadings and other Sunni Islamist depredations against Christian and Shiite minorities inside Syria.

The latest US military intervention in the Middle East is no more a “humanitarian mission” than the 2003 invasion was about weapons of mass destruction. Obama, like his predecessor Bush, is determined to shore up US dominance in the energy-rich Middle East. The Abbott government’s decision to sign up for a new war in Iraq and potentially Syria is recognition that the interests of Australian imperialism are best served by continued US global hegemony. Like the previous Labor government, the Coalition has been in the forefront of the US war drive, whether in the Middle East, Ukraine or in the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” against China.

The entire Australian political and media establishment has lined up behind the Abbott government's commitment of military forces. Briefed by the government on Friday, opposition Labor leader Bill Shorten has backed the bogus "humanitarian" mission to the hilt. "This is happening because of one reason—there are vulnerable people who need help and need it now," he declared to the media yesterday.

The government and opposition parties are acutely aware that the US-led invasion of Iraq a decade ago provoked mass protests internationally, including the largest-ever, antiwar demonstrations in Australia. As a result, there is a concerted and utterly cynical effort by the government, opposition and in the media to draw a distinction between the intervention in 2003 and now, in order to disguise its predatory character.

Speaking on the ABC's "Insiders" program yesterday, Labor deputy opposition leader Tanya Plibersek declared that the situation was very different from the 2003 invasion. "The difference here is you've got the newly formed Iraqi government speaking with the international community, you've got an imminent humanitarian disaster, we've seen already that IS [ISIS] are prepared to commit genocide if they can. So you do have a responsibility-to-protect from the international community."

Over the past decade, the "responsibility-to-protect" has been turned into an all-purpose "humanitarian" pretext, selectively applied, to justify imperialist interventions in any part of the globe. The previous Labor government was in the forefront of pushing for the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011 supposedly to protect the population of Benghazi. In reality NATO air forces provided support to opposition militia, including those linked to Al Qaeda, to oust Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The hypocrisy involved is staggering. Washington and its allies are applying the "responsibility-to-protect" to Iraq and the US puppet government in Baghdad, but denouncing the "Russian invasion" of eastern Ukraine to protect the Russian-speaking minority from the armed forces and fascist militias of the right-wing government in Kiev.

While the Labor Party has lined up openly with Abbott and his war preparations, the Greens and so-called independents like Andrew Wilkie are criticising the lack of a parliamentary debate, but are not opposing the Australian military commitment itself. While it is certainly true that the Australian people are being kept in the dark, a debate in parliament will not shed any light,

precisely because all of the parties and independents back the US war drive, as they have done in Ukraine and in Asia.

As is particularly the case in Britain, Australian involvement in US military operations in Iraq is being accompanied by a terror scare campaign over Australian citizens fighting with ISIS and returning to commit atrocities in Australia. Abbott is exploiting the issue not only to justify Australian military actions in Iraq but to justify an extension of draconian anti-terror laws to strip "foreign fighters" of their citizenship and legalise extensive Internet surveillance and spying on the Australian population.

The boosting of police-state powers and funding for intelligence agencies highlights the other driving force for war—the deepening social crisis and social polarisation at home produced by the worsening global economic crisis. It is no accident that government has seized on the US military intervention in Iraq amid widespread public opposition to its far-reaching austerity budget brought down in May. Like Obama, Abbott is seeking to project acute social tensions at home outward against a foreign enemy.

Labor Senator Sue Lines unwittingly stirred up a hornet's nest last week when she suggested that Abbott was "hyping up" the terrorist threat to "scare the Australian public and to distract everyone" from the austerity budget. She was quickly hauled into line by Labor leader Shorten who declared that "Labor's position is that we will work in the best interests of this nation and our stability and security."

However, the "interests of the nation" are those of the ruling class, not the working class. The new wars abroad are intimately bound up with a deepening assault on the democratic rights and the social position of the working people at home.



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