

Australian government poised to commit fighter jets to Iraq war

Peter Symonds
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Speaking last Friday at the NATO summit in Britain, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop reiterated Canberra's determination to take part in the expanding US-led war in the Middle East against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militias.

Having already committed military transports to ferry arms and ammunition in Iraq and conduct so-called humanitarian airdrops, Australia is poised to dispatch Super Hornet fighter jets to join US air strikes on ISIS positions in Iraq, and potentially Syria.

On the NATO sidelines, Bishop took part in a meeting of a de facto coalition of 10 countries "that have expressed a willingness to tackle ISIL [ISIS] head on." She declared that they had "looked at what more can be done in terms of air strikes and Australia will respond when a formal request is made."

The formal request is likely to come quickly. Bishop comments came as US President Obama prepares to unveil his plans for expanding the war against ISIS on Wednesday (see: "Obama prepares to escalate war in the Middle East").

Bishop insisted that the "red line is combat troops on the ground", adding that there was "no interest" from the countries in the coalition in committing combat troops. All of the governments involved in the new war in the Middle East are acutely aware of the widespread opposition to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the lies on which it was based.

Nevertheless, the US is already increasing the number of troops in Iraq to more than 1,200 under the guise of liaison officers, military advisers and protecting US diplomatic assets. Likewise, SAS special forces troops are widely reported to have accompanied Australian military aircraft taking weapons to the Kurdish militia in northern Iraq last week.

The Australian government, with the support of the media and opposition parties, has been in the forefront of the propaganda campaign to justify the accelerating war in Iraq, denouncing ISIS as "pure evil." Washington, backed all the way by Canberra, is directly responsible for spawning ISIS, most recently as part of the US-led regime change operation in Syria.

Bishop declared that Australia was "prepared to play its part in combating ISIL because it's a direct domestic threat to Australia." The government is using the presence of small numbers of Australian citizens who have joined ISIS militias, not only as the pretext for war, but also to enact draconian new anti-terror legislation.

Speaking to Fairfax Media yesterday, Bishop foreshadowed an unending war, declaring that "we have to be wary of claiming to be able to eliminate ISIL, because you're talking about an ideology." Like Washington, Canberra is seizing on ISIS to breathe new life into the bogus "war on terror" that has already been exploited to justify neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as ramping up police-state measures at home.

Bishop played down, but did not rule out extending military operations into Syria, saying there were "legal complexities that have to be worked through thoroughly." The "legal complexities" arise from the fact that what is being prepared is an unprovoked act of aggression on a sovereign nation that is flagrantly illegal under international law.

Significantly, of the 10 nations attending last Friday's gathering of the "coalition of the willing," Australia was the only non-NATO member. Like the previous Labor government, the current Liberal-National Coalition has backed the Obama administration's machinations in the Middle East to the

hilt, as well as in its confrontation with Russia over Ukraine.

In recognition of services rendered, NATO upgraded relations with Australia to “enhanced partner.” Sweden, Finland, Jordan and Georgia were also given the same designation. While not an alliance member, Australia’s new status will ensure that Canberra is involved in the planning and preparation of new military operations and wars from the very outset.

The US and NATO paid particular tribute to Australian military involvement in the occupation of Afghanistan. The *Australian* reported last week that the government is considering returning 200 SAS troops to Afghanistan, on top of 400 military trainers, to remain after the formal withdrawal of US and NATO forces at the end of the year. The SAS would be integrated with US special forces, as part of an estimated American presence of 10,000 troops, providing an agreement can be finalised with the Afghan government.

The Australian military commitment to on-going operations in Afghanistan and Iraq is one aspect of a broader commitment to the US global war drive. The Coalition government has continued and extended Labor’s previous backing for the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” against China—opening up Australian military bases for US forces. Bishop and Prime Minister Tony Abbott played a particularly aggressive role in exploiting the Malaysian Airlines MH17 crash to intensify the pressure on Russia over Ukraine.

On the NATO sidelines, Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans presented Bishop with his country’s Order of Merit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—only the 11th such award. Without any evidence, Bishop and Abbott were among the first in the world to allege that Russia was responsible for downing the airliner. Australia used its position on the UN Security Council to push through a resolution demanding access to the crash site in the midst of escalating fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists.

Bishop declared that Australia could further increase economic sanctions imposed on Russia “should there not be some kind of ceasefire and resolution to the conflict in the very near future.” Asked about the possibility of Australian troops training Ukrainian forces, she said that the Ukrainian government had not

sought such assistance from Canberra or NATO, but “we keep these matters under review.” In other words, it is not ruled out. Last week, Abbott declared that Australia was considering providing “non-lethal military assistance” to Ukraine as well as unspecified “civil and military capacity building assistance.”

The opposition parties—Labor and the Greens—have lined up with the government across the board, from the “pivot to Asia” to Ukraine and the expanding war in the Middle East. Calling for a parliamentary debate and greater clarification of the aims and scope of the military intervention in Iraq, the Greens have not opposed the new war as such.



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