

# Australian government commits warplanes, troops to Iraq war

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15 September 2014

Yesterday's announcement by Prime Minister Tony Abbott that up to 600 Australian military personnel and 10 aircraft will be deployed within the week to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to "contribute" to fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is surrounded by deception and lies. While Abbott declared that Australia was involved in a "humanitarian operation," the real aim of the new US-led war is regime-change against the Iranian and Russian-backed government in Syria.

Abbott said he received a request in the previous 24 hours from US President Obama for Australia to "contribute forces to possible military action in Iraq" and that the Iraqi government had "welcomed" a "military contribution." The decision was made by the National Security Committee of Cabinet and full cabinet, in consultation with the opposition Labor Party, without the slightest pretence of a democratic consultation with the Australian population.

Up to 200 ground troops will be deployed. According to the *Australian*, this will include the Special Operations Task Group, the majority of which are SAS forces and commandos. Australian military instructors who served in Afghanistan will reportedly also be sent to provide "training and logistical support" for the Iraqi army and Kurdish peshmerga militias.

Two transport aircraft and SAS forces have already been involved in so-called humanitarian air drops and the transport of arms and military supplies into Iraq. Eight Australian Super Hornet fighter-bombers will now be added along with a Wedgetail early warning and control aircraft and an aerial refuelling aircraft to join the US air war. Up to 400 Royal Australian Air Force personnel will man and service the aircraft.

Abbott is maintaining the threadbare pretence that the dispatch of Australian forces to the UAE does not mean

they will be used in military operations. In reality, the government has committed warplanes and troops to an open-ended conflict that could engulf the Middle East. As Abbott admitted, "Should this extend into combat operations, it could go on for some time."

In his announcement, Abbott again declared that Australian troops would not be involved in combat operations in Iraq but the presence of elite SAS and other special forces gives the lie to this claim. The SAS are highly regarded in the Pentagon for their role in the Afghan and Iraq wars as scouts and assassins. They will undoubtedly carry out a similar role in the new Middle East war as part of US dirty operations in Iraq and Syria.

While Obama has declared the US will attack targets in Syria, Abbott said yesterday that "at this point in time," the government was "not intending to operate outside Iraq." However, the government has committed Australian military forces to a conflict whose real aims are being concealed.

Washington is putting together a coalition to fight a war that has nothing to do with "humanitarian" concerns about Iraqi minorities or with fighting ISIS militias. The Obama administration is reviving plans, aborted one year ago, for an air war in league with pro-Western militia inside Syria to oust the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

As well as providing Australian military forces, the Abbott government's strident support for the renewed American military intervention over the past month has provided much needed political backing for the Obama administration as it marshals "a new coalition of the willing."

Well aware of the deep reservoir of anti-war opposition produced by the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Abbott is cautious about committing to another blatant

war of aggression against Syria. However, once the war begins in earnest, the government will march in lockstep with Washington as the bogus “war on terror” shifts to a war to oust Assad.

It is worth noting that last September as the Obama administration was on the point of launching its aerial blitzkrieg against the Assad regime, both the Greens-backed minority Labor government and the opposition Liberal-National Coalition supported the US to the hilt.

In its bid to sway public opinion, Abbott seized on the latest barbaric beheading of British aid worker David Haines to once again denounce ISIS as evil incarnate and to declare that the “shock, horror, outrage, fury” of the latest atrocity had consolidated his resolve to fight ISIS. No such horror has been expressed over the beheading of 113 people over the past 21 months by the Saudi Arabian regime, a US ally, which last week pledged itself to the new US-led war.

Moreover, the ISIS beheadings have been made-to-order. With impeccable timing, ISIS has presented first the Obama administration, and now the British government, with a pretext for ratchetting up their new “war on terror.” A year ago, British Prime David Cameron failed to obtain a parliamentary vote to authorise air strikes on Syria. Now Cameron is preparing to overturn the vote.

The portrayal of ISIS as simply “evil” is to conceal the real origins of the Islamic extremists that trace their roots to the CIA-backed holy war in Afghanistan in the 1980s and the formation of Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda in Iraq emerged out of the sectarian violence deliberately provoked by the US occupation in the mid-2000s and transformed itself into ISIS as part of the US-backed regime-change operation in Syria from 2011. Its growing strength was a direct product of training, arms and finance provided by the US and its Middle Eastern allies to anti-Assad forces.

The Abbott government has been able to proceed with the military deployment confident that the opposition parties and a compliant media will support its lies. After a government briefing, Labor leader Bill Shorten and foreign affairs spokeswoman Tanya Plibersek issued a joint statement declaring “we support the government’s decision that Australia has a role to play in eradicating this evil.” Reinforcing Labor’s full support, Shorten stated: “We are in this together. The PM and I are partners in national

security.”

The attempt by the Greens to posture as anti-war is utterly bogus. In her statement, Greens leader Christine Milne did not oppose the new US-led war in the Middle East and gave credence to its justification declaring that ISIS “is a horrendous organisation, there is no doubt.” Her only objection was to the involvement of Australian military forces, which she declared would only heighten the danger of terrorist attacks at home. Milne backed the government’s decision last week to raise the country’s terror alert level, part of the scare campaign used by Abbott to justify dispatch of forces to the Middle East.

In 2003, the Greens opposed Australian participation in the Iraq invasion, arguing that the troops would better serve the interests of Australian imperialism in the Asia Pacific region. Similarly, Milne declared yesterday that Australia needed “to have its own foreign policy” and not “blindly follow the US.” The Greens have no principled opposition to the war unfolding in the Middle East, but rather tactical differences over whether Australian interests are best served by being involved. At the same time, the Greens have backed Australian involvement in the US military build-up and preparations for war against China under the banner of the “pivot to Asia”.

The only party that has unequivocally opposed the Abbott government commitment to the US-led war in Iraq and Syria is the Socialist Equality Party. Along with our sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International, we are fighting to build an anti-war movement of the international working class on the basis of socialist internationalism to put an end to the root cause of war—the bankrupt capitalist system.

*The authors also recommend:*

Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War  
[3 July 2014]



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