

Australian forces deployed in Iraq: Bipartisanship and the war drive

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In times of war, a capitalist government devotes vast resources, financial and political, to create the appearance of being all-powerful and representing the interests of the nation and its people.

Utilising all the forces of the state at its command and supported by the capitalist mass media, it seeks to conjure up threats to the population in order to obscure its real, predatory aims, and intimidate and stifle opposition.

This long-established *modus operandi* has again been exemplified in the Abbott government's deployment of Australian military forces to the US-led war in Iraq and Syria.

The war is being fought on the pretext that it is necessary to destroy the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as ISIL, in order to prevent a humanitarian disaster in the region, and defeat a global threat posed by this organisation.

The real aim is to effect regime change in Syria and ensure US control over the Middle East as Washington presses ahead in its drive for global domination. The predatory objectives of US imperialism do not stop at Syria but extend to Iran and the entire Eurasian landmass, where the US confronts Russia and China. In the era of mass politics, however, such aims have to be covered up with references to "humanitarianism" and the threats to the lives of ordinary people.

Both these propaganda tools have been front and centre in Abbott's justifications for the commitment of Australian military forces to Iraq and potentially Syria.

ISIL, Abbott insisted, had effectively "declared war on the world." Australian military actions were part of a "humanitarian mission" aimed at protecting "the people of Iraq and ultimately the people of Australia from the murderous rage of the ISIL dealt cult" and consequently were "absolutely in Australia's national interest."

Words alone do not suffice in creating the necessary war "atmosphere" and so the military deployment has been backed up by the largest police "terror raids" in Australian history, promoted by the mass media, to create the impression that the population is in danger of terrorist attacks, including public beheadings.

The central purpose of this campaign is to create the image of a powerful government and state apparatus—acting in defence of the people—in order to browbeat and intimidate opposition to

the military commitment.

Those who denounce the war, or point out that ISIS is a product both of the imperialist wars of the past two decades and the immediate provision of funding and arms by the US and other imperialist powers in Libya and Syria, can then be vilified as "justifying terrorism," in order to stifle opposition.

However, as Lenin explained more than 100 years ago, on the outbreak of World War I, while it might appear that a government is at its strongest when it commits to war, it is actually extremely weak. The mobilisation of the state and media apparatuses plays a part but the illusion of strength is primarily a product of the role of political tendencies and parties.

In the years leading up to World War I, there was deep opposition in the European and international working class to the increasing militarism of the ruling classes. Resolutions warning of the dangers of war, and calling for action to utilise the crisis created by war to hasten the downfall of the capitalist system should it break out, were passed at several congresses of the Second International prior to 1914.

But when war broke out, that opposition was stifled because of the betrayal of the leaders of the social democratic and labour parties, who supported their "own" ruling classes and voted for the war.

The situation today is, of course, different from that at the outbreak of World War I. Yet the essential points made by Lenin have lost none of their validity.

The present-day mass opposition to war was revealed in 2003 when the US invasion of Iraq was preceded by the largest global anti-war demonstrations in history, including in Australia. Since then, opposition to the imperialist war drive and the lies used to support it have intensified, as was seen in the hostility to US plans to start bombing Syria just over a year ago. The phrase "weapons of mass destruction"—the pretext for the invasion of Iraq—has entered the political lexicon of broad masses of the population in Australia and around the world, symbolising deep-felt opposition to war.

In the present situation, however, this opposition can find no ready political outlet because the parties of the political establishment are marching in lockstep with the imperialist state.

This is what gives rise to the illusion of an all-powerful government, just as it did in Lenin's day.

The crucial importance of bipartisan support for the Australian government's commitment to the US-led war drive was demonstrated in a very revealing series of incidents on Thursday.

Speaking in Washington, where he is attending meetings of the International Monetary Fund, at which the ongoing stagnation of the world economy will be at the top of the agenda, Treasurer Joe Hockey said the refusal of opposition Labor Party leader Bill Shorten to allow the passage of some government budget spending cuts called into question his support for the war against ISIS.

"Everything comes at a cost," Hockey said. "And if Bill Shorten truly is honest about his commitment to deliver bipartisan support to our defence efforts in the Middle East, he will provide bipartisan support to pay for it."

The government estimates its new military operations might cost \$500 million a year. With Abbott having ruled out tax increases, this means they will be paid for by further cuts in government services.

Nevertheless, after his remarks, Hockey was effectively slapped down by his prime minister.

"I've had numerous conversations with Bill [Shorten] about this and he is an Australian patriot," Abbott said. "Obviously there are lots of things on which the government and the opposition disagree, but when it comes to national security, it's good that we stand shoulder to shoulder, together."

The *Australian Financial Review* report on the incident by Phillip Coorey, published under the headline "Hockey loses patriot games," pointed to the vital political considerations motivating Abbott's decision to back Shorten against his treasurer.

Coorey wrote: "Privately, Mr Abbott is fearful that the war in Iraq, which could last for years, could go wrong and cause a domestic political backlash. Bipartisan support for the mission would ameliorate that backlash."

The crucial importance of bipartisan support extends to the so-called anti-terror raids that have sought to poison the political atmosphere and create the conditions for suppressing anti-war opposition.

By any objective examination, the contrived character of the raids and the key role of the mass media in pumping out the foul fumes of anti-Muslim hysteria have been exposed.

The largest police raid in Australian history, carried out on September 18, involving more than 800 state and federal police in two states, brought the arrest of just one man, on highly dubious and vague charges.

The raids also resulted in the seizure of a supposed ceremonial sword, pictures of which were plastered all over the media, accompanied by the claim that it could have been used to carry out a beheading.

The sword turned out to be made of plastic, unable to even

cut a cucumber. It also carried Shia inscriptions, making it anathema to any followers of ISIS, who are Sunni extremists.

In other circumstances, the government's anti-terror operations would be the subject of denunciations, ridicule and satire, as was former Prime Minister John Howard's massive security operation at the APEC leaders' summit in Sydney on the eve of the 2007 federal election, at which he lost office.

But with the Labor Party "opposition" in lockstep with the government, both on the war and the associated anti-democratic terror legislation now going through parliament, the campaign of hysteria can continue its foul work.

Labor's role is not the only factor in facilitating the Abbott government's war drive. It is supplemented by the Greens. They do not oppose the US-led war in Iraq and Syria but attempt to divert opposition by offering "tactical" criticisms of Australian involvement, a position they replicate on the government's anti-democratic terror laws.

They do not denounce the legislation and the war drive with which it is associated, but offer amendments in parliament and then fail to vote against it, in line with their position on previous anti-democratic laws initiated by the Howard government in 2005.

In 1914-15, Lenin concluded that the betrayal of the Second International, which played such a crucial part in the catastrophe of World War I, required the building of a new revolutionary leadership of the working class. This leadership had to be forged on a profound understanding that the struggle against war could only be carried forward on the basis of a socialist program, aimed directly at the overthrow of the capitalist system that produced war and carried through in a relentless struggle against the system's political props.

That conclusion has lost none of its relevance. It must be realised through the building of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International as the revolutionary leadership of the working class.



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