

Obama calls for more Australian, allied troops for Middle East war

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President Barack Obama announced during a joint press conference with Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott yesterday that he has requested US allies to send additional military forces to the war in Iraq and Syria. Appearing with Abbott in Beijing during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, Obama stated: “I am having conversations with Australia and other coalition partners that have already committed to putting trainers in how they can supplement and work with us in this overall effort.”

The US-led intervention was launched in August on the pretext of destroying the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which had taken control of significant areas of northern and western Iraq, and much of eastern Syria. After last week’s mid-term congressional elections, during which the war was barely mentioned, Obama quickly announced the doubling of US ground troops working with Iraqi government forces, from 1,500 to over 3,000. At least 7,000 mercenary contractors are also involved, along with war planes carrying out daily attacks inside Iraq and Syria.

Obama’s statement yesterday signals a further escalation of the war. While initially focussed on ISIS, the intervention’s longer-term goal is ousting the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad and installing an American client state. ISIS and other Islamic fundamentalist militias have waged a brutal civil war against Assad’s government since 2011. They have received significant aid from US allies such as Turkey and the Gulf states, with Washington’s knowledge and support. It was not until ISIS posed a danger to the stability of the US puppet government in Iraq that ISIS was demonised as the world’s greatest terrorist threat.

Obama declared on Sunday that weeks of airstrikes have depleted ISIS’s strength to the point where Iraqi government forces and the peshmerga militia of the Kurdish Regional Government could “start going on some

offense.” Planning is no doubt underway for bloody attacks to retake major cities controlled by ISIS, such as Tikrit and Mosul in the north and Fallujah in the west. Despite Obama’s denials, the local units will be accompanied by the military “trainers” from the US or other countries. While nonsensically described as “non-combat” personnel, the so-called trainers are largely drawn from special forces units. They are likely to serve in many capacities, including as snipers, spotters to call in air strikes and hit squads for difficult operations.

A number of US allies have sent combat aircraft to join the attacks on ISIS inside Iraq: Australia, Britain, France, Canada, Denmark, Belgium, The Netherlands and Spain. The air forces of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Jordan have been involved in attacks on ISIS targets inside Syria.

Few countries, however, have sent or intend to send troops who could take part in ground operations. At present, the only non-US presence consists of Australia (200), Canada (100), the Netherlands (130) and a small German contingent. The British Special Air Service (SAS) has personnel stationed in the region and Spain has said it will send 300 military personnel.

Abbott confirmed yesterday that the initial Australian contribution of Army commandos has actually entered Iraq, after delays caused by Iraqi government resistance to signing off on the type of legal immunities demanded by the Australian military.

Australian Assistant Defence Minister Stuart Robert told a radio interviewer no decision had been made in Canberra on the US request for additional troops. “Our forces have now spent a number of days moving into locations,” he said. “It will take weeks, if not months, for that training force to really come into effect. So let’s see what effect we can have on our ground before we jump further.”

Obama’s remarks, however, indicate that US

commanders are pushing for more Australian special forces to be sent and the White House is confident that the Australian government will “jump further.” The deployment of troops to Iraq was given complete bipartisan support by the Labor Party opposition and virtually no criticism has been raised in any part of the Australian political or media establishment.

On the world stage, Australian imperialism functions as an unconditional ally and advocate of US militarism and neo-colonial intrigue. Australia sent troops to the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, and significantly increased its force in Afghanistan in response to US requests during Obama’s “surges” of additional American troops in 2009 and 2010.

Coinciding with Obama’s announcement of the anti-China “pivot” to Asia in the Australian parliament in November 2011, the former Labor government granted the US marine basing rights in northern Australia. In the years since, American aircraft and ships have been given far greater access to airfields and ports, while training exercises to effectively integrate the Australian armed forces into the US military have been ratcheted up.

The Australian air force is already heavily engaged in combat operations in Iraq. The six FA-18 Super Hornet fighter-bombers sent by the Abbott government have flown some 90 sorties and bombed at least 14 targets. The military claims it “destroyed” 11 of them, resulting in an unknown death toll.

The Australian SAS, which has earned high praise from US commanders for its ruthless operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 13 years, is the obvious unit to be deployed next to the Middle East, alongside the 200 Army commandos.

Australia’s involvement paves the way for the military’s mission to be extended into Syria, if Washington requests it. The Abbott government has repeatedly refused to rule that out and labels the Assad government as “illegitimate,” establishing the pretext for Australia to join US operations to overthrow it.



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