

The Sydney siege and the drive to war

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Many questions remain unanswered about the circumstances of the Sydney siege this week, largely due to the organised cover-up by the police, the New South Wales (NSW) and federal governments and the mass media.

But despite the suppression of information, some very definite political conclusions can and must be drawn.

The entire operation and its bloody denouement, which resulted in the death of two hostages as well as the hostage taker, is a graphic warning of how far and how fast the militarisation of the state and police apparatus is proceeding, under conditions where the “war on terror” is being stepped up in line with the increasingly bellicose role played by Australia internationally as part of its integration into the US war drive.

From the very beginning, the 16-hour siege was not carried out as a police operation to deal with a deranged individual, but was organised as a military-style campaign.

Within just half an hour of the siege commencing, the Abbott government convened its national security committee, which met a further two times during the course of the day.

No serious negotiations were entered into, despite the pleadings of the hostages that this be done, due to “security advice” given to the prime minister. The entire central business district of Sydney was turned into a virtual war zone and the way in which police controlled the flow of information, including that provided by the hostages themselves, resembled nothing so much as war-time censorship.

The military nature of the operation flowed from its essential origins as the domestic counterpart of the accelerating war drive of the Australian state, in collaboration with the US.

This connection was set out clearly in an editorial in the *Australian* published before the bloody storming of

the site.

It said the incident should “remind Australians” and those “liberal-left” critics who claim “we are on the road to becoming a police state” that measures such as the Abbott government’s raft of new “anti-terror” laws were essential “with our security under threat.” And then, in an exposure of the modus operandi now in operation, it continued: “The Sydney siege, **whether connected with radical jihad or not** (emphasis added) has underlined the magnitude of the dangers facing the world, not only in Syria and Iraq, but here as well.” In other words, the hostage-taking was seized on to put into practice well developed plans.

The way in which the domestic political agenda, including police operations, is being determined by the war drive was underscored by US Secretary of State John Kerry in a press briefing on Tuesday.

After conflating the Sydney siege with the attack of the Taliban on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, he continued: “That is why the United States is engaged in more places with more partners on more issues than ever before.”

There has been no more willing “partner” than Australia, going to more places and taking on more issues than ever before.

A review of recent events makes clear how Australia is functioning ever more directly and openly as a kind of attack dog for US imperialism on a global scale. The same methods were employed domestically as are used to inflame international tensions. An incident was seized on and then inflated and exploited to create an air of crisis in order to carry out a definite agenda.

This year began with remarks by foreign minister Julie Bishop, following a discussion with US Vice President Joe Biden in Washington, emphasising the complete alignment of the Australian political establishment with the US on the global arena, and its economic underpinnings.

Notwithstanding the dependence of Australia on China as its major export market, Bishop said, there was no conflict between this and Australia's strategic alignment with the US, because once investment and the flow of finance were taken into account, the US was also Australia's major economic "partner." This was a declaration that there was no trace of ambiguity in the Australian position on US war preparations against China, which form the core of the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia."

In February, the Australian government fully endorsed the regime-change operation in Ukraine orchestrated by the US, in collaboration with openly fascist forces. Five months later, following the downing of the Malaysian airliner MH17 over Ukraine, in still unexplained circumstances, Prime Minister Tony Abbott took the lead in denunciations of Russian President Vladimir Putin, as the US push against Russia intensified. This culminated in Abbott's threat to "shirtfront" Putin at the November G-20 summit meeting in Brisbane.

In June, the emergence of ISIS became the pretext for the US to resume its direct military intervention in Iraq and Syria, with Australia playing a key role in supporting US actions, as well as committing aircraft and special forces to the new "coalition of the willing."

The resumed military operations had immediate domestic political consequences, with the launching of the largest police raids in Australian history on September 18, allegedly to thwart an ISIS beheading plot. The raids, which resulted in the arrest of one individual on dubious charges and the seizure of a plastic ceremonial sword, had a two-fold purpose. The bogus terror plot and raids were used by Kerry as he sought international backing for US military operations in Iraq and Syria, while in Australia, as had now been acknowledged, they were aimed at creating a climate of fear.

But the raids did not produce the desired effect, as scepticism grew over their purpose and the scale of the operation. While raids were continued, it was clear that another, even more dramatic, event was needed to create the required domestic conditions for the war drive. The scene was thus set for the Sydney siege and its bloody conclusion.

There is another significant aspect to the context in which the events of this week took place. Throughout

this year, the ongoing global slump has heavily impacted on Australia, as commodity prices and government revenues declined and the budget deficit continued to widen. The Abbott government, under the lash from key sections of the corporate establishment for an austerity drive, has been unable to get its budget measures passed in the Senate so far because the minor parties are fearful of the deep-felt public opposition. Having secured the complete support of the Labor Party and the Greens for its foreign policy and anti-democratic legislation, the government is clearly seeking to overcome its domestic problems by extending this "national unity" to the financial emergency, while at the same time using the "war on terror" to deflect rising social tensions.

The hostage-taking and its bloody outcome have been described by Abbott and others as a "wake up call." It is, but not in the sense intended by the prime minister. Rather than revealing the danger of "terror," it is a very big step in the formation of a military-police state and a warning of the unending assault on democratic rights that necessarily accompanies the drive to war.

While the military has not yet emerged onto the streets—they may be deployed in the future—the transformation of the police into a military force armed with what amount to war-time powers shows the tendency of development.

Furthermore, the absence of any opposition to this in any section of the political establishment and the slavish compliance of the press—no media organisation nor any journalist expressed opposition to police control of the news—shows there is no constituency for the defence of democratic rights in the fourth estate either.

The interconnected struggle against war and the defence of democratic rights can be taken forward only by the independent political struggle of the working class on the basis of a socialist program.



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