

Australian prime minister visits Iraq to promote US-led war

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Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott heaped lie upon lie in Baghdad on Sunday to try to justify the US-led war in Iraq and Syria and Australia's participation in it. After flying into the country in secret and meeting with Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, Abbott declared that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia, which seized areas of northern Iraq last year from the US puppet regime now headed by Abadi, was a terrorist network that "declared war on the world."

Abbott asserted that Australia joined the renewed US operations in the Middle East, which seek to prop up Abadi's government in Baghdad and legitimise Washington's direct intervention in the Syrian civil war, because its "vital national interests are threatened" and "universal values are at stake."

In fact, the initial justification for the dispatch of US, Australian and other military forces back to Iraq was not "vital national interests," but a purported humanitarian crisis created by an ISIS offensive into areas populated by the Yazidi religious minority. Once the military operation began, the Yazidis were soon forgotten in the official propaganda. What has unfolded since last August is a wholesale air war against ISIS and other anti-government forces in Iraq, and against ISIS and other Islamist militias in Syria that Washington views as an obstacle to installing a pro-US regime in Damascus.

Abbott's visit coincides with the Obama administration's push to expand the size and operations of the US forces in Iraq and Syria, and follows Obama's specific appeal in November for Australia, among other states, to increase its deployment. The Abbott government, with the full backing of the Labor Party opposition, dispatched six F-18 fighter-bombers and 400 Air Force personnel to Iraq in October, along with 200 Army special forces commandos. The F-18s

are flying regular bombing missions and have reportedly killed hundreds of alleged ISIS fighters. The special forces troops are attached to Iraqi government military units and are accompanying them into ground combat as "advisors."

Abbott gave a broad hint that Australia will increase its military role in Iraq and potentially join the intervention in Syria and anywhere else that ISIS is alleged to be operating. The war, he asserted at a joint press conference with al-Abadi, was "a struggle not just for the people of Iraq, and not just the people of this region, but for the whole world."

Australia, Abbott declared, had already "had its brush with terrorism in recent weeks"—a reference to the taking of hostages in a Sydney café by a lone, mentally disturbed gunman who was well-known to the police and other security agencies. The Abbott government, the police and the establishment media seized upon the incident to assert that Australia was the target of a major terrorist attack and to plunge the country into a national security emergency.

The siege ended in tragedy after no serious attempt was made to negotiate a peaceful outcome. Police stormed the café. The gunman and two hostages were killed in still unexplained circumstances (see: "The Sydney siege: Official lies and contradictions").

The incident has been exploited to justify the Iraq deployment, sweeping additional powers for the intelligence agencies and police raids and arrests of alleged ISIS sympathisers. Every effort has been made by the government, supported by the Labor opposition and the mass media, to generate a wartime-like atmosphere of imminent threat, with Abbott warning on the eve of the Christmas-New Year holidays that "heightened terrorist chatter" had been monitored.

Abbott sought to use his visit to the Middle East to

maintain the fear-mongering over ISIS-inspired terrorism. Speaking on Monday at the airbase in Abu Dhabi from where the Australian warplanes are operating, he asserted: “Australians back home are safer because all of this is designed to defeat the Daesh death cult.”

In a particularly obscene statement, Abbott asserted that Australia’s motives were to “help” the Iraqi people who “suffered... First, decades of tyranny under Saddam Hussein. Then, the chaos and confusion that followed the American-led invasion. Most recently, the tumult, the dark age, which descended upon northern Iraq as a result of the Daesh death cult.”

The history of Australian foreign policy toward Iraq demonstrates that it has always been based on the most predatory motives—above all the determination of Australian imperialism to maintain the closest possible alliance with the United States.

During the 1980s, following Washington’s lead, Australia supported Saddam Hussein’s regime as it waged war against neighbouring Iran and massacred internal Kurdish and Shiite opposition. In 1991, when the US turned on Hussein and seized upon his invasion of Kuwait to justify a full-scale military intervention into the Middle East, Australia was the first country to announce that it would send forces to fight alongside the US. Throughout the 1990s, Australian officials played prominent roles in enforcing the UN sanctions against Iraq that were responsible for an estimated 500,000 deaths.

In 2003, Abbott was a minister in the Australian government that enthusiastically repeated the Bush administration’s lies about weapons of mass destruction, joined “the coalition of the willing” with the US, Britain and Poland, and illegally invaded Iraq.

After the invasion, Australian troops took part in the occupation, and Australian diplomats and military personnel held key posts in the occupation regime that Abbott now declares produced “chaos and confusion.” The death of as many as one million people was the result of brutal repression by the US-led occupying forces and the murderous sectarian violence that the US and its allies deliberately fomented to divide the Iraqi population and suppress resistance.

The origins of ISIS lie in this “chaos.” Layers of Iraqi Sunnis, hostile to the sectarian Shiite-dominated regime backed by Washington and alienated from the failed

nationalist program of Hussein’s Baath Party, embraced Wahibbist Islamist ideology as the basis for their fight against the US occupation. A small faction of the Iraqi insurgency, ISIS only began to grow substantially after 2011, when it largely transferred its operations to Syria and joined the US-backed civil war against the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. ISIS was a major beneficiary of the vast amounts of arms and money that Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Turkey funnelled to the anti-Assad forces, with the full support of the US.

ISIS and its brutality—which is little different from the murderous methods adopted by US-backed Shiite militias in Iraq—has been exploited by Washington and its allies as the pretext to intervene directly into the now four-year Syrian civil war. At a certain point, the Obama administration will manufacture the conditions to launch US attacks on the Assad regime and its military forces. The White House has made clear that its objectives in Syria will be realised only once Assad has been removed.

The broader US objective—and that of its Australian ally—remains what it has been since the first Gulf War in 1991: ensuring that Washington has complete military dominance over the Middle East and can deny any other power access to the region’s energy resources.



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