

Australian citizen on US drone “kill list”

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A front-page article in last Friday’s *Australian* reported that, for the first time, an Australian citizen—Mostafa Farag—had been placed on the Obama administration’s “kill list” for assassination by drone attack. The lack of any response, let alone criticism, from any section of the Australian political and media establishment underscores not only its support for Washington’s criminal actions but its contempt for democratic rights at home.

Farag is an Islamist cleric, also known as Abu Sulayman al Muhajir, who reportedly left Australia for Syria in 2012 and is now a member of the sharia council or leadership body of the Al Qaeda-linked Al-Nusra front in Syria. He played a role in attempting to mediate between Al Nusra and its breakaway—the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—but failed leading to bitter recriminations on both sides.

No explanation has been given for the US decision to put Farag on its hit list, which according to the *Australian*, took place sometime in 2012–13 under the previous Greens-backed Labor governments of prime ministers Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd. The current Coalition government “was informed soon after it came to office.” All the major parties have sanctioned the targeting of an Australian citizen for assassination without the slightest pretence of legal process.

The cynicism involved is breathtaking. While adding Farag to its kill list, the US and its allies including Australia were fully backing the war being waged by Syrian opposition militias such as Al Nusra to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The emergence of reactionary Islamist organisations such as Al Nusra and ISIS as the dominant military forces in the Syrian opposition is due in no small measure to large quantities of finance and arms provided by US allies such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.

For the Obama administration, “targeted killings” have become routine. The US has arrogated to itself the

“right” to murder anyone, in any part of the world. This includes at least three American citizens who have been killed so far, in flagrant breach of the US law and constitution: Anwar al-Awlaki, his 16-year-old son Abdulrahman al-Awlaki and Samir Khan. Thousands of innocent civilians have died as a result of US drone strikes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and other countries.

In April last year, Australian citizen Christopher Harvard and dual Australian-New Zealand citizen Muslim bin John were killed in a US drone strike in Yemen that targeted Abu Habib, supposedly a leading figure in Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). US authorities notified the Australian government of the deaths describing Harvard and bin John as “collateral damage” and suggesting that they had been AQAP “foot soldiers” (see: “Australian, New Zealand citizens killed by US drone strike in Yemen”).

The Australian and New Zealand governments both justified those killings as part of the “war on terror.” Asked to comment on the placing of Farag on the US hit list, spokespersons for Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, former Labor foreign minister Bob Carr and former Labor attorney-general Mark Dreyfus, as well as the US embassy in Canberra, all refused to comment to the *Australian* on security grounds. The Greens confirmed to the WSWs yesterday that they had issued no comment.

This silent complicity makes clear that there is no line that the Australian political establishment will not cross. Successive governments, Labor and Coalition, condoned the arbitrary imprisonment and torture of two Australian citizens—Mamdouh Habib and David Hicks—who were detained by American authorities in Afghanistan in 2001. Habib was subject to “extraordinary rendition” to Egypt where he was tortured before being sent to Guantanamo Bay and finally released in 2005 without charge. Hicks was held

in Guantanamo Bay before being transferred to an Australian prison in May 2007 then released in December 2007 as part of a plea deal. The charges against him were annulled by a US court this year.

At the same time, Labor and Coalition governments have been party to the vendetta against Australian citizen and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange whose only “crime” has been to expose US imperialism’s war crimes in the Middle East and its diplomatic intrigues and skulduggery around the world. He remains holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy in London after being forced to claim political asylum in the face of trumped-up allegations of sexual assault brought by Swedish authorities. Washington’s aim is to extradite him to the US to face trial on unspecified charges that may include the capital offence of espionage.

The tacit support in Australian ruling circles for the extra-judicial killing of Mostafa Farag, in which the US administration will be judge, jury and executioner, makes a mockery of the official appeals for clemency of two convicted Australian drug smugglers in Indonesia who face the firing squad. This thoroughly hypocritical campaign is both to capitalise on the groundswell of public opposition to the death penalty and to cover up the role of the Australian Federal Police in delivering Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran to Indonesian authorities knowing full well they could face execution if convicted (see: “Australia: Official campaign against Indonesian executions steeped in hypocrisy and cynicism”).

In the case of Mostafa Farag, the Australian government is no bystander. The joint US-Australian spy base at Pine Gap in Central Australia plays a central role in intercepting communications and pinpointing targets for drone attack. A Fairfax media article in 2013 indicated that a “primary function” of what is one of the world’s largest satellite ground stations is to identify the “geolocation” of radio signals, including hand-held radios and mobile phones, throughout the “eastern hemisphere, from the Middle East across Asia to China, North Korea and the Russian far east.”

The direct involvement of the Australian political and security establishment in US criminal activities is a warning to workers and young people of the anti-democratic methods that will be used at home to suppress any resistance to its agenda of war and

austerity.



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