

Australian pseudo-lefts hail advance of US-backed Islamists in Syria

Oliver Campbell
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The Australian pseudo-left group Socialist Alternative has once again demonstrated its pro-imperialist politics. An article published on June 9, on its *Red Flag* web site, hails the recent military advances of US-backed Islamists in Syria, and explicitly endorses the gun-running operations of Washington's allies in the region, including the despotic Saudi Arabian monarchy, and Turkey.

Entitled "Rebels on the march in Syria," the article, written by *Red Flag* editor Corey Oakley, continues Socialist Alternative's public support for the US-led regime-change operation against the government of President Bashar al-Assad, stretching back to 2012.

The WSWS has commented before on Socialist Alternative's pro-US line on Syria. In August, 2012, Oakley wrote, "The time for 'knee-jerk anti-imperialism' has passed," and dismissed those opposing Washington's machinations in Syria and the Middle-East, by declaring that "US imperialism is not the central issue."

In 2013, when the US was concocting a pretext for direct military intervention against the Assad regime, Socialist Alternative promoted the now discredited claim that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons against its own population. In fact, evidence documented by veteran investigative journalist Seymour Hersh revealed that it was Islamist groups, hailed by Socialist Alternative as "rebels" and "revolutionaries," that carried out the gas attack near Damascus.

Significantly, under conditions of an escalation of the US campaign to oust the Assad regime, Oakley and *Red Flag* are recycling their lies on Syria. Oakley begins his latest article by declaring, "After four devastating years of war in Syria, the tide has turned against the vicious Assad dictatorship."

In a desperate attempt to obscure the character of the Syrian opposition forces, Oakley tries to draw a distinction between the military advances of the "ultra-reactionary Islamic State (ISIS)" and the gains of "genuine rebel forces in other areas."

As an example of the latter, he cites the recent seizure of

much of the north-western province of Idlib, by an "alliance of rebel groups." The reactionary character of the "genuine rebel forces" hailed by Oakley was demonstrated by an incident in Idlib province the day after his article appeared.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, on June 10, a Tunisian leader of the Islamist Al-Nusra Front attempted to seize a home, in the village of Qalb Loze, belonging to a member of the minority Druze community. When the residents objected, the Al-Nusra leader reportedly accused them of blasphemy, and indiscriminately opened fire, killing at least 20, including elderly residents and a child.

These are Oakley's "genuine rebel forces!" The Al-Nusra front is formally aligned with Al Qaeda.

Oakley favourably quotes opposition leaders, who complain that they have not received sufficient arms from the US, and goes on to state, "The US claims to oppose both Assad and ISIS. In reality, it is assisting Assad in his last gasp attempt to hold off the rebel advance by strengthening ISIS across northern Syria. You really couldn't make it up."

In fact, Oakley's scenario is entirely "made up." Throughout the Syrian civil war, Socialist Alternative has sought to deny the widely-recognised reality that the so-called rebels, dominated by various Islamist militias, have been armed, funded, and trained by the US and its junior partners in the region, in an attempt to oust the Assad regime.

A secret 2012 report from the US Defense Intelligence Agency, released last month under a Freedom of Information filing, documents this basic fact. The report stated that, "the Salafist [sic], the Muslim Brotherhood, and AQI [Al Qaeda in Iraq] are the major forces driving the insurgency in Syria." It noted that "the West, Gulf countries, and Turkey" were all supporting this opposition.

Oakley is forced to acknowledge: "An important factor facilitating rebel advances has been the sudden availability of weapons via Saudi Arabia and Turkey." He attempts to counterpose the response of these "regional powers" with the supposed reticence on the part of the US to intervene. In

fact, an article in the *Observer* entitled, “Amid the ruins of Syria, is Bashar Al-Assad now facing the end?” upon which Oakley bases much of his article, directly refutes his position.

Oakley cites the *Observer*’s account of meetings between Saudi King Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and officials from Qatar and other Gulf States in March. Those meetings resolved to flood the opposition with arms in a bid to topple Assad. But Oakley deliberately omits the piece of information that demolishes his entire argument—namely, as reported by the *Observer*, that King Salman indicated that his initiative had received Washington’s prior approval.

While Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Middle Eastern countries pursue their own interests, they all function as compliant errand boys when it comes to the dictates of Washington. The suggestion that their operations in Syria are being carried out without consultation with the US, or even in opposition to the US, is transparently absurd.

Conscious that his claims rest on thin ice, Oakley resorts to bombast to try to cover up his pro-imperialist politics. “These developments,” he declares, “are of course grist to the mill for those ‘leftists’ who have dedicated themselves to the defence of the fascist Assad regime and its barrel bombs and torture cells.”

The claim that opposition to imperialist intervention is tantamount to support for bourgeois-nationalist regimes in oppressed countries, demonstrates that Oakley, and Socialist Alternative, have nothing to do with the Marxist traditions of socialist internationalism.

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Summing up principled socialist opposition to imperialist war, Leon Trotsky explained that, “in the struggle between a civilised, imperialist, democratic republic and a backward, barbaric monarchy in a colonial country, the socialists are completely on the side of the oppressed country, notwithstanding its monarchy, and against the oppressor country, notwithstanding its ‘democracy.’”

In 2003, proponents of the US invasion of Iraq accused those who opposed it of supporting the “dictatorial” regime of Saddam Hussein. That Oakley is now employing such arguments to justify the US intervention in Syria underscores how far to the right Socialist Alternative and the entire pseudo-left fraternity have moved over the past decade.

The political purpose of Oakley’s arguments is revealed in the following lines, where he claims that, “The real ‘foreign intervention’ into the Syrian war has been billions of dollars in military support given to the regime by Iran and Russia.”

The message could not be clearer: if the US is at fault, it is

for not conducting an extensive enough intervention, while those to blame for the continuing crisis are those regimes in Washington’s crosshairs, above all Russia.

Oakley’s article makes no mention of the continued expansion of Washington’s new war in Syria and Iraq, in which the Australian government is playing a central role. In fact, the entire Middle East has been transformed into a cauldron of sectarian conflict and war, as a result of more than a decade of US-led wars, interventions and imperialist intrigues.

And just as it has backed the US regime-change operation in Syria, Socialist Alternative has lined up with Washington against Russia. Last year’s US-backed coup in Ukraine to oust President Viktor Yanukovich was, in part, motivated by Russian President Vladimir Putin’s opposition to US actions in Syria. Since then, the US has stoked a civil war in Ukraine, armed, funded and trained Ukrainian forces, including fascists, and is openly courting war with Russia by placing heavy weapons near its European borders.

Throughout the US campaign against Putin, *Red Flag*—in line with Washington’s propaganda—has turned reality on its head, depicting the fascist-led coup in Kiev as a popular revolution, branding Russia as the aggressor in Ukraine, and maintaining a deafening silence on the US-NATO provocations in Eastern Europe.

Under conditions of an explosion of imperialist militarism, threatening a new global conflagration, the pseudo-left organisations—such as Socialist Alternative—which speak for affluent sections of the upper middle-class, are ever more openly aligning themselves with their own governments in the imperialist drive to war. With the Abbott government, and the entire Australian political establishment playing a central role in Washington’s militarist intrigues in Europe, the Asia-Pacific and the Middle-East, Socialist Alternative’s lies are directed at preventing the emergence of a genuine, anti-war movement of the Australian and international working class, based on a socialist perspective.



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