

Australia: Socialist Alternative hails downing of Russian jet in Syria

Oscar Grenfell**29 March 2016**

Late last year, Socialist Alternative published an extraordinary article in its *Red Flag* newspaper, hailing the shooting-down of a Russian jet by the Turkish military near the border with Syria on November 24. Its headline—“Downing of Russian fighter a small victory for humanity”—underscored the support given by the pseudo-lefts for US-backed military interventions.

The article was written by Michael Karadjis, a member of another Australian pseudo-left organisation, Socialist Alliance, and published in *Red Flag*’s December 7 print edition. It was not, however, posted in the online edition of the same publication to reach a wider audience. No explanation has been given.

In an editorial board statement at the time, the *World Socialist Web Site* condemned the Turkish action as “a flagrant act of war,” warning: “Turkish authorities have seized on the alleged Russian violation of their airspace to launch a monumental escalation of the proxy war in Syria between Islamic opposition fighters supported by NATO and the Russian-backed regime of President Bashar al-Assad. It threatens to provoke all-out war between Russia on the one hand, and Turkey and the rest of the NATO alliance on the other.”

The Karadjis article, on the contrary, supported the actions of the Turkish government and its proxy forces among the Turkish-speaking Turkmen minority inside Syria and was completely silent on the dangers of a conflict between nuclear-armed powers.

From the outset of the war in Syria, Socialist Alternative and the rest of the pseudo-lefts have been unabashed cheerleaders of the escalating efforts of US imperialism and its allies, in this case Turkey, to oust the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, and of the right-wing Islamist militias that act as their surrogate ground forces. In August 2012, *Red Flag*’s editor Corey Oakley, writing on the so-called “Syrian revolution” infamously declared, “The time for ‘knee-jerk anti-imperialism’ has passed,” and “US imperialism is not the central issue.”

Significantly, the pseudo-lefts have also backed

Washington’s provocations against Russia elsewhere. In 2014, Socialist Alternative lined up behind the US-orchestrated coup that ousted Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, who was supported by Moscow. Just as it identifies the US regime-change operation in Syria as a “popular revolution,” so *Red Flag* characterised the neo-fascist-led forces that toppled the democratically-elected Ukrainian government as “revolutionaries,” and condemned “Russian aggression” in the civil war that followed.

Now, Socialist Alternative has taken this pro-imperialist line to its logical conclusion by backing direct US-NATO aggression against Russia. While Turkey certainly has ambitions to become a regional power, it is inconceivable that its decision to down a Russian plane, which risked an open clash with a powerful neighbour, would have been taken without the direct prior approval of the Obama administration. Turkey is deeply integrated into US military operations inside Syria. Moreover, the CIA maintains a centre in Turkey to arm and train anti-Assad forces while, since last November, American war planes have taken off from the Incirlik air base for bombing missions over Syria.

Indeed, Karadjis openly attacks the “anti-imperialists” and “imperial left” for not joining in his celebration of the downing of the Russian plane. No one is named and no one cited, but the International Committee of the Fourth International and the WSWS have been alone in exposing the pseudo-lefts’ support for the US-led intervention in Syria and the bogus “Syrian revolution.” We give no political support to the bourgeois Russian and Syrian regimes of Putin and Assad, but insist that the working class cannot cede to US imperialism, its allies and their Islamist proxies inside Syria, the task of dealing with them.

The Obama administration’s actions, along with those of the other imperialist powers, are fully responsible for the descent of Syria into a bloody civil war and the transformation of the conflict into a virtual proxy war by the US and European powers against Russia. While there has been nothing progressive about Russia’s intervention in Syria, it came in response to a concerted campaign, spanning

almost five years and led by the US and its allies, to oust Putin's sole ally in the Middle-East.

Turkey's downing of the Russian jet, far from being a "victory for humanity," represented an escalation of long-standing moves towards a direct US-led confrontation with Russia—something that would have catastrophic consequences for the entire world's population. Karadjis fails to mention that it was immediately endorsed by the Obama administration, which provocatively declared Turkey's "right to defend its territory and airspace."

Karadjis also explicitly supports the Turkish government, which has funnelled tens of thousands of Islamist fighters into Syria. He declares that the government's "soft Islamist" ideology is the reason it "can welcome 2 million Syrian Arabs as refugees, and be influenced enough by their catastrophe to want to oust Assad."

In other words, the Recep Erdogan regime, which has established a virtual police state in Turkey that routinely represses domestic opposition, is supporting violent jihadists in Syria out of the purest of "humanitarian" motives and supposedly not being driven by ambitions to expand its standing as a regional power at the expense of rivals such as Iran. Karadjis dismisses the Turkish government's war against Kurdish separatist groups, declaring that "beggars can't be choosers" when it comes to allies in the overthrow of Assad.

Karadjis devotes the lengthiest and most contorted portion of his article to a cynical apologia for the cold-blooded killing of one of the Russian pilots by an anti-Assad Turkmen militia inside Syria, and the uncomfortable fact that the killer was the son of a Turkish fascist—a National Movement Party (MNP) mayor. He even goes to great lengths to try to prove that not all Turkmen "revolutionaries" are aligned with the MNP or with the Turkish military and intelligence apparatus. He argues, instead, that most Turkmen brigades are affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (FSA)—in other words, they are closely aligned with US imperialism! Regardless of the number of MNP supporters inside the "Syrian revolution," their presence is a damning indication of its extreme right-wing character.

Karadjis is such a naked pro-imperialist propagandist that he whitewashes the role of US imperialism in creating the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria. He makes no mention of the impact of the bombing campaigns conducted by the US, Australia and Jordan, or the direct military intervention of Germany, France and other imperialist powers in Syria. He is likewise silent on the 15 years of continuous US-led wars in the Middle-East for oil, resources and geopolitical dominance, beginning with the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which resulted in up to a million deaths.

To the extent that Karadjis' article criticises the Obama administration and its allies, it is for not pursuing a sufficiently aggressive regime-change operation in Syria. He laments that "For years, Syrians have called for anti-aircraft weapons, to make their own DIY no-fly zone; for years well-known supplies of manpads, shoulder fired anti-aircrafts have been blocked by the US," and absurdly claims that this demonstrated that the US was "fearful" of a "rebel" victory over Assad.

Karadjis perpetuates the myth of the "Syrian revolution" despite the well-documented fact that the anti-Assad opposition has been armed, funded and trained by the US and its client regimes in the region. In October 2014, US vice-president Joseph Biden personally acknowledged that US allies had "poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad—except that the people who were being supplied were al Nusra and al Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world."

The opposition has called for greater arms precisely because the anti-Assad forces have suffered serious setbacks, despite their US sponsorship. In recent weeks, Karadjis and Socialist Alternative have made clear that the purpose of their feverish denunciations of "Russian aggression," is to agitate for a major escalation of the offensive against the Assad regime to reverse the crisis of the "rebel" forces, in line with calls from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and sections of the US military for a ground invasion.

The positions advanced by the pseudo-left increasingly correspond to the line of the most hawkish sections of the military-intelligence establishments of the major imperialist countries. Having jettisoned "knee-jerk anti-imperialism," these organisations, which articulate the interests of layers of the upper middle-class anxious to secure their place in the corridors of power, are making clear they will support the military activities of their own governments, including in the event of a global conflict between nuclear-armed powers.



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