

Australian government backs US-led campaign against Syria

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The Australian Labor government is marching in lockstep with the Obama administration as the US escalates its belligerent rhetoric against the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad and prepares for military strikes inside Syria.

In his most pointed accusation to date, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd all but declared this morning that the Assad government was responsible for the alleged chemical weapons attack on civilians last week. Speaking at the Lowy Institute, Rudd alleged that the regime had chemical weapons and had the necessary delivery systems, adding that UN inspectors would confirm that Syria had used them against civilians.

Having spoken to President Obama this morning, Rudd echoed the drumbeat from Washington aimed at stampeding public opinion behind US military action. “Without doubt, Syria is now the world’s greatest political crisis and unfolding humanitarian disaster,” he stated, insisting that the world could not turn a blind eye.

Earlier today on ABC Radio, Rudd expressed his agreement with yesterday’s speech by US Secretary of State John Kerry, in which Kerry declared that the chemical attack in Syria was “undeniable” and accused the Assad regime of covering up “a moral obscenity”. (See: “John Kerry’s ‘Colin Powell moment’”)

Neither Rudd nor Kerry provided a shred of evidence to demonstrate that the Assad regime was responsible for the alleged gassing of civilians. In fact, the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra militias, which control the area where the deaths took place, reportedly have chemical weapons. They also have a far stronger motive for such an atrocity—to create the pretext for an American-led military intervention in conditions where US-backed anti-Assad forces are losing ground to the Syria military.

Rudd’s comments mark a shift from his rhetoric over the weekend when he suspended his election campaign to take a security briefing. At a press conference on Saturday, he called for “a calm and measured” approach, echoing the line from the Obama administration that the Assad regime had to allow UN inspectors into affected areas. Rudd nevertheless declared that “the burden of proof now lies with the Syrian regime” to demonstrate that it was not responsible for the civilian deaths.

On Sunday, speaking on ABC television’s “Insiders” program, Rudd claimed that “indications point to the use of chemical weapons and indications point to their likely use by the regime” in a way that was “just horrendous beyond description.” He nevertheless cautioned against a rush to judgment. He pointedly observed: “We’re all very reminiscent of when previous Australian governments and other governments went into armed conflict in Iraq based on, frankly, something that was entirely incorrect.”

Rudd’s reference to the illegal US invasion of Iraq, which the Labor Party supported at the time, reflects fears in Australian ruling circles that a US-led war against Syria based on lies about weapons of mass destruction will provoke popular opposition. As in the US, there is widespread anti-war sentiment after more than a decade of Australian military involvement in US neo-colonial operations in Afghanistan and Iraq aimed at securing American domination in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Having been briefed by Obama this morning, Rudd has now taken his cue from Kerry’s belligerent speech yesterday and adopted a far more strident tone. A brief White House statement declared that Obama and Rudd had expressed their “grave concern” about the reported use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime and

“agreed to continue to consult closely.”

The Rudd government will support any US military aggression, just as the Labor Party has backed every US military operation over the past decade, from Iraq and Afghanistan to Libya. When foreign minister in 2011, Rudd was in the forefront of campaigning for air strikes and the imposition of a “no-fly zone” in Libya, as part of NATO’s regime-change operation to oust Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Likewise, current Foreign Minister Bob Carr has been particularly bellicose in his rhetoric against the Syrian regime. Last October, he expressed concerns that the Syrian army had proven effective in combatting US-backed opposition militias. Carr then suggested: “Perhaps an assassination, combined with a major defection taking a large part of the military, is what is required to get, one, a ceasefire, and, two, political negotiations.”

Australia plays a key role for the Obama administration as the US prepares to attack Syria. As Rudd emphasised today, Australia is due to temporarily take over the presidency of the UN Security Council on Sunday. As such, the Australian diplomats will be in a position to frame the debate and to put pressure on China and Russia to accede to US demands for a diplomatic fig leaf for military action against Syria.

Bases such as Pine Gap in central Australia are essential to the US military’s communications, spying and targetting across wide areas of the globe, from East Asia to the Middle East. It was recently revealed that Pine Gap provides targetting information for the Obama administration’s illegal drone assassinations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and other countries.

A syndicated News Limited article reported last week: “Australian military officers are working alongside the US military in the Pentagon to help draw up war plans for an American-led intervention” in Syria. “Planning sessions involving Australians are underway to brief the [Obama] administration on options,” a source declared.

The Australian media and political establishment as a whole is lining up behind the US preparations for war against Syria. The opposition Coalition has given bipartisan support for Rudd’s stance. Under the protocols for the election period, senior opposition members also received an intelligence briefing on Syria. Liberal Party leader Tony Abbott denounced the

“terrible things” taking place in Syria, and declared that it was “entirely appropriate” for the prime minister to suspend his election campaign to be briefed.

The various pseudo-left organisations, such as Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative, have already lined up in support of the US-backed anti-Assad militias in Syria. Socialist Alternative member Corey Oakley last year dismissed “knee-jerk anti-imperialism” as a thing of the past, asserting that an emphasis on the “imperialist threat” to Syria was “profoundly mistaken.” (See: “Australian pseudo-left backs imperialist intervention in Syria”). In lining up behind the US regime-change operation against Assad, the pseudo-left organisations are politically responsible for helping to create the conditions for the US to attack Syria.



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