

Australian foreign minister slanders Edward Snowden

By Patrick O'Connor
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Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop delivered a speech in Washington, DC on Thursday night denouncing former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden, who has exposed the illegal global surveillance regime developed by the US and its allies, including Canberra.

“In June,” she declared, “a grave new challenge to our irreplaceable intelligence efforts arose from the actions of one Edward Snowden, who continues to shamefully betray his nation while skulking in Russia. This represents unprecedented treachery—he’s no hero. Snowden claims his actions were driven by a desire for transparency, but in fact they strike at the heart of the collaboration between those nations in world affairs that stand at the forefront of protecting human freedom.”

This torrent of lies and slanders was in line with what Bishop had earlier declared the “core priority” of her visit to Washington: “strengthening the Australia-United States alliance.”

After President Barack Obama’s January 17 speech that pledged bogus intelligence “reforms”—while issuing an unabashed defence of the NSA and its activities against the people of the US and the world—various members of Congress denounced Snowden as a traitor and Russian spy who ought to be tried and executed. (See: “Apologists for NSA redouble witch-hunt of Edward Snowden”).

Mike McCaul, Republican chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, declared that Snowden “was cultivated by a foreign power to do what he did... he’s not a hero by any stretch. He’s a traitor.”

The Australian foreign minister is now the only representative of another government to echo such language and weigh into the coordinated campaign against the NSA whistleblower.

Bishop delivered her speech at an event sponsored by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies think tank, after a meeting she held with Obama’s National Security Adviser Susan Rice and just prior to a discussion with Vice President Joe Biden. “It is understood that Biden privately expressed his appreciation to Ms. Bishop for aggressively denouncing Mr Snowden,” the *Australian Financial Review* reported yesterday.

The foreign minister’s vicious statements point to Australian imperialism’s role as the slavish junior partner of the US. They recall former Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s baseless accusation against Julian Assange and WikiLeaks in December 2010 that the publication of US diplomatic cables was an “illegal thing to do.”

As part of the “Five Eyes” intelligence alliance, Australia’s spy agencies are completely integrated into the NSA’s spying network. While only a small percentage of the internal intelligence documents secured by Snowden have been publicly released, they have already incriminated the Australian government.

An unresolved diplomatic crisis with Indonesia was triggered over revelations that Canberra was tapping the mobile phones of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his wife. Australian officials have admitted they are awaiting the publication of other media reports detailing similar intelligence operations in other East Asian countries.

Bishop’s insistence that Snowden was “no hero” brings to mind the proverbial lady protesting too much. Among Australian working people, the former NSA employee is rightly regarded as a heroic figure for his role in exposing the truth about the daily violations of basic democratic rights carried out by the US and allied intelligence agencies.

Within the ruling elite, on the other hand, Snowden is a figure who inspires fear and hatred. His actions have further torn away the cynical masks of “democracy” and “human rights” with which successive Australian governments have sought to cover their involvement in US-led war crimes and provocations around the world.

In her Washington speech, Bishop nevertheless absurdly maintained that Snowden had harmed those who “stand at the forefront of protecting human freedom” and had attempted to “destroy the trust between those who are most supportive of and sympathetic to the security and influence of the United States in maintaining global peace and freedom.”

These paeans to world peace and freedom, it may be noted, was issued by a figure whose last overseas trip was to Israel, where she attended the funeral of the notorious Israeli war criminal Ariel Sharon, while publicly denying that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories violated international law.

Bishop’s declarations on Washington’s world diplomacy dripped with cynicism. The Obama administration is playing an incendiary role in world politics, fuelling a sectarian civil war in Syria as part of its longstanding regime-change drive, launching regular illegal drone strikes across the Middle East and North Africa, assisting fascistic forces in Ukraine as they try to oust the government, and actively preparing for a possible military attack against China as it “pivots” to the Asia-Pacific in an attempt to block any challenge to its global hegemony.

The Australian foreign minister’s visceral hostility towards Snowden partly reflects deep concern that his exposés will undermine Washington’s drive to diplomatically isolate and militarily encircle China. The former Labor government positioned Australia as a central partner of the US pivot, opening up a new US Marine base in Darwin and accommodating a wider US naval and air force presence in Australia. Since coming to office last September, the Liberal-National government is picking up where the Labor Party left off.

The title of Bishop’s speech was “US-Australia: The Alliance in an Emerging Asia.”

“In this year, a century on from the commencement of the Great War of 1914-18, we can reflect on the fact that over those 100 years the US and Australia have fought side-by-side in every major conflict in which

either of us have been engaged,” she declared. “Seventy-five years ago, while much of the rest of the world was focussed on the darkening clouds in Europe, we were focussing ourselves on the potential for a clash in the Asia-Pacific. Today, we still walk that geopolitical line... It is fair to say that our region, indeed the world, continues to feel the reverberation of China’s rise.”

Bishop’s speech formed part of a series of discussions in Washington on the US-Australia alliance and the possibility of war in Asia that were convened by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

One panel held yesterday, on “Politics and Security in an Emerging Asia,” included Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s senior national security adviser Andrew Shearer. He declared the government was preparing to significantly boost military expenditure, as “Australia has become much closer to the major fault-lines in global politics” and the “sharpness of the strategic tensions [in the region] has reached a new level.”

He added, “In recent years our military deployments under the alliance have been in the Middle East; I think we’re going to see the alliance become more regional, and much more focussed on maintaining the regional order and the maritime balance in the western Pacific as it comes under growing strain.”

While Julie Bishop attempted to portray Edward Snowden as a malicious law breaker, the remarks of Abbott’s national security adviser pointed to who the real criminals are—the officials in Canberra and Washington who are preparing to unleash a devastating Pacific war that would have devastating consequences for hundreds of millions of people.

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