

Australia's Socialist Alternative agitates for escalation of US intervention in Syria

By Will Morrow
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The five year long US-led regime-change operation against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has exposed the right-wing, pro-imperialist character of the Australian pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alternative.

On October 27, Socialist Alternative's website *Redflag* published its latest comment on the issue, entitled "The western left and Syria," continuing the organisation's four-year support for the US proxy war. Adopting the standpoint of an imperialist military strategist, author Corey Oakley demands that the Obama administration provide its right-wing Islamist proxy forces with surface-to-air missiles to shoot down both Syrian government aircraft and Russian warplanes, which have provided key air support to the Syrian army fighting against the imperialist-backed "rebels."

"CIA officers in Turkey, nominally in place to assist arms supply, in many cases in fact prevented the flow of weapons, particularly heavy weapons, to rebel forces," Oakley complains. He adds: "After the September ceasefire collapsed, there was renewed talk that the long-enforced US ban on the supply of significant numbers of Saudi surface-to-air missiles to Syrian rebels would be lifted. But by mid-October it was clear that these plans had yet again been shelved."

Oakley's prayers have since been answered. On November 20, members of the Al Qaeda-linked Ansar al-Islam front and Free Syrian Army posted a video in which they claimed to be in possession of a number of portable Manpad anti-aircraft rockets.

The provision of these weapons, whether directly by the Obama administration or factions of the military/intelligence agencies, marks a dangerous and reckless escalation of the Syrian war, posing the threat of a US-Russian nuclear war. It follows increasingly bitter conflicts within the Obama administration, the Pentagon and intelligence apparatus, centring on how to respond to the defeats suffered by their proxy forces at the hands of the Russian and Syrian militaries.

The recriminations have intensified in the wake of the election of Donald Trump, who has called into question Obama's policy of arming the "rebels" and signalled the possibility of working with Assad and Moscow against ISIS. Trump's statements are anathema to decisive sections of the US ruling establishment, who view the toppling of Assad, a Russian ally, as a component element of a broader strategy to isolate and prepare war against Russia. (See: "US arms Syrian Islamists with surface-to-air missiles")

Oakley's latest article demonstrates that Socialist Alternative, like its counterparts internationally, such as the International Socialist Organisation in the US, is politically aligned with the most hawkish elements of the US military-intelligence apparatus. Its specific political function is to provide a "left" cover for the predatory operations of US and Australian imperialism.

Thus, Oakley sets out to whitewash the record of US imperialism's responsibility for the five-year carnage inflicted on the Syrian people.

"It is clear as day who is culpable" for the crisis in Syria, Oakley writes. "First, the Assad regime... Second, the Iranian regime... Third, Russia." Oakley dismisses outright what he calls the "predominant narrative on the left [that] the US and its allies have pursued a strategy of 'regime change' in Syria, and are responsible for fuelling the resistance to Assad. In fact, the opposite is true."

Who is Oakley kidding? It is a publicly known fact that the CIA, and US allies in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey, have funded and armed Islamist proxy forces in Syria since at least 2012. In 2014, US Vice President Joseph Biden committed what the American media called a "gaffe," by blurring out to Harvard University students 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." French President Francois Hollande admitted in an interview with *Le Monde* in August 2014 that France had been funding the Free Syrian Army, which Socialist Alternative hails as a revolutionary organisation, since 2013.

Oakley's claim that Russia, Iran, and the Syrian government, and not American or European imperialism, are primarily responsible for the catastrophe in Syria, is both politically reactionary and false.

Washington's war for regime change against Assad, which has plunged the country into civil war, is the latest episode in US imperialism's drive, stretching back to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, to assert its untrammelled global dominance through military force. The countries targeted by these wars and interventions include Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia and Syria. These wars, which rank among the great crimes of the 20th and 21st centuries, have destroyed entire societies, killed millions of people, and turned 50 million into

refugees. Iran has suffered years of harsh US sanctions that have crippled its economy and skyrocketed prices for basic goods and medicines, as the US government, under both Bush and Obama, has repeatedly threatened it with war.

Now, these conflicts are metastasising into growing US preparations for war against both Russia and China, which Washington identifies as its major geopolitical rivals. Faced with what it recognises as an existential threat, and organically incapable of making any appeal to the anti-war sentiments of the working class, the Putin government's intervention in Syria only raises the danger of a US-Russian nuclear war. There is nothing progressive about Moscow's response, which defends the interests of the oligarchs, who amassed their billions out of looting state property as the Stalinist bureaucracy restored capitalism in the former Soviet Union.

Socialist Alternative's line-up with the CIA is no aberration. It flows directly from the social outlook and material basis of the upper middle class layers for which it speaks. While many of this social constituency opposed imperialist wars in the past, such as the war in Vietnam, they have shifted far to the right over the past three decades. During this period, their wealth has grown exponentially through the process of financialisation—centred in Wall Street—which has deepened social inequality and the polarisation between rich and poor. Today, they are fervent advocates of US imperialist war, upon which their continued enrichment depends.

In August, 2012, Oakley spoke for all of them when he declared that the time for “knee-jerk anti-imperialism has passed,” and that “US imperialism is not the central issue.” Late last year, Socialist Alternative published an article that hailed the shooting of a Russian jet by Turkey—a close US ally and NATO member—as a “small victory for humanity.” Socialist Alternative's website, *Redflag*, routinely publishes pro-war propaganda produced by its co-thinkers internationally, including a recent interview by the International Socialist Organisation with Anand Gopal, a fellow with the New America ruling-class think tank.

In his latest article, in a section titled, “The responsibility of the western left,” Oakley gets to his main aim: attacking opponents of imperialism as traitors to the so-called Syrian “revolution.” This emerges most clearly when he denounces the invocation of the slogan of the great German revolutionary Karl Liebknecht, during World War I: “The main enemy is at home.”

Oakley writes: “The problem—as is often the case when enlisting quotations from the dead for use in contemporary debate—is one of context... In the Syrian context, though, all it does is say to those resisting Assad: ‘Your enemy is not our enemy. Because you are not fighting our government, your plight is not our concern.’”

There is not a shred of political principle here. Firstly, Liebknecht's slogan was aimed at differentiating the independent political interests of the German working class from the predatory ambitions of the German ruling elite. The latter concealed its real aims of securing access to colonies, markets and spheres of influence in the war with fraudulent claims that it was seeking to defend “German culture.”

Writing in 1915, Liebknecht declared: “The main enemy of the German people is in Germany: German imperialism, the German

war party, German secret diplomacy. This enemy at home must be fought by the German people in a political struggle, cooperating with the proletariat of other countries whose struggle is against their own imperialists... Everything for the international proletariat, for the sake of the German proletariat and downtrodden humanity.”

Oakley argues that Liebknecht's slogan is inappropriate when the regime targeted for destruction by imperialism is guilty of oppressing its people. But since there is no capitalist government in the world that does not oppress and exploit its working class, his formula amounts to support for imperialist-orchestrated regime change in whichever country falls afoul of the major powers and their media propaganda mouthpieces. Oakley is merely providing a cheap imitation of the Austrian and German national chauvinists of the Second International, who justified their support for participation in World War I by declaring that they were thereby fighting against the barbaric Russian Tsarism.

At no point in his article does Oakley provide any analysis of who the “forces resisting Assad” actually are; what political program they advocate, or what their class interests are. He simply asserts that US and European imperialism's proxies are “revolutionaries” and hopes no one asks any more questions. In fact, Oakley's “revolutionaries” consist of right-wing Islamic fundamentalist groups seeking to establish their own capitalist government and independent relations with imperialism.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has no brief for the Syrian or Russian governments. But it is a fundamental principle of the Marxist movement that overthrowing these governments is the task of the working class, leading behind it all the oppressed sections of society, and uniting with its class brothers and sisters internationally in the fight for socialism.

Oakley's attack on Karl Liebknecht's slogan, which remains a bedrock principle of the socialist movement, is aimed at justifying Socialist Alternative's own alignment with imperialist wars, including the US preparations for war against Russia and China.

Today, the struggle for a genuinely socialist, international anti-war movement of the working class that fights to overthrow capitalism and institute workers governments in every country, can only advance through an ongoing political exposure of the pro-imperialist politics of the pseudo-left, including Socialist Alternative.

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