

Australian government backs US provocations against Iran

By Oscar Grenfell
8 January 2020

Australia's Coalition government has responded to Washington's illegal assassination of Iranian General Qassem Suleimani in Baghdad last Friday by doubling down on its support for US provocations that threaten a catastrophic military conflict in the Middle East.

Senior government ministers expressed their "concern" over "Iran's behavior," even as that US President Donald Trump has threatened to launch an aggressive war against the country, in violation of international law.

In doing so, the government has tacitly endorsed the killing of Suleimani, an unprovoked act of gangsterism, along with Trump's threats to bombard Iran, a country of over 80 million people, including essential infrastructure and densely populated civilian areas.

The response is in line with the support of the entire Australian political and media establishment for the US alliance. Australia, under Labor and Coalition governments, has participated in virtually every US-led war since the end of World War Two. This has included the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and an expanding US military build-up throughout the Middle East directed against Iran.

On Monday, just days after the drone strike killed Suleimani and nine others, Foreign Minister Linda Reynolds told Nine Media that her government and its allies had "long been concerned" by "Iran's behaviour in the Middle East."

Reynolds did not even directly mention the assassination of Suleimani. Instead, she implicitly blamed Iran for ratcheting up tensions, stating that her government would "encourage" unnamed parties to show "restraint and avoid escalation."

"Australia's focus remains on supporting Iraq's stability and unity and ensuring a de-escalation of tensions," Reynolds declared, echoing US claims that

Iran has provoked instability in Iraq.

Morrison indicated that his government, which marches in lockstep with the Trump administration, had not received forewarning of the US drone strike. Despite this admission, Morrison signalled his support for the attack, declaring that the US had expressed its "concern" with Iran for "some time," adding that it had been in "constant contact" with allies throughout the region and had ensured that no Australians were injured.

Demonstrating Labor's bipartisan support for this militarist line, party leader Anthony Albanese and senior federal MPs have not even bothered to comment on the killing of Suleimani. Labor has, for decades, sought to position itself as the preeminent party of the US alliance. In recent years, it has overseen Australia's integration into a vast US military build-up in the Asia-Pacific region directed against China.

This has resulted in the Australian state's emergence as one of the most aggressive attack dogs of the US and a key partner in its most egregious provocations. The Morrison government has sought to closely identify itself with the Trump administration. Senior US officials feted the Australian prime minister when he visited Washington last year, and Morrison even took part in a de facto Trump election campaign rally.

This role was on display on Tuesday. Foreign Minister Reynolds responded to a vote of Iraq's parliament demanding that US, Australian and other allied troops leave the country by calling on the government to ignore the ballot.

Indicating the contempt of the major powers for the Iraqi people, whose mass demonstrations forced the parliament to pass the motion, Reynolds stated: "We understand the resolution passed by Iraq's Parliament is non-binding, absent formal approval by the

government in Baghdad.”

She called for a guarantee that the 300 Australian troops, alongside thousands of American soldiers and contractors be allowed to continue occupying Iraq. “We urge the Iraqi government to ensure the coalition is able to continue its vital work with Iraq’s security forces in countering the shared threat of Daesh,” Reynolds said.

The claim that US and Australian troops are in Iraq to defeat the already-vanquished Islamic State, known in the Middle East as Daesh, is a fraud. In reality, the ongoing occupation is aimed at shoring-up US hegemony of the geo-strategically critical and oil-rich region. It is also aimed at undercutting the influence of Iran, Russia and China.

The US and its allies, including Australia and the Gulf States, have pursued this strategy in neighbouring Syria by backing the very Islamist militias out of which ISIS developed. The assassination of Suleimani, who played a central role in Iran’s collaboration with the Assad regime against ISIS and other Sunni extremists, will only encourage their re-emergence in Syria, Iraq and throughout the region.

The Australian political establishment has actively backed the US regime-change operation in Syria, directed in part against Iran, as well as direct provocations against Tehran.

In August, the entire political and media establishment rolled-out the red carpet for US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who was on a tour of the region to escalate the US military build-up against China and to advocate broader participation in aggression against Iran.

Pompeo’s militarist agenda was not challenged by a single parliamentary representative, including the Greens and the right-wing populist “independents,” or by the corporate media.

In backroom discussions, Pompeo pressed the Australian government to agree to send military ships to the Persian Gulf to menace Iran, which it did, just weeks later, with the full support of the Labor opposition. Labor defence spokesman Richard Marles declared: “Australia has an interest in freedom of navigation... this [the Persian Gulf] is a piece of international architecture which is as essential to our national interests as any.”

At the time, the WSWS warned: “Australia’s

involvement in the 2003 invasion of Iraq likewise began with naval operations to uphold ‘freedom of navigation’ and enforce sanctions.” That illegal invasion resulted in up to a million deaths and has created unprecedented social and political catastrophes throughout the Middle East. A war against Iran, a country with a population more than twice as large as Iraq, would be even more disastrous.

The Australian ruling elite’s support for the murder of Suleimani is another demonstration that successive governments, Labor and Coalition alike, have placed Australia on the frontline of military preparations, in the Middle East, the Asia-Pacific and internationally, that threaten the eruption of nothing less than a nuclear world war.

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