

US to station nuclear-capable B-52 bombers in Australia

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An Australian television program yesterday revealed advanced plans for the US to station B-52 bombers in northern Australia. The deployment of the nuclear-capable bombers, which are crucial to US strike capabilities, marks a significant escalation of the militarisation of Australia, the Indo-Pacific region and the world.

The target is clear. The representatives of pro-war think tanks who spoke on last night's episode of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's "Four Corners" program, and those who have commented in the press since, have openly stated that the bombers are being dispatched to prepare for a war with China that would threaten a global nuclear catastrophe.

In other words, even as the US and its allies are continuously escalating their war with Russia over Ukraine, they are transforming the entire Indo-Pacific into a powder keg that could erupt at any point.

For the strategists of American imperialism, the war that is already underway against Russia is the necessary prelude to war against China, the chief threat to US global dominance. This was spelled out in the latest US National Security Strategy, released last month, which proclaimed a "decisive decade" of "geopolitical conflict between the major powers." China, it stated, was "the only competitor with both the intent and, increasingly, the capability to reshape the international order," something the US would combat with everything at its disposal.

The stationing of the bombers points to the disastrous implications of this program, driven by the long-term decline of American imperialism and the deepening crisis of the entire global capitalist system.

"Four Corners" revealed that the US is preparing to build a "squadron operations facility" at the Tindal air force base in northern Australia. It will include a vast hangar and logistical facilities that can equip six B-52 bombers, which will be rotated out of the facility, likely being based there during the tropical dry season. The US will construct jet fuel tanks at Tindal and an ammunition base. An Australian "upgrade" of the facility is expanding its runways and other

capabilities.

Meanwhile, the US is building eleven giant jet fuel tanks in Darwin.

The US air force confirmed the plans, declaring: "The ability to deploy US Air Force bombers to Australia sends a strong message to adversaries about our ability to project lethal air power."

"Four Corners" also reported a major expansion of the joint US-Australian Pine Gap facility in Central Australia. The military-intelligence facility plays a central role in the technical planning and waging of US military operations throughout Eurasia. The Nautilus Institute has found that the number of its super-powerful satellite antennas has increased from 33 in 2015 to 45 today. The quantitative expansion has been accompanied by the deployment of increasingly sophisticated equipment.

Becca Wasser, of the hawkish Center for New American Security, told "Four Corners" that "having bombers that could range and potentially attack mainland China could be very important in sending a signal to China that any of its actions over Taiwan could also expand further." She blithely declared that the deployment would ensure that Tindal and Darwin, with a population of 150,000 people, would inevitably be a target in any US war between China and Australia.

Greg Sheridan, foreign editor of the Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper, who has close ties to US and Australian military and intelligence circles, wrote this morning that the B-52 deployment heralded a "growing 'pre-war' environment," adding: "The drumbeats of potential war are sounding across the world. This is not alarmist, it's reality."

Sheridan bluntly stated: "The B-52 bombers will have the ability to deliver powerful strategic strikes on Chinese bases and assets in the South China Sea, and indeed in the South Pacific should any ever be developed there. They could also fly from the Northern Territory to mainland China itself, unleash a payload and fly back."

A Chinese spokesman warned this morning that the

deployment was part of a broader US drive which “increased regional tensions, seriously undermined regional peace and stability, and may trigger a regional arms race.”

The dispatch of the bombers to northern Australia is part of a US program to diversify its strike capabilities and to align regional allies ever more closely with the war preparations. Northern Australia has been earmarked to play a particularly crucial role. Unlike the US base on Guam, where the B-52s are often located, Australia is out of reach of most conventional Chinese missiles, though not of its intercontinental ballistic missiles.

In justifying the deployment, various pro-war commentators and the “Four Corners” program itself have claimed that the dispatch of the B-52 bombers is a defensive response to the threat of a war triggered by a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

This, however, is a lie. It is the US that has deliberately transformed Taiwan into a major flashpoint of war. Successive US administrations have undermined the decades-long norm, under which the American government and the international community de facto recognised the Chinese Communist Party regime as the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan. The US has greatly boosted its arms sales to Taipei, along with military trainers, stoked Taiwanese separatism and conducted one provocative diplomatic visit after another.

This has nothing to do with a newfound concern for “little Taiwan.” Instead, the territory, located just 160 kilometres off the Chinese mainland, is to play a parallel role to Ukraine, which the US exploited to provoke war with Russia. The aim is to goad China into an invasion, which would be used as the pretext for open war waged by the US.

The militarisation of northern Australia gives the lie to the claims that the heightened US aggression is a response to the recent developments relating to Taiwan.

In 2011, the then-Labor government signed on to the US “pivot to Asia,” a vast military build-up throughout the Asia-Pacific, directed against China. That included the establishment of a new US base in Darwin, which now hosts more than 2,000 marines, and other measures integrating Australia into the US war machine.

Under the Pentagon’s “Air-Sea Battle” strategy, sketched out when the “pivot” was launched, Australia and its north is to play a decisive role as a “southern anchor” during war with China. It is to be a launching point for US and allied war planes and the staging ground for imposing a blockade of the key shipping routes in the region, which China is dependent upon for most of its raw materials and trade.

The deployment of the B-52s is a warning that these long-running plans are now being activated.

This, along with the entire US-led program of global war,

takes the form of a conspiracy against the population. The plans to dispatch the B-52s have never been debated in the Australian parliament, much less publicly announced. Instead, they have been hatched in closed-door discussions between the US and Australian governments, militaries and intelligence agencies. They were found by “Four Corners” in US tender documents.

In the case of the B-52s, this secrecy is particularly significant. While the aircraft and other nuclear-capable strikers have previously stopped over in Australia, they have never been based in that country, which is officially a non-nuclear state. Yet the US, as a matter of policy, refuses to confirm or deny whether any of its nuclear-capable war planes and warships are carrying nuclear payloads.

In other words, Australia’s status as a non-nuclear state has effectively been overturned without any public discussion. Significantly, the project, which appears to have begun under the previous Liberal-National government, is being completed by the current Labor administration.

It is likewise pressing ahead with AUKUS, the militarist alliance with Britain and the US, unveiled in September 2021. Under the pact, Australia is acquiring nuclear-powered submarines and has also been earmarked as a launch site for new era hypersonic missiles.

This militarist program is conducted under a veil of secrecy in Australia and internationally, because the governments know that workers and young people oppose war and want peace.

The advanced preparations for a conflict that could rapidly involve nuclear weapons demonstrate that this sentiment must be developed into a conscious political movement of the international working class, aimed at halting the catastrophe that capitalism is preparing. The basis for such a movement exists in the mass hostility to war and the resurgence of the class struggle in the US, Britain, Australia and around the world.



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