

Australia aided US-British airstrikes on Yemen

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As American and British bombs struck 60 locations in Yemen yesterday, the Australian Labor government declared its full support for the act of war and stated that it had provided unspecified assistance to the attack.

In his written statement confirming the strikes, US President Joe Biden named only four countries aside from the UK as having given “support” to the bombardment—“Australia, Bahrain, Canada, and the Netherlands.”

Together with the US, the UK and eight other states, Australia issued a statement, justifying the bombing as it was unfolding. Presenting the US-led attack as a defensive reaction to Houthi operations targeting shipping in the Red Sea, the document proclaimed: “Today’s action demonstrated a shared commitment to freedom of navigation, international commerce, and defending the lives of mariners from illegal and unjustifiable attacks.”

In reality, the “shared commitment” is to the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. The stated aim of the Houthi attacks has been to obstruct and block the Zionist regime’s slaughter of Palestinian civilians, over 30,000 of whom have been killed in the past three months. In doing so, they have invoked the Geneva Convention, which formally obligates the international community and nations to take concrete actions to prevent genocide from occurring.

The involvement of Australia in the bombing of Yemen demonstrates that while Labor leaders seek to avoid mentioning Gaza at all costs, they remain de facto participants in the genocide.

Last year, Labor approved more than 50 weapon export permits to Israel, and is doing everything it can to keep their contents hidden from the population. Labor has protected the Zim shipping line, one of those targeted by the Houthis because it committed its entire fleet to the Israeli war effort last October. Aggressive police-state mobilisations have been orchestrated against those protesting the presence of Zim vessels at Australian ports.

More generally, Labor is signaling its support for the US escalation of the Gaza onslaught into a broader, nationwide

war targeting Iran and all those forces in the Middle East, such as the Houthis in Yemen, who are aligned with it.

That the bombing of Yemen marks a turn towards a Middle Eastern conflagration has already been acknowledged by corporate pundits and foreign policy think tanks. Yesterday’s bombing was not a one off. Fresh US attacks have taken place today, reportedly aimed at civilian infrastructure, including the international airport in Sanaa, Yemen’s national capital.

As in Britain and the US, where there was no parliamentary or congressional approval for the bombardment, Australian participation in the attack on Yemen has proceeded without even a fig leaf of democratic discussion, much less a mandate sought and approved.

It remains entirely unclear what the participation concretely consists of, and the Labor government is keeping that information hidden.

In comments to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation this morning, Defence Minister Richard Marles said only that there were Australian military officials at the US-led joint headquarters in Bahrain, where the strikes were planned or orchestrated from. Marles gave an open-ended commitment of Australian support for “any actions” that the US would take going forward, but said he would not elaborate on what role Australia was playing.

There is every likelihood that the joint US-Australian Pine Gap spy base in Central Australia is involved in targeting the strikes on Yemen. The facility is not only for surveillance, but functions as a war-planning centre. It is the central collection point for data from US satellites covering a vast expanse of the globe, including much of Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

In comments to *Declassified Australia* last November, a former US National Security Agency employee who previously worked at Pine Gap said it was almost certain that the base was being used to assist the targeting of Israeli strikes in Gaza. That report, buried by the official media, has never been responded to by the Labor government. The Department of Defence has refused to comment.

While Labor has placed Australia front and centre in the political and diplomatic backing of US aggression against Yemen, it has not dispatched warships to the region. This is despite an unusual public appeal from US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin last month, as the American state was assembling the coalition that carried out yesterday and today's strikes. Along with Australia, other close US allies have also rebuffed Washington's requests or indefinitely delayed any positive response.

The reluctance itself underscores the immense implications and recklessness of the US assault, threatening as it does the eruption of a much broader conflagration potentially involving Iran.

The strikes have intensified demands for Australian warships to be sent. For weeks, the Liberal-National opposition has condemned Labor's failure to deploy vessels as an indication of "weakness" that sends the wrong "message" to the US.

Opposition defence spokesman Andrew Hastie declared: "The prime minister continues to put at risk important alliances with the US and the UK by failing to provide a maritime contribution to the Red Sea. While our AUKUS partners defend vital trade routes against Houthi rebels, Australia is sitting on the sidelines letting our allies do the heavy lifting."

Whatever element of politicking is involved, there is little doubt that the opposition is channeling the frustrations of sections of the American and Australian military-intelligence establishment that no ship commitment has been forthcoming. Commentators, particularly in the Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper with close ties to the American state have advanced the same complaints.

What is striking about Hastie's comments, as well as the statements by Marles, is how closely they tie the US-led aggression in the Middle East to the escalating American military-build up in the Indo-Pacific directed against China.

AUKUS, mentioned by Hastie, is the tripartite alliance between the US, Britain and Australia, unveiled in September 2021, and deepened since then. It is a cockpit of war planning, the integration of the three militaries and their expansion, explicitly directed against Beijing. Under AUKUS, Australia is acquiring a fleet of US nuclear-powered submarines.

That goes hand in hand with a vast expansion of US basing arrangements in Australia, and the development of other military capabilities. Last year Labor committed to the recommendations of a Defence Strategic Review (DSR) for the country to acquire "strike" capabilities that can be projected throughout the region and internationally, centering on a major program of procuring and developing missiles for all branches of the armed forces.

While the DSR was hailed by hawkish commentators, there have been ongoing complaints about the speed with which it is being enacted, especially for the navy. That feeds into the agitation against Labor over its failure to dispatch warships to the Red Sea to this point.

Marles said Australia was supporting the US strikes, as part of its commitment to global "freedom of navigation." That is the banner under which the US and its allies, including Australia, have conducted provocative incursions near or into waters claimed by China in the Indo-Pacific, including in the South and East China Seas.

This morning, a commentary by former diplomat David Livingstone in the *Sydney Morning Herald* obliquely pointed to the real motives for the US attacks. He wrote: "There is the more subtle question of whether the actions against the Houthis are purely to protect the lives of seamen and keep trading routes open, or whether the coalition is acting as a shield for Israel."

However, Livingstone added, it was "unlikely that this distinction will be closely examined, or if it is, greatly cared about." That is true of a political and media establishment that unanimously backs the Israeli genocide, as well as the US-led threats against Iran.

Livingstone drew a direct connection between Australian support for the strikes on Yemen and preparations for war against China. "Indeed, one of the important outcomes of Australia's involvement may be for Australia to gain a deeper appreciation of the new balance shift in favour of military capabilities required for effective area denial," he wrote.

"Australia's Department of Defence and the ADF will reflect carefully on the implications of this, both for Australia's defence of its mainland and operations further from home—especially in and around the first island chain that is a key to military competition with China."

In other words, even as the military planners and strategists of imperialism are backing the worst war crimes of the past 80 years in Gaza and again setting the Middle East ablaze, they are preparing still greater catastrophes on a global scale.



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