

Australian government expands military involvement in US-led attacks on Yemen

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Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles announced yesterday that six more military personnel will be sent to US headquarters in the Middle East to assist in the planning and preparation of American and British strikes on Yemen.

While the increase is small, the decision signals the Labor government's unalloyed political commitment to US war plans in the Middle East and its full support for the Israeli regime's genocide of the Palestinian population in Gaza.

The US has amassed a large naval armada in the Middle East to back Israel's war on Gaza and to prepare for a wider war against Iran and Iranian-backed militia in the region. Together with Britain, the American military has carried out strikes against Houthi militia in Yemen that have attempted to disrupt supplies to the Israeli military, in solidarity with the Palestinians. As of Friday, the Houthis had carried out some 57 attacks against shipping in the Red Sea since November.

The six personnel will be part of a newly formed Operation Hydrant, directly assisting in the US-British strikes on Houthi positions in Yemen. Marles told parliament that Australia would not be sending a warship or a plane to the region but called the increase in troops to shore-based roles "significant."

Speaking this morning on Channel Nine's "Today" program, Marles explained that the number of Australian military personnel at the Combined Maritime Force headquarters in Bahrain had already been increased last year. "This [extra six] is in addition, but separate to that, which is a headquarters specifically supporting the US-UK strikes," he said.

Asked whether six people would make a difference, Marles insisted that it would, saying: "These headquarters aren't huge places, and it's certainly a

contribution which is very much welcomed by both the US and the UK." He added that it was "very important that we are a part of this mission" because of "our national interest" as "an island trading nation."

In reality, the government's decision to join the widening US-led war in the Middle East is bound up with its commitment to its military alliance with US imperialism more broadly, including the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and Washington's advanced preparations for war against China. Australian imperialism is completely dependent on the US to advance its own predatory interests in Asia and internationally.

No details have been released about the specific military personnel being deployed or their roles. Nevertheless, they will be integral to the planning, preparation and monitoring of the US-led attacks on Yemen, which will inevitably result in civilian casualties. The Houthi militia, linked to Iran, control large parts of Yemen, including its capital, Sana'a.

Last Saturday, US and British warplanes carried out the largest air strikes in weeks against targets inside Yemen. A statement by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the operation to "further disrupt and degrade" Houthi capacities was directed against eight locations, hitting underground weapons-storage facilities, missile-storage facilities, one-way attack drones, air defenses, radar and a helicopter.

On Sunday, the Houthis' official Saba news agency announced the first civilian death in the US-UK strikes, stating: "The American-British aggression on the district of Maqbana in the governorate of Taiz has left one civilian dead and eight wounded." Two more civilians were injured in the raids on the al-Nahda neighborhood in the al-Thawra district of Sana'a.

Support for the air strikes has been provided by

Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands and New Zealand. A joint statement declared: “Our aim remains to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea.”

In fact, the huge US military build-up in the Middle East began in concert with Israel’s onslaught on Gaza which from the outset set its sights on expanding the assault into the West Bank and southern Lebanon. Just as the Israeli military has already carried out attacks inside Lebanon and Syria, the US has launched strikes inside Syria and Iraq, as well as Yemen.

The Australian government, which is now expanding its direct involvement in US military operations, has backed the Israeli genocide in Gaza to the hilt. Amid ongoing weekly protests across Australia against Israeli war crimes, now responsible for more than 30,000 civilian deaths, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his ministers have issued meaningless expressions of concern for the plight of Palestinians and supported calls for a temporary ceasefire.

The Labor government’s attitude to the humanitarian disaster in Gaza, however, is exposed by its continued withholding of at least \$A6 million in aid to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)—the main lifeline for more than a million refugees in Gaza in desperate conditions without food, clean water, medicines and other essentials.

The Albanese government joined the US in cutting aid to UNRWA based on unsubstantiated Israeli claims that a handful of UNRWA employees were involved in the October 7 military operations by Hamas in southern Israel.

According to the *Guardian*, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong met on Tuesday with Tom White, the director of UNRWA affairs in Gaza, to discuss the “acute humanitarian situation” in the besieged territory. In parliament yesterday, however, Albanese, refused to give a timeline for the reinstating the aid.

Wong was reportedly updated in the meeting with details of the internal UNRWA investigation into the Israeli allegations. In recent parliamentary proceedings, she conceded that she was yet to see any detailed evidence to support Israel’s claims.

By blocking aid, Israel, with the support of the US and its allies, including Australia, is deliberately using starvation as part of its genocidal war. Speaking to the

Guardian on Tuesday, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Michael Fakhri declared: “Intentionally depriving people of food is clearly a war crime. Israel has announced its intention to destroy the Palestinian people, in whole or in part, simply for being Palestinian. In my view as a UN human rights expert, this is now a situation of genocide.”

The Albanese government is directly complicit in the crimes of the Zionist regime in Gaza. By boosting Australian military integration into US military operations in the Middle East, it is committing to a broader US war of aggression in the region that will be waged with the same barbarity that the world is witnessing in Gaza.



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