

US used Australian bases in bombing Houthi facilities in Yemen

Mike Head

18 October 2024

The Australian Department of Defence confirmed yesterday that Australian air bases were used for long-range US attacks by B-2 stealth bombers on Yemen on the night of October 16-17. This included “access and overflight for US aircraft in northern Australia,” a spokesperson told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

Many questions remain unanswered by the Albanese Labor government about the involvement of Australian bases in what amounts to an escalation by the Biden-Harris administration of its military aggression to back Israel’s intensifying genocide in Gaza and plans for attacks on Iran.

It is not clear whether the B-2s landed in Australia before or after their strikes on alleged Houthi weapons bunkers in Yemen, or whether US air force tankers used the bases to refuel the giant bombers.

The ABC initially reported that “A remote Northern Territory air base has been used as a staging post for this week’s major US airstrike on underground Houthi weapons stores in Yemen.”

Later, the ABC added a strange note to the story. It said the Defence Department refused to confirm or deny whether US aircraft involved in the strikes took off from Australian air force base RAAF Tindal, in the Northern Territory. The spokesperson claimed the need to protect “operational security.”

Regardless of the precise extent of the involvement, this development marks another intensification of the Labor government’s transformation of northern Australia into a strategic platform for US wars, both in the Middle East and against China.

It also demonstrates Australia’s active participation in the US-backed Israeli onslaught in Palestine and Lebanon, and its support for an imminent Israeli assault on Iran, which could provoke a wider catastrophic war for US-Israeli control over the Middle East.

The Iranian-linked Houthi regime was targeted because of its military strikes in the Red Sea and Israel, attempting to oppose the genocide in Gaza.

While not explicitly naming Iran or China, the US

administration said the B-2 strikes in Yemen were intended to send a message to any other enemy of the US capacity to strike anywhere in the world.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said President Joe Biden ordered the strikes to “further degrade the Houthis’ capability” to destabilise the region and protect US forces.”

“Today, US military forces, including US Air Force B-2 bombers, conducted precision strikes against five hardened underground weapons storage locations in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen,” Austin said.

“This was a unique demonstration of the United States’ ability to target facilities that our adversaries seek to keep out of reach, no matter how deeply buried underground, hardened or fortified.

“The employment of US Air Force B-2 Spirit long-range stealth bombers demonstrate US global strike capabilities to take action against these targets when necessary, anytime, anywhere.”

While the Pentagon did not mention Iran, American media noted that the B-2 is the only plane capable of hitting allegedly deeply buried Iranian nuclear facilities.

RAAF Tindal, near Katherine, south of Darwin, is undergoing a multi-billion-dollar upgrade, due to be completed in 2026, to accommodate US bomber deployments, under access agreements with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s government.

According to the *Warzone*, a specialist military website: “Available low-resolution satellite imagery for the dates in question doesn’t show any B-2s at Tindal—which is not conclusive in itself—but there are other possible operating locations in northern Australia, including some auxiliary installations.”

The website said the official US line appeared to point to a roundtrip to Yemen from Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, the main operating base for the B-2s, “although it may be the case that one or more Australian bases were made available as an alternative landing site, after the mission. If the flight was direct, it would have literally flown around the world.”

Warzone reported that it was “more or less certain” that US Air Force aerial refueling tankers used Australian air bases to support the raids. “Photos—backed up by some satellite imagery—show KC-135 Stratotankers and KC-46 Pegasus tankers at Cairns Airport in Queensland and more KC-135s at RAAF Amberley [near Brisbane], soon after the strikes.”

So far, the US air force has not confirmed what weapons were used, possibly the 30,000-pound GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP), which can only be carried by B-2s, or 2,000-pound BLU-109-equipped GBU-31 Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM).

Neither Albanese nor Defence Minister Richard Marles have yet commented, but others were quick to broadcast the government’s closer integration into US military operations.

An Australian official told the ABC that the support Australia provided was “consistent with our long-standing alliance commitment and close cooperation, demonstrating the interoperability of our militaries.”

Darwin Labor MP Luke Gosling, who is the Albanese government’s special envoy for defence, told the ABC that Australia works “incredibly closely with the US Air Force” in the country’s north.

Gosling said there were “no deliberate messages being sent from Australia, other than we are in lock-step with our allies in order to uphold a rules-based order upon which Australia’s security and prosperity is so dependent.”

This “rules-based order” is in fact a US regime, whereby it and its allies, such as Israel, increasingly flout international law, in order to seek to reassert US global hegemony, particularly over its designated targets of Russia, China and Iran.

Justin Bassi, executive director of the government-financed Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said the operation in Yemen was unprecedented in scale, means and what it targeted. Alongside the Israeli killing of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, the raid was “possibly the major international story” of the day. He said it “took a B-2 to be able to destroy these underground facilities in Yemen containing sophisticated weaponry supplied by Iran.”

Under Labor’s agreements with Washington, exercises and visits involving US bombers have accelerated. B-2s have become regular visitors, with four having deployed to RAAF Base Amberley in 2022, and another two in August this year, for a Bomber Task Force mission.

The upgrade work at Tindal includes an expanded apron with space for up to six B-52 strategic bombers, squadron operations facilities, maintenance infrastructure, fuel and munitions storage, and mission planning buildings.

This will make Tindal and other Australian bases forward operating locations for US bombers across the Indo-

Pacific—in addition to Japan, Hawaii, Guam and Diego Garcia—capable of striking China as well as the Middle East.

The Yemen operation underscores the analysis made by the Socialist Equality Party in the resolution adopted at its Seventh National Congress on October 3rd 2026. It warned:

Australia’s acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS pact, as well as hypersonic missiles and other advanced weaponry, is only one expression of the transformation of the country into a launching pad for war. Bases across the country, especially in the north and west, are being expanded, with the US given access across all military domains. US nuclear-capable strike assets, including nuclear submarines and B-52 bombers, are being “rotated” through Australia, with preparations for their semi-permanent basing. Over the past four years, Pine Gap has grown by a third, with analysts describing it as one of the key US bases in the world for planning nuclear war with China.

On the same day as the Yemen bombing, the Labor government also escalated its commitment to the US-NATO war against Russia. The government announced it would donate 49 M1A1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, the largest such tank donation yet by any US ally, taking Australia’s military contribution to \$1.3 billion.

As these developments demonstrate, the Labor government is fully committed to what is a three-front global war by US imperialism against Russia, China and Iran. Every previous “red line” is being crossed, threatening humanity with a potential nuclear conflagration unless stopped by the international working class, guided by a socialist strategy to overturn the capitalist profit system, the root cause of the lurch into war.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact