

Australian Labor government secretly sends SAS to join the war against Iran

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Behind the backs of the Australian population, the Albanese government last month dispatched approximately 90 Special Air Service (SAS) commandos to participate in the escalating US-Israeli assault on Iran.

This secret deployment shows that nothing that the Labor government says about the war can be believed, including its repeated claims that it is not involved in the Trump administration's barbaric offensive.

The Special Air Service Regiment was evidently sent in mid-March, about two weeks before reports of the deployment first appeared yesterday in the Murdoch press. At a media doorstep yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles did not deny the news, instead declaring: "We never make comments about the operations of our special forces."

In the same breath, Marles again recited Labor's insistence that it will not send ground troops to join the war. "I would be really clear to the Australian people, we're not having boots on the ground in Iran," he told reporters in response to questions about the SAS operation.

Military sources told Murdoch media outlets that the Australian special forces are stationed at the Al Minhad Air Base—a US and allied forces hub—near Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. They said the deployment was upgraded as part of "prudent forward planning."

Other unnamed sources said the SAS were deployed for emergency contingencies, specifically the potential evacuation of Australian diplomats and citizens if regional tensions escalate. One source told the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*: "Having a squadron there just gives the government options. It's not like we are in the war or anything."

That flies in the face of reality. SAS regiments are not designed for the protection of diplomats and citizens. They are highly-trained killers, typically used on the frontlines of invasions, as in previous Australian commitments to US-led wars, from Vietnam to the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the protracted occupation of Afghanistan.

There is a documented precedent. On March 18, 2003, SAS troops entered Iraq on board US military helicopters—authorised by Coalition Prime Minister John Howard—and opened fire on Iraqi forces without any declaration of war on Iraq by the

Australian government and more than 24 hours before US President George Bush announced the start of hostilities.

Labor's SAS deployment is part of a deepening commitment to the Iran war. That includes an E-7A Wedgetail aircraft, which is an advanced airspace battle management capability, accompanied by 85 military personnel, and an unstated number of air-to-air missiles to the UAE. Marles admitted on March 17 that all the data that the Wedgetail collects is instantaneously provided to the American military. In effect, he revealed that the Labor government is playing a direct role in the planning, targeting and execution of the devastating strikes on Iran.

The truth is that the Albanese government has been an active participant in the war from the start, including through the joint Pine Gap satellite surveillance and war targeting base in central Australia, the North West Cape submarine communications base and the embedding of Australian forces in the US military-intelligence apparatus.

That integration was underscored by the presence of three Australian naval personnel on a US nuclear attack submarine that torpedoed a defenceless Iranian frigate off the coast of Sri Lanka on March 4, claiming at least 87 lives. The Australian personnel were undergoing training under the auspices of AUKUS, the military pact with the US and the UK directed against China.

The SAS mobilisation is occurring under conditions where the Trump administration—while also denying it will have "troops on the ground"—is ramping up US forces around Iran and President Trump has blatantly vowed to send the Iranian people "back to the Stone Ages, where they belong."

In that nationally-televised address last Wednesday, Trump declared his government's intention to annihilate an entire country—to level its cities, its power grid, its water supply, its hospitals and its industry, everything that sustains 90 million people.

Not a single member of the Labor government, from Prime Minister Anthony Albanese down, has uttered a word of condemnation of Trump's vow, signalling again their readiness to fully support the US war, as they did within hours on day one, on February 28.

Some 10,000 US troops have arrived in the Gulf region on board three aircraft carrier strike groups. According to

the *Washington Post* last week, the Pentagon has drawn up plans for ground operations lasting “weeks” and is preparing to deploy 10,000 additional troops. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the administration is planning a special operations mission to extract nearly 1,000 pounds of enriched uranium from deep underground in Iran.

This war is taking a devastating toll. Human rights group Hengaw reported last week that at least 6,900 people were killed in Iran by Day 29 of the war. Iran’s Red Crescent reported more than 85,000 civilian structures damaged, including 64,000 homes and 600 schools. Other reports indicate that over 11,000 targets were struck in the first month, and more than 300 hospitals and medical facilities were damaged or destroyed, as were cultural heritage sites, all commencing with the destruction of an elementary girls’ school in Minab, which killed more than 170 children.

Knowing that the war is increasingly unpopular, with media polls indicated 72 percent opposition, the Labor government has been cynically trying to distance itself from the disastrous war that is also causing a soaring cost-of-living crisis for workers in Australia, as it is internationally.

At the same time, it is stepping up its commitment to the war, while still claiming that it is not engaged in “offensive” operations against Iran, just “defensive” measures to support the Gulf states, which are hosting US forces. No such distinction exists. The Gulf States are directly contributing to the US-Israeli bombardment and preparing to possibly enter the war directly themselves.

The six Gulf Cooperation Council states—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman—have all allowed the US and Israel to use their airspace and military installations, just as they had during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This includes the UAE base, as well as Saudi Arabia’s Prince Sultan Air Base, which hosts US refuelling planes and offensive actions, and the US has fired ballistic missiles at Iran from Bahrain.

Last week, the Gulf states and Jordan jointly condemned what they called Iran’s “criminal” attacks on their energy infrastructure and declared their right to act in “self-defence” under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. The statement signalled their impending intervention as open belligerents in the criminal and illegal war against Iran.

Under these conditions, the Labor government is also preparing plans to join European powers and other governments in military operations to confront Iranian forces in the Strait of Hormuz. The *Australian*, a Murdoch media flagship, reported today that Australian military officials will meet with counterparts from around the world next week to devise such a plan.

The talks were set down by a UK-chaired meeting of more than 40 countries last week that accused Iran of attempting to “hold the global economy hostage” by closing the strait to seek to defend itself against Washington’s devastating attacks.

Foreign Minister Penny Wong joined the UK-led videoconference, pledging support to end “Iran’s de facto closure of the strait,” while still pretending that Australia would take no part in any offensive action against Iran.

Britain’s Defence Ministry said a multilateral meeting of military planners would take place in the UK “to discuss viable options to make the Strait of Hormuz accessible and safe for navigation.” An Albanese government source told the Australian that officials based in Brussels were likely to attend the talks on Australia’s behalf.

In his doorstep comments yesterday, Marles again denied, as Albanese has done repeatedly, receiving any US requests for greater involvement in the war. Nevertheless, he doubled down on the Labor government’s commitment to the US military alliance.

“The alliance with the United States goes back a very long way and is enduring, and it’s as important today as it has ever been,” Marles stated. “And I’m very clear about that, and the government is very clear about that. We engage with the United States in so many different ways and very much in respect of our national security. And that continues to be profoundly important.”

This underscores Labor’s readiness, on behalf of the Australian ruling capitalist class, to back the US offensive to secure control over the resource-rich and strategic Middle East, regardless of the blatant war crimes involved, as part of Washington’s drive for the global hegemony it asserted after World War II, particularly against China, as well as its European imperialist rivals.

Labor is doing so in defiance of the popular opposition to the war, which is growing because of sky-rocketing prices for fuel, food and other essentials, intensifying a cost-of-living crisis for working-class households, and the allocation of hundreds of billions of dollars to AUKUS and other preparations, at the expense of public health, education, disability and other essential social spending.

This underlines the connection between the fight against imperialist war and against the assault on workers’ jobs, conditions and living standards. What is required is the development of an independent movement of the working class against the Labor government, based on a socialist perspective that targets the root of the plunge into war and economic and social crisis—the capitalist system itself.



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