

US to expand “force posture” at Australian bases

Oscar Grenfell
4 September 2026

The US announced on Wednesday that it will “accelerate force posture initiatives at Australian bases,” a euphemism for the expanded stationing of troops and military assets. The declaration was made in the Pentagon’s official readout of a meeting earlier that day between US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles.

The readout indicated that Marles had given his assent to the expanded basing. In a press conference afterwards, Marles confirmed that the “force posture initiatives” he had discussed with Hegseth were beyond those already publicly announced, but refused to provide any details whatsoever. There has been only limited media coverage of the announcement, none of it critical or probing.

That is all the more striking given the wide-ranging character of existing US basing arrangements. Hegseth and Marles boasted of those, and of the ever-greater integration of the US and Australian armed forces, in what is a massive military build-up in preparation for war against China.

They drew attention to the fact that US sailors have already begun arriving in Western Australia, where they are to be stationed permanently. The Labor government is undertaking a \$8 billion expansion of HMAS Stirling Naval Base near Perth, which will become, in effect, one of the largest US bases adjacent to the Indian Ocean.

Beginning next year, US nuclear-powered submarines will “rotate” through Stirling. More than 1,000 US sailors and military personnel will be housed in Perth, as part of an American contingent that is predicted to number 2,300, including contractors and technicians.

That arrangement is part of the AUKUS pact with the US and the UK, under which Australia is also slated to acquire its own fleet of nuclear-powered submarines in

the 2030s.

The expansion extends across the continent.

In the Northern Territory, an annual “rotation” of US marines has grown from fewer than 200 personnel in 2012 to around 2,500, while Darwin and Tindal are being upgraded for increased rotations of US bombers, including those that can carry nuclear weapons, fighters and surveillance aircraft.

Fuel storage, aircraft aprons and other infrastructure are being expanded, US weapons, equipment and aircraft are being pre-positioned, and the Labor government is spending more than \$A14 billion over a decade upgrading its northern bases.

The US military footprint is also spreading to RAAF bases Scherger in Queensland and Curtin and Learmonth in Western Australia, while Amberley in Queensland is being scoped for infrastructure supporting additional US aircraft. US Army equipment has already been pre-positioned at Bandiana in Victoria, with northern and southern logistics networks being established to sustain US operations across Australia.

The joint Pine Gap facility, in central Australia, is a key facility for US war planning, processing satellite data covering more than half the globe, stretching from West Africa and the Middle East across Russia, China and the Indian subcontinent to East Asia and the mid-Pacific.

As revealed by investigative reporter Peter Cronau in 2024, over the previous four years Pine Gap had undergone the largest expansion in its history, growing by up to a third since 2020, with 10 new satellite dishes and antennas taking the total to 45. The new facilities expand its capacity to detect and track missile launches and integrate the base ever more directly into US nuclear war-fighting operations directed above all

against China.

Taken together, the existing US basing arrangements already form an interconnected network involving all military domains, with the purpose of the Australian continent serving as both a rear base for war against China, and a launching pad for aggressive military operations throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Marles boasted that US basing arrangements had expanded continuously over the four years that the current Labor government has been in office. The inevitable question is what more has been agreed to?

The Pentagon's readout of the Marles-Hegseth talks also pointed to an accelerating series of US-led war games in Australia.

It highlighted June's Southern Jackaroo in Queensland, involving more than 3,000 personnel and combined-arms and live-fire operations. An Australian commander described the exercise in unusually blunt terms as "a rehearsal for war," testing forces to deploy rapidly, operate in austere conditions and "fight on arrival."

The Pentagon also cited July's Southern Cross, in which more than 1,000 Australian, US and Japanese personnel and up to 40 aircraft operated from Darwin and Tindal as an integrated and dispersed "fighting force," practising aerial refuelling, multinational aircraft support and weapons employment in what the Defence Department called a "high-end, warfighting environment."

And it pointed to Talisman Sabre 2025, the largest iteration of the biennial war games, which brought together more than 35,000 personnel from 19 countries for drills across Australia and Papua New Guinea. Taken together, the exercises are increasingly integrating Australia, the US, Japan and other allies into a single war-fighting force capable of conducting large-scale operations throughout the Indo-Pacific.

According to the readout, "Hegseth emphasized the importance of capable allies contributing to the collective defense by investing in their own sovereign security." Last year, he publicly demanded that the Labor government lift military spending to 3.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

In his press conference, Marles boasted that Labor had a "good story to tell" in Washington, given that it had hiked military spending every year of the past four he said, adding, "[W]e now have defence spending at

2.8 per cent of GDP by the NATO measure puts us ahead of most NATO countries." Marles claimed that Australian defence funding as a proportion of GDP was greater than the UK and Germany, and behind only countries on the "front lines" of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, such as Poland.

Marles repeated the false claim that China was engaged in the largest military build-up of any nation since World War II, "without the kind of strategic reassurance that one would expect." The assertion flies in the face of reality, including that American imperialism has ringed the globe with military bases over the past 80 years, and has carried out a vast military build-up in the Indo-Pacific over the past 15, explicitly targeting Beijing.

Together with Hegseth, Marles claimed that the expansion of US basing and the Australian military was aimed at "deterrence" and ensuring "balance" in the region. That line has always been a fraud, presenting the aggressors as the defensive party.

It is all the more striking now, under a Trump administration that has dispensed with even a pretense of adhering to international law. Hegseth, who describes himself not as a secretary of defense, but as a secretary of war, has explicitly declared in the context of the criminal assault on Iran that American imperialism would not be hindered by "stupid rules of engagement."

In addition to refusing to provide any details of the expanded US "force posture" he had discussed with Hegseth, Marles would say nothing concrete about their talks on Iran. The question was raised by a journalist, with reference to the latest US escalation, involving the open resumption of illegal airstrikes.

Marles vaguely spoke of the Labor government's hope for the war's "deescalation," having just been holding fawning meetings with its chief escalator. At the same time, he denounced the Iranian regime, underscoring Labor's alignment with that war crime that is underway, as well as those that are being prepared in the Indo-Pacific.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact