

20 Percent of the USAF's B-2 Force Is Deployed 'Down Under'

The B-2 deployment to Australia comes as the USAF ramps up its presence in the Indo-Pacific region amid growing tensions with China.

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Recent imagery obtained by The War Zone from Planet Labs shows four USAF [B-2 Spirit stealth bombers](#) lined up at the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Amberley airbase in Queensland. Considering the USAF currently only operates [20 B-2 bombers](#), the photo provides an unprecedented glimpse from space of one-fifth of the service's entire B-2 fleet deployed 'down under.' That being said, it will likely become a very normal sight as the U.S. and Australia work more closely to deter China.

20% of the B-2 Spirit fleet on deck at RAAF Amberley a couple days ago.
pic.twitter.com/pmV5KSKl0i

— Tyler Rogoway (@Aviation_Intel) [August 1, 2022](#)

The photo highlights the growing presence of USAF B-2s in Australia [in recent months](#) – signaling the U.S.' commitment to maintaining stability within the Indo-Pacific amid growing [tensions with China](#). The four B-2s currently stationed at Amberley were sent from the 509th Bomb Wing at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, to support a Pacific Air Forces Bomber Task Force. Two B-2s [arrived at Amberley on July 10](#), while another two B-2s [arrived on July 12](#). While B-2s have visited Australia before, this is the first deployment of B-2s to the country as part of the Bomber Task Force (BTF), [according to Janes](#). USAF and RAAF flyers have focused on "training missions and strategic deterrence missions" since the four USAF B-2s arrived at Amberley as part of the Enhanced Cooperation Initiative under the Force Posture Agreement between the U.S. and Australia.

The first pair of B-2s to arrive at Amberley [will remain there](#) “throughout the months of July and August and are planning to be involved in various Australian Defence Force (ADF) exercises such as Exercise ‘Koolendong’ and Exercise ‘Arnhem Thunder,’” an Australian Department of Defense spokesperson said. Exercise Koolendong 2022 wrapped up [at the end of July](#).



A USAF B-2 Spirit stealth bomber parked on the tarmac at Amberley Airbase in Queensland, Australia.
USAF photo.



Two USAF B-2 Spirit stealth bombers perform a Bomber Task Force mission on July 18, alongside two Royal Australian Air Force F-35A Lightning IIs. *USAF photo by Tech. Sgt. Dylan Nuckolls.*

Two U.S. [#AirForce](#) B-2 Spirit Stealth Bombers fly a mission July 18, alongside two Royal Australian Air Force F-35A Lightning IIs, over [#Australia](#) ...

<https://t.co/CBgkcSgzOw> [pic.twitter.com/O3DN7IBZjs](https://t.co/O3DN7IBZjs)

— DVIDSHub (@DVIDSHub) [July 30, 2022](#)

Performing training missions with USAF B-2s and allied fighter jets has been an “absolute blast [so far,]” Lt. Col. Andrew Kousgaard, commander of the 393rd Expeditionary Bomb Squadron, said in a statement after USAF flyers began training with their RAAF counterparts. “Since our advance team hit the ground... U.S. airmen have integrated with their Australian counterparts in every specialty: fuels, logistics, maintenance, aviators, you name it.”

USAF and RAAF flyers also intend to experiment with refueling B-2s from RAAF KC-30 tankers, Kousgaard indicated, which would add another means of refueling USAF bombers in the Pacific during coalition operations.

“We have plans to conduct engines-running refueling with Australian equipment, [and] air refuel with Australian KC-30s ... the list goes on, and the entire deployed squadron is really excited about it,” Kousgaard said. “It’s important for us to demonstrate that we can accomplish that mission from diverse locations in the largest combatant command in the world, and that’s exactly what we’re doing here.”

“The only way to learn and improve is to actually deploy and practice,” he noted. “We simply cannot operate effectively by ourselves in this environment, and learning to effectively integrate with our partners is absolutely critical to success. We’re training against that ‘tyranny of distance,’ alongside our Australian partners on this deployment, and that experience is truly invaluable.”

The [@AusAirForce](#) recently teamed up with [@Whiteman_AFB](#) & the [@131stBombWing](#) during a B-2 hot-pit refueling in Amberley, Australia. Hot-pit refueling cuts down on the aircraft's turn around time to take off for another mission, increasing its readiness. [#FriendsPartnersAllies](#) [pic.twitter.com/kiYlKhHgVQ](https://t.co/kiYlKhHgVQ)

— US Strategic Command (@US_STRATCOM) [July 25, 2022](#)

Report:

Two [#US](#) Air Force (USAF) Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit stealth bombers landed in Australia and will operate in [#Australia](#) until the end of August 2022 [pic.twitter.com/bBqrhG3aeZ](https://t.co/bBqrhG3aeZ)

— OsintTv [] (@OsintTv) [July 26, 2022](#)

Commenting on the deployment of the first pair of B-2s sent to Amberley, Kousgaard said: “This deployment of the B-2 to Australia demonstrates and enhances the readiness and

lethality of our long-range penetrating strike force.”

The presence of so many B-2s in Australia clearly sends a very public signal that the U.S. is prepared to use the B-2, and do so from new operating locations, should a future conflict with China unfold.

The deployment also highlights the U.S.’ commitment to supporting its allies in the region – particularly Australia. The U.S., Australia, and the U.K. formed a trilateral security pact in September 2021 covering the Indo-Pacific region (AUKUS,) which aids the transfer of weapons and technologies between the three countries. As part of the pact, the U.S. and U.K. will also help Australia to [build nuclear-powered submarines](#). In a further show of unity, U.S. Navy Adm. John C. Aquilino, commander of U.S. military forces in the Indo-Pacific, recently [visited RAAF Base Amberley](#) while in the country for the 24th annual Indo-Pacific Chiefs of Defense (CHODs) conference.

[#USINDOPACOM](#) Commander Adm. John C. Aquilino visits [@AusAirForce](#) in Amberly, - [#FreeAndOpenIndoPacific](#) [#FriendsPartnersAllies](#)

Read more: <https://t.co/G6KCNmmJQG> pic.twitter.com/3TCOZqLN49

— U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (@INDOPACOM) [August 2, 2022](#)

RAAF Air Cmdre. David Paddison underscored the significance of Aquilino’s to the base.

“It is a privilege having Admiral Aquilino visit our largest Air Force base in Australia and meeting our aviators, who have been working with their peers from the 509th Bomb Wing.”

“It’s not a regular occurrence for our refueling, security, and firefighters to gain experience on aircraft such as the B-2. This partnership has been instrumental in enhancing the capabilities and interoperability of both our forces through joint exercises and activities. The Indo-Pacific is our home and we stand committed to an open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific.”

In a recent public statement, Adm. Aquilino stressed that the Indo-Pacific is “the most consequential theater with the most challenging security issues [for the U.S.] ... advancing our interoperability with critical allies like Australia is critical to maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

While several USAF B-2s are expected to stay at Amberley for at least another few weeks, it’s likely that the [service’s presence in Australia will only increase](#) with U.S. bombers setting up shop ‘down under’ becoming a common occurrence.

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Featured image: Four USAF B-2 Spirit stealth bombers lined up at Amberley airbase in Queensland, Australia. Planet Labs.

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