

Supporting Australia To Deter China Helps America

By [ROBBIN LAIRD](#) and [ED TIMPERLAKE](#) on June 11, 2021 at 1:37 PM



Two F-22 Raptors and one B-2 Spirit deployed to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam on April 14, 2009, the first time the key strategic stealth platforms in the Air Force deployed together outside the continental US.

As the Biden administration focuses on ways to improve deterrence in the Pacific, reenforcing Australia’s defense against China is a good place to start. Working closely with Australia now can send an important message to Beijing that political intimidation, backed by economic and military threats, is not in its long-term interest.

For those not following the Chinese campaign against Australia, Chinese leaders have made it very clear they believe Australia must comply with their plans to dominate the Pacific. The Chinese threat has been stated clearly in the Chinese state media: “China has a strong production capability, including producing additional long-range missiles with conventional warheads that target military objectives in Australia when the situation becomes highly tense.”

If someone is threatening to kill you, you’d best believe them. Examining China’s direct threat closely, one is immediately struck that the focus is upon conventional strike, as raising a nuclear threat might lead to a reaction from Canberra that the Chinese might regret — even more than having to deal with the prospect of an Australian defense buildup that includes new long-range strike capabilities.

Paul Dibb, a noted Australian strategist and former intelligence official, has argued that China's moves are significantly reducing the country's warning time in the face of any attack.

"The Chinese have been clearly communicating for some time that it is now time to teach Australia a lesson. They used similar language against Vietnam in 1979 prior to their invasion," he said in a recent interview. "And there are many ways they could generate force to pressure Australia, without directly striking the country, such as take us on in our 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone, threatening our offshore energy platforms. And by so, doing put the challenge directly to Australia."

In the long term, the Australian government is committed to building long-range strike and has committed to spending serious money in this area. But what should Australia do now as part of a crisis management approach to such a threat? What does one do now to respond effectively to dangerous saber rattling?

There is an option which provides a building block for the way ahead with regard to a long-range strike capability for the Australian Defense Force (ADF), and for the United States to learn how to more effectively utilize its naval and air capabilities in the Pacific both with its own services, as well as with allies.

The United States has brought B-1 bombers to participate with the ADF in Northern Australia. By deploying a rotational force of B-2s to the North of Australia, a stealth bomber capability could be brought to the defense of Australia. It would be an important immediate input to responding to China, but it would also underscore to the Chinese that their military buildup in the Pacific — especially that directed against Australia — is not in their own interest.

By training the Royal Australia Navy and the Royal Australian Navy to work with the B-2s, B-1s and B-52s, those two key Australian power projection forces can train with operational long-range strike assets.

There further is discussion in Australia about whether buying the B-21 is the right answer for longer-range strike or are there other options. Thus, rotational US bomber deployments would also help guide the way ahead for building out the kind of sovereign missile industry Australia desires. It is clear that the United States also

needs a different approach than it has followed to date to get a less costly and more effective mix of strike assets itself.

As the United States shapes a more effective approach to support allies in the Indo-Pacific, a key part of what the US Navy and the US Air Force clearly need to work on is much more effective integration of the bomber force with the fleet.

One measure for the near term could be building reinforced bases in Australia from which US bombers could operate, while Australia builds its own capabilities. These bases would be used for rotations to exercise with the ADF or to reinforce Australian forces in a crisis.

This is all about taking the US-Australian alliance forward in an effective way to deal with the defense of Australia today. It is about also demonstrating to China's leaders that bullying is not going to make Australia or any other liberal democratic states submit to a Chinese global order. The Chinese leadership needs to pause and consider what Australia, as an arsenal for democracy, might mean to the Peoples Republic of China's future.

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