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NUCLEAR DETERRENCE AND THE US-AUSTRALIA ALLIANCE

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If raised: Hosting US nuclear bombers

- US bomber training in Australia continues a long-standing and mutually beneficial program of combined training initiatives and exercises involving Australia and the United States.



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NUCLEAR DETERRENCE AND THE US-AUSTRALIA ALLIANCE

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If asked: Use of RAAF Base Tindal by US nuclear capable B2 bomber

- A military platform that is nuclear-capable, such as the B-2 and B-52 bomber, is not necessarily armed with nuclear weapons on deployment.
- In any event, successive Australian governments have understood and respected the longstanding US policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons in any location.
- This applies to transits of such platforms to Australia, including in the context of existing training and exercise programs.
- Australia is a signatory to both the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- There is no impediment under either of these treaties to the transit of foreign aircraft to Australia's airfields or transit of Australia's airspace.

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PDR: QB20-000375
Date cleared: 19/10/2020

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NUCLEAR DETERRENCE AND THE US-AUSTRALIA ALLIANCE

<i>Contact Officer:</i> Zoe Cameron Assistant Secretary Strategic Policy s47E(d) [REDACTED] [REDACTED]@defence.gov.au	<i>Clearance Officer:</i> Celia Perkins First Assistant Secretary Strategic Policy s47E(d) [REDACTED] s22 [REDACTED] s4 / L(d) [REDACTED]@defence.gov.au Date: 13 January 2020
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PDR: QB20-000375
Date cleared: 19/10/2020

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Budget Estimates: November 2022

Last updated:

US Force Posture

Key witness: Hugh Jeffrey

United States Force Posture Cooperation in Australia

Handling Note: Acting Deputy Secretary Strategy, Policy, and Industry, Hugh Jeffrey to lead on United States Force Posture in Australia.

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What is the status of force posture cooperation with the United States?

- Defence has been transparent about forecasting an increase in US presence in Australia under US Force Posture Initiatives (USFPI) program.

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- At AUSMIN 2021, under the former Government, Australia and the US agreed to enhance force posture cooperation through:
 - Enhanced air cooperation through the rotational deployment of US aircraft of all types in Australia;

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Budget Estimates: November 2022

Last updated:

Key witness: Hugh Jeffrey

US Force Posture

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Are dual capable US B-52 Bomber aircraft being deployed to Australia?

- US bomber aircraft, including B-52s, have been visiting Australia since the early 1980s and conducting training in Australia since 2005.

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- The US is funding a project – under the USFPI program – to construct an aircraft parking apron at RAAF Base Tindal, which is capable of hosting a range of aircraft, including six B-52 aircraft.
 - The project provides functionality for Australian Defence Force use and can also host other aircraft types, enhancing our capacity to train with and host international partners.
- Information about this project was published on the Defence public website in 2019, and US Air Force representatives briefed the proposed projects at Industry events in 2019 and 2020.
- Any future rotations of US B-52 aircraft in Australia would be consistent with the longstanding objectives of the US Force Posture Initiatives.
- **If pressed:** no decisions have been made at this point on future B-52 rotations.

Do US Bomber visits contravene Australia's treaty obligations?

- Australia is a state party to both the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
 - There is no impediment under either of these treaties to the visit of foreign aircraft to Australia's airfields or transit of Australia's airspace.
- US Bomber aircraft have been visiting Australia since the early 1980s and conducting training in Australia since 2005.
- A military platform that is nuclear-capable, such as the B-2 and B-52 bomber, is not necessarily armed with nuclear weapons.
- Successive Australian Governments have understood and respected the longstanding US policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons in this context.
- The Government remains committed to fulfilling Australia's international legal obligations, including those in the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty.

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Budget Estimates: November 2022

Last updated:

Key witness: Hugh Jeffrey

US Force Posture

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- RAAF Base Tindal

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- Aircraft Parking Apron capable of accommodating six Bomber Aircraft, procurement expected in mid-2023 (USD \$25 to \$100 million approximately).

Treaty of Raratonga, South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty

- Australia is a state party to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Rarotonga), which entered into force in 1986. Article 5 of the Treaty states:
 - Each Party undertakes to prevent in its territory the stationing of any nuclear explosive device.
 - Each Party in the exercise of its sovereign rights remains free to decide for itself whether to allow visits by foreign ships and aircraft to its ports and airfields, transit of its airspace by foreign aircraft, and navigation by foreign ships in its territorial sea or archipelagic waters in a manner not covered by the rights of innocent passage, archipelagic sea lane passage or transit passage of straits.
- Australia is also a state party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which entered into force in 1970. The NPT contains no explicit provisions relating to the stationing, transit, or visit of foreign aircraft or ships.

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Last updated:

US Force Posture

Key witness: Hugh Jeffrey

- On 2 November 2022 media [reporting](#) covered Deputy Prime Minister Marles and Foreign Affairs Minister Wong's comments responding to B-52 media reporting.

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Division:	International Policy
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PDR No:	SB22-001059
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Budget Estimates: November 2022

Last updated:

US Force Posture

Key witness: Hugh Jeffrey

Prepared by: s47E(d) Director United States Indo-Pacific Policy Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 7 November 2022	Cleared by Group Head: Hugh Jeffrey, Acting Deputy Secretary Strategy, Policy, and Industry Group Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 7 November 2022
Consultation: USFPI Name: Air Commodore Sandy Turner	Date: 1 November 2022 Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d)
Cleared by CFO / DPG:	N/A
Cleared by Group Head: Hugh Jeffrey	Date: 7 November 2022

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United States Force Posture Cooperation in Australia

Handling Note: Acting Deputy Secretary Strategy, Policy, and Industry, Hugh Jeffrey to lead on United States Force Posture in Australia.

Key Messages

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- The presence of US personnel, capabilities, and supporting infrastructure in Australia provides a platform for defence cooperation s22

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What is the status of force posture cooperation with the United States?

- At AUSMIN 2022, Australia and the US agreed to:

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- continue the rotational presence of US capabilities in Australia, including air (US Bomber Task Force rotations), maritime, and land capabilities;

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Last updated:

US Force Posture

Key witness: Hugh Jeffrey

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What capabilities will the United States bring to Australia?

. At AUSMIN 2022 Australia and the United States agreed to continue the rotational presence of U.S. capabilities in Australia, across air, land, and maritime domains.

– This includes U.S. Bomber Task Force rotations, s22

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Budget Estimates: January 2022

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Key witness: Hugh Jeffrey

US Force Posture

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Are dual capable US B-52 Bomber aircraft being deployed to Australia?

- . US bomber aircraft, including B-52s, have been visiting Australia since the early 1980s and conducting training in Australia since 2005.

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Budget Estimates: January 2022

Last updated:

US Force Posture

Key witness: Hugh Jeffrey

- . The US is funding a project – under the Force Posture Initiatives program – to construct an aircraft parking apron at RAAF Base Tindal, which is capable of hosting a range of aircraft, including up to six B-52 aircraft.
 - The project provides functionality for Australian Defence Force use and can also host other aircraft types, enhancing our capacity to train with and host international partners.
- . Information about this project was published on the Defence public website in 2019.
- . Any future rotations of US B-52 aircraft in Australia would be consistent with the longstanding objectives of the US Force Posture Initiatives.

Do US Bomber visits contravene Australia's treaty obligations?

- . Australia is a state party to both the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
 - There is no impediment under either of these treaties to the visit of foreign aircraft to Australia's airfields or transit of Australia's airspace.
- . A military platform that is nuclear-capable, such as the B-2 and B-52 bomber, is not necessarily armed with nuclear weapons.

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Background

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Since the AUSMIN 2021 announcement to enhance force posture cooperation, there has been an increase in US rotations and visits, including s22
bomber aircraft, s22

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PDR No: SB22-001059

Last updated:

US Force Posture

Key witness: Hugh Jeffrey

Division: International Policy	
PDR No: SB22-001059	
Prepared by: s47E(d) Director United States Indo-Pacific Policy Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 16 December 2022	Cleared by Division Head: (Band 2/2* level) Samantha Higgins, A/g First Assistant Secretary International Policy Division Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: D December 2022
Consultation: s47E(d) Infrastructure Division, Security and Estate Date: 16 December 2022 Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d)	
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US BOMBER AIRCRAFT ROTATIONAL PRESENCE IN AUSTRALIA BACK-POCKET BRIEF

Key Witness: Mr Hugh Jeffrey, Deputy Secretary Strategy, Policy, and Industry Group.

Strategic Narrative

At AUSMIN 2022, Australia and the United States agreed to continue the rotational presence of US capabilities in Australia, including US Bomber Task Force rotations.

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Talking points

If asked: Does the US station nuclear weapons in Australia?

- No. The United States does not station nuclear weapons in Australia.
 - Stationing of nuclear weapons in Australia is prohibited by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, to which Australia remains committed.

If asked: What about the rotational presence earlier this year of dual-capable US bomber aircraft in Australia (e.g. B-2 visit in July-August 2022)?

- Australia is a state party to both the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- Neither of these treaties prohibit the visit of dual-capable foreign aircraft to Australia's airfields or the transit of Australia's airspace.
 - Including in the context of our training and exercise programs.

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- *(If pressed)* US bomber aircraft have been visiting Australia since the early 1980s and conducting training in Australia since 2005.
 - A military platform that is nuclear-capable, such as a B-2 or B-52 bomber, is not necessarily armed with nuclear weapons.
 - Successive Australian Governments have understood and respected the longstanding US policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons in this context.

If asked: What about future plans for the rotational presence of dual-capable bomber aircraft to Australia (e.g. recent media reporting on potential B-52 visits)?

- At AUSMIN 2022, Australia and the United States agreed to enhance the rotational presence of US capabilities in Australia, including US Bomber Task Force rotations.
- The Government remains committed to fulfilling Australia's international legal obligations, including those in the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty.
- Visits by United States aircraft to Australia, including any mutually agreed rotational presence of bomber aircraft, will be consistent with the Force Posture Agreement and our full knowledge and concurrence policy framework.

If asked: Will United States Bombers be permanently based in Australia?

- No. The **rotational** presence of US Bomber aircraft in Australia is fully consistent with our domestic commitments, including Australia's longstanding bipartisan policy of no foreign bases on Australian soil.
 - Bombers will be rotated through Australia, with US Bombers being at Australian bases and facilities at the invitation of the Australian Government.

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Timeline of Significant Events

Date	Action
7 December 2022	Ministers Marles and Wong and Secretaries Blinken and Austin agreed to enhance Australia-US force posture cooperation at AUSMIN 2022. This included the continuing rotational presence of US aircraft in Australia, as well as enhancing Australian infrastructure and logistics capabilities to support the aircraft.

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Background

Media coverage of the B-52 presence in Australia

- On 31 October 2022, ABC's Four Corners reported on the planned upgrades to RAAF Tindal in the context of Australia-US force posture cooperation. The coverage focused on a perceived heightened risk of conflict with China.

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- In February 2023, various Australian media outlets reported on comments by Minister Wong and Secretary Moriarty on Australia's support for the US Government's policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on their aircraft.

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Relevant Ministerial Comments

Deputy Prime Minister Marles (3 November 2022) [commented](#) on force posture cooperation, including upgrades to RAAF Tindal.

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Cleared on	May 2023		
Drafting Officer	s47E(d) Policy Officer United States Indo-Pacific Policy	Americas, United Kingdom and East Asia Branch	s47E(d)

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Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2023

Last updated: 03 October 2023

PDR No: SB23-000727

United States

Key witnesses: Hugh Jeffrey; Bernard Philip.

United States

Handling Note:

- Hugh Jeffrey, Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Policy, and Industry to lead.
- Bernard Philip, First Assistant Secretary International Policy Division to support.

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Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2023

Last updated: 03 October 2023

Key witnesses: Hugh Jeffrey; Bernard Philip.

PDR No: SB23-000727

United States

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How does Australia know if United States assets that rotate through Australia under the Force Posture Agreement are nuclear-armed [United States SSNs and B-52 and B-2 bombers]?

- . A nuclear-capable military platform is not necessarily armed with nuclear weapons.
- . The United States does not station nuclear weapons in Australia. Stationing of nuclear weapons in Australia is prohibited by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, to which Australia remains committed. Visits by United States strategic assets are consistent with our obligations under these treaties.
- . Neither of these treaties prohibit dual-capable foreign aircraft being present at Australia's airfields or transiting Australia's airspace.
- . Successive Australian Governments have understood and respected the longstanding United States policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons in this context.
- . Australia will continue to fully comply with our international obligations and the United States understands and respects Australia's international obligations regarding nuclear weapons.

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Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2023

Last updated: 03 October 2023

PDR No: SB23-000727

United States

Key witnesses: Hugh Jeffrey; Bernard Philip.

Supporting Information**Questions on Notice****2023-24 Budget Estimates: 30 - 31 May 2023**

In **QoN 81, AUKUS ports**, Senator Jordon Steele-John (Greens, Western Australia) asked a series of questions regarding:

- . maintenance of future Australian nuclear-propelled submarines;
- . the alignment of United States B-52 Bombers rotating to Royal Australian Air Force Tindal and the Treaty of Rarotonga;
- . whether the Government would prevent nuclear-capable or armed B-52s to visit Royal Australian Air Force Tindal;
- . the transit and stationing of United States nuclear weapons in Australia;
- . United States declaratory policy on carriage of nuclear weapons; and
- . whether the government would only permit non-nuclear capable United States aircraft in Australia.

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Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2023

Last updated: 03 October 2023

PDR No: SB23-000727

United States

Key witnesses: Hugh Jeffrey; Bernard Philip.

Division: Strategy, Policy, and Industry Group	
PDR No: SB23-000727	
Prepared by: Sally Timbs, Assistant Secretary, United States Alliance Management Branch Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 16 August 2023	Cleared by Division Head: Bernard Philip, First Assistant Secretary, International Policy Division Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 3 October 2023
Consultation: s47E(d) Strategy and Plans, Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Capability Development Division	Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 24 August 2023
Consultation: Alanna Mackay, Assistant Secretary, Strategic Policy and Guidance, Strategic Policy Division	Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 16 August 2023
Consultation: Kylie Wright, Assistant Secretary Defence Industry, Defence Industry Policy Division	Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 16 August 2023
Consultation: s47E(d) Intelligence Policy and Priorities Branch, Defence Intelligence Group	Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 16 August 2023
Cleared by Deputy Secretary Hugh Jeffrey, Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Policy, and Industry Group Date: 1 September 2023	

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Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2023

Last updated: 03 October 2023

Key witnesses: Hugh Jeffrey; Bernard Philip.

PDR No: SB23-000727

United States

Questions on notice referred to within the brief:**2023-24 Budget Estimates****Senator Jordan Steele-John**

Question Number: 81

Date question was tabled: 14 July 2023

Question

Will the facilities at the AMC Henderson be used for maintenance work on the nuclear submarines, both the Virginia Class and the forthcoming SSN-AUKUS?

In the Rarotonga Treaty, stationing is defined as "emplantation, emplacement, transportation on land or inland waters, stockpiling, storage, installation and deployment. Does the government consider the basing of 6 B-52s at Tindal to amount to stationing?

Will the government confirm that the B-52s at Tindal will not be nuclear-armed nor nuclear-capable?

Will the government reject the transit of nuclear weapons in Australian airspace, territories and waters?

AUKUS will open Australian ports to routine deployments from American and UK nuclear capable submarines. The US Navy has a policy of 'nuclear ambiguity' and refuses to confirm or deny whether a vessel is carrying nuclear arms. Australians deserve to know whether we are hosting and facilitating nuclear weapons - will you require visiting vessels to openly declare their weapons status or will you fully cede Australian sovereignty and responsibility?

As a demonstration of Australia's commitment to reducing the threat of nuclear war, will the government commit that any B52 deployment on Australian soil will only permit non- nuclear capable aircraft?

Answer

Defence and the Australian Submarine Agency are continuing to work through the maintenance arrangements in consultation with our AUKUS partners.

No. The United States does not station nuclear weapons in Australia. Stationing of nuclear weapons in Australia is prohibited by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, to which Australia remains committed. B-52 and B-2 bombers are not based at RAAF Base Tindal, but visit Australia on a rotational basis. Visits by United States strategic assets are consistent with our obligations under these treaties.

Australia will continue to fully comply with our international obligations and the United States understands and respects Australia's international obligations regarding nuclear weapons.

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Additional Estimates February 2024

Last updated: 13 February 2024

Key witnesses: Hugh Jeffrey; Bernard Philip

Australia-United States Force Posture Cooperation

Australia-United States Force Posture Cooperation

Handling Note:

- Deputy Secretary Strategy, Policy, and Industry, Hugh Jeffrey, to lead on Australia-United States Force Posture Cooperation.
- First Assistant Secretary International Policy, Bernard Philip, to support on Australia-United States Forces Posture Cooperation.

Key Messages

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- The United States military presence and activities in Australia take place under the *Force Posture Agreement*, where access and use is on a rotational basis, mutually determined, and at Australia's invitation – with full respect for Australian and United States sovereignty.

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Talking Points

Australia-United States Force Posture Cooperation

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Force Posture Initiatives

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Additional Estimates February 2024
Last updated: 13 February 2024
Key witnesses: Hugh Jeffrey; Bernard Philip

Australia-United States Force Posture Cooperation

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At Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations on 29 July 2023 in Brisbane, Australia and the United States agreed to:

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– increase rotations of United States capabilities in Australia s22

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If asked: How does Australia know if the United States platforms in Australia are nuclear-armed (United States SSNs and B-52 and B-2 bombers)?

- Visits by United States strategic assets are consistent with our treaty obligations.
- Successive Australian Governments have respected the longstanding United States policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on their platforms.
- Australia will continue to fully comply with our international obligations and the United States understands and respects our obligations regarding nuclear weapons.
 - The United States does not station nuclear weapons in Australia. Stationing of nuclear weapons in Australia is prohibited by the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (known as the Treaty of Rarotonga), to which Australia remains committed.
 - There is no impediment under the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty or the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to the visit of dual-capable foreign aircraft to Australia's airfields or transiting Australia's airspace.

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Additional Estimates February 2024
Last updated: 13 February 2024
Key witnesses: Hugh Jeffrey; Bernard Philip

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Division: Strategy, Policy, and Industry and Group	
PDR No: EC23-005029	
Prepared by: Sally Timbs Assistant Secretary United States Alliance and International Force Posture Policy Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Brigadier Michael Say Director General Force Posture Initiatives Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 13 February 2024	Cleared by Division Head: Bernard Philip First Assistant Secretary International Policy Division Mob: s22 Ph: s47E(d) Date: 14 December 2023
Consultation: s47E(d) Deputy Director International Engagement (Army) s47E(d) International Engagement (Air Force) s47E(d) Deputy Director Navy International Engagement Ciril Karo First Assistant Secretary Defence Strategic Review Implementation Dan Fankhauser First Assistant Secretary Infrastructure s47E(d) Director Finance SP&I, JOC, and DIG	 Date: 24 January 2024 Date: 24 January 2024 Date: 24 January 2024 Date: 12 February 2024 Date: 12 February 2024 Date: 13 February 2024

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Supplementary Estimates October 2025

Last updated: 18 September 2025

Key witnesses: Hugh Jeffrey, Celia Perkins, LTGEN Natasha Fox AO CSC

GROUP-LEVEL BRIEF

US Force Posture Initiatives

Lead: *Mr Hugh Jeffrey, Deputy Secretary Strategy, Policy, and Industry Group.*

Supporting: *Ms Celia Perkins, Deputy Secretary Security and Estate Group, to support on project-specific estate queries.*

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Context: Australia's force posture cooperation with the United States has drawn commentary regarding Australia's sovereignty and potential implications of that cooperation in the event of regional conflict.

Key Messages

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- United States force posture cooperation in Australia takes place under the Force Posture Agreement, where access to and use of Australian facilities and areas is rotational, mutually determined, and at Australia's invitation – with full respect for Australian sovereignty.

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Talking Points

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Supplementary Estimates October 2025

Last updated: 18 September 2025

Key witnesses: Hugh Jeffrey, Celia Perkins, LTGEN Natasha Fox AO CSC

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Nuclear armaments on US strategic assets rotating through Australia (e.g. Nuclear-powered submarines, B-52 and B-2 bombers)

- . Visits by United States strategic assets are consistent with our treaty obligations.
- . Successive Australian Governments have understood and respected the longstanding US policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on particular platforms.
- . Australia will continue to comply with our international obligations and the United States understands and respects our obligations regarding nuclear weapons.
 - The United States does not station nuclear weapons in Australia. Stationing of nuclear weapons in Australia is prohibited by the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (the Treaty of Rarotonga), to which Australia remains committed.
 - There is no impediment under the Treaty of Rarotonga or the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to the visit of dual-capable foreign platforms to Australia's territory or transiting Australia's airspace or waters.

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Background

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- On 6 August 2024, at the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN), Australia and the United States agreed to:

- continue frequent rotations of bombers, s22
building on previous rotations at RAAF Bases s22
Tindal;

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Consultation: Nil.	
Cleared by DFG: Nil.	
Cleared by Deputy Secretary/3 Star:	
Mr Hugh Jeffrey Deputy Secretary Strategy, Policy, and Industry Group	Date: September 2025
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I confirm that all information in this brief is suitable for public release	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I confirm this brief follows the template guidance and checklist	

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