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AMERICAN BASES:
SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR
AUSTRALIAN SECURITY

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Since 1963, when the Menzies Government agreed to the establishment of the US naval communications station at North West Cape, the American installations in Australia have frequently been the subject of major political controversy. Most recently, of course, North West Cape was itself in the news again when, in May, it was revealed that the US planned to instal a new satellite ground station (designated AN/MSC-61) at the facility.

The May affair had a number of features typical of previous controversies involving the American bases. There was evident Government ignorance and misinformation. Even though the contract for the AN/MSC-61 had been let in the United States, the Australian Defence Minister had not been informed. There was a clear break-down in communications between the technical and policy areas in the Department of Defence. Instead of there being proper assessment of the strategic implications of the new installation, the policy areas were themselves also not informed. And it seems clear that the US was somewhat lax in fulfilling its obligations to provide the Australian Government with 'full and timely information about strategic and operational developments relevant to the station'.¹ Given the continued lack of candour on the part of the US Government and the extraordinary penchant for secrecy and evasiveness on the part of the Australian Government, it can only be expected that these controversies will recur.

¹ See text of a joint statement by the Minister for Defence Mr Barnard and the US Secretary of Defense, Dr Schlesinger, 10 January 1974, in the Canberra Times, 11 January 1974.

It is worthwhile then, to review again² the purposes and functions of the most significant of the American installations in Australia, and to survey some of the implications of these installations for Australian security.

The most recent list of American defence and scientific installations in Australia was provided by the Prime Minister in answer to a question on notice in the House on 2 November 1976³.

Listed were:

- (i) Naval Communications Station 'Harold E. Holt', North West Cape;
- (ii) Joint Defence Space Research Facility, Alice Springs, commonly known as Pine Gap;
- (iii) Joint Defence Space Communications Station, Woomera, commonly known as Nurrungar;
- (iv) NASA tracking stations at Orroral Valley, Honeysuckle Creek and Tidbinbilla, ACT;
- (v) Project Hibal Balloon Launching Station, Mildura;
- (vi) Joint Geological and Geophysical Research Station, Alice Springs, commonly known as USAF Detachment 421;
- (vii) Seismograph stations at Hobart, Adelaide, Charters Towers, Alice Springs, and Mundaring; and
- (viii) Seismic Research Observatory, Narrogin, W.A.

² For an earlier discussion, see Desmond Ball, 'American Bases in Australia: The Strategic Implications', Current Affairs Bulletin, (Vol. 51, No. 10), March 1975, pp. 4-17.

³ Hansard (House of Representatives), 2 November 1976, pp. 2255-2256.

Currently under construction are also a solar observatory at Learmonth, W.A., and an Omega VLF navigation station in Gippsland, Victoria. In addition, the American National Security Agency (NSA), the super-secret American electronic intelligence organization, operates from a number of electronic intelligence posts inside Australia. These reportedly include joint operations of NSA with the Australian Defence Signals Directorate (DSD), operated under the secret UKUSA Agreement of 1947, at Albert Park in Melbourne, Darwin, HMAS Harman near Canberra, Pearce Air Force Base near Perth, and Toowoomba; an NSA facility at the US Embassy in Canberra; and NSA operations at North West Cape, Pine Gap, and Nurrungar.⁴

These installations cover a wide range of American 'interests' in Australia - ranging from strategic intelligence, strategic support, regional defence to civilian cooperation. Most of them have some implications for some aspect of Australian national security policy. Some, like North West Cape, Pine Gap, and Nurrungar, have direct strategic and defence significance; others, such as the USAF Detachment 421 at Alice Springs perform intelligence functions; even those NASA stations wholly committed to the civilian space programme have important 'goodwill' and cooperation implications.

This article, however, focuses on the three more critical installations - North West Cape, Nurrungar and Pine Gap. These installations and their respective functions are described in turn.

⁴ Paul Kelly, 'NSA, the Biggest Secret Spy Network in Australia', The National Times, 23-28 May 1977, p.12.

North West Cape is presently one of the most important links in the US global defence network. According to official brochures, the base 'may serve several purposes. However, its main reason for existence is to maintain reliable communications with submarines of the US fleet serving in this area of the world [i.e., the Indian and Western Pacific Oceans]' - and, in particular, 'to provide communication for the US Navy's most powerful deterrent force - the nuclear powered ballistic missile submarine'.⁵ The VLF facility for communicating with the American submarines is the largest and most powerful of the three principal VLF stations in the US world-wide submarine communication system - the other two are Jim Creek, Washington, and Cutler, Maine.

North West Cape also has an array of high frequency transmitters which are extremely important to US military operations, as was dramatically illustrated during the American mining of Haiphong and other North Vietnamese harbours in 1972, when the high frequency site on the base was fully committed.⁶ This capability will be greatly enhanced with the installation of the AN/MSC-61 satellite ground station, which will tie North West Cape into Phase III of the US Defense Satellite Communications System (DSCS III).⁷

⁵ Welcome Aboard the U.S. Naval Communications Station Harold E. Holt - a booklet for personnel newly assigned to North West Cape, preface and pp. 10-11; see also North West Cape, (Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, January 1968), pp. 5-6.

⁶ See Frank Cranston, 'Value of Base to US Operations', Canberra Times, 12 April 1973, p.11.

⁷ See Ian Reinecke, 'What US Plans at North West Cape', Australian Financial Review, 19 May 1978, pp. 1, 4, 38.

Also, some time in the late 1960s North West Cape became host to an operation of the Naval Security Group (NSG)⁸, the largest component of the NSA. The NSA facility at North West Cape is apparently a four-point log-periodic VLF electronic intelligence receiver, for monitoring Soviet submarine communications from Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, etc..

Nurrungar, which is located within the Woomera restricted area, about 480 km. (300 miles) north-west of Adelaide, is one of two ground stations for the American satellite early warning system. Officially known as the USAFs Space and Missile Systems Organization (SAMSO) Detachment 2, Nurrungar provides a real-time data link between the North American Air Defence Command (NORAD), the Strategic Air Command (SAC) and the National Military Command System on the one hand, and the satellite early-warning system on the other hand. (The second ground station for the system is at Buckley, Colorado.) Data are derived from infra-red, charged particle and radiation sensors aboard the geostationary satellites of the 647 or Defense Support Program, which detect missile firings shortly after lift-off.⁹ Program 647 is now 'the most important' system which the US relies on for early warning of ballistic missile attack.¹⁰

⁸ Joint hearings before the Subcommittee on Military Construction of the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, Military Construction Authorization, Fiscal Year 1973, (May-June 1972), p. 299.

⁹ See Barry Miller, 'US Moves to Upgrade Missile Warning', Aviation Week and Space Technology, 2 December 1974, pp. 16-18.

¹⁰ Secretary of Defense, James R. Schlesinger, Annual Defense Department Report, F.Y. 1975, 4 March 1974 (US Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1974), pp. 72-73.

The Pine Gap facility, which became operational in 1969, is located 19 km. (12 miles) south-west of Alice Springs. The 'business end' of the facility currently consists of five large radomes, various other antennae, and an enormous computer complex.

Pine Gap is controlled by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), although its operations also involve extensive participation of the NSA. According to a telegram of 10 November 1975 from the ASIO liaison officer in Washington to the Director-General of ASIO in Melbourne, read into Hansard by Mr Whitlam on 5 May 1977, the successive American officers in charge of Pine Gap have all been senior officers of the CIA.¹¹

A wide range of intelligence activities are evidently undertaken, monitored, and collated at Pine Gap. According to Victor Marchetti, former executive assistant to the deputy director of the CIA and co-author of the secret Pine Gap agreement, Pine Gap was originally established as part of Project Rhyolite. Marchetti has described Rhyolite as involving a single, geostationary satellite, stationed at 22,300 miles above Borneo, capable of 'sucking up like a vacuum cleaner' a wide spectrum of Soviet and Chinese military communications and radar transmissions and beaming them back down to Pine Gap.¹²

Other CIA projects reportedly involving Pine Gap include Projects Pyramider and Argus. Project Pyramider was described

¹¹ Hansard (House of Representatives), 4 May 1977, pp. 1520-1521.

¹² See The Sun (Sydney), 4 May 1977, p.45, and Four Corners, (Australian Broadcasting Commission), transcript, pp. 3-4.

during the Boyce trial in Los Angeles in 1977 as consisting of a number of satellites, controlled through Pine Gap, which would enable CIA agents in the field, including those in the Soviet Union and China, to communicate directly with CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Although Project Pyramider did not itself become operational, the CIA does have some similar system currently in use. Project Argus was apparently undertaken in the mid-1970s, in some degree as a follow-on to Rhyolite. Very little is known about Argus, although it apparently involved the addition of the fifth radome and a major expansion of the computer facilities at Pine Gap.

Various other antennae at the facility, including a long high-frequency (HF) dipole array, permit the interception of a wide range of communications and other electronic signals which emanate from Australia's northern neighbours. Indeed, it has been speculated that Australia's internal communications are not exempt from this operation.¹³

There is no doubt about the extreme importance of Pine Gap. As the CIA informed ASIO in November 1975, Pine Gap is 'vital to both of our services and countries!'¹⁴

The following discussion of some of the implications of the American bases for various aspects of Australia's security is divided under five heads:

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Hansard (H. of R.), 4 May 1977, p.1521.

1. The Strategic Implications

For discussion purposes, the strategic implications of the 'joint' installations can be divided into two sorts - the global strategic implications, i.e., those for the central Soviet-American strategic relationship; and the strategic implications for Australia itself - recognizing, of course, that these are not independent.

First, with regard to the global strategic implications, it is part of the conventional wisdom that the American defence and intelligence installations in Australia are stabilising, i.e., that they contribute to greater international strategic stability. The argument with regard to submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) systems is that they lack the accuracy and the required command and control characteristics to be anything other than a 'second-strike' weapon, and are therefore an 'ideal' deterrent system. The argument with regard to satellite reconnaissance, electronic intelligence and early warning systems is that they support deterrence by making a surprise 'first-strike' impossible.

These arguments - those relating to both SLBM systems and intelligence and early-warning satellite systems - are correct so far as they go. Unfortunately, however, developments in strategic weapons technology and strategic doctrine have made them obsolescent - and endowed the American defence installations in Australia with more destabilising strategic implications.

SLBM systems, for example, now have much more than a purely counter-city deterrent capability - they now have, in other words, a hard target, 'time urgent', counterforce capability. This means that the conventional assumptions about SLBM systems need to be

re-thought - for the strategic implications of systems with potential counterforce capabilities are obviously much different from those of purely deterrent systems. They are, at the very least, and for a variety of reasons, destabilising - as are the communications stations which are prepared to serve more than purely deterrent missions.¹⁵

And with regard to the intelligence and early warning systems, it is now clear that these are involved in much more than the simple deterrence of surprise attack. They are, for example, used for the identification and precise location of targets necessary for the planning of counterforce attacks, as well as for the continuous real-time monitoring of Soviet missile silos and bomber bases, command and control centres, etc., necessary for the slow-motion counterforce exchanges envisaged in current US strategic nuclear war-fighting doctrine. If these capabilities are considered inimical to the maintenance of deterrence, then so are the intelligence systems on which they necessarily depend.

The strategic implications for Australia of the American bases are not independent of these global strategic developments. The global strategic situation today is much less stable than it was a decade ago. The attempts by both the United States and the Soviet Union to realize the strategic potential of counterforce attacks and of selective and flexible responses has undoubtedly increased the probability of nuclear war. And at least to some extent, pari passu with the increase in the general probability of nuclear war, the probability of Australia's involvement in such a war is increased.

¹⁵ See Desmond J. Ball, 'The Counterforce Potential of American SLBM Systems', Journal of Peace Research, No.1, 1977, pp. 23-40.

Moreover, given current developments in strategic weapons technology and in strategic nuclear war-fighting doctrines, this is further increased by the presence of the US installations on Australian territory. North West Cape, Pine Gap and Nurrungar are certainly significant enough to be targets in their own right. There are many situations in which the taking out of one (or more) of these would degrade the American strategic capability more than would an actual attack on the strategic forces themselves - and even more situations where some measures to reduce or limit damage from nuclear attack could be achieved.

These observations are apparently supported by several recent statements by both American and Australian defence officials. For example, Donald Rumsfeld, then the US Secretary of Defense, testified to Congress on 17 January last year that:

'Space-based systems offer many inherent advantages over ground or air-based systems and, as space technology matures, these systems will undoubtedly play an increasing role in support of U.S. and Soviet military operations. As military dependence on space grows, the loss of key space systems could materially influence the outcome of future conflicts.' ¹⁶

It follows from this that the command and control stations for these space systems are no longer the 'relative sanctuary' they were in the past. ¹⁷

With regard to the naval communication station at North West Cape, there is considerable official American testimony to its

¹⁶ Report of Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld to the Congress on the F.Y. 1978 Budget, 17 January 1977, pp. 137-138.

¹⁷ Ibid..

likelihood of being a target. For example, Admiral Kaufman testified in April last year that "we have to assume that an attack will be made on our communications facilities".¹⁸ More directly, in secret testimony declassified in 1975, former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger said that one of the most likely targets in a limited nuclear counterforce exchange is the VLF naval communications station at Cutler, Maine.¹⁹ He might just as easily have said North West Cape!

Finally, it was reported in 1976 that the possibility of North West Cape being a nuclear target was officially acknowledged by senior Australian defence planners in the preparation of the Australian Strategic Analysis and Policy Objectives of 1976, the document which currently provides the strategic guidance for all Australian defence planning.²⁰

2. The Defence of Australia

The conventional wisdom in Australia with regard to the US installations and Australia's defence is that Australia - because of its enormous size but limited budgetary resources and population - can only defend itself with the active assistance of the United States, and that the presence of the US facilities on Australia's soil commits it to such assistance.

¹⁸ Senate Armed Services Committee, Fiscal Year 1978 Authorization for Military Procurement, (Part 10, April 1977), p. 6734.

¹⁹ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Briefing on Counterforce Attacks, (Secret hearing held on 11 September 1974, sanitized and made public on 10 January 1975), pp. 29, 53.

²⁰ See Andrew Clark, "Why We Are a Nuclear Target", The National Times, 31 May - 5 June 1976, pp. 1, 25.

There are two associated arguments which need to be considered here - that the American facilities commit the US to the defence of Australia, and that such American commitment is necessary for the defence of Australia.

The argument that the American facilities commit the US to the defence of Australia was made explicit in the relevant passage in the 1971 Strategic Basis:

The ultimate US commitment is not in doubt and US strategic interest in Australia is enhanced by our growing importance to the US for defence and space purposes.²¹

(A similar logic underlay Australia's support for the US south-east Asian commitment in the mid-1960s and, more recently, in the Australian proposal for joint naval operations in the Indian Ocean and an increased Australian air and sea activity in that Ocean.)

The other side of this argument is that the removal of the US installations, if done at Australia's insistence, would lead to a US denial of this commitment and, at least effectively, an abrogation of the ANZUS treaty.

The evidence for this latter argument is rather slim. It was hinted at by President Nixon in February 1973, before the new Labor Government's acceptance of the facilities was realized in Washington, but whether it was really seriously considered is rather doubtful.

The argument that the forced removal of the facilities would lead to the abrogation of ANZUS actually contains a non-sequiter - and the reasoning linking the two actions has never been fully explicated.

²¹ Cited in 'A New Top Secret Basis for a New Defence Policy', The National Times, 25-30 June 1973, p.7.

Certainly, the American Defense establishment has on at least one occasion (November-December 1975) given serious consideration to the thought that, 'since Australia is rapidly becoming a politically unstable country', the facilities should perhaps be moved.²² The idea of abrogating ANZUS in a related move apparently did not occur at that time.

Much would really depend on exactly how the Australian Government actually went about removing the facilities. A number of options are available which would minimize American resentment and retaliation in the event of such action. These include not just termination following notice given in accordance with the formulae contained in the respective agreements, but also the negotiation of premature termination.²³

The particular argument that the US facilities commit the United States to Australia's defence rests on two assumptions. One is that these installations are vital to US security. And, certainly, there is no question but that North-West Cape, Pine Gap, and Nurrungar at least are extremely important.²⁴ This importance was confirmed in the ASIO cable of 10 November 1975, in which the CIA was reported to have described the installations as 'vital',²⁵

²² Washington Post, 28 December 1975, editorial. See also The National Times, 17-22 November 1975, p.3.

²³ See Peter King, 'Credibility and Other Gaps', in Robert O'Neill, (ed.), The Strategic Nuclear Balance: An Australian Perspective, (Australian National University, Canberra, 1975), pp. 127-129.

²⁴ See Current Affairs Bulletin, March 1975, pp. 7-10.

²⁵ Hansard (H. of R.), 4 May 1977, p. 1521.

and in other aspects of the so-called 'security crisis' of November 1975; for example, Sir Arthur Tange is reported to have told a member of the Prime Minister's staff on 10 November that Mr Whitlam's linking of the CIA to Pine Gap was 'the gravest risk to the nation's security there has ever been'.²⁶ More recently, an officer of the US Naval Facilities Engineering Command testified before a Congressional Sub-Committee in March this year that North West Cape was

a vital link not only in fleet communications but also the defence communications system.²⁷

As the 1975 Strategic Basis noted, 'the US has repeatedly made clear the value it attaches to the defence facilities it maintains in Australia'.²⁸

The other assumption here is that US interests in Australia, at least with the presence of 'joint' defence and space facilities, are sufficiently similar to Australia's own national interests as to ensure an American military commitment in all emergencies. It is being increasingly acknowledged, however, that this may not be the case. Prime Minister Fraser stated on 1 June 1976, for example, that 'the interests of the United States and the interests of

²⁶ See Paul Kelly, The Unmaking of Gough, (Angus and Robertson, Melbourne, 1976), p.32.

²⁷ Testimony of Mr W.K. Taylor before the Military Construction Appropriations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, March 1978, cited in The National Times, 8 July 1978, p.30

²⁸ Cited in Alan Reid, 'Top Secret: Our Defence Planning', The Bulletin, 12 June 1976, p.19.

Australia are not necessarily identical';²⁹ this reflects the assessment in the 1975 Strategic Basis that, while Australia's natural major ally is the United States, 'this does not mean that in all circumstances Australia must support the United States or can expect to be supported by it'.³⁰

Indeed, it is possible to explicate a number of scenarios in which US policy would be at best ambivalent in certain emergencies involving Australia, notwithstanding the presence of its facilities on Australian territory. Whether or not American support would be forthcoming in any contingency would depend on a number of factors including the specific identity of the notional adversary, and in particular the nature of the relationship between the United States and that adversary; the nature of the issue at the basis of the controversy, and particularly the position of the United States Government on that issue; whether or not Australia or the notional adversary was responsible for the issue leading to conflict; the level of the contingency in terms of both Australia's basic national integrity and the nature of the American commitment required; and whether the United States Government believed that Australia had made sufficient effort to defend itself on the basis of its own resources. It is clearly possible that if the notional adversary gave the United States some guarantee about non-interference with the American installations, those installations would not by themselves lead to automatic support of Australia.

²⁹ Hansard, (H. of R.), 1 June 1976, p. 2738.

³⁰ Cited in Alan Reid, 'Top Secret: Our Defence Planning', The Bulletin, 12 June 1976, p.18.

The second argument relevant here is that the US commitment is necessary for the defence of Australia. This argument derives from the conventional wisdom that Australia cannot defend itself from its own resources. (There are actually two versions of this argument - one, that Australia's limited population and defence resources make an independent defence effort physically impossible; the other, that while such an effort is theoretically conceivable, it is not possible with the present strategic policy and doctrine and associated force structure, and that the alternatives to these are too costly and difficult to implement.)

This conventional wisdom has never been supported by any force-on-force calculations. On the contrary, it can be argued that 'there is no doubt that Australia, using its own resources, could be defended against [all regional powers] if those resources are allocated wisely'.³¹ Indeed, it may be that the American connection is a positive obstacle to the new ways of thinking and the restructuring of the Australian force posture that are necessary if such self-reliance is to be achieved.

It is possible to identify several relationships between the American connection and the difficulties of implementing an independent Australian defence effort. On the one hand, there are strong American interests and pressures working against the adoption of an independent continental defence posture; and on the other hand, there are strong bureaucratic interests and pressures working in support of a closer US connection.

³¹ Ross Babbage, Desmond Ball, J.O. Langtry and Robert O'Neill, The Development of Australian Army Officers for the 1980s, (Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No.17, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 1978), p.8.

Some of the relevant American interests and pressures against an independent continental defence posture are as follows: such a posture makes Australia less dependent on the United States and therefore a less reliable supporter of American global foreign and defence policies; there is the argument that the adoption of such a posture is an apparently selfish act - Australia only wants an American presence when it is imminently threatened by a great power; Australia would not be able to fulfil its obligations under ANZUS to come to the assistance of its Treaty allies outside of Australian territory and its immediate surroundings; and, of course, a truly independent continental defence posture would require the removal of the American defence and space installations from Australian territory.

These points are generally reflected in some form within the Australian defence bureaucracy - a dominantly pro-American organization to begin with. Maintaining the American connection means not having to think seriously about continental defence, and hence not having to 'rock the boat'. And hosting the American defence installations guarantees American commitment to Australia. In fact, somewhat ironically, those arrangements negotiated by Mr Barnard and senior Australian Defence officials under the Labor Government by which Australia now has more access to the intelligence information received and correlated at the US facilities have meant committing the Australian Defence bureaucracy even more to the American connection.

3. The Intelligence Relationship

One argument which is quite often put forward by Defence officials in favour of the presence of the US installations is the intelligence 'spin-off' which accrues to the Australian defence establishment.

It is apparently true that Australia is quite dependent upon the United States for much of its intelligence; it may be, as some Defence officials often assert, that the US is quite generous in the amount and quality of intelligence material which it 'shares' with Australia; and it also may be the case that, especially in such areas as new developments in weapons technology and regional political developments, such intelligence is quite critical for Australian defence planning.

There are, however, a number of very important questions which need to be answered before this argument can be assessed. First, how much of this intelligence relationship is dependent upon the bases? It is clear that the regard for these facilities is at least an index of that relationship - in November 1975, for example, because of the then-Prime Minister's references to the former officer-in-charge of Pine Gap, Richard Lee Stallings, the CIA questioned whether this signalled some change on Australia's side in bilateral security intelligence relations between the two countries.³² But the Australian-American intelligence relationship is much older and much broader than the associations through the 'joint' facilities. It dates back at least as far as the Second World War and extends to areas which have absolutely no connection with the bases (eg CIA-ASIS and NSA-DSD co-operation abroad).

³² Hansard, (H. of R.), 4 May 1977, p. 1521.

Second, how much of the intelligence that comes through the 'joint' facilities does Australia actually see. It may be that much of this is at the discretion of the American intelligence agencies. Indeed, it has been alleged not only that the United States is quite selective in the intelligence that it passes on to Australia, but that Project Argus at Pine Gap was specifically 'designed by the CIA to cut the Australians out of certain information acquired' at that facility.³³

There is also a question as to whether Australia in fact has access to the nuclear test data received at the USAF Detachment 421 at Alice Springs and from satellite sensors through Pine Gap. These stations do provide 'prompt, reliable and comprehensive information' on French and Chinese atmospheric nuclear testing, but Australian Prime Ministers have never been prompt in announcing either Chinese or French tests - they have consistently been scooped by the New Zealand and Japanese governments, whose monitoring devices are much less sophisticated than those at the American facilities in Australia - and they never give any positive details about these tests.³⁴

³³ Victor Marchetti, interviewed on Four Corners, 17 May 1977, transcript p. 4. For the allegations of Christopher Boyce to the effect that Pine Gap involves some deception of Australia, see United States of America versus Christopher John Boyce, (U.S. District Court, No. CR 77 - 121 - RJK, Los Angeles), 26-27 April 1977, reporter's transcript of proceedings, pp. 34-38, 182-192.

³⁴ See, for example, Brian Toohey, 'US Base Missed that Bomb', Australian Financial Review, 26 July 1973, pp. 1, 6.
For further discussion of the difficulties Australia has encountered in obtaining access to the intelligence obtained through the USAF Detachment 421 station, see Paul Kelly, 'New Doubts Raised About US Bases', The National Times, 6-11 March 1978.

It also seems that the US facilities have been involved in external military activities several times without the knowledge (or consent) of the Australian government. There was, for example, the full commitment of North West Cape's high frequency transmitters to the service of the American mining of Haiphong and other North Vietnamese harbours in 1972. A Defence Department dossier leaked at the ALPs Federal Conference in July 1973 asserted that satellites controlled through Australian ground stations were being used to pin-point targets for American bombing raids in Cambodia at that time. And it appears that during the Middle East War of October 1973, Pine Gap and Nurrungar, as well as North-West Cape, were placed on alert on October 11, or five days after the war began and two weeks before the US general alert of October 25.

Australian ground stations were apparently used for relaying American satellite reconnaissance photographs of the Middle East conflict to the United States, at least some of which were passed on to the Israelis, all without the knowledge of the Australian government.³⁵ North-West Cape itself was used on October 25 to communicate the US general alert to American installations and forces in the Indo-Pacific region. It was apparently only with this communication that the Australian government first learnt that any bases in Australia were involved in the alert;

³⁵ See John Edwards, "US Puts its Bases Here on Full Alert", Sunday Telegraph 21 October 1973, p.5; Brian Toohey, "Bases Bogey Plagues Government", Australian Financial Review, 21 November, 1973, pp.1 & 5; "Big Bird is Watching", The Australian, 22 October 1973, p.7; and Mr Whitlam's comments at his 8 November press conference, Canberra Times, 9 November 1973, p.11.

Australia was not even told this until the alert had been implemented.³⁶

The discretion which the US apparently has in deciding what intelligence material can be passed on to Australia obviously gives the US great influence in Australian defence policy-making; the threat of cutting-off the intelligence flow to Australia allows the US to bring great pressure to bear on Australian policy. It is known that American threats to cut off the intelligence flow were made in the late 1940s³⁷ and again, two or three times, during Labor's term in office from 1972 to 1975.³⁸ Although a senior ASIO officer has reportedly told The Bulletin that the flow was in fact severed for some time in 1973,³⁹ this has been denied by James Angleton, Chief of CIA Counterintelligence at the time;⁴⁰ according to Angleton, severance of the intelligence relationship was considered but the US 'received assurances' from the Australian Government that certain attitudes, actions and policies would not be continued - despite the fact that the Labor Government had never done other than pursue its lawful prerogatives.

³⁶ See Sydney Morning Herald, 22 November 1973, p.10.

³⁷ See Alan Stretton, Soldier in a Storm, (Collins, Sydney, 1971), pp. 76-77.

³⁸ See 'The CIA, Labor & ASIO', The Bulletin, 5 June 1976, pp. 14-16.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁰ See interview with James Angleton on the ABC programme Correspondents Report, 12 June 1977, transcript reprinted in Denis Freney, The CIA's Australian Connection, (1977), pp. 75-80.

Third, how much of the intelligence that Australia receives from the United States is really needed by the Australian defence establishment? It may be that, the quality and quantity of the intelligence flow notwithstanding, much of this intelligence is not really relevant to Australia's essential defence needs. The accuracy of Soviet ICBMs as revealed in their latest missile tests is nice to know, but reams of such intelligence have swamped the more critical efforts to determine the orders of battle of our potential adversaries and build up a data base on physical aspects of the Australian continent and the environment of future Australian military operations.

And fourth, how much of the intelligence that Australia really does need could it gather from independent national technical and other means of its own design and deployment? Australia already has much expertise in this area, both within and outside the official intelligence community. The development of an Australian satellite photographic intelligence capability and the further development of indigenous electronic intelligence activities should perhaps be pursued in an attempt at greater independence.

Whatever, it is clear that the relationship between the 'joint' facilities and foreign intelligence operations in Australia is not a healthy one. It was probably only coincidence that the 'security crisis' of November 1975 has become connected with the constitutional/political crisis. But the only way of avoiding such 'connections' is by breaking the nexus between the 'defence' installations and foreign security and intelligence operations in Australia.

4. US Installations and Australian Foreign Policy

Compared to many of the other facets of the American connection, the US installations may be of only secondary importance in their implications for Australian foreign policy. It is clear, however, that their presence does constrain any independent Australian policy.⁴¹

On the one hand, they do make it difficult for any Australian Government to move to extricate Australian policy from association with and dependence upon the United States.

And, on the other hand, they make a number of the proposals for greater regional co-operation difficult to implement. Mrs Gandhi explicitly referred to North West Cape and Pine Gap when she rebuffed Mr Whitlam's idea of a 'zone of peace' in 1973. How sincere was he, she asked, when Australia continued to house American strategic command and control facilities? She, at least, could not seriously consider the idea while North West Cape and Pine Gap remained. And how could the other Indo-Pacific countries be expected to support Australia's proposal when it allows American ground stations from which the United States spies on their internal affairs? Pine Gap and Nurrungar are involved in continuous monitoring of China, and it has even been suggested that photographic and electronic intelligence received through these ground stations was used in the US bombing of Cambodia. Australia's playing host to the US base at North West Cape also caused problems with its

⁴¹ This point is discussed in greater detail in my 'Political Constraints on Defence and Foreign Policy Making', in Roger Scott and J.L. Richardson, (eds.), The First Thousand Days of Labor, (Australasian Political Science Association, Canberra, 1975), pp. 266-286.

strong support for the Sri Lanka proposal in the United Nations to declare the Indian Ocean a zone of peace. The Sri Lanka Ambassador to the United Nations told the General Assembly on 11 October 1972 that the ultimate objective of the Sri Lanka proposal 'was the removal of all foreign bases from countries of the Indian Ocean'. Again, the bases made the 'neutralization' declaration of the former Labor Government an empty slogan.

The Defence Department is aware that the American connection conflicts with some of the proposals for greater regional co-operation - and, indeed, that it has induced some differences in defence matters between Australia and our other closest ally, New Zealand. As the 1975 Strategic Basis states:

New Zealand's efforts to promote a nuclear-free zone in the south Pacific are detrimental to Australia's security interests. The United States has recently made clear its objections to New Zealand's nuclear-free zone proposal and its dissatisfaction that an ANZUS ally should persist on a course which the US has declared harmful to its interests. New Zealand's co-operation with us is highly desirable but there are some New Zealand attitudes on defence matters which impose some limits to the cooperation between Australia and New Zealand on strategic and defence matters.⁴²

The removal of the US installations would not only simultaneously remove a major obstacle to greater regional cooperation but would also allow Australia to pursue a much more independent foreign policy generally.

⁴² See Alan Reid, 'Top Secret: Our Defence Planning', The Bulletin, 12 June 1976, p.18.

5. Some Implications of the North West Cape Controversy
of May 1978:

In March 1977, the US Congress was informed by the Pentagon that a contract was to be let in August 1977 for 21 AN/MSC-61 ground stations for the DSCS III system, and that one of these stations (which each cost somewhat more than \$1m.) was to be deployed at North West Cape. Construction of the new facility was to begin at North West Cape in late 1978, and to be completed by the end of 1980; the new terminal was to be operation in early 1981.⁴³

Although certain senior military officers within the Department of Defence (including the Australian Deputy Commander at North West Cape) had been informed of the new development, the first the Australian Government and the Parliament knew of it was a report in the Australian Financial Review of 8 May.⁴⁴ Indeed, it took the Minister for Defence several days to determine that a new ground station was in fact destined for North West Cape. His initial response then was to indict the US was not treating Australia 'with the proper courtesy'.⁴⁵ However, when it became clear that at least some Australian officials had been apprised

⁴³ See House Appropriations Committee, Hearings on Military Construction Fiscal Year 1978, (1977, Part 2), pp. 182-183.

⁴⁴ See Brian Toohey, 'Australia Gets New US Defence Station', Australian Financial Review, 8 May 1978, pp. 1, 16.

⁴⁵ Interview on AM, 15 May 1978, transcript, p.6.

of the proposed new terminal, he turned his attention to the Department of Defence; on 25 May he told Parliament that the failure of the technical levels to further apprise the policy levels was a serious 'blemish' on the Department and that an instruction had 'been issued to all senior officers to be a little more alert about the [North West Cape] issue'.⁴⁶

These events raise some quite disturbing questions. What is meant by the term 'joint' facility? What are the procedures for communicating between the United States Government and the Defence Department on American interests regarding the North West Cape facility? What is the situation regarding the monitoring of US communications traffic through the facility? What is meant by the term 'up-date'? When do technical issues become matters for policy consideration? And what consultation took place over the transition in the strategic role of the US FBM submarines using the North West Cape facility? Two of these questions warrant especial comment.

First, the American actions make it clear that North West Cape is far from being a 'joint' facility. While the term 'joint' has never been officially defined, it clearly must mean more than simply that Australia has to be 'informed' or 'consulted' about new technical or operational developments. Indeed, if North West Cape was truly 'joint', then there would not even be a question of 'consultation'. Joint should mean that both parties would, at all times, be in continuous and fully candid discussion over all aspects of the installation. In this case, the idea of installing new

⁴⁶ Hansard, (H. of R.), 25 May 1978, p. 2457.

equipment would have originated from a joint technical group and the actual specifications would have been drawn up by a joint group. The implications of the new system for the functions of the base and for the general questions of Australian-American strategic relations would have been considered by a joint policy group.

The most candid statement on the actual relationship at North West Cape was made in Congressional testimony in March this year.

Admiral Iselin, of the US Navy, when asked whether North West Cape was a joint facility, replied: 'No, it is our complex. There are a very, very small number of Australians who help man the base'.⁴⁷

The second question relates to the ability of the Australian defence establishment to appreciate the strategic implications of technological change. It is clear that the senior military officers who had been apprised of the MSC-61 proposal lacked the ability to perceive any policy significance in the change.

More significantly, the policy levels themselves are seriously deficient. There is a complete lack of any recognition that a succession of 'technical up-dates' can radically change the function (and hence the strategic significance) of a facility from that defined in the original agreement. Such change has apparently occurred at both North West Cape and Pine Gap.^N

The transition in the strategic role of the US FBM submarines using the North West Cape facility, involving the acquisition by SLBMs of a quite significant counterforce potential, making them a first-strike weapon and a destabilizing factor in the global

⁴⁷ Cited in 'The State of the Defence Alliance', The National Times, 8 July 1978, p.30.

strategic balance, has taken place without any appreciation on the part of the Australian Department of Defence.

These questions alone are sufficiently disturbing to suggest that, at the very least, serious consideration should be given to the options available to Australia for removing the American installations, and to the implications for Australian security of such action.

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