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AUSTRALIA, THE U.S., AND THE STRATEGIC BALANCE: Some Comments on the Joint Facilities

by

H.G.Gelber

1982

The Research School of Pacific Studies
The Australian National University, Canberra

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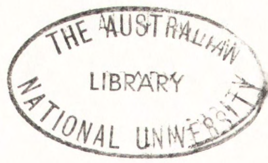
ABSTRACT

The author traces the history of Australia's increasing involvement with the strategic and intelligence systems of the major Western powers since the realignment of the world balance after World War II.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THE OPENING PHASE

Australia's involvement with the strategic and intelligence systems of the major Western powers has become steadily closer and more complex since the second World War. The first stages of the involvement coincided with the realignment of the world balance of power which followed that conflict, and the congealing of fronts in the Cold War. The split between the West and the Soviet Union, which Chifley and Evatt regarded as a tragedy, became the major fact of international politics. Fear of Communist influence and power was stimulated by the failed foreign Ministers' conferences of 1946 and 1947; by Soviet policies in Eastern Europe, from the elimination of opposition to Communist rule to the show trials of "bourgeois nationalists"; by the spy trials in the West; by the experience of the Berlin blockade; by Soviet opposition to the Marshall Plan; and by the formation of NATO. Within Australia, wartime sympathies for the Soviet Union waned and Communist influence, notably in the trade Unions, began to cause widespread concern.

The policies of the Chifley Government were composed, as policies often are, of different and sometimes contradictory elements. Though it was evident that Australian security could no longer rest principally or solely on British power, it was far from clear that Britain's role in the Asian-Pacific region was played out. Chifley and his colleagues felt close to the British Government, not only because it was a fellow-Labour administration or because of Commonwealth sentiment, but because they wanted to balance Australian links with the United States and provide an alternative in the event of renewed US isolationism. The Government sympathised with anti-colonialism and gave active help to Indonesian independence. But it also supported Britain and the Malayan authorities against Communist insurgency.

Chifley, and perhaps Evatt, regarded the US with ambivalence, a mixture of admiration and suspicion. But if they were wary of the US, they also accepted the conditions of the containment of Communist power and, in particular, American predominance in the Pacific. They were conscious of the pre-war history of failed Australian attempts to involve the Americans in Pacific security commitments and particularly in guarantees to Australia. They had recent memories of the US and British refusal to accept Australia's claims to be seen as a party principal in the Pacific war and the post-war settlement. But they renewed the attempt, throughout the postwar years, to formalise American support for Australia's basic security interests, preferably through a broad Pacific security pact which would also involve the Commonwealth and especially the British.

The general thrust of these policies was strengthened following the change of Government in 1949. By the end of that year the division of Europe had been consolidated but, in addition, the Soviet Union had exploded an atomic bomb - several years before that had been thought probable - Mao Zedong had become the ruler of China and a series of Communist insurrections had broken out in parts of Southeast Asia. The new Minister for External Affairs, Percy Spender, told the House of Representatives in March 1950 that:

> "(a) Soviet Russia's foreign policy is essentially global in character. There is a necessary interdependence, recognised by it perhaps more than by any other nation, between European and Asiatic policies ....
>
> (b) Its ultimate objective is world Communism .... with Moscow as the controlling centre ....
>
> (c) Its immediate purpose is to work towards its ultimate

> objective by communist infiltration in all democratic countries - organised from the centre, Moscow - so creating unrest, causing economic disruption and discrediting Governments...."[1]

A month earlier he had called for the urgent conclusion of a Pacific pact, whose members he envisaged as being Australia, New Zealand and Britain, possibly together with Canada and the US. By March, the shape of the proposal included the US as an essential member; but Washington remained wary of a proposal which did not include, among others, Japan, whose membership would at one and the same time guarantee Japanese security and the security of others against Japan.

In the meantime, Australian military, security and intelligence cooperation with allies was growing steadily. For the first decade after 1945 the British connection was of primary importance. It came to involve not just the traditionally close links in foreign policy and political information, but defence science, including advanced weapons research, and links between intelligence services. As early as November 1946 the Australian Government, following a visit by British rocket experts, announced proposals for the establishment, jointly with Britain, of an experimental rocket and guided missile range at Woomera, South Australia. The "Joint United Kingdom-Australia Long Range Weapons Project" engaged initially in ballistic testing for bombs and in testing anti-aircraft guided weapons. It later acquired tasks to do with air-to-ground and air-to-air and ground-to-ground missile systems and in the area of upper atmosphere research.

On the intelligence side, some important links had been created or expanded during the war. In 1939, Australia seems to have had little

more than a small cryptographic unit working in Singapore with a British electronic intercept and cryptography group; a station outside Canberra, operated by the Navy and designed to monitor diplomatic traffic; access to the defence communications links of the British Empire; and general information from London. But during the war a number of electronic listening stations were established in various parts of Australia and over 20 allied intelligence organisations became involved in activities conducted from Australian soil. There is no simple historical connection between these wartime activities and the post-war establishment of Australian-allied intelligence links. Nevertheless, the organisation, activities and links stemming from Australia's role as the centre of Allied intelligence operations in the Southwest Pacific probably helped in a general sense to create a basis for these links in the following decade. The most important ones stemmed from the Australian Government's agreement, in 1948, to set up a Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB) in Melbourne, as part of a network of JIBs which also included London, Ottawa and Wellington. Originally set up to repair previous general deficiencies in the available information base, the Melbourne JIB became the basis for Australia's strategic intelligence efforts in later years, and the forerunner of the Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO) and the Office of National Assessments (ONA). In addition to the development of intelligence proper - which includes assessment - there was an expansion of information collection. Notably, there was Australia's role in the post-war allied system for collecting electronic intelligence, formalised by the UKUSA agreement of 1947.[2] Under this, the USA, Britain, Canada and Australia, as the four "principal parties", agreed to cooperate in certain intelligence activities, mostly in the areas of communications and signals. The major participating agencies were (or became), the United

States National Security Agency (NSA), established in 1952, the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and, on the Australian side, the Defence Signals Directorate (DSD).[3]

As a complement to these activities, Australian foreign intelligence and internal security activities were strengthened. On the security side, there had existed since 1917 a Commonwealth Investigation Branch (later the Commonwealth Investigation Service) to look after Commonwealth law enforcement and security. By the later 1940s fresh arrangements had become necessary, partly because of real or alleged leaks of information from Canberra and American worries about passing sensitive information, including atomic information, to London whence it would reach the Australians. In March 1949 the Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, established the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) to protect the Australian Commonwealth against espionage, sabotage and subversion. ASIO was given a variety of tasks, notably in relation to the collection and evaluation of intelligence on security matters, and given special powers, including the right to conduct telephone intercepts. On the foreign intelligence side, preliminary conversations between Australian and British officials and initiatives by Ministers like Richard Casey led to a detailed submission to Government around April 1950, proposing the formation of what was to become the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS).[4] Both ASIO and ASIS were formed with advice and help from British and US agencies, notably MI5 and 6 and the new Central Intelligence Agency. These links, stemming from the foundation of the Australian services, appear to have been strengthened by time and experience and to have given Australia connections, and access, which security and intelligence officials have repeatedly claimed to be both invaluable and irreplaceable.

Before these plans could come to fruition there came the Korean war, which changed many things. The almost instant diplomatic and military help which Australia rendered to the US earned substantial goodwill from the Americans in general and from President Truman in particular.[5] The notion of a Pacific pact and of American security guarantees for Australia suddenly moved into the realm of the feasible. By February 1951, when John Foster Dulles visited Canberra and returned home with a draft treaty, it was also clear that Britain would not be a member. The final version, now confined to Australia, New Zealand and the United States (ANZUS), was signed on 1.9.51.

Discussion of security matters, and the attachment to ANZUS, were of course affected by the anti-Communist passions which swept public opinion in the US, Australia and elsewhere in the wake of the Korean war. In Australia they were fed, inter alia, by the Petrov spy affair of 1954 which, in dramatic form, brought home to the wider public that the country was involved in a global struggle and not exempt from the long reach of Soviet activities, including espionage. Security problems tended to be discussed, not by reference to any direct and immediate threats to the Australian continent, but in relation to the general dangers posed for the Free World by communism led from Moscow and, within Asia, sponsored by China. The appropriate counter was thought to be a global containment of Communism, with America as the leader of the containing alliance.

It is hardly surprising that in such a period the Australian involvement with the intelligence and weapons development programs of the Western alliance should have grown deeper. Australia became host to British atomic weapons tests at Monte Bello island off the north-west coast in 1952 and 1956 and in central Australia in 1953 and 1956. By 1955 there was an agreement for the first permanent US installation in Australia. It was a seismic station at Alice Springs, whose purposes included the gathering of information on the Soviet nuclear test program.[6]

Consolidation during the 1960s

The 1960s brought perhaps the greatest changes in Australia's strategic situation since the second World War. They saw the abandonment

of Britain's great power role and her withdrawal from Asia. This in turn meant the end of the traditional Australian effort to use ties with Britain to balance and qualify reliance upon the United States. Similar lessons flowed from the Franco-British failure at Suez and the crises in Berlin and Cuba, which further underlined the central role of the US in underwriting the security of the West. At the same time events in East and Southeast Asia increasingly focussed Australian, but also American, attention on the region to Australia's North. There were the strategic dangers from a China likely soon to acquire nuclear weapons. There were the long-term consequences of the French collapse in Indo-China and of Chinese support for insurgencies there. And there were the indirect repercussions of these developments, as well as the rise of Communist political forces in Indonesia which was causing alarm in Australia.

It would be misleading to suggest that these developments produced policies in Canberra which were invariably coherent, consistent or far-sighted. Decisions were often made in ad hoc ways, or because they suited some Departmental interest. They were not even always referred to Cabinet. In the case of some joint Australian-American facilities, for example, they appear to have been taken by Robert Menzies and one or two senior Ministers and public servants. Nevertheless, in retrospect one can detect certain strands running through the cluster of policies which the Menzies Government and its immediate successors adopted. One, which may have seemed too obvious to require much detailed discussion, was that the current and prospective problems of Southeast Asia could not be dealt with unless US power could be fully brought to bear upon them. And because a US commitment to Australia or Southeast Asia could not be

taken for granted, it became a major objective of Australian policy to secure a firm US presence in the region and in matters connected with Australian defence. That aim was pursued, inter alia, by Australian support for the United States in Vietnam. It is difficult to avoid the impression that, in giving it, Australian leaders were consciously or unconsciously influenced by the Korean precedent. In Vietnam, as in Korea, the political value of Australian assistance to the US was greater than its military value. In each case, the scale of the Australian military contribution was small, whereas the political returns to be expected from it were large.

Another cluster of considerations had to do, from the 1950s onwards, with the wish to maximise Australian security while minimising defence expenditure, partly in the interests of permitting more rapid national development. A third probably concerned a strengthening of the very real partnership in intelligence which had developed between the US and Australia. And another again stemmed from a general wish to strengthen ANZUS through appropriate Australian contributions. It was against this kind of background that the Government accepted American requests for the establishment on Australian soil of a number of defence and intelligence facilities of substantial importance to US strategy. When the first of the major installations, the North West Cape Communications Station, was debated in Parliament, the Minister for External Affairs, Sir Garfield Barwick, related the agreement to ANZUS. The facility would be an Australian contribution to America's capacity to resist aggression and hence to the security of the free world.[7] This was only slightly disingenuous. The point was not that the installation was required under ANZUS or even directly related to it. It was rather that insofar as it improved American strategic capabilities it was a valuable Australian contribution to common purposes and insofar as it was on Australian soil

it necessarily committed the US to its and hence to Australia's support and protection.

From an American point of view, Australia had become increasingly important for two kinds of reasons. One had to do with the political and strategic situation in East and Southeast Asia, the other with the global strategic balance. The increasingly burdensome and complicated American involvement in Southeast Asia made Australian political support and cooperation especially valuable, not only in Southeast Asia itself but in the American domestic political arena. It was valuable also for another, and possibly more important, reason. In a period of increasing strategic fears of China it was the Australians who seem to have produced especially well-informed political, economic and scientific assessments of China, as well as general intelligence on other areas of Southeast Asia. This was linked with considerations of broader kinds. The Soviet launching of Sputnik in 1957 had led to changes in every aspect of American scientific research, development and training, and in most major US strategic and intelligence activities and plans. It encouraged the formation of the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in mid-1958. By 1961/62 the US had also begun a strategic force build-up which was to lead, by 1967, to totals of 1054 ICBM and 41 FBM submarines carrying 656 SLBM. There were future possibilities of multiple warheads for missiles and perhaps of anti-ballistic missile systems. All of this created requirements, some of them severe, for the testing of systems and components; for global communications, for instance with submarines; and, given the prospect of Soviet force increases and improvements, for surveillance and early warning systems. Detailed surveillance would also be required for the verification aspects of any serious approach to nuclear arms control. Many of these tasks would clearly have to be entrusted to

satellite systems and by the early 1960s there had occurred developments in electronic intelligence and photo-reconnaissance which, though less publicised than missile and rocket programs, were in their own way no less remarkable. By that time the US had succeeded in developing methods of direct recovery of film by way of capsules ejected from reconnaissance satellites, though direct visual transmission was not to come for another decade. During the same period electronic monitoring devices bacame more sophisticated and sensitive and the large, fast computer systems needed to back them up and sift signals began to be available. Clearly, many systems in these various categories would require sophisticated ground-based control and communications and other facilities. For many of these purposes Australia had decided - in some respects perhaps unique - geographic advantages as well as political stability, a proven record of friendship with the US and tried systems of strategic and intelligence cooperation. It may be that the establishment of the major joint facilities was as much the result of an existing partnership as the cause of further cooperation.

In any event, Australian cooperation with NASA in tracking, communications and the running of data acquisition and management facilities began early. On 7.6.57 the two Governments agreed to make arrangements for the installation of a radio tracking station at Woomera and three months later this was followed by an agreement on optical tracking. These and subsequent agreements on space vehicle communications and tracking led to intensive cooperation during the US manned space programs Apollo and Gemini during the 1960s and again during the Space Shuttle program at the start of the 1980s. At the start of the 1960s the first US Navy engineers visited Western Australia to look into possibilities which matured into

the 1963 agreement to establish the North West Cape Communications facility. It was commissioned in 1967. In 1965 came the first engineering work on what was to become the satellite communications and control and intelligence facility at Pine Gap, near Alice Springs. By June 1966 the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, had firm proposals to put to the Australian Cabinet and an agreement was concluded in December. The station became officially operational in 1970, by which time negotiations on the sister station at Nurrungar, near Woomera, had also been completed. Construction there began in 1969 and the station appears to have been operational by 1971.[8]

By the latter half of the 1960s this cluster of Australian policies was beginning to run into severe political difficulties and dilemmas. The US determination to extricate itself from Vietnam, underlined by President Nixon's announcement at Guam in July 1969,[9] made it clear that old patterns of protection and intervention were no longer viable. From an Australian point of view, this was much more than the collapse of the assumptions which had made forward defence possible. The withdrawal of the US, following that of Britain, meant the end of that entire Australian foreign policy tradition which had attempted to secure Australia's neighbourhood by means of friendly great power commitments. This was bound to lead to fundamental reassessments of many established principles of foreign and security policy. In foreign policy, it compelled closer attention to bilateral and multilateral relations with the states of Southeast Asia. In security policies it involved a much harder look, even within the framework of a maintained ANZUS, at the question how far, and where, Australian and American interests and actions were likely to coincide and under what circumstances America might in future be able and willing to come to Australia's help. In

defence policy proper, it was bound to involve a search for greater self-reliance and, given the inevitable limitations of Australian military effort, a concentration on the defence of continental Australia while leaving diplomacy and economic policy to deal, as best they could, with the wider security of Southeast Asia.

Yet the implications of the US facilities, growing in numbers and importance throughout this period, suggested conclusions very different from those being debated in public or even by many foreign affairs professionals. The facilities increased Australia's involvement with, and importance to, American global strategic policies including, from the end of the 1960s onwards, the verification aspects of Soviet-American arms control agreements. They helped to make Australia a still closer partner in US and Western allied intelligence arrangements. Their presence, together with the Australian contribution to the allied pool of strategic intelligence, gave Australia considerable access to US agencies and decision-makers, as well as access to vast quantities of raw intelligence material from US sources. It also increased Australian access to, and sophistication in, many elements of high technology including communications and space matters. While it could be argued that the facilities attracted some danger of nuclear attack, the Government's advisers did not think that very likely.[10] Much more importantly, they attracted American protection. In the words of the 1971 edition of the Governments "Strategic Basis" paper, the US installations on Australian soil strengthened the US commitments through "our growing importance to the United States for defence and space purposes".[11] From this point of view, their presence played a dual role. It committed the US in some measure to Australia's protection. And, not

unlike the US Army in Europe, it made them a "trip-wire", likely to trigger US retaliation in the event of attack on them. Yet there was the necessarily unanswerable question how far, in a period when America's credibility and effectiveness were in doubt, the presence of the facilities might by itself suffice to assure broader protection. Successive Australian Governments were intent on keeping the purposes of the facilities confidential and fending off suggestions that their presence incurred strategic dangers and derogated from Australian sovereignty. But they felt unable to explain, let alone discuss in public, the increasingly important role which the facilities played not merely in the Australian-American relationship at large but in any coherent scheme for the development of Australian security and defence policies.

The Whitlam Government

During the early and middle 1970s, not just the shape of world politics but the contours of Australian affairs underwent substantial changes. The western withdrawal from Vietnam and the US domestic disaster of Watergate were accompanied and followed by Henry Kissinger's pyrotechnic diplomatic performances in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, vis a vis China and in arms control; but also by increasing economic weakness in the western world. In Australia there were increasingly pressing domestic demands, especially for social benefits, largely based on assumptions about easy and continuing economic growth and the social preferences of a growing, tertiary-trained, urbanised and public-sector oriented middle class. They reflected a widespread if sometimes imprecise desire for change and renewal after the long paternalism of the Menzies era. They reflected an impatience with the foreign policy principles which had led to failure in Vietnam. And they reflected a wish for

national self-assertion centred upon, but by no means confined to, traditions of Labor nationalism. If Labor was suspicious of the US, the right wing was no less sceptical about US promises of protection following the abandonment of the western position in Southeast Asia.

The new Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, who came to power at the end of 1972, had a very different view of the world from that of his predecessors. He believed that the old East-West divisions were becoming obsolete; that new "multi-polar" power patterns were succeeding to the old world order, created by the Cold War and centred upon Washington and Moscow; that the new conditions offered more clout and greater flexibility to smaller and less developed nations with whom Australia, after the fashion of Evatt at the San Francisco conference of 1945, should make friends; that the new conditions called for emphatic opposition to racism and colonialism; that the utility of military force in the world was declining and its morality being increasingly called into question; and that the possession of raw materials conferred the sinews of usable political power. In that context the Whitlam Government, while accepting that ANZUS remained essential for Australian security, felt much readier to be critical of the US in public and to deal with Washington somewhat at arms length. In Whitlam's words: "We are not a satellite of any country. We are friends and partners of the United States, particularly in the Pacific; but with independent interests of our own".

Such a Government was bound to attempt a number of changes in military and security policies. It abolished conscription, brought home the remnants of Australian forces from Vietnam and the troops which had been stationed in Singapore as part of the cooperative arrangements with

New Zealand and Britain, and ended notions of forward defence. Defence expenditure was reduced and the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty ratified. Alert to previous criticisms that Australia had not enough control over military and intelligence activities on Australian soil, the Whitlam Government set about reviewing arrangements for the North West Cape Station. Although certain revisions were agreed in talks between the Defence Minister, Lance Barnard, and the US Secretary of Defense, James Schlesinger, the essential structures of operation and control remained unaffected.[12] On the other hand, the agreement to hold periodic official talks on the general strategic situation as it affected the facilities was, from an Australian point of view, highly productive. Officials who have taken part at various times seem agreed that the talks have given Australia a real insight into the wellsprings of US strategic and associated policies, as well as an opportunity to influence American decisions in this area. Other Australian initiatives, especially during the early Whitlam years, caused considerable alarm in the US. Australian Ministers spoke about the involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency at Pine Gap and named some CIA officers. There was a general habit of leaking information which produced a belief in some quarters that almost any sensitive information reaching a Cabinet thus constituted would be likely to find its way to the enemies of Australia and of the US. There was even a fear that presence of the US facilities might become untenable and there seem to have been American contingency plans to remove them if necessary.

Yet if there was evidence to support the more far-reaching of these fears it has not been made public. Labor Ministers were far from unique in the recent history of Australian politics in the manner or

quality of their indiscretions. As early as 28.2.73 Mr. Barnard, in a Ministerial statement on the US defence installations, said the new Government would continue Australia's treaty obligations in these matters and observe secrecy.[13] When, shortly afterwards, a well-known journalist complained about undue secrecy, he made the point that the US was willing to reveal more information than the Australian authorities.[14] A more serious charge against the Whitlam administration is that much of its world outlook was a little naif. In the aftermath of the Vietnam war, to adopt a policy of self-reliance in defence was to make a virtue of necessity. But it was not essential that the Government should over-estimate the predictability of the new power balance and the measure of flexibility available to Australia. It was not inevitable that the Government should assume that military capacity and security relationships, once downgraded or dismantled, would go on being dispensable. It was not wise to assume that others would inevitably accept Australian political rhetoric as applied to international dealings.

Australian defence after Vietnam

More important was the fact that by a predictable irony Australia found that the attempt to devise a new, credible and self-reliant policy for the defence of continental Australia led in many respects straight back to the need for close military, technical and intelligence ties with the United States. These imperatives, somewhat obscured during the Whitlam period, became more apparent for his successor, Malcolm Fraser. The implications of planning for a self-reliant defence were that Australia needed forces and especially information systems of advanced and high technology kinds. The fact that defence expenditure was contained within 3% of GNP may have made the problem more acute, but did

not cause it: even much higher levels of defence spending would not have enabled Australia to plan for defence autarky. Australian forces might be small in numbers of men, but they had to be able to operate in a high technology environment; to cooperate with the high technology-capable forces of a friendly superpower; to maintain an understanding of, and some ability to use, a considerable variety of weapons systems and ancillary equipment; and to maintain a measure of technical superiority over powers in Australia's neighbourhood. Under these conditions, notions of greater defence independence in the long term themselves depended on the exploitation of interdependence in the short term.

This was not just because of Australia's desire for advanced hardware, though Australia was not and is not in a position to produce all the items, including many major items, which her services need. The need rested at least equally on the slenderness of Australia's research and development base and the desire for information. The Australian research and development effort has for many years compared unfavourably with that of other advanced countries, especially in fields related to defence science. The total Australian R&D effort rose, in real terms, by some 20% between 1968/69 and 1973/74, only to decline sharply again in 1976/77.[15] In that year gross expenditure on R&D amounted to only 1% of GDP, with the Commonwealth Government, State Governments and higher education between them providing 83% of the expenditure.[16] As for defence science, an independent review reported in 1981 that both in terms of staff and of spending Australia was much more poorly served than comparable nations.[17]

Yet successive Government have also looked for three overlapping kinds of information: general and current intelligence, information on technical developments and information for general purposes of forecasting and management. In almost all modern Governments, the hunger for more and more complete information seems to grow by what it feeds on. The increasing sophistication of foreign affairs and strategic assessments as reflected in official documentation through the 1970s would have been impossible but for the flow of intelligence information made possible, in large part, by inter-allied cooperation. For Australia to seek to acquire an independent capacity for assessment, and for some specialist areas of expertise, was and remains sensible. To seek an independent capacity for information and intelligence collection which could in any way match the access to material derived from allied sources, would not. As a result of years of partnership, Australia has access to very great quantities of information, both raw data and assessments, from the USA, Britain and other parts of the allied information network. This includes access to all information obtained and processed from US facilities in Australia.[18] The quantity of information potentially available is almost certainly much greater than the Australian evaluation and assessment machinery could cope with and problems of selection cannot be trivial. Of the information received, or sought, technical information has often had particular importance. As T.B. Millar pointed out a decade or more ago, the technical cooperation established with Britain in the 1950s and early 60s "... has been of incalculable benefit to Australia. The fact that we had the space and could provide the facilities meant that we were given access to the advanced military technology of Britain and, to a lesser extent, Western Europe and the United States ....."[19]

Similar results flowed from the US connection. These were the more important in that, as the Secretary of the Department of Defence, Sir Arthur Tange, explained towards the end of the 1970s, "All of us are falling further behind the technological defence frontier set by the United States .... autarky is neither technically possible nor economically desirable in Australia ....."[20]

It is therefore not surprising that the later 1970s saw both improvements in the technologies and equipment of the Australian services and closer cooperation with the US at many levels. In 1976 the new Fraser Government decided to speed up completion of the Cockburn Sound naval base and make maintenance and refuelling facilities available to American nuclear-powered warships.[21] By 1980 the Government was offering Cockburn Sound as a base for a US carrier task force and to allow unarmed B-52 bombers to use Darwin as a staging post on surveillance flights over the Indian Ocean.[22] In 1977 the North West Cape Station received new advanced antennae to service the Defence Satellite Communications System,[23] and it was agreed that the station would be available for the Army and Air Force and for general defence purposes, not merely for naval communications.[24] Towards the end of 1977 the Prime Minister informed Parliament that the Government would extend the Pine Gap agreement by ten years.[25] And by the following year the Labor Party conference decided to weaken the Party's traditional opposition to foreign military facilities on Australian soil and to substitute a commitment to make public the general functions of such facilities and to ensure that their operations did not derogate from Australian sovereignty.[26] By 1981/82 the Party seemed inclined to tighten its requirements again, but not so far as to make it impossible for a future Labor Government to continue the operations of the facilities.[27]

The facilities: an overview

By the 1980s the Australian-American facilities on Australian soil had become large, elaborate and well-established systems, with purposes which could be classified under three or four broad headings. The first was the direct support available to US forces, such as the facilities available to US air operations at Darwin and elsewhere, or the backup which vessels of the US Navy could get in Australian ports. A second group consisted of navigation and communications systems capable of supporting US naval and air operations, and perhaps air defence. The most significant facility in this category was, and remains, the North West Cape Communications Station. Contrary to some assertions, this is a relay and communications facility, not a command centre. Its three most important elements appear to be a high frequency and VLF receiving centre, a high frequency transmission capacity and a capacity for VLF communication with submarines, including submerged ones, in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This last makes North West Cape one of the three such stations which, between them, give global coverage; the other two being at Jim Creek, Washington, and Cutler, Maine.[28] The high frequency transmitters can communicate by both teletype and voice with Clark Field and Guam as well as with the US 7th Fleet and Canberra. Since 1968 the station has also handled British and Australian naval traffic, including messages for submarines. Australian participation as common user in allied and NATO networks means that the North West Cape also carries, or can carry, important segments of Australia's general defence communications with allies.

A third group of facilities concerns the gathering of intelligence information, whether electronic or seismological or photographic or by other sensors. There appear to be some eight or nine seismological

facilities in various parts of Australia. Only two to them were set up for strategic monitoring purposes: that at Tennant Creek and the Alice Springs facility which has been used for twenty years to monitor Soviet or Chinese nuclear tests. The others are essentially scientific or University-run stations, though most of them have incidental monitoring capabilities. But the facilities on which public attention has undoubtedly been concentrated are the electronic intelligence and satellite support stations at Pine Gap and Nurrungar. The outlines of their functions have appeared in academic and journalistic publications [29] but it has been authoritatively argued that the Soviet Union does, in fact, remain ignorant of the details of their operations.[30] They appear to have four main groups of tasks. They are involved in intelligence gathering by means of satellite photography and infra-red sensing, the latter being of particular importance to early warning of missile launches. They are involved in electronic intelligence and the interception of communications and other signals, including radar emissions. They are involved in processing some of that information and in its dispatch from Australian ground stations to the US. These activities include, inter alia, association with US early warning satellites, probably the most important element in US early warning systems. The sensors could also be used to monitor nuclear explosions in the atmosphere and to provide post-attack assessments. There has been some speculation that one or both stations may be involved in covert communications and surveillance systems.

The fourth category consists of the Australian role in support of mainly scientific efforts, the most notable of which is the connection with the US Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). There has grown up, since 1958, an intimate system of cooperation on tracking, command,

communications and data acquisition and management in a program which, though essentially civilian and scientific in character, has inevitably had some military and intelligence dimensions. The NASA facilities have in recent times been consolidated into a complex of three stations in the Australian Capital Territory which, together, are said to constitute the largest NASA facility outside the US itself.

The importance of the facilities is difficult to estimate. Several of them play a relatively subordinate role. But others clearly have functions which are important, even essential. North West Cape appears to be necessary to US FBM submarine communications as at present structured and to be, in addition, an important element in allied global defence communications. But it is in the area of surveillance and electronic intelligence that Australia's main importance probably lies. It is difficult to visualise how the US early warning and surveillance system could operate effectively if Australian support and participation were suddenly cut off. And for some intelligence purposes Australia may be very hard to replace if only by virtue of global geography, the characteristics of the earth's magnetic field or of radio wave propagation and transmission. In the case of certain important electronic intelligence tasks, if Australia were not available, they could not now be peformed at all.

It is possible that the Australian role in these matters of intelligence communications and in the coming economics and politics of space could become less important. The key changes which might produce such a result would be political ones. But on the technical side, manned orbital vehicles could be the forerunners of multi-mission space stations which would replace some of the specialised systems in use at present.

Electronic surveillance from satellites is already in use. At the same time, the development of satellite relay systems could mean declining reliance upon some ground-stations and especially ones outside the metropolitan territory of the operating power. In communications, greater redundancy could mean less reliance upon any one ground-based station, even a large and elaborate one like the North West Cape. Or again, the development by both superpowers of longer-range SLBM like the US Trident D5 is likely to mean more emphasis on deployment closer to home, where submarines would be more easily protected by friendly naval forces and hostile ASW efforts become more difficult. Yet through the 1980s and probably also the 1990s, satellite systems seem likely to lack the power, capacity, reliability and above all the survivability of ground-based monitoring, command and control facilities. While they will be useful adjuncts to ground stations, and add useful elements of redundancy to global communications systems, they seem unlikely to replace ground stations for the foreseeable future. Similarly, while US-based ELF systems for submarine communications will be developed, their slow rate of delivery and other limitations are unlikely to allow them to replace, rather than complement, existing methods of communication. For these as well as other reasons, greater redundancy in communications systems seems likely to mean, for the time being, adding to and elaborating and hardening existing facilities rather than eliminating the major present links. Or again, while the longer reach of SLBMs will permit on-station deployment of FBM submarines closer to home, it is unlikely that either superpower will abandon the option of deployment anywhere, if only as a constraint upon the opponent's ASW forces.

Present-day systems are in any case not the only ones which need to be considered. Faster cruise missiles, more accurate means of delivering

missiles at inter-continental ranges and more complicated and survivable C^3I, the command, control, communications and intelligence methods for the management of competition or conflict, are likely to be deployed within a few years. The US and the USSR have begun to develop anti-satellite (ASAT) systems and, observing each others programs, methods for countering anti-satellite weapons. For the time being the first-stage, semi-conventional US ASAT methods - missiles fired at satellites in space from very high-flying aircraft - appear more promising than the clumsy first-generation Soviet ASAT systems. But the competition is in its infancy and the present generation of satellites is in principle quite vulnerable to interference, interception or destruction. It is certain that the search for directed beam systems, some of them orbitally based, will continue and that they could become available for ASAT, anti-missile and other purposes. The literature now also contains a good deal of quite detailed writing - much of its inevitably somewhat speculative - about the characteristics and methods of deployment of future manned space battle stations,[31] whose appearance might prove decisive not just for space-based but for many terrestrial conflicts.

Space developments will, of course, not be confined to areas of immediate and direct military relevance. Many grey-area systems capable of civilian or military uses exist and others are certain to be developed. They have to do with a variety of communications, surveillance and navigational needs, from systems for the more precise location, tracking and control of civil aircraft and satellites to satellite-based sensing and surveillance of weather, crops, ground conditions, sub-surface mineral deposits and ocean phenomena. As satellite surveillance improves,

civilian systems like LANDSAT will acquire definitional and other capabilities which have so far been reserved for military use. Western intelligence officials have suggested there may be damaging consequences as and when commercial cryptography begins to close the gap with military and intelligence cryptography and as capable commercial systems begin to be available on the open market. But beyond all that, many civilian space activities are already well established. Telephone and telegraph transmission via satellite is an everyday affair. The real-time transmission of television pictures and news will be greatly expanded in the next decade or two, largely as a result of cost improvements. The transmission of information between cities, countries and continents is in its infancy. The acquisition of information, its processing, storage, retrieval and communication, in bulk and in a brief period, is a rapidly developing art. The next phase of manned space exploration, following the proving of the Space Shuttle during the 1980s, may be the exploitation of space, with the development of some kinds of space-based manufacturing systems and experiments in space-baced power production, even space living.[32] In the very long term, the physical limits of man's activities in space are not clear. Nor are all these systems confined to the superpowers. The number of nations possessing them is increasing. China, India, the European Community and Japan have or have had satellite programs of various kinds, many with potential military utility.

It can hardly be doubted that civil and military programs of even approximately such scope and complexity will require sophisticated ground-based support facilities which are global in scope. In relation to such a requirement Australia has singular advantages. The Southern hemisphere is more favourably situated than the Northern one for the purpose of exploring, or sending signals to, the greater part of our

galaxy or the rest of the known universe. In that Southern hemisphere Australia is large, politically stable and possessed of certain climatic and other assets. Being on the opposite side of the globe from the continental USA, it is a convenient location for setting up, jointly with the US, communications, navigational and other systems which are global in scope. Moreover, orbiting satellites should be capable of communicating in most major longitudinal segments of their circumnavigation of the globe. Through the arc from approximately 40° East to 160° West, from Hawaii to Africa, Australia is incomparably the largest and most secure base for such operations South of the Equator and the one with the most solid record of friendship with the Western alliance. Between them or together, US and Australian ground stations can monitor all satellites, including geostationary ones engaged in monitoring the USSR or China. Data can be transmitted from orbiting or geostationary satellites to Australian ground stations, to be processed and/or communicated via communications satellites to American command posts, in the case of orbital satellites sometimes many hours before the originating satellite comes within transmission range of US-based ground stations. Australia has other advantages of size and location. It is a large island, with a coast line of approximately 20,000 kilometres, whose centre is nowhere closer than 800 kilometres from the coast. This frustrates hostile monitoring of any closely directed communications beam from a satellite to a centrally-emplaced ground station. For electronic communications purposes, facilities in Australia and the US can provide global coverage of many kinds. In addition, Australia has special advantages for signals intelligence purposes. She is in a natural position to monitor radio emissions from most of Southeast Asia. She is a conjugate point for many transmissions from China and the central parts of the USSR. Australia

has proved to be ideally positioned to take part in monitoring telemetry from Soviet missile testing areas near the Caspian Sea or at Tyuratam and during the 1970s a major western intelligence coup, listening to some Soviet micro-wave transmissions, was conducted from an Australian base. It goes without saying that these and other advantages are available not just for US or general Western purposes, but for Australia's own intelligence and defence activities. Given Australia's small population base and necessarily limited resources, the defence of a large island continent and its sea and air approaches is bound to involve transport, communications and intelligence problems whose solution relies, and will increasingly rely, on facilities of the kind already present on Australian soil.

Australia's position in relation to Western C^3I activities is, of course, complemented by other elements in the nation's geopolitical position. Her role as supplier of raw materials is certain to be considerable. Her position at the transit-points between the Indian and Pacific oceans is likely to become of greater rather than lesser importance, if only in relation to problems of Indian Ocean strategy and to westabout access to the Middle East. Australia may also have a major role in relation to the exploitation of the seabed and the resources of continental shelves. And she will certainly be important - whether by acts of omission or commission - in relation to the disposition of Antarctica.

Do any of these assets make Australia essential and indispensable to any of her Western partners? The Australian position at the transit points between the Indian and Pacific oceans is an essential element in all

geopolitical assessments of the Indian Ocean balance. As a supplier of raw materials Australia, though convenient, safe, reliable, cannot claim to be indispensable. As for the joint facilities, there appears to be some dispute within the defence and intelligence community about their precise importance in the global strategic balance. Nevertheless, the following assessment seems plausible. Australia is not and has never been indispensable in all circumstances to the conduct of US photo-intelligence operations, or to procedures of analysis and assessment. Australia has at times been, but need not remain, indispensable to certain electronic intelligence programs. In all these matters the strength of the Australian position is the convenience of having the facilities established and operating here, and the cost and difficulties of devising replacements. The existing facilities are essential in the sense that they are established and play a vital role in current programs; that their sudden removal would undoubtedly cause severe damage and disruption to Western surveillance and intelligence capabilities; and that no immediate replacements of comparable power and precision are available.

Nevertheless, most of the functions of the joint facilities could be carried out somewhere else in time. If there were, for example, a major change of political direction in Australia, it would be possible, by the middle or later 1990s, and at considerable cost and inconvenience, to transfer the functions even of Pine Gap and Nurrungar to other ground-based facilities (some might be emplaced in Guam, for example) or to space-based facilities supplemented by satellite relays.

Some Political Considerations

What use Australia will make of its position, and its strategic and diplomatic assets, will depend on the general tone of internal politics as well as of the nation's international position. It will depend, in particular, upon the view which Australian opinion takes of the US alliance and the presence of the facilities. At the moment it seems quite clear that majority opinion accepts both. It is possible that that might change. Critics have argued that the facilities could make Australia a target for enemies who might not attack her if the facilities did not exist. Others have raised the broader objections that the facilities, and the alliance relationship, compromise the independence of Australian foreign policy decision-making and skew the assessment of Australia's interests and purposes.

The fears that Australia might come under attack are not fanciful. The probabilities are uncertain, because we know very little about Soviet perceptions and planning and because estimating the probability of one-off events is in any case logically impossible. But most observers have agreed that the danger is very small;[33] and that, insofar as it exists, it needs to be weighed against the disadvantages of alternative policies. While the US strategic connection may entail dangers, moreover, it also involves protection. Indeed, insofar as a major nuclear power would have to react to an attack on any part of its global system - and could expect to pay very heavy prices for any failure to do so - it may very well be that to remove the military and strategic connection with the United States would increase rather than decrease the dangers and difficulties confronting Australia. It might increase the chances of war. It would not insulate Australia from the consequences of a nuclear war, even one in which Australia was not subjected to attack.[34] It is not even clear that

a nuclear war in which Australia was not directly attacked would be much less damaging to the nation than one in which an attack on the facilities took place. If all that is so, it may well continue to be sensible to make an appropriate Australian contribution to a Soviet-American balance of deterrence, one of whose chief purposes is to avoid war or to contain it if it should occur. Altogether, it is not obviously wise to encourage a de-coupling of the US from Australian strategic interests. Australia might, of course, try to move towards neutrality. But unless this meant unarmed neutrality, it would be markedly more expensive than present defence policies, yet less effective in assuring the country's safety. Australia would have no assurance that neutrality would avoid all difficulties vis a vis the growing number of nuclear powers in the world and alternative defence policies could not be relied upon to produce immunity from all other external dangers.

Within the context of a maintained alliance and retained facilities on Australian soil, certain variations of policy may well be possible. It may be feasible to increase the measure of Australian control over certain aspects of the facilities' operations. Detailed suggestions are not possible without more information on the technical characteristics of the operation of the various facilities. It is, perhaps, worth noting that the Australian Government has insisted that it has full access to all aspects of these operations, that they are undertaken with its consent and that the Government has the power to halt them or part of them, at any time.[35] Nevertheless, there will continue from time to time to be questions about the nature of the activities and the adequacy of Australian control over them. It is inevitable, and proper, that there should be discussion about the dangers which current policies might incur and about possible changes in the strategic situation

which might affect Australian security. National growth and a general desire for national self-assertion can be expected to stimulate such questioning. It is equally inevitable that Governments will, from time to time, be compelled to point out that demands for particular forms of control, if acceded to, would vitiate the purpose of some facility and effectively endanger or halt some forms of activity.[36] These tensions are inherent in the situation. They can be managed; they can probably not be resolved.

As for the broader objections, it is necessary to begin with a distinction which, though obvious, is frequently overlooked. Criticisms of the behaviour of Australian Governments, justified or not, are logically and in substance separate from complaints about a relationship with the US within whose compass different forms of Australian behaviour would have been possible. One needs to separate the necessary and inherent concomitants of the relationship, or of the presence of the facilities, from complaints which, if allowed for, would not change the nature or functions of the Australian-US connection. Moreover, it is difficult to discuss the indictment without knowing what particular policy initiative may not have been pursued, or which may have failed, because it was incompatible with the general tenor of the US connection. It is also impossible to decide what ideas successive Australian Governments might have had, or what policies might have been formulated, if the framework of the Australian-American alliance had not existed. A few general remarks can nevertheless be offered. It is true that this relationship, like any other, imposes general constraints in that some kinds of action become undesirable, even impossible, once it has been entered into. Total freedom of action is by definition incompatible with

It seems likely that, for the foreseeable future, the maintenance of a general alliance framework will continue in the view of all Australian Governments to be greatly preferable to its disruption. The attractive options will be seen to lie within its general ambit. But if the alliance is to be maintained, the presence of the facilities is a major net asset for Australia in its dealings with the US, as well as with many others. If Australia wishes to maintain the flow of information and intelligence, the facilities are a major countervailing Australian contribution and a card of entry to allied intelligence policies and decision-making. If Australia wishes to maintain influence on America's general external and strategic policies, that influence is likely to be stronger if the facilities are maintained, and maintained on mutually agreeable terms, than if they are not. And if Australia wishes to influence the relations between the great powers, the presence of the facilities make it more likely that her views will be listened to.

None of this is to deny that the passage of time will alter the shape and importance of particular elements of the US-Australian connection, without necessarily damaging its political substance or the common view of many world problems on which, in the end, it rests. Debate within Australia can be expected to concentrate on the wisdom, shrewdness and sophistication of Australian policies within such a framework and the measure of influence over US decisions and actions which Australia should seek. These considerations will doubtless include questions about the details of Australian participation in the function of the joint facilities.

In future, as in the past, the facts of alliance will not avoid all differences in outlook or interest. Australia will sometimes need to adopt positions visibly at arms length from those of the United States.

Yet ideas about Australian independence and self-reliance and the politics and strategy of alliance, far from being mutually exclusive, can more usefully be regarded as complementary. To strengthen Australia's capacity for diplomatic and military self-reliance is not just satisfying to national pride and a sensible preparation for coping with a variety of contingencies in which American help would be unnecessary or inappropriate, but also a way for Australia to make an independent contribution to common purposes and to mount a national effort which would make appeals for US support less likely but also more plausible. This consideration may be especially significant in a period when there is considerable debate within the US about the purposes and strategies of foreign policy. Three kinds of argument appear to be on offer. One favours traditional alliance relationships, interpreted in accustomed ways. A second stresses impatience with foreign entanglements. A third emphasises the need for greater US freedom of manoeuvre in pursuit of more narrowly-defined national interests. The tendencies towards unilateralism have produced tougher-minded attitude towards friends as well as others. There are indications that the intelligence relationship may already be somewhat less close than it was during the 1960s, when senior officers in the US and Australia were on first-name terms. In the longer run it might be in the interests of the US - at any rate it would be prudent to assume that it might be in America's interests - to phase out some of the facilities in Australia and to base their capabilities solely on US-controlled territory or in space. The nature of the Australian public debate might encourage such a development. But it does not follow that such a phasing out, if done gradually and with no weakening of the American strategic posture, would mean an end to the alliance. It might reduce Australian

influence and access. But the results of such developments will depend, as always, on timing and manner and on whether they are achieved by mutual agreement or not, in a spirit of Australian separatism or US isolationism or within a framework of continuing cooperation. We should also remember that few historical trends last for long unchanged and that diplomatic and intellectual patterns can alter swiftly. The trend towards insulation and unilateralism is unlikely to persist, either in the US or Australia. Some change of direction seems bound to come. While it may be prudent, therefore, to guard against the possibility of divergences between the interests and policies of Australia and the United States, it would be equally wise to hedge against the possibility that closer cooperation might yet be desirable, perhaps in some unforeseeable emergency.

Conclusion

The need within Australia is for a sense of realism and practicality. That means a wider understanding that foreign relations are not merely an opportunity to air preferences but a matter of practical difficulties and the adjustment of real differences with others including ones who may not share Australian views nor values. It means steering a middle path between the temptation to overestimate Australia's importance to others, or to overstate the certainty of allied support, and an equally unhelpful disposition to underestimate the Australian role. It means neither exaggerating the degree of Soviet-American strategic stability nor underestimating the possibility of changes in the balance between them. It means accepting that in some areas of strategic understanding the US and the Soviet Union have a special relationship shared by no-one else, without supposing that this need diminish the Australian-American alliance. It may also mean resisting

the understandable but excessive stress by some policy advisers on those areas of foreign relations where Australia can exercise maximum influence, as distinct from those areas where the most important national interests are involved. Pragmatism does not necessarily equate with a certain regional paraochialism.

The 1980s may altogether see an increasingly anxious debate within Australia about the terms and conditions of Australia's involvement with the outside world. That debate seems likely to be stimulated by a variety of factors. The Australian economy seems increasingly sensitive to the ebb and flow of international trade and financial dealings. Social conditions and individual ambitions are apt to be changed by easier travel and global television. There will be increasingly acute dispute between those who would like to see Australia insulated, separate, maintaining her customs and traditions, and those others who believe that closer involvement with a complex, uncontrollable and sometimes uncomfortable outside world needs to be managed rather than resisted. There will, equally, be more acute debates between those who believe that democracy requires more open Government and decentralised decision-making and those who believe in more traditional methods. In such a context a focus of public debate could well become the question whether Australia does indeed need to risk involvement in great power struggles and nuclear conflicts, however small the risk may be, and what alternative policies, with what consequences, might be available.

The framework for decisions will remain, as always, a sober assessment of the relative costs and benefits of particular policies, together with an estimate of the costs and benefits of alternatives. No one doubts that it is open to Australia to ask for the closing down of the US-related facilities, or to opt out of the alliance or to abstain

Footnotes:

1. <u>Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates</u> (CPD), House of Representatives (H of R) 9/3/50.
2. See Desmond Ball, <u>A Suitable Piece of Real Estate</u>, Sydney, Hale and and Iremonger, 1980, Ch.2.
3. Ibid, p.27, footnote 1.
4. The report was written by A.D. Brookes, later the first head of ASIS.
5. Robert O'Neill, <u>Australia in the Korean War 1950-55</u>, Vol.1: Strategy and Diplomacy, Australian War Memorian and Australian Government Publishing Service, 1981, pp.111-112 and Ch.13.
6. See the statement by the then Defence Minister, Mr. Lance Barnard, <u>CPD</u>, H of R, 28/2/73.
7. Second Reading speech, <u>CPD</u>, H of R, 9/5/63.
8. At the end of the 1960s the Government listed the installations on Australian soil connected with US activities. See <u>Current Notes on International Affairs</u>, September 1969, pp.547-49.
9. <u>New York Times</u>, 26/7/69.
10. The 1968 and 1973 editions of the Government's "Strategic Basis" paper agreed on this point.
11. Strategic Basis 1971.
12. It was agreed to appoint an Australian Deputy Commander, to establish a separate Australian facility on the site and to arrange for greater consultation between the two Governments. For the text of the joint statement, see Department of Defence Press Release 202/74 of 10/1/74.
13. <u>CPD</u>, H of R, 28/2/73, p.68.
14. Brian Toohey asserted (AFR, 3/4/73, p.4) that soon after the election of the Labor Party the Americans offered to send a team to Australia to talk about the facilities, but were turned down by the Australian Department of Defence. It might be, of course, that Australian officials

35. See Mr. Killen's statement on Pine Gap, CPD, H of R, 2/6/77, op.cit.
36. See the response by Mr. Killen to questions raised by the Leader of the Opposition about the North West Cape station, CPD, H of R, 5/5/81.
37. It is said that a junior officer once approached the legendary James Angleton of the CIA to discuss something to do with friendly intelligence agencies. "There are" Angleton responded "no friendly intelligence agencies."
38. It is sometimes argued that if Australian security policies were somewhat more narrowly - and, by implication, properly - defined, much of the information now obtained might be unnecessary. The difficulty with this is that it is impossible to tell in advance what piece of knowledge might be useful for what policy purpose. Still less is it possible to say what might be the future consequences of some, otherwise avoidable, area of ignorance.
39. Tange, AFAR, May 1978, op.cit., p.264.

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