

NORTH-WEST CAPE NAVAL COMMUNICATION STATION  
AGREEMENT WITH U.S.

---

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon.  
Sir Robert Menzies, in the House of Represen-  
tatives on Thursday, 16th May, 1963.

---

Mr. Speaker, I am indebted to the House and I hope that I will not need this indulgence. I think that I ought to begin by saying that I am vastly indebted to the honourable member for Bowman (Mr. Comber), who has cast me with a versatility of role to which I have never aspired. It turns out that I rode into office on a dead horse - that is not a bad feat - sitting at the time in a gilded cage and drawing a red herring across the trail. I am indebted to my friend for this. It is in some way a compliment.

There is one thing that I would like to say quite seriously about the end of the honourable member's speech and about other speeches that have been made this afternoon. This is a very curious debate. I thought that we were to get to the heart of this matter and have the points of difference fought out as they are entitled to be fought out for the public benefit. But most of the campaign on the Opposition side of the House has been directed at justifying the system of internal government in the Australian Labour Party. No doubt, this is a very interesting thesis, but it is hardly an answer to the issues that are being dealt with here in relation to the establishment of this station and the conditions on which it ought to be established. However, Sir, I will not occupy any time on that.

I just want to address myself to some of the remarks made by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Calwell), who, if I may say so, was in uncommonly vigorous form this afternoon. He became almost excited, I thought, at one or two stages, when he indulged in the luxury of making a little free with history. I suppose that that is pardonable. For one thing, he seemed to me to set out to establish that there was not much wrong with this agreement with the U.S.A. for the establishment of a naval communication station. That surprised me, having regard to recent events and recent votes. It astonished me, and it must have astonished some of those opposite who have taken Trappist vows in the course of this debate. After all, what did the honourable gentleman say?

He attacked my colleague, the Minister for External Affairs (Sir Garfield Barwick), for having misled the House about the effect of the agreement. How far can a man mislead the House about the effect of an agreement that has been tabled and is explained in simple and measured terms? The Leader of the Opposition said, "There is nothing in this agreement about sole control. This is a device used by the Attorney-General" Then later he said, "There is nothing in this agreement inconsistent with joint control." I am glad to see the honourable member for Bass (Mr. Barnard) nodding his head because that shows that he followed the argument of the Leader of the Opposition. Therefore, in that event there is joint control and, if there is joint control, the Australian Government can veto any decision because obviously joint control involves the right of veto. So everything in the garden is lovely.

I put this quite seriously to honourable members and to the people of Australia. They should consider it. I am repeating the argument which was advanced by the Leader of the Opposition. If I were in opposition and entertained those views - I will demonstrate in a moment that they are wrong and I will face up to the great problem in this matter without any hesitation - I would support the bill ratifying the agreement without any qualification and without needing to do what the Leader of the Opposition has done and without engaging in this by-play.

I begin by being puzzled to know where the Leader of the Opposition, who has been much instructed on this matter, now stands. Yet I cannot suppose for one moment that he took forty-five minutes of passion and invective and, I repeat, making singularly free with history - I will put it politely - just to say "Yes" to the bill. If one can judge by the atmosphere, one thing is clear - that he does not like the bill or the agreement. But if I am wrong about that perhaps the Opposition will relieve me of all my responsibilities by saying, "We are all wholeheartedly in favour of the agreement." If Opposition members will say that I will be glad to resume my seat, but they know that they cannot say that because it is a flat contradiction of everything that has been happening during their debates.

I will address myself to the genuine issues in this matter and the deep differences that are disclosed here because I think that the people of Australia want, quietly and carefully, to understand them. But before I address myself to the major task, I want to dispose of the allegation repeatedly made that we, and in particular I, have concealed the true nature of this station at North West Cape. Long after the Minister for Defence (Mr. Townley) had made a statement about this matter, I made quite a lengthy statement on 17th May last year and again on 26th March this year, saying all that could be said about the proposed station. There is nothing to be added to or subtracted from that today. Indeed, if any confirmation were needed, it was afforded by the distinguished visiting U.S. Admiral who came here for the Coral Sea celebrations.

Mr. Allan Fraser - Don't bring him into it.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : We brought him into Australia.

Mr. Allan Fraser - Don't bring him into it. That is very bad.

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : Come come, grow up. The Admiral came to Australia. I wonder what the honourable member would have said if the Admiral had criticised the Government on this matter. We would have heard all about it in this place and the television audience would have listened to it and wondered. All I know is that the Admiral said, obviously with complete accuracy, that this was a radio communication station and nothing more. That of course is true. But on 8th May this year, the honourable member for Yarra (Mr. Cairns) was exercised to say: "You said that this was a naval communication station to communicate with naval vessels. You did not mention submarines." I did not mention submarines! No. I give it to the honourable member for what it is worth - I did not mention aircraft carriers and yet I am told that they are naval vessels which carry aircraft and that some of the aircraft are so furnished that they can deliver nuclear weapons. The Leader of the Opposition used some pretty hard terms but I would venture to describe the point made by the honourable member for Yarra as puerile. If any one in

this place other than the honourable member for Yarra believed that submarines and aircraft carriers were not naval vessels, I would be astonished at the illiteracy of the House. Therefore, there is no occasion to alter a single word of what was said then.

Having said that I want to return for a moment to the central problem - does this agreement provide for sole control, as my colleague rightly said that it does, or for joint control, as the Leader of the Opposition hopes that it does? This requires two answers. First, what does the agreement provide? Secondly, is it right, speaking responsibly on behalf of our own country? As for the agreement itself, I must say that I was taken aback by hearing an argument that the Attorney-General was wrong. The preamble to the agreement is in these terms -

"Considering that the establishment, maintenance and operation of a United States naval communication station in Australia will materially contribute to that end ...."

That being the end of common defence -

"..... in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in this Agreement, the United States Government may establish, maintain and operate a naval communication station."

The United States Government, not someone else. Then there is a provision in Article 3 to which my distinguished friend referred to the effect that the two governments will consult from time to time at the request of either government on any matters connected with this station and its use. Of course! We are allies. In that sense we are partners. Of course we will consult about all sorts of things. We want to be able to use the station ourselves for our own communications. But there is nothing in this agreement - I had thought this was the nub of the matter from the point of view of the Labour Party which proposes joint control of the station - which enables the Australian Government to veto the use of the station in the event of war. If honourable members opposite object to that - I imagine they do from all that I have heard and read on this matter, and it is an intelligible view - let them say so. I am here to defend it, to say that this is a proper arrangement. If it were not made in this sense, the fact is that in the event of a war breaking out in which nuclear weapons were involved, if you like, Australia could nullify the effect of U.S. nuclear weapons in the Southern Hemisphere by saying to the U.S. : "You are not to use this communication station." I will come back later to that aspect to explain what a fantasy that is and how utterly inconsistent it would be with the safety of our own country.

I began by saying that I agreed that this agreement provides for sole control. Therefore the agreement is inconsistent with the Opposition's desire of joint control and inconsistent with the power which the Opposition wants to say to the U.S. in the event of war, "You are not to use this station because it might involve us in some way." I state that matter quite clearly. These are the matters at issue. It would be very advantageous if the people of Australia could see quite clearly the points on which there is deep division of opinion between the Government and the Opposition.

Having said that, I want now to clear aside a little lumber that has come forward in the course of this argument. Argument about the establishment of the station at North-West Cape gets muddled every now and then with argument about the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Southern Hemisphere. Indeed, I think the Labour Party's ambitions in the direction of a nuclear-free zone have largely affected its attitude towards the North-West Cape project and have created within the Labour Party, putting on one side all shams, most determined opposition to the establishment at North-West Cape. Labour's argument has become so muddled that the Leader of the Opposition cited, not for the first time, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference of 1961 and said that that Conference produced the right ideas. I agree; the Conference did produce the right ideas. I should know something about the two paragraphs to which the honourable gentleman has constantly referred because I drafted them at the Conference and I adhere to them.

Paragraph 7 of the communique issued that year read -

"Every effort should be made to secure rapid agreement to the permanent banning of nuclear weapons tests by all nations and to arrangements for verifying the observation of the agreement. Such an agreement is urgent since otherwise further countries may soon become nuclear powers, which would increase the danger of war and further complicate the problem of disarmament. Moreover, an agreement on nuclear tests apart from its direct advantages would provide a powerful psychological impetus to agreement over the wider field of disarmament."

Quite true; we said that. That is why this Government has not taken steps to make Australia, in the military sense, a nuclear power. We believe that the fewer hands - the greater and more responsible those hands are - in which this terrific weapon resides, the better for mankind. Earlier in the 1961 communique - I recommend this section to my friends - the Commonwealth Prime Ministers said -

"The elimination of nuclear and conventional armaments must be so vast that at no stage will any country or group of countries obtain a significant military advantage."

This is, of course, of fundamental importance. For us to join with other people, if they can be found, to strike out of the hands of our friends and allies the nuclear weapon in some vast area while leaving it completely in the hands of our potential enemies in respect of the same area would, of course, be hopeless. For us to promote the idea - this is something that people should think about - that you will help the world's peace by getting rid of nuclear weapons and not touching conventional armaments is simply a policy which would leave undisputed power in the hands of the Communist nations. I do not for a moment say that the Leader of the Opposition proposed that course. I want to make it quite clear that this is one of the issues that we must determine.

Pending disarmament on the grand scale, the existence of the nuclear deterrent - the capacity to deliver the nuclear deterrent at the right time and in the right place - is the condition by which we live. The nuclear deterrent will cease to deter if the Communist powers come to think that it cannot be effectively organised or deployed south of the equator though from the point of view of the Communist countries, which are north of the equator - never forget that - there will be no prohibition or inhibition at all. It is essential for the effectiveness of the deterrent that the United States naval forces - I mean cruisers, destroyers, frigates, aircraft carriers, submarines and anything else you care to mention - should be within reach of a radio communication station. That is essential.

Sir, I have no expert views to offer on these matters but the best military opinion that I have been able to discover is that while it remains possible for Communist China to acquire nuclear weapons - I think that will be agreed to be an understatement because most certainly in due course Communist China will acquire nuclear weapons - a nuclear-free Pacific Ocean or Indian Ocean on our side would be suicidal.

I am happy to say that that situation is clearly understood by 80 per cent. of the people of Australia. Suppose Communist China gave a guarantee. I do not suppose any of us would be very excited by a Communist guarantee, but suppose that happened. The military disadvantages of a nuclear-free Southern Hemisphere must be unacceptable to the United States and her global allies because such a situation would reduce their overall nuclear deterrent capabilities. Honourable members have only to look at the map of the Indian Ocean and the South-West Pacific area and note where the equator is, to understand how crippling it would be if, having that power, we should say to the United States: "You are not to deploy in the Indian Ocean south of the equator any naval unit carrying nuclear weapons or any aircraft on an aircraft carrier carrying nuclear weapons." In the world picture, the Indian Ocean is strategically placed and under those circumstances to which I have just referred, if you were to defend yourself against Communist aggression, naval units would have to come in through the Suez Canal on the one side or through the Straits of Malacca on the other. Really, the safety of our country is of paramount importance to us. We are not to trifle with it in this way.

Some of what the Minister for External Affairs (Sir Garfield Barwick) said in his second reading speech has been decried or questioned by the Opposition. Some very offensive words were used about what I thought was a singularly objective statement. But some things are not and cannot be challenged. Perhaps we have forgotten those things. Perhaps many people have forgotten them. It is my duty to make a reminder. All I want to do is go back to the ANZUS treaty of 1951 and 1952 - the treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States. People forget the nature of that agreement. Some people say that we should not tie ourselves too much to the United States because, who knows, it may have some day a President other than the one it has today.

They forget the nature of the ANZUS pact, which is a treaty between nations ratified by the Parliament of each nation. And in its preamble it says -

"Desiring to declare publicly and formally their sense of unity, so that no potential aggressor could be under the illusion that any of them stand alone in the Pacific area."

Then, in Article II, which was also read previously by my colleague, we read -

"In order more effectively to achieve the objective of this Treaty the Parties separately and jointly by means of continuous and effective self help and mutual aid will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack."

It is in that context and against that background that the U.S. is being allowed to establish this naval communications station in the North-West.

Article IV is worth recalling. It says -

"Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific Area.."

which was the broad sweep they were taking -

".....on any of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety..."

In other words, America has declared in this treaty that an armed attack on Australia would be dangerous to the peace and safety of the U.S. This is a wonderful provision. The article continues -

"....and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes."

Then, we come to Article V. This is worth mentioning, not, perhaps, entirely with relation to this measure, but because for general purposes it ought to be known. It states -

"For the purpose of Article IV, ...."

which I have just referred to -

".....an armed attack on any of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack on the metropolitan territory of any of the Parties, or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific or on its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific."

That is the ANZUS Pact. We are really now being told by the Opposition, as I understand it - not so much from the speech of the Leader of the Opposition as such, but from other general indications - that although we have this partnership; although we have this treaty which is absolutely one of the vital elements in the safety and security of this country, we are to say to the most overwhelmingly powerful member of the pact, "But understanding we insist on the provision that if you are attacked by nuclear weapons without warning" - because, of course, there will be no gentlemanly stuff if that happens - "you cannot give orders to your people in our area or within the scope of this station to deliver their retaliatory blows" - which ought to be delivered in an hour - "until you first arrange to have a meeting with the Government of Australia in order that it may say 'Yes' or 'No!'".

Sir, this is so unreal and so much preferring barren theory to the actual security of Australia, that it baffles me. How does that kind of thing fit into the facts of life or into the ANZUS concept? Because joint control - let me repeat - is not just the power to consult - there is plenty of power to consult - but a power to veto, a power to say "No" and that is what the Opposition wants to be said to the U.S. Is the U.S. which, at vast expense can create this essential facility for Western defence and for the carrying out of the obligations of the ANZUS Treaty, to be told that it must accept the risk that at the very time when these facilities are most needed - that is to say, when the U.S. is attacked in a nuclear war - it may be denied them by the then Government of Australia?

Sir, that point was elaborated in another way in a statement made on behalf of the Opposition. The Opposition underlined it by saying that there should be a provision that the station should not be used by the U.S. at war without the consent of the Australian Government. It is the same thing. It is merely another way of putting it. I would like our fellow countrymen to think. Do they suppose that if the Communist powers decided that the moment had come to strike they would give any warning?

I, like most people around the world, am not anticipating that there will be a nuclear war. So long as we have the deterrent and the deterrent can be used and launched with the greatest effect, I do not think we will have nuclear war unless somebody goes mad somewhere. After all, we are talking about a provision which is designed to help this country and other countries in the event of war.

Suppose a war came - how would it come? Only by one of the Communist powers, or both, launching an attack on the rest of the world in pursuit of world power and dominating the world with their strange ideas. They would give no warning about it. Do not we know that from the very first moment that some nuclear attack is made, the retaliation - the reply - must come within minutes; not within weeks or days. Of course, that is why it is necessary for somebody to be able to say "Go"; not a committee; not a laborious consultation at this end of the world. Every minute will count and if we are twenty minutes late, thirty minutes late or a day late, this may mean the destruction of our kind of world all around the world.

Sir, suppose a war of that kind occurred! It would not occur because the democratic nations attacked the Communist world. Nobody is silly enough to believe that. Suppose a war of that kind occurred, begun without warning, launched by a Communist dictator who does not have to consult anybody! Can we in this Parliament representing, as we do, a pretty fair cross-section of the people of Australia, suppose, as sensible men, that in a war of that kind the U.S. would be against us? That is not real life. That does not come within the wildest imagination of anybody. Can anybody imagine that in such a war, if we were the object of attack, the U.S. would be neutral, would tear up the ANZUS Pact, would forget all these associations that we have with her? Not for one moment, in the wildest imagination of men! That could not happen.

Would Australia, supposing we were not the first object of attack but that America or Great Britain or somewhere in Western Europe was, wish to be - let us face up to it - a neutral observer waiting to be the prize of victory? Nothing

in the history of Australia suggests that that would be our role. Could we rationally suppose that, should the U.S. be in a war in which the U.S. naval forces in the Indian Ocean must receive signals - clearly a war against Communist aggression - any Australian Government would repudiate ANZUS and declare for neutrality and evict the U.S. from the North-West Cape? Of course we cannot. And that is why the agreement that they should establish this station and that they should control it and that we should have certain rights of access, as described in the agreement, is a completely justifiable agreement.

Before I conclude, I hope I have gone to the centre of the real problems in this matter soberly and seriously. They are great problems. They deserve an informed public opinion. Before I sit down, I just want to say that my friend, the Leader of the Opposition - really he does not think as badly of me as some of his remarks might suggest - offered a very remarkable argument. He said -

"In fourteen years of office, the Government has not acquired nuclear weapons. Australia is therefore nuclear-disarmed without any agreement. Whether the Prime Minister realises it or not, every argument he advances for the need for nuclear weapons for Australia's defence is a self-condemnation of his own defence programme. The Prime Minister cannot have it both ways."

This argument fascinates me. I have already pointed out that we have not ourselves acquired or produced nuclear weapons. I have pointed out that we ourselves took a prominent place in the discussions in the Prime Ministers' Conference which led to the statement that nuclear weapons ought not to be spread into too many hands. Therefore, Sir, of course we have avoided being a nuclear power in our own right.

The point that the honourable gentleman overlooks is that we are not prepared to bind the unknown future by pledging our word that we will never allow nuclear weapons to be used in our defence, because that would be suicidal. If they are to be used against us - as they well might, under conceivable circumstances - we are to say "No". Under no circumstances will we allow any power to come into our defence and deploy nuclear weapons from our soil or from our waters. On top of that, I want to end by repeating that so far as the Government is concerned, and I would think so far as the vast majority of the Australian people is concerned, we will not handicap our allies in the use of such weapons to resist nuclear aggression by the common enemy of all.

---