



## PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

WEDNESDAY, 11 MARCH, 1981

### STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE STAGING OF B-52s THROUGH AUSTRALIA FOR SEA SURVEILLANCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND FOR NAVIGATION TRAINING

Honourable Members will recall that negotiations on the staging of B-52s through Australia were temporarily suspended to allow the new Administration of President Reagan time to examine and consider the matter.

I am pleased to inform the House that in the course of his recent talks in Washington with Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tony Street, took this matter further and was able to bring it to a successful conclusion. I should like to pay tribute to the Minister for his handling of this important issue.

Agreement has now been reached between our two Governments on the terms and conditions which will govern US Air Force B-52 staging flights through Darwin.

I am tabling the texts of the Notes exchanged between the Department of Foreign Affairs and the United States Embassy on 11 March 1981, which constitute this agreement. As Honourable Members will note, the agreement provides that:

- the B-52 flights shall be for sea surveillance in the Indian Ocean area and for navigation training
- the agreement of the Australian Government would need to be obtained before the facilities at RAAF Base, Darwin could be used in support of any other category of operations
- the B-52 aircraft on surveillance flights will be supported by KC-135 tanker aircraft for aerial refuelling and the operations shall consist of periodic deployments of up to three B-52 and six KC-135 aircraft
- about 100 US Air Force personnel and associated equipment will support the staging operations and some of these may be stationed at RAAF base Darwin
- there will be no change in the status of RAAF base Darwin as an Australian facility under Australian control. As the terms of the agreement make abundantly clear, nothing in the arrangements governing these flights could be regarded as in any way infringing Australian sovereignty

the US will provide the Australian Government with full and timely information about strategic and operational developments relevant to the B-52 staging operations through Darwin.

The House will be aware that US Air Force B-52 aircraft are currently conducting low-level navigation training over Australia. As the Minister for Defence stated on 3 February 1980 these flights originate at Guam, the aircraft carry out navigational training over Queensland, and then return to their base at Guam. The operations will be an extension of these current operations. After completing the low-level training exercises, the aircraft will land at Darwin and refuel. After appropriate crew rest the aircraft will undertake sea surveillance and navigation training operations over the Indian Ocean - an area of great security interest to both Australia and the United States. The flights will then return via Darwin to Guam. As is the case with the current navigational missions, the flights landing at Darwin will be unarmed and will carry no bombs.

As there has been much speculation in the media and elsewhere about this matter, I should like to emphasise that it has been agreed between the Foreign Minister and the Secretary of State that the aircraft staging through Darwin under the arrangements now agreed for surveillance flights and navigation training will be unarmed and carry no bombs.

As I have also told the House the exchange of notes provides that the Australian Government's agreement would need to be obtained before the RAAF facilities could be used in support of any other category of operations by the United States. In that regard let me state, so that there can be no grounds for question or doubt, the basis on which the agreement of the Australian government would be given to such other operations. Australia would need to know, firstly, what the strategic and tactical objectives are - and Australia would need to be in agreement with these; and second, what weapons are being carried and in particular whether nuclear weapons are being carried.

The Australian Government has a firm policy that aircraft carrying nuclear weapons will not be allowed to fly over or stage through Australia without its prior knowledge and agreement. Nothing less than this is consistent with the maintenance of our national sovereignty.

I am particularly pleased that it has been possible to reach finality on this question so soon in the term of the new Administration. Australia shares the US determination to take all steps within its power to deter further Soviet expansionism. We stand ready to lend our ANZUS partner what assistance we can in pursuit of our common aims. The provision of staging facilities at Darwin for these US aircraft will facilitate the surveillance and training operations they are carrying out in an area of prime security concern to Australia. It also affords a further example of the close practical co-operation which has been developed over many years between our two nations.



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The Department of Foreign Affairs presents its compliments to the Embassy of the United States of America and has the honour to refer to recent discussions between representatives of the two Governments concerning the proposal by the United States for the staging of United States Air Force B-52 aircraft and associated KC-135 tanker aircraft through Royal Australian Air Force Base Darwin, and the terms under which the proposed operations might proceed.

Subject to the terms and conditions specified below, the Government of Australia agrees to USAF use of RAAF Base Darwin for these staging operations:

- (I) The B-52 staging operations shall be for sea surveillance in the Indian Ocean area and for navigation training purposes. The agreement of the Government of Australia shall be obtained before the facilities are used in support of any other category of operations.
- (II) The operations shall consist of periodic deployments through Darwin of up to three B-52 and six KC-135 aircraft, supported by about 100 USAF personnel and associated equipment. En route to or from Darwin the B-52s may conduct low-level navigation training over Australia on the basis of the arrangements announced by the Australian Minister for Defence on 3 February 1980.
- (III) Staging may include the stationing at RAAF Base Darwin of some US support personnel and equipment if requested. The support personnel would remain under US command and the RAAF would provide mutually agreed levels of logistic and administrative support.

(IV) The Status of Forces Agreement of 9 May 1963 would apply.

(V) Irrespective of financial arrangements agreed between the two Governments, RAAF Base Darwin shall remain an Australian facility under Australian control.

(VI) No circumstances arising from this Agreement shall affect the title of the Government of Australia to the relevant land, or the pre-existing authority of the Government of Australia in the use of RAAF Base Darwin.

(VII) Arrangements shall be made for consultations to ensure that the Government of Australia has full and timely information about strategic and operational developments relevant to B-52 staging operations through Australia.

(VIII) In considering whether to agree to any request for alteration of the terms of this Agreement the Government of Australia shall give weight to its international commitments and policies relating inter alia to the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, to Australia's commitments under the Security Treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America signed at San Francisco on 1 September 1951, to the common objective of deterrence of Soviet military expansion and to its understanding of US strategic and operational policies and activities as derived from the consultations under sub-paragraph VII above.

The Department of Foreign Affairs has the honour to propose that, if these terms and conditions are acceptable to the Government of the United States of America, this Note, together with the Embassy's reply, shall constitute an agreement

between the two Governments. The Department further proposes that the agreement shall enter into force on the date of the Embassy's reply and that it shall continue in force until terminated on one year's notice in writing by either Government.

The Department of Foreign Affairs takes this opportunity to renew to the Embassy of the United States of America the assurances of its highest consideration.

CANBERRA ACT

11 March 1981