



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

MONDAY, MARCH 16 1981

"THIS WEEK IN CANBERRA"

(BTV 6 BALLARAT)

I am delighted to join you, on BTV 6 tonight, and I hope to be here several times through the year.

This week, our Foreign Affairs Minister, Tony Street, finalised a new and important agreement with the United States. This agreement allows United States B-52 aircraft to put down at Darwin, while doing surveillance and navigation flights over the Indian Ocean and Queensland.

The aircraft come from Guam, a United States base in the Pacific, about 3,000 kilometres from Darwin.

By entering this agreement, we are giving support and assistance to our allies. The United States carries the great burden of maintaining world peace, especially against Soviet expansionism.

We benefit from the protection that the United States provides, but Australians would not want the Government to sit back and simply take the benefits without helping where we can when we agree with the basic objectives of the United States.

If we are able to make a contribution to assist the United States, of course, we will do so. We would not be taking our responsibilities seriously if we did anything else. Of course, in doing this, Australia is looking to her own strategic interests. The new agreement is an excellent agreement for Australia, and fully protects Australia's sovereignty. The flights which it authorises are surveillance and navigation flights. They will be keeping an eye on an ocean which is of prime security interest to Australia. But the aircraft will be unarmed and will carry no bombs. The agreement does not allow flights of any different kind to be made - in fact, it requires that our agreement would have to be sought before the facilities in Darwin could be used for flights of a different kind - and it is clearly on record that we would not give our agreement if we were not in agreement with the strategic and tactical objectives of any such flights.

It is also on record that we would need to know and be in agreement with weaponry being carried on such flights, and in particular whether nuclear weapons were being carried.

I believe that all Australians can welcome this new agreement. It further cements the alliance which is fundamental to Australia's security.

Matters of this kind should not be subject to party politics. Of course, the Government of the day has, and must have, the responsibility for negotiation and concluding agreements such as this one. But it is highly desirable and very much in the interests of Australia that a bi-partisan approach should be maintained.

We have in Australia arrangements whereby briefings can be given to the Leader of the Opposition in connection with agreements such as this. Such arrangements can obviously lay the groundwork for a bi-partisan approach in matters of strategic importance to Australia.

I am confident that when the details of this new agreement are clearly understood throughout the whole Australian community, its usefulness for both the United States and for Australia will be universally recognised.

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