



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28 1982

ELECTORATE TALK

Last Thursday, Defence Minister Jim Killen announced the Government's decision to acquire H.M.S. Invincible from the United Kingdom. This follows his announcement last October that Australia would acquire 75 FA18 aircraft from the United States as our new tactical fighter force.

These are two of the most recent decisions in achieving the Government's programme to develop our defence force and to enhance our overall defence capabilities. The Government's prime objective is to develop a balanced defence force which has advanced capabilities in all services - Army, Navy and Air Force. A balanced defence force is one in which the whole range of contingencies which might threaten our security can be met in a co-ordinated and integrated way.

For land operations, we have an army which is equipped with the manpower, fire power and mobility to give it real teeth. Apart from its obvious fighter and bomber capabilities, the Air Force commands extensive resources needed to meet the transport and surveillance needs of the armed forces. For its part, the Navy operates fast patrol boats and landing craft for in-shore work as well as highly flexible guided missile frigates and destroyers which can be used for both in-shore and deep ocean tasks.

Modern warfare requires both high technologies and rapid communications so as to ensure that these capabilities are co-ordinated effectively. A modern and sophisticated ship like Invincible has a crucial role in directing major naval task force operations.

The Defence Force needs advanced command and control facilities which can support the movement of troops, aircraft and ships. With its special computers and control systems, Invincible will constitute a key element in the projection of combined air and naval power. Operating with our long-range Orion maritime control aircraft, the F1-11 strike force, the FA-18s our guided missile destroyers and submarines, Invincible will be an exceptionally potent deterrent to any potential aggressor.

It is partly because Invincible offers these capabilities that the United Kingdom is very reluctant to part with it. Far from acquiring something which is second-hand or obsolete Australia is able to obtain a defence system which is regarded as being amongst the most advanced in the world. H.M.S. Invincible will provide a very substantial increase in Australia's national defence capabilities, and will greatly enhance our ability to deter aggression in our own region in the decades ahead.

Australia's economic and social health depends on being able to maintain our trade. We need to be able to keep our trade routes open and counter any threat to them. Submarines would present the most difficult type of threat for us to counter. With Invincible our ability to detect and destroy any submarine threat to our trade routes will be second to none in the region.

For Australia, a balanced defence force must have very highly developed anti-submarine warfare capability. But Invincible is not simply a platform for anti-submarine warfare. While it is particularly suited for operating large anti-submarine helicopters, it is not aimed at any single contingency. It could be used in a wide variety of military operations including the carriage of up to a battalion of troops, the co-ordination of air elements and the direction of naval units in combat. With these functions it adds a wide range of capabilities beyond those now available to us.

The acquisition of a major new capability like Invincible will not only contribute significantly to the needs of a balanced defence force and to our security within our immediate region. Given the present threat levels of international tension, the Government intends to make sure that Australia is fully equipped to contribute to the strengthening of the Western alliance.

With New Zealand and the United States, Australia has a crucial role in both the Pacific and Indian Oceans, where advanced anti-submarine warfare capability and high grade command and control facilities are essential. Our position in the world is not so secure that we can take possible threats to our security lightly. While we have the advantage of distance from the main centres of potential conflict, we cannot assume we will not be gravely affected by conflict whenever it may occur. For example, the security of our trade routes is essential for our economic survival. The field of defence is one which is fraught with hard choices for all democratic countries. We are making decisions which at once protect our national interests and represent a reasonable investment of resources.