

**PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER
ON THE JOINT DEFENCE FACILITIES
22 NOVEMBER 1988**

I wish to inform the House that the Australian and US Governments have agreed to a number of important changes to the arrangements under which we cooperate in running our joint defence facilities at Pine Gap and Nurrungar.

The changes we are making reflect the commitment of both Governments to maintaining and strengthening our long-standing partnership in these joint facilities. They ensure that the facilities continue to operate in ways that best serve the interests of ourselves and our partners.

These changes also reflect the commitment of this Government to informing the public as fully as possible about the facilities. On 6 June 1984 in this place I made the first detailed public statement about the roles of the facilities. In making that statement I was convinced that better public understanding of the roles of the joint facilities could only increase public support for them. My remarks today, which will in some respects go beyond that earlier statement, are made with the same conviction.

Since the joint facilities were established in the 1960s, the alliance between Australia and the US has evolved and matured, the technologies involved at Pine Gap and Nurrungar have developed, and Australians have learned more of the skills involved in running the facilities.

The new arrangements at Pine Gap and Nurrungar accommodate these important changes.

At Pine Gap, the number of Australians engaged in the central-operational activity is being steadily increased. Some of these personnel, who are drawn from scientific and intelligence areas of the Department of Defence, are taking over functions previously carried out by US employees.

Whereas only a handful of Australian Government personnel was directly involved in the central work of the facility in the 1970s and early 1980s - contributing less than 10 per cent of the staff there - the proportion is scheduled to rise to about 30% over the next two or three years.

But Australians are not only doing more of the operational work at the facilities. Under the new arrangements we have agreed, Australians will carry out more of the senior management functions at both Pine Gap and Nurrungar.

At Pine Gap, a senior Australian Defence official will be appointed to a newly created position as Deputy Chief of the Facility. He will advise and support the US Chief of Facility in managing the facility and its activities, and he will share responsibility with him for that work. He will also continue to be the officer in charge of the prohibited area, with ultimate responsibility for the physical security of the facility. Other senior management positions will also be filled by Australians.

Parallel changes have been agreed to the staffing at Nurrungar. Australians constitute some 40 per cent of the staff in the key operational areas, and will now take a role in management with the appointment of the senior Australian officer there as Deputy Commander. Like his counterpart at Pine Gap, he will share responsibility with the Commander for the management of the station and its physical security.

The integration of Australian personnel in both the operation and the management of the joint facilities at Pine Gap and Nurrungar is such that the Australian Government can be assured of having full knowledge of all aspects of the operations at the facilities, and reinforces our confidence that our interests and sovereignty are respected at all times.

At the same time, Australia will be able to take more direct advantage of the facilities' capabilities for our own purposes than has been practicable in the past.

Hitherto, by agreement between ourselves and our partners, we have spoken in public of the capabilities of the two facilities only in conjunction. Under the new arrangements, and in pursuit of better understanding and stronger support for the facilities we have now agreed to specify the separate roles of Pine Gap and Nurrungar.

Nurrungar is a ground station used for controlling satellites in the US Defence Support Program (DSP). The DSP satellites provide ballistic missile early warning and other information related to missile launches, surveillance and the detonation of nuclear weapons.

Few if any elements of the strategic systems of either superpower make such a decisive and unambiguous contribution to keeping the peace as the Defense Support Program. As an essential link in the DSP, Nurrungar plays a quite fundamental role in preventing nuclear war.

The DSP, through Nurrungar, would give the earliest warning of an ICBM attack on the US or its allies.

Because the DSP gives longer warning of an attack than other systems, it reduces the chances that US forces could be destroyed in a surprise attack, and that makes it extremely unlikely that anyone would ever try such an attack.

Together with other elements of the US early warning system, the DSP provides highly reliable warning of attack. It thus plays a vital role in helping to prevent nuclear war by accident.

Australians can be glad that we help to operate this vital facility, and that every day, around the clock, Australian personnel are playing this part in helping to prevent nuclear war.

I turn now to Pine Gap. Pine Gap is a satellite ground station, whose function is to collect intelligence data which supports the national security of both Australia and the US.

Intelligence collected at Pine Gap contributes importantly to the verification of arms control and disarmament agreements. The value of that data has become more and more evident over the last year or two, as disarmament has moved from being an aspiration to become an emerging reality.

Today, for the first time since the invention of the atom bomb, nuclear weapons systems are, under the INF Treaty, being destroyed by their owners. The next step is already underway. In the START talks the superpowers are seriously negotiating to make major cuts in their strategic arsenals.

Verification is vital to this arms control process. Verification was the key issue in reaching that INF agreement last year, and verification will be the key to any START agreement in the future. If the START process were to fail, despite the efforts of both sides, it would be largely because of the difficulties with verification.

In April this year, nuclear risk reduction centres were created in Washington and Moscow. This new confidence building channel is being used to notify the two sides of missile launches required by arms control accords and will also serve to reduce the possibility of nuclear conflict.

Without Australia's involvement in arms control verification, the risk of nuclear war would have been directly and significantly increased.

I think it is important for those who have urged us over the years to close Pine Gap and Nurrungar to reflect on the undoubted fact that, had we done as they urged, the INF Treaty could not have been signed and the START process would not have got underway.

With the information now on the public record about the roles played by these facilities in preventing nuclear war, I think it is clear that nobody seriously committed to peace could argue for their closure.

There are of course limitations on what it would be sensible for me to reveal publicly about details of the operations that are conducted at either of these joint defence facilities, or details of the organisation and manning arrangements which apply there. It has been the practice of successive Australian Governments not to comment on intelligence matters, and this Government will continue that policy. Details of our capabilities in the sensitive and important area of intelligence collection, or in relation to systems providing attack warning, are not in our national interests to divulge and this Government will not do so.

The Government takes the view that the irreplaceable contribution made by these facilities gives us a special responsibility to ensure that they can continue to function in an atmosphere of stability and commitment.

At present both facilities operate under agreements which are terminable at one year's notice by either side. We do not regard this as satisfactory, both because of the continuing importance of their effective operation to global peace, and because of the specific benefits to Australia of long-term access to their capabilities.

To this end the US and Australia have, as part of the new arrangements for the operation of the facilities, agreed to extend the arrangements under which the two facilities operate for a further ten years in each case. We have further agreed that three years' notice shall be required to terminate the agreement.

Last week the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senator Evans, and the US Ambassador Mr Bill Lane, signed exchanges of notes to formalise this agreement. For the information of Honourable Members I now table those exchanges of notes. Members will note that this exchange also defines clearly the functions of the two facilities.

These agreements confirm my Government's conviction that the joint defence facilities will continue to serve Australia's national interests; that they will continue to reflect the depth and substance of our bilateral strategic relationship with the United States under ANZUS; and that they will continue to play a vital role in preventing nuclear war. The Government intends that Honourable Members will have an opportunity to debate this statement.