



PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
AT THE INDUCTION CEREMONY FOR HMAS WESTRALIA
AT HMAS STIRLING - 12 MARCH 1990**

Ladies and gentlemen

Today marks an important step forward in the development of Australia's defence self-reliance. And not just because HMAS Westralia is about to expand the capacities of our Western fleet, important and welcome as that is.

I can announce today that Australia has proposed to the United States that the Australian Defence Force take over and operate the North West Cape Naval Communications Station.

My Government put this proposal to the United States last month, and last week the US Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney, wrote back to Kim Beazley welcoming it and agreeing to the opening of negotiations. These will begin soon.

This development is a landmark in building Australia's self-reliance and a measure of the maturity of our relationship with the United States.

North West Cape has functioned as a joint facility since 1963. Its primary purpose is to communicate with submerged submarines.

The Station is becoming more and more important to Australia's own defence forces. It provides the only means of communicating with our submerged submarines, and we use that capability extensively.

Under current arrangements, one of the Station's submarine communications channels is continuously used by the RAN.

North West Cape will become even more important to Australia over the next ten years, as our new submarines join the RAN.

They will make the submarine squadron an even more crucial element of Australia's defence - and Australia's defence self-reliance.

For Australia, North West Cape remains absolutely vital.

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The operation of North West Cape as an Australian defence facility will therefore further enhance our drive for self-reliance. It shows that Australia is itself willing to take the responsibility for ensuring that this essential element of our submarine capability is maintained.

Australia's proposal has been made at a time when the United States is re-examining its strategic role and responsibilities.

The Australian Government strongly supports a continued United States involvement in the Asia/Pacific region - and I know that President Bush's Administration is fully committed to maintaining that involvement.

We recognise that over the coming years it will be harder for the United States to sustain the huge commitment it has borne in the Pacific for so long.

The United States has developed new ways of communicating with its submarines, and they are deploying fewer submarines in our region. North West Cape remains important to the United States but not as vital as it used to be.

Under our proposal, Australia would manage the Station and facilitate the passing of United States signals through it to US Navy submarines.

So, as well as enhancing Australia's self-reliance, our proposal makes a new and constructive contribution to modernising the alliance in changing times, and to supporting our shared interests in the stability of the Asia/Pacific region.

A few years ago a significant number of Australians resented and opposed the presence in Australia of what were widely misunderstood to be "US bases" including at North West Cape.

Now, as a result of the deliberate policies of my Government, such misconceptions are rare.

We have made it clear to the Australian people that these facilities are indeed jointly managed and we have also increased the degree of Australian management in them.

At the same time, we have demonstrated that these facilities perform tasks that are of critical importance and value to Australia's own needs, both in enhancing our own security and in promoting the great global goals of disarmament and arms control verification - goals which my Government has actively sought to advance in our broader bilateral and multilateral policies.

So, as we signal this landmark change in Australia's responsibilities in relation to North West Cape, I take pride that it has been my Government that has achieved this transformation in public opinion, and I believe all Australians can take pride that our defence self-reliance is being so effectively advanced.

Ladies and gentlemen,

HMAS Westralia, based here in Western Australia, will give the ships of our western fleet the ability to undertake extended operations throughout our region and make an important contribution to our defence self-reliance.

Self-reliance demands that our defence forces can protect Australia on their own which means defending all of Australia. That is why we are building a two-ocean navy.

Under the Government's defence strategy, Australia's maritime forces will play an increasing role in our defence in the years ahead. We are finding that as we re-shape our force structure to meet the unique demands of our strategic environment, maritime forces are becoming more important.

We have responded to this by building new frigates, submarines, minehunters and survey ships, and, of course, by buying the Westralia.

In the air, we are developing the maritime strike capabilities of our airforce by fitting our aircraft with modern guided weapons, building strategically-located airfields, and developing air-to-air refuelling.

And we are building the Jindalee radar system to give us unparalleled surveillance of our maritime approaches.

Our over-riding priority in developing our defence forces is the direct defence of Australia. Our commitment to this priority was confirmed by the unique and highly successful Kangaroo 89 exercise across northern Australia last August.

We also value the capacity which modern maritime forces based here in Western Australia give us to contribute to security in our wider region.

And that itself is part of a wider policy, to which we are deeply committed, of comprehensive engagement with Asia and the Pacific. It includes our concern with and involvement in the political issues of the region, as demonstrated by the Government's efforts to contribute to a solution of the Cambodian tragedy. It includes our determination that Australia must be enmeshed with the economic dynamism of Asia and the Pacific, a goal which we have pursued through our initiative to establish a new mechanism for economic cooperation linking regional countries.

HMAS Westralia will play a significant role in our defence and, in that way, in our larger goal of regional stability. I am delighted to be here for her naming by Mrs Gratton and to see her take her place in the Royal Australian Navy.

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