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Being Australia

AS CHANGES SWEEP THE DISTANT NATION, IT IS BECOMING MORE VITAL TO U.S. INTERESTS.

By Seymour Topping

AUSTRALIA ALWAYS SEEMED SO FAR away and perhaps not so important. Suddenly, there was Secretary of State George P. Shultz flying off to Canberra, the Australian capital, to listen more carefully to what the folks down under had to say about global defense strategy. At parties in Manhattan, the learned were talking about great Australian films and applauding the Aussies' delightful bravado in snatching the America's Cup from the stuffy New York Yacht Club. Business executives were going off eagerly to vibrant Sydney following the Labor Government's unexpected decision to open the Australian economy to foreign banks. At home, my kids were rattling around to Men at Work and other Australian rock groups.

The urge to find whence all this came was irresistible. So ensued the tedious daylong flight across the Pacific. I found it was small price for the joys of rambling through pleasant cities blessed with glorious beaches, visiting sheep and cattle stations in the bush, watching kangaroos and flocks of pink galah cockatoos and spectacular sunsets in the awesome emptiness of the Outback. More important, I became aware of how little we Americans know about Australia; of the wrenching changes in the society, and of how much the security of the United States depends on ties to that distant southwest Pacific nation.

In the three weeks I took to make a 7,400-mile circuit of Australia, which is almost as large as the continental United States, there were surprises aplenty. Obscured by secrecy, attributable more to Washington bureaucracy than to security imperatives, is the crucial importance of American bases, hidden in the Outback, to the defense of American cities. (Box, page 22.) Behind the characteristic Australian swagger, I sensed a faltering of national confidence. According to one economist, living standards have declined over the last century from first rank in the world to 16th. The leisure-loving Australians still enjoy a very comfortable life but their leaders question whether such style can endure unless the nation becomes more competitive in the scramble for world markets. While they concede the urgency of expanding trade with Asia, most Australians still suffer from an overweening fear — described by some high Government officials as paranoia — of being swamped by the brown and yellow peoples to the north. In the remote, vast continent, the 15 million Australians are assuming a new identity: Asian immigration is transforming a white Australia into a multiracial society and, as the Commonwealth ties to Britain wither, there is a growing affinity with the United States. A unique society of the Pacific basin is emerging.

AMERICAN INTERESTS DOWN UNDER

IF AN AMERICAN WANTS TO LEARN HOW Australians are serving him, one of the best places to start is Alice Springs in the center of the continent. In appearance, Alice Springs could be a town in Wyoming: There is the cluster of neat, ranch-style houses, the inevitable supermarkets and those ubiquitous honky-tonk signs inviting you to cafes and, of course, the movie, all on a main street that meanders out to the bush where cattle graze. At the Gap Motor Hotel bar, conversation over beers is about how much tougher it is nowadays to earn a dollar; the latest television sequence of "Dallas" or maybe "Dynasty"; the doings of local ball clubs. Once in a while, there is a shrug about Pine Gap, the United States military installation 15 miles down the road, on the other side of the Macdonnell Range, and a remark revealing that it is one of Russia's priority nuclear missile targets.

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Yes, it's just like southeastern Wyoming where there are intercontinental ballistic missile launch sites. But there is an essential difference. Australians know that Russians would have little interest in their country if it were not for the Pine Gap installation and at least two other American facilities. Because of their location in relation to the Eurasian land mass, these bases are indispensable to the United States. Not only do they provide early warning against Soviet missile attacks, but they gather vital military intelligence and are communication links for American naval forces in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Standing by secret agreements negotiated by previous governments, the Labor Government accepts the presence of the bases and the subsequent nuclear risk, but not without dissent from its left wing and a strong grass-roots antinuclear movement.

Sitting in the hot sun on a bench opposite the little John Flynn Church, named after the founder of the Flying Doctor Service that treats isolated communities, Lew Lambert talks about what it is like living near Pine Gap. "We don't know much about the base, but everyone tells us it is a target and the local people worry about a Russian nuclear attack," he says. "If the base were hit by a nuclear missile, some of them think Alice Springs would be protected from the blast because the base is on the other side of the mountain, and the prevailing wind might also take the cloud away. But most of us know it will be all over if there is nuclear war. We know the United States will never press the button. It would be the Russians."

Nonetheless, Lambert is willing to live with Pine Gap. "We know the United States is a good ally," he says. A mild-mannered man of 53, Lambert is typical of many of the 22,000 inhabitants of Alice Springs. He came to Australia because there was more opportunity than he could hope for in his native England. He and his wife own a sandwich shop and a car-hire service.

Lambert says that the several hundred Americans who work at Pine Gap mix well with the locals. They live with their families in air-conditioned houses provided by the Australian Government. The Americans even captured a trophy last year in the annual Henley-on-Todd Regatta, run by crews in bottomless boats through a dry river bed. But these are discreet Americans who do not speak about the nature of their work amid the huge white bulbous communications radomes of Pine Gap. At the police post on the road to the carefully guarded base, there is a deceptive white sign that reads: "Joint Defense Space Research Facility." In fact, the facility is a ground station controlling spy satellites that gather vital intelligence data from the Soviet Union. The other key facilities are Nurrungar, in the state of South Australia, and North West Cape, on the Indian Ocean.

The need to retain these bases is not the Reagan Administration's sole motivation for the solicitious attention it is giving Australia. Washington is adjusting to New Zealand's decision to deny its ports to all nuclear-armed and nuclear-propelled ships. The action effectively bars all American naval vessels, since the United States, for security reasons, will not declare which of its vessels are nuclear.

The New Zealand shock comes at a time when Washington is worried about the viability of American bases in the Philippines, in the face of the political instability of the Marcos Government and the Communist insurgency in the rural areas. Adding to the concern is the increased Soviet activity in the Pacific, where Russia has the largest of its four fleets. Its submarines prowl from the Vladivostok base south to Australian waters. Soviet bombers and reconnaissance aircraft range out of Cam Ranh Bay, a former American base in Vietnam. In time of war, the Russians could block the passage of shipping to the Indian Ocean by way of the Indonesian archipelago straits and the Strait of Malacca. Alternate routes would be through the South Pacific, making access to Australian ports even more essential.

The United States' withdrawal from joint military exercises with New Zealand has increased its dependence on Australian ports to host American naval forces. American officials in Australia have anxiously watched antinuclear demonstrations for signs of any trend toward the New Zealand option. They can even be worried by the occasional automobile bumper sticker: "I support the NZ stand."

THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENSE

SO THIS IS PERTH, THE SPARKLING CITY that is the capital of the state of Western Australia, and some of its one million inhabitants are awaiting the arrival of a United States carrier battle group. Antinuclear activists are planning a demonstration. In the past, as many as 10,000 demonstrators have confronted sailors with a sea of hostile placards. Here comes the giant aircraft carrier U.S.S. Constellation, with thousands of its crew members on deck in serpentine formation spelling out "Connie Loves Perth." The carrier is accompanied by the guided-missile cruisers California and Worden; escort destroyers stand off Perth's Fremantle port. Eight thousand liberty-hungry sailors with bulging wallets start coming ashore. Behold, there are only some 150 demonstrators and they are lost among the welcomers, most prominently women and merchants.

I am in Perth to interview Kim Beazley, Australia's Minister for Defense, who is visiting his parliamentary constituency. In the informal, friendly style of Australians, the heavyset man of 36 receives me in jogging clothes at his modest, wood-frame row house. He talks about his new regional approach to defense strategy, regarded with some uneasiness by American officials who are accustomed to the more dependent attitude of previous governments.

Under Beazley's direction, Australia has scrapped the last of its two aircraft carriers, which were symbols of a "forward defense posture." Engraved in bronze on the walls of the national memorial are the names of 122,224 Australian war dead. Most died on distant battlefields — Europe, the Middle East, Africa, some in Southeast Asia. Now, with a strategy of regional defense, a century-old global commitment of the Australian fighting man is ending.

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In the broad strategic framework, Beazley sees the United States as the defender against the Soviet Union and as the source of vital intelligence information and modern weaponry. But he regards the Anzus treaty as less of a security blanket than is generally perceived by the Australian public. The treaty binds the signatories — Australia, New Zealand and the United States — to recognize an armed attack in the Pacific area on any one as a common danger, and commits them to meet such an attack in accordance with their constitutional processes. However, Australian officials recall private warnings from Washington in past confrontations with Indonesia that they were on their own, and Beazley says there is some doubt as to whether Australia could count on the United States Seventh Fleet to meet any threat to Australia. When I ask Beazley who might threaten Australia, he smiles slightly. "I've got a budget of $6.3 billion — over $4 billion U.S. — in search of a threat."

Beazley has assigned Paul Dibb, a civilian specialist, to develop the rationale and priorities of the new defense strategy. Dibb, receiving me in his office in the Strategic and Defense Studies Center at the Australian National University in Canberra, dismisses Washington's suggestions that the plan is solely for continental defense. "We are the superpower of the southwest Pacific," Dibb says, citing Australian responsibilities for the surrounding island states. Offshore, Australia will depend on a strike force that eventually will include 75 F-18's, 24 F-111's — equipped with harpoon missiles — as well as six conventional attack submarines and Lockheed Orion antisubmarine aircraft.

Privately, Australians in and out of Government talk of a possible threat from Indonesia, to the north. Australian relations with the Suharto Government are, for the most part, cordial, but some worry that expansionistic impulses may develop as Indonesia's population grows to 200 million by the end of the century. Many say such worries are paranoid, and dismiss the idea of a seaborne military invasion, not only because of the vast terrain of desert and mountains in northern Australia which are an effective barrier to invasion, but also because of the technical sophistication such an invasion would require.

There are, however, other troublesome signs. The Indonesian Government is moving millions of people from the populous islands of Java and Bali to other parts of the archipelago. This transmigration has provoked some resistance, particularly in the eastern province of Irian Jaya, where Government troops have been clashing with members of an independence movement. For years, refugees have been crossing into neighboring Papua New Guinea, a former Australian mandate, and now 11,000 are in camps on the Papuan side of the frontier. Pressure is building on the borders, and although Indonesia claims the problem is an internal one, Australians worry they might be compelled to go to the aid of Papua New Guinea if it is seriously menaced by Indonesia.

Beazley promises a ring of air bases around Australia and an electronic network to monitor against clandestine landings on the coast. This does not dispel a nightmare commonly shared by the Australians of massive influxes of boat people seeking refuge if an ecological disaster should strike Indonesia or another Southeast Asian nation.

Leaving Beazley's home, I soon find that the people of Perth are obsessed with another kind of defense. On the Fremantle waterfront, an Australian flag flaps defiantly over a building with a sign identifying it as America's Cup Defense Headquarters. And 12 miles away, the Royal Perth Yacht Club proudly displays the America's Cup, carried off after victory in Newport in 1983 by Alan Bond's wing-keeled Australia II.

In 1986, the New York Yacht Club and some 16 syndicates from six other countries plan to put 12-meter yachts into the waters off Fremantle, braving the stiff prevailing winds called "Fremantle's Doctor," to determine who will eventually face Australia for the cup.

Eliminations begin in early October and the America's Cup final series does not start until Jan. 31, 1987, but Australian enthusiasm already has generated business. In anticipation of a half-million visitors, 11,000 new service jobs are projected for Perth and Fremantle. Since the Australian victory in Newport, six hotels have been built; four more are under construction, along with a casino, golf course and another airport. Spoils to the victor, Bond has profited handsomely from his triumph: advertising revenues of his television station are up, Australia II decorates Swan beer cans, produced by his brewery, and the value of his large real-estate holdings in the area have soared. Also, he is chairman of the committee that is raising $7 million for Australia's defense.

Fremantle's old picturesque sandstone houses, which together with the sturdy pubs testify to the town's English heritage, are being restored. Older residents grumble that at least all this will endure even if that mug, beg pardon, mates, should be snatched away.

IN THE BUSH: OLD THOUGHTS, NEW TECHNOLOGY

FROM PERTH, MY WIFE, Audrey, and daughter, Joanna, fly south with me to the Oceanview sheep farm near Esperance, a pretty seaside resort town on the southern coast. Esperance was in the world news several years ago when the American Skylab burned through the atmosphere, showering bits over the town. Since then, excitement has focused on a woman who was fatally attacked by a great white shark ("he came back for a second bite") and the lusty doings of vacationing gold miners from Kalgoorlie, 200 miles to the north.

About 140 million sheep graze in Australia and 22,000 are on this 13,000-acre farm, which is owned by two New Yorkers, Benno Schmidt and David Rockefeller, and Jim Elkins, a Houston banker. It is managed by Tony Moore, a lean, blue-eyed man of 46 with powerful leathery hands who wrested the farm from the arid bush. Many would say he is the quintessential Australian farmer, born of British stock, industrious, innovative, conservative and troubled by what is happening to "his" white Australia.

We spend the afternoon with Moore in his Land Cruiser, jouncing through sheep paddocks and skidding down gullies to glimpse kangaroos. So many "roos" roam the Australian bush, devouring grazing grasses, that farmers hire hunters to thin the herds. Moore raises merino sheep for export to the Middle East. They are transported live in air-conditioned ships so that they can be slaughtered, in accordance with religious tradition, by a Moslem uttering "Allah" as he slashes their throats. We watch as two of Moore's dogs, respond-

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ing to his shouts and whistles, herd the sheep with astonishing skill. With the dogs' help, Moore can run the farm with only two stockmen, plus contractors for shearing.

In his tastefully furnished home after dinner and a bottle of excellent Australian wine, Moore discusses his vision of Australia's future: "I would say that, almost to a man, rural Australia favors bases like Pine Gap because we believe very firmly that we need to be doing our share, so America will look out after us. Our defense capacity is very limited. We live in a sea of Asians and our huge country is potentially their breadbasket. Without the United States defending us, I think we would be in very bad shape."

It is not only military invasion that worries Moore and others like him. The Australian policy that encouraged the immigration of Europeans and restricted the entry of Asians has been changing since the early 1970's. In the last few years, Australia has admitted 88,000 Indochinese refugees and some of their families are now following. Asians now account for 12 percent of the population. Moore says his children may have a different view, but he is concerned about Australia's being "led away from a European base." Unlike Europeans, Asian communities, he complains, are disinclined to assimilate. Moore's wife, Phyllis, speaks regretfully of the way the Asians keep themselves apart in her daughter's school.

Phyllis is a sturdy woman. She cares for the immaculate house and does all the office work for the farm. At times, she confesses, she is a bit lonely in the isolation of the bush.

Like other Australian women, she lives in a society heavily influenced by the frontier machismo of the Outback. The feminist movement is perhaps a decade behind that in the United States, and advancement of women lags in the senior ranks of most professions, industry and government. It is true that writers such as Thea Astley, Elizabeth Jolley, Barbara Hanrahan, Judith Wright and Shirley Hazzard have made their marks in contemporary Australian literature, and performers such as the opera singer Joan Sutherland have received acclaim at home and abroad. But, for the most part, Australian women — whether in the Outback or in the cities — have not yet been accorded the same share of opportunity as have women in Western Europe and the United States.

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Seymour Topping is the managing editor of The New York Times.

AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Plastic radomes dot the joint U.S.-Australian base at Pine Gap.

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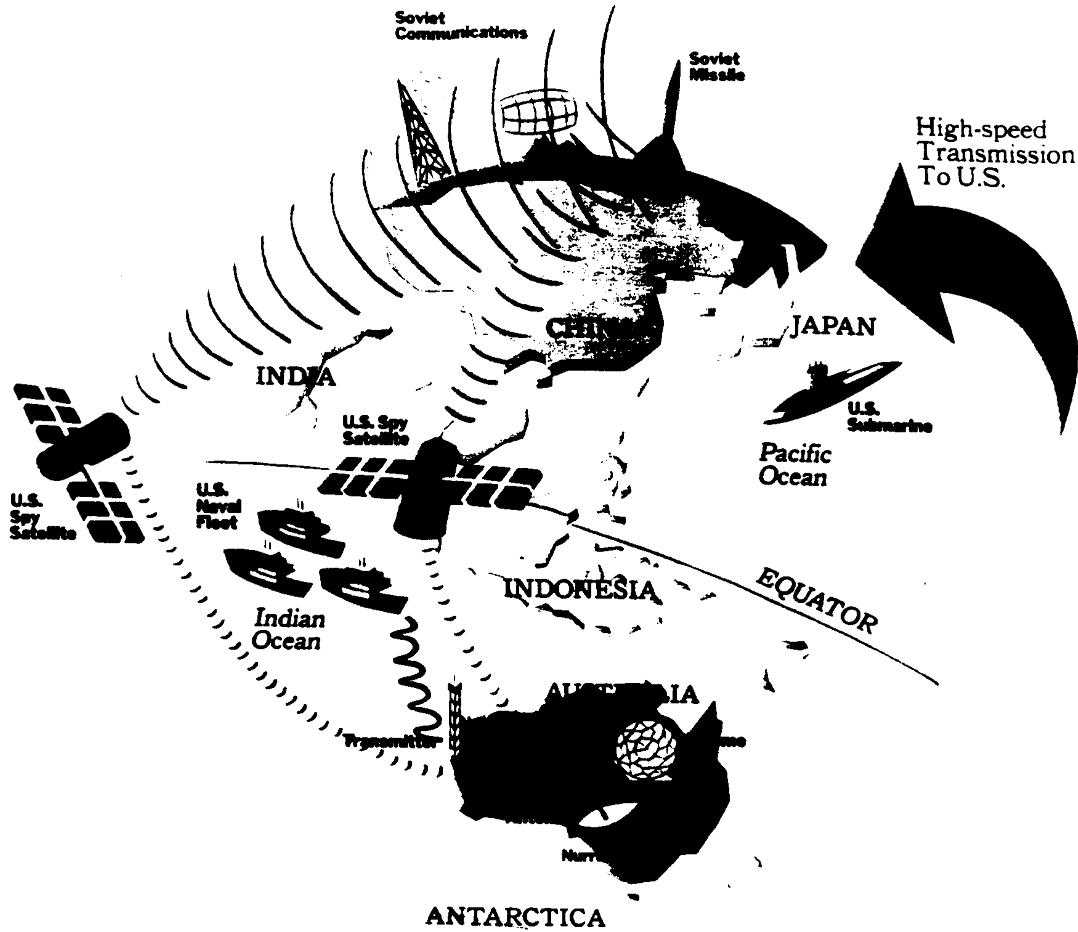

DAY VIEW

THE AUSTRALIAN CONNECTION

OF THE 20 BASES THAT ARE USED BY THE U.S., THREE ARE SO VITAL THEY ARE SEEN AS PRIMARY SOVIET TARGETS IN CASE OF A CONFLICT

UNDER VARIOUS conditions of secrecy, the United States has use of some 20 installations in Australia. These aid in early warning against Soviet missile attack; intelligence gathering, including monitoring Soviet and Chinese missile tests and experimental nuclear explosions; military communications; naval navigation; satellite tracking, and scientific research. The Australian facilities are strategically significant because the curvature of the earth does not allow stations in the United States to perform the same functions. American bases, for instance, simply cannot directly receive signals from spy satellites monitoring the Soviet Union. The three most important installations — Pine Gap, Nurrungar and North West Cape — are so vital to the United States they are regarded as certain priority targets for Soviet nuclear missile attack in the event of general conflict.

The facilities are jointly operated with Australia but, in compliance with an agreement with the United States, the Australian Government has never published a list of the facilities or described their functions, except in general terms. Australian commentators such as Desmond Ball, the head of the Strategic and Defense Studies Center at the Australian National University in Canberra, have protested the policy of secrecy, arguing that the Australian people have the right to know what the Russians have gleaned from information in the public domain. Many facts in this report were obtained in an interview with Ball, who extracted most of them from official United States documents and reports to Congress that are available to the public.

NORTH WEST CAPE is equipped with one of the most powerful very low frequency transmitters. It relayed commands to Polaris missile-firing submarines before they were replaced with Tridents. Tridents, which have a longer missile range than the Polaris and can operate closer to the United States, receive communications from a base in Washington state and from North West Cape. North West Cape continues to relay commands to American

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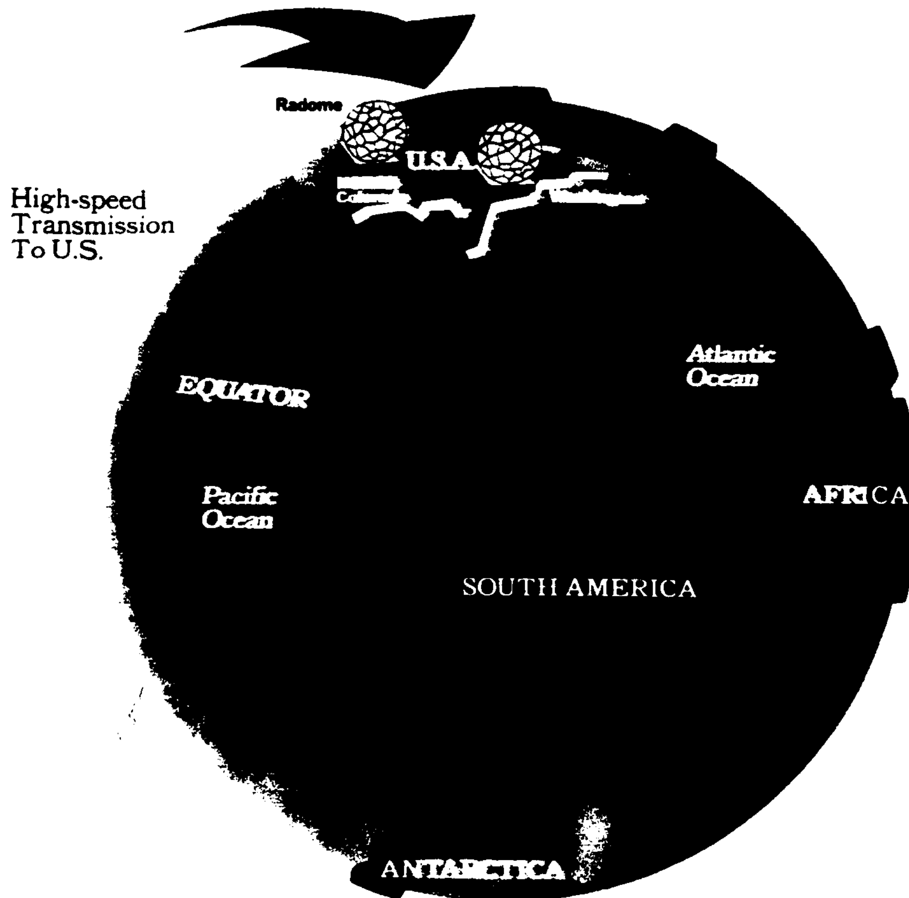

NIGHT VIEW

RICHARD OSAKA

and Australian attack submarines and surface naval groups in the western Pacific and Indian Oceans.

NURRUNGAR, about 300 miles northwest of Adelaide, is one of two key ground-control satellite stations in the United States' early-warning system. Code named Casino, it is the downlink for the geosynchronous Defense Support Program (DSP) East satellite that monitors the Soviet Union and guards against Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile attack. Another station in Colorado controls the two DSP West satellites over the Pacific and Atlantic that guard against submarine-launched missiles. Every year, Nurrungar detects the firing of about 400 tests, including those of Soviet ICBM's, intermediate range SS-20's and satellite launches. DSP satellites function by means of infrared telescopes that record emissions of intense heat in a spectrum that can only be produced by rocket engines. The ground stations insure that the satellites do not drift away and that their telescopes are correctly oriented. Data are transmitted, or downlinked, to ground stations and then relayed at high speed to the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) at Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs. The United States is developing relay satellites and a ground station in West Germany that will provide alternate means of receiving data, but Nurrungar will continue to control positioning of the DSP East satellite.

PINE GAP, near Alice Springs, orients Rhyolite satellites. These antenna-carrying, eavesdropping satellites suck up, vacuum-cleaner style, a variety of communications in the Soviet Union and China: telemetry data transmitted during Soviet ballistic missile tests; radar transmissions; telephone, radio and microwave communications. The station consists of a large computer complex and giant plastic radomes that contain monitoring equipment and transmission links to intelligence centers in the United States.

The Australian Government recently sought clearance from the Pentagon to give the public more information about these facilities, but was dissuaded for what seemed to be political rather than security reasons. In June 1984, after extended negotiations with the United States, Prime Minister Robert Hawke made a statement on the installations to Parliament. Though sketchy, it was the most comprehensive report since the facilities were first installed in the 1960's. Hawke justified the bases as contributing to the Western alliance and as deterrents against nuclear war. They are, he explained, indispensible to verifying compliance with the SALT and ABM arms-control treaties. The opposition view was expressed to me by Gerard Hand, a leader of the left wing of the Labor Party: "We are locked into an arms system that we have absolutely no control over. We don't want any early-warning systems here. In Europe, there are those sort of installations and a whole defense mechanism built up around them. Here, they sit in the middle of the desert with absolutely no defense. Through no fault of our own, we are a nuclear target." —SEYMOUR TOPPING

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