

# B-52s in Australia in 1979-1991 and the Nuclear Heterodoxy of Malcolm Fraser

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## Summary

On 11 March 1981, Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser addressed the House of Representatives to announce two U.S. B-52 bomber missions involving Australian airspace and military bases. These operations – BUSY BOOMERANG, a low-level terrain-avoidance training exercise, and GLAD CUSTOMER, a maritime surveillance mission over the Indian Ocean utilising RAAF Base Darwin – formed part of a broader U.S. strategic response to Soviet expansionism and the loss of regional basing options, particularly following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution. Fraser’s statement marked the culmination of nearly a year of intense and confidential negotiations with Washington, and it represented a significant turning point in Australia’s role within U.S. global military planning.

Fraser’s announcement was historically significant because it openly defied the longstanding policy of the United States to ‘neither confirm nor deny’ (NCND) the presence of nuclear weapons on its military platforms. Instead, Fraser insisted on four key principles that asserted Australian sovereignty and introduced a rare degree of transparency into Australia-U.S. strategic arrangements: (1) B-52s operating in Australian territory would not carry nuclear or conventional weapons; (2) the Australian government would retain the right to approve any change in the mission parameters; (3) Parliament would be informed of any such changes; and (4) the United States would publicly consent to these arrangements.

This position was not only unprecedented in Australia, but also unique globally. No other host country of U.S. nuclear-capable platforms had previously succeeded in defying U.S. NCND policy while extracting a public commitment from the U.S. about the non-introduction of nuclear weapons. This remains without parallel to the present.

The BUSY BOOMERANG mission, described domestically in Australia in benign terms as ‘low-level navigation training,’ was in reality a highly demanding and hazardous terrain-avoidance exercise conducted at night at speeds up to 740 kph and altitudes as low as 100 metres. This training aimed to prepare U.S. Strategic Air Command for nuclear offensive operations that could penetrate Soviet air defences.

The GLAD CUSTOMER maritime surveillance mission arose from a deteriorating U.S. strategic position in the Indian Ocean during the late 1970s. In response to increasing Soviet naval capabilities and the loss of access to Middle Eastern bases, the U.S. accelerated plans to deploy B-52s for surveillance and interdiction missions globally, with Australia playing a key role.

Despite opposition from civil society, the media, and the Australian Labor Party, much of the criticism lacked a nuanced understanding of the strategic imperatives driving U.S. requests for access. Notably, although then Opposition Leader Bill Hayden strongly criticised the arrangement – citing concerns about Australia’s subservience to U.S. interests – the subsequent Hawke Labor government not only maintained but expanded both B-52 missions.

To the best of public knowledge, nuclear weapons were never introduced into Australia under either mission. Nevertheless, there was little public awareness that B-52 low-level terrain-avoidance training was inherently tied to U.S. nuclear war planning under the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP). Moreover, the B-52 missions in Australia were not isolated cases but part of a broader strategy by U.S. Pacific Command to secure access to bases across the region,

including in Japan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand, and South Korea – developments not widely known in Australia at the time, and likely not fully understood even at senior political levels.

Fraser's principled rejection of the NCND policy stands as a rare and bold assertion of national sovereignty within the framework of a close military alliance. While subsequent Australian governments have expressed 'understanding of and respect for' U.S. NCND policy, none have repeated Fraser's demand for explicit sovereign control over such nuclear-related decisions. His nuclear heterodoxy offers a compelling model of what a U.S. ally can achieve within the confines of a nuclear alliance. That achievement ought to be replicable by U.S. allied host states today.

## Note

The complete Special Report is available in PDF form. (4.9 MB). This file and related materials in the *Nuclear-capable B-52H Stratofortress bombers project* are available [here](#).

Historical and contemporary policy aspects of this study are developed at greater length in two Nautilus Special Reports by Vince Scappatura and Richard Tanter:

- [Nuclear-capable B-52H Stratofortress strategic bombers: a visual guide to identification](#), Nautilus Institute Special Report, 26 August 2024 (241 pp.; 11.2 MB)
- *Undermining Rarotonga: Australia's new nuclear posture* (forthcoming)

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## Cover image

Ann Stephen, 1982; image based on Arthur Streeton, 'Land of the Golden Fleece', (1926); image courtesy of the artist.

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## Glossary

AFB	Air Force Base
AGM	Air Ground Missile
ALCM	Air Launched Cruise Missile
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AREFS	Air Refueling Squadron
ASW	anti-submarine warfare
AUSTEO	Australian eyes only
AWACS	airborne warning and control system
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defence
CEG / CEVG	Combat Evaluation Group
CINCPAC	Commander in Chief Pacific Command
CINCPACAF	Commander in Chief Pacific Air Forces
CINCSAC	Commander in Chief Strategic Air Command
CONUS	Continental United States
CVN	Aircraft Carrier, Nuclear
CPD	Commonwealth, Parliamentary Debates
CY	Command Year
DEFCON	Defence Readiness Condition
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
D.P.R.K.	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
DSP	Defence Satellite Program
EAC	Enhanced Air Cooperation
ECM	Electronic Counter-Measures
FAD	Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee
FLIR	forward looking infra-red
FPA	Force Posture Agreement
IR	Instrument Flight Route
JASDF	Japan Air Self Defence Force
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JDFPG	Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap
JGGRS	Joint Geological and Geophysical Research Station
JSCF	Joint Space Communications Facility
MIJI	Meaconing Intrusion Jamming and Interference
MTR	Military Training Route
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NC3I	Nuclear Command, Control, Communication and Intelligence
NCND	Neither Confirm Nor Deny



NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
NVN	North Vietnam
ONA	Office of National Assessments
PACOM	Pacific Command
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government
PTTF	Pacific Tanker Task Force
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
R.O.K.	Republic of Korea
RBS	Radar Bomb Scoring
RGS	Relay Ground Station
SAC	Strategic Air Command
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SBIRS	Space-Based Infra Red System
SLOCs	sea lines of communication
SIOP	Single Integrated Operational Plan
SPF	Strategic Projection Force
SR/S	Sea Reconnaissance/Surveillance
TA	Terrain Avoidance
TG	Task Group
TRAINS	Threat Reaction Analysis Indicator System
U.S.	United States
USAF	United States Air Force
USN	United States Navy
VAW	Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron
VHF	Very High Frequency
VR	Visual Flight Route

# 1. Introduction

Late in the afternoon of Wednesday, 11 March 1981, the Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser rose in the House of Representatives to make a major statement on defence issues, ushering in a new stage in Australia's alliance relations with the United States.<sup>1</sup> A year earlier, a matter of weeks after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Fraser's Liberal-National Country Party coalition cabinet had authorised United States Air Force B-52 Stratofortress operations over Australian territory to carry out low-level terrain avoidance training flights over far north Queensland.<sup>2</sup>

Fraser's 11 March 1981 *Ministerial Statement on Staging of B52s through Australia for Sea Surveillance in the Indian Ocean and for Navigation Training* announced a second and more strategically significant mission, involving U.S. B-52s not only overflying Australia for low-level navigation training, but also using Australia's northernmost air base to launch maritime surveillance operations over the Indian Ocean.

The B-52 low-level navigation training mission, codenamed BUSY BOOMERANG by the U.S. authorities, was aimed at remedying deficiencies that had emerged in the Vietnam War in the capabilities of U.S. Air Force strategic bomber crews to carry out low-level nuclear penetration missions of the Soviet Union and China required under the Single Integrated Operational Plan for nuclear war. Codenamed GLAD CUSTOMER by the Pentagon, the maritime surveillance mission staging through Darwin originated in wider U.S. plans to counter Soviet regional expansion and possible threats to western control over Middle Eastern oil sources in the aftermath of both the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

After almost a year of intense and sensitive negotiations in the last year of the Carter Administration and the first months of the Reagan Administration, Fraser's ministerial statement announced a set of guidelines and principles for both Australian B-52 missions that amounted to a globally significant challenge to U.S. demands that governments hosting deployment of nuclear-capable aircraft comply with the U.S. policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence or absence of nuclear weapons (NCND).

Both the BUSY BOOMERANG B-52 terrain avoidance training mission and the GLAD CUSTOMER maritime surveillance mission initiated by the Fraser government were subsequently maintained to at least the end of the decade by the Hawke Labor government. This decade-long deployment constituted the first of four main phases in Australia's half century of

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<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, Staging of B52s through Australia for Sea Surveillance in the Indian Ocean and for Navigation Training: Ministerial statement, 11 March 1981, 664-666, (Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister). The ministerial statement and subsequent parliamentary debate is available at CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 664-684.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defence, *Defence Report 1980*, AGPS, Parliamentary Paper No. 174/1980, p. 6, at <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1928178155/view?partId=nla.obj-1929030610>; Department of Defence, 'US Air Force B-52 Flights', *Defence Press Release No. 9/80*, 18 February 1980, at [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/HPR08005951/upload\\_binary/HPR08005951.pdf](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/HPR08005951/upload_binary/HPR08005951.pdf).

almost continuous close involvement with U.S. B-52 Stratofortress operations from 1979 onwards.<sup>3</sup>

The first phase, which forms the focus of this study, centres on the decade-long low-level terrain-avoidance training mission and the Indian Ocean maritime surveillance missions. The second phase began in earnest in November 2005 with the commencement of the United States Strategic Bomber Training Program centred on the use of Delamere Air Weapons Range in the Northern Territory for live conventional bombing practice and increasing interoperability capability. A third phase incorporated more frequent bomber deployments to a larger array of northern air bases with the announcement of the Enhanced Air Cooperation initiative under the framework of the 2014 Australia-United States Force Posture Agreement. The fourth phase began with the announcement in 2022 of the construction of a dedicated set of USAF infrastructure facilities at RAAF Base Tindal near Katherine centring on the rotational deployment of up to six USAF B-52H Stratofortress aircraft.

Table 1. Principal Australia – United States strategic bomber agreements and deployments, 1980-2025

Program/Agreement	Dates
B-52 terrain avoidance training and maritime surveillance	1980 - 1991
Strategic Bomber Training Program	2005 - 2018
Force Posture Agreement	2014 - ongoing
Enhanced Air Cooperation	2017 - ongoing
Expanded Enhanced Air Cooperation	2021 - ongoing
Enhanced Air Cooperation - Bare Base deployment	2022 - ongoing
Bomber Task Force Rotations	2022 - ongoing
Tindal AFB B-52 rotational deployment	2026 (planned)

With each new phase, Australian governments not only expanded the scope of permissible strategic bomber operations but jettisoned critical limitations that had been imposed on prior deployments under the framework established by the Fraser government and that served to maximise Australian sovereignty and maintain a degree of democratic transparency and accountability.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The last currently available evidence of B-52 ‘crew training’ operations related to the BUSY BOOMERANG and the GLAD CUSTOMER missions is a brief statement by Defence Minister Robert Ray to the Australian Senate in November 1991. Ray does not mention either mission continuing. (See Appendices 2 and 3.)

<sup>4</sup> These principal phases have usually overlapped to some degree, and throughout the whole period since 1980, B-52s have also participated in Australian-US military exercises, both on a regular schedule of multilateral exercises, and on an ad hoc basis. For further discussion see Section 4.8 below.

When Prime Minister Fraser announced the guidelines and principles that governed the first phase of B-52 bomber deployments to Australia in March 1981 he did so explicitly within the framework of maintaining Australia's national sovereignty, even though this meant breaking the worldwide U.S. policy to neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons on board U.S. aircraft:

"The Australian Government has a firm policy that aircraft carrying nuclear weapons will not be allowed to fly over or stage through Australia without its prior knowledge and agreement. Nothing less than this is consistent with the maintenance of our national sovereignty."<sup>5</sup>

In addition to this commitment to national sovereignty, Fraser insisted on a degree of democratic transparency and accountability concerning war powers when he declared in parliament that should his government accept any future request from the United States to carry out any other category of B-52 operations, including nuclear operations, the House would be informed of the agreement and provided with the opportunity to debate it:

"I also indicate to the House that if the agreement of the Government of Australia were sought and given for any other category of operations I, or the Minister, would advise the House at the time of its being done. The Parliament would be able to debate that agreement if it wished to do so."<sup>6</sup>

The key principles regulating the BUSY BOOMERANG and GLAD CUSTOMER missions developed by the Fraser government can be summarised as follows:

- a. Deployed B-52 strategic bombers must not carry nuclear or conventional weapons, that is, they must be unarmed and carry no bombs;
- b. The knowledge and consent of the Australian government is required before any change in the mission type and/or arms carried;
- c. The Australian government will inform parliament of any change in mission type and/or arms carried; and
- d. The United States agrees to consent to these arrangements in public.

This set of principles was unprecedented and never repeated by any host governments of nuclear-capable USAF aircraft, in Australia or elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

In Australian political histories, these decisions by the Fraser government have been usually presented in terms of Fraser's ardent Cold War views on Soviet expansionism, particularly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, his concern to bind the United States

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<sup>5</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 666, (Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister).

<sup>6</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Questions without Notice: B52 Bombers, 12 March 1981, 703.

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion of this issue in Vince Scappatura and Richard Tanter, *Nuclear-capable B-52H Stratofortress strategic bombers: a visual guide to identification*, Nautilus Institute Special Report, 5 August 2024, pp. 51-53 and Appendix 5, at <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/nuclear-capable-b-52h-stratofortress-bombers-a-visual-guide-to-identification/>.

more closely to the defence of Australia by offering increased naval and air base access to the United States, and his support for a US-led nuclear world order during the post-détente era then emerging.

While undoubtedly each of these elements of Fraser's views on Australian foreign policy and defence played a part in initiating over four decades of an almost continuous presence of B-52s in Australia, this received narrative is misleading in six important respects:

- Fraser's nuclear heterodoxy, characterised by his insistence that the United States publicly acknowledge that BUSY BOOMERANG flights would be unarmed and carry no nuclear weapons, has been largely overlooked by historians of Australian foreign policy. And while rare exceptions to the seven decade global history of U.S. neither confirm nor deny policy have been occasionally noted in studies of U.S. nuclear policy, Fraser's nuclear heterodoxy was unique amongst leaders of countries hosting U.S. nuclear-capable aircraft, both during the Cold War and subsequently.
- In reply to Fraser's March 1981 Ministerial Statement, the Australian Labor Party opposition launched a vitriolic parliamentary attack, resting in part on a need to avoid what opposition leader Bill Hayden termed 'a master-servant relationship' with an ally, and on what Hayden's deputy viewed as 'a mistake on their [the U.S.] part' by publicly acknowledging that B-52 flights over Australia would be unarmed and carry no bombs.<sup>8</sup> However, both Australian B-52 missions were continued after Fraser left office without interruption under the successor Hawke Labor government between 1983 and 1991, with the 1981 agreement described in 1986 by the Labor Defence Minister, Kim Beazley, as a 'cast-iron' guarantee of the aircraft being unarmed and carrying no bombs.<sup>9</sup>
- Australian official, media and academic reporting and discussion of the BUSY BOOMERANG mission always referred to the mission in somewhat innocuous terms as 'low-level navigation training'. U.S. military internal discussions, on the contrary, used the more accurate, if diplomatically unpalatable, term of 'terrain-avoidance' training, with the aim of limiting domestic host country concern about the obvious dangers of bomber flights over mountainous terrain at a height of 100-150 metres and at speeds up to 740 kph, often at night.
- U.S. need for access to Australia for both the terrain-avoidance low-level training mission and the Indian Ocean maritime surveillance mission was a response to significant deterioration in the 1970s in U.S. strategic capability in two distinct respects:
  - On the one hand, the vulnerability of B-52s in high level bombing operations confirmed by the success of Soviet-supplied advanced air defence systems during the Vietnam War which required the perfection of technically demanding low-level terrain-avoidance strategic penetration capability to fulfil the requirements

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<sup>8</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 666-670, (Bill Hayden and Lionel Bowen).

<sup>9</sup> 'No warheads on B-52s: Beazley', *Canberra Times*, 17 January 1986.

for viable nuclear attack by U.S. bombers on the Soviet Union and China under successive iterations of the Single Integrated Operational Plan.

- On the other, initial U.S. planning in the mid-1970s for a long-range maritime surveillance and interdiction role for B-52s was accelerated by an unprecedented Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean, combined with the geopolitical and basing consequences of the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
- Neither the B-52 terrain-avoidance low-level training mission nor the Indian Ocean maritime surveillance mission took place in Australia alone: each was part of U.S. global military planning.
  - The U.S. programs to obtain access to Australia for B-52 terrain-avoidance training and maritime surveillance operations were part of a region-wide coordinated campaign by U.S. Pacific Command over more than a decade involving sustained diplomatic pressure to obtain B-52 access rights from Australia, Japan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, South Africa, the Republic of Korea, and Thailand.
  - Responding to increases in the scale, capabilities and geographical reach of the Soviet blue-water navy and naval aviation in the 1970s, B-52 maritime surveillance operations commenced in the western Atlantic in 1975, and extended into the north Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East, until the loss of access to suitable Middle Eastern bases at the end of the decade heightened the requirement for Australian base access.
- The two 1980s B-52s missions in Australia, while quite distinct, were similar insofar as both were physically and mentally demanding on pilots, technically difficult for aircrew to attain the required level of proficiency, and frequently dangerous. However, the two missions were responses to quite distinct U.S. strategic requirements and organisational imperatives, resulting in dissimilar operational characteristics, and quite different relationships to the question of nuclear armament.
  - The maritime surveillance mission was one part of the complex suite of non-nuclear-armed B-52 missions that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly responding to the requirements of the Indochina war and shifting geopolitical requirements. By 1986 the B-52 maritime surveillance mission evolved into a surveillance and interdiction mission, with B-52 squadrons based in Maine and Guam equipped with Harpoon antiship missiles with conventional explosive warheads.
  - The core objective of the terrain avoidance training mission was to ensure that Strategic Air Command aircrews were capable of meeting the unique and



demanding operational standards of the low-level strategic offensive penetration mission for B-52s under the SIOP for nuclear attack in the face of modern air defence systems. Serious accidents in the early stages of the terrain avoidance training program meant that the aircraft should not carry nuclear weapons, but the training itself was inherently tied to offensive nuclear operations essential to U.S. success in nuclear warfighting.

This study of Fraser's nuclear heterodoxy proceeds as follows. Chapter two situates the deployment of B-52 bombers to Australia within the broader context of U.S. strategic planning in the Pacific and Indian Oceans during the late Cold War. Drawing on declassified Commander in Chief Pacific Command (CINCPAC) histories, it demonstrates how the two B-52 missions in Australia served multiple U.S. military objectives – from nuclear and conventional strategic penetration training to surveillance and maritime interdiction – while disclosing key, previously classified operational details. Chapter three examines the two B-52 missions from the Australian perspective, detailing the negotiations, agreements and domestic debates surrounding the deployments and the evolving strategic context of the Cold War that framed them. It highlights the Fraser government's success in imposing stringent conditions on U.S. access to Australian airspace and bases, notably securing public U.S. confirmation that no nuclear weapons would be introduced. Chapter four examines the legacy of Fraser's unique and assertive stance on nuclear weapons, particularly his rejection of the global U.S. NCND policy. While successive Australian governments have continued to express 'understanding of and respect for' U.S. NCND policy, Fraser's approach remains an exceptional assertion of national sovereignty, transparency and accountability.

## 2. B-52s in Australia – the American story

### 2.1 Introduction

While the focus of this study is on the Australian experience of B-52 Stratofortress deployment in the 1980s, the story is told first from the American perspective, then the Australian. This wider focus sets the Australian narrative in the context of strategic planning by the United States involving a number of countries in the Pacific at the same time, drawing on extensive annual Command Histories for the Commander in Chief Pacific Command (CINCPAC), originally classified Top Secret. Declassified and released to the Nautilus Institute, the CINCPAC Command Histories provide detailed insight into U.S. military planning for the two Australian B-52 missions and the regional framework of B-52 operations in the Pacific region. The CINCPAC Command Histories for Command Years (CY) 1974 – 1986 obtained by the Nautilus Institute under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act are an indispensable and rich, if uneven, set of sources for understanding U.S. military operations in the Pacific, including Australia, in the first half of the 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For details of the CINCPAC *Command Histories* used in this study see Appendix 5; hereafter cited as CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY.

## 2.2. The low-level terrain avoidance training mission

In U.S. Air Force doctrine, the primary role of B-52 Stratofortress aircraft from the 1950s onwards had always been strategic aerospace offense, the objective of which was specified in the 1980s as being

‘to neutralize or destroy an enemy’s war-sustaining capabilities or will to fight. Aerospace forces may conduct strategic aerospace offense actions, at all levels of conflict, through the systematic application of force to a selected series of vital targets. Attacks are directed against an enemy’s key military, political, and economic power base... Strategic aerospace offense may involve projection of power, with limited or massive application of force, or merely positioning of force as a threat to achieve a desired objective.’<sup>11</sup>

The Vietnam War led to two developments in the B-52’s strategic offensive role which, by the late 1970s, had produced significant consequences for the state of B-52 training levels and ultimately influenced the two Australian missions.

Firstly, during the Vietnam War a substantial number of nuclear-capable B-52s were converted to a dual-capability to allow use of conventional gravity bombs – mostly over South Vietnam and Cambodia, as well as Laos and North Vietnam – the last mainly over a short but extremely intense period in 1972. Between the start of Operation Arc Light in South Vietnam in 1965 and the end of USAF operations in Indochina in April 1973, over 200 B-52s were deployed to the theatre, flying 126,615 sorties and dropping over two million tons of bombs.<sup>12</sup> In December 1972 alone during the LINEBACKER II ‘Christmas bombing’ of the North Vietnamese cities of Hanoi and Haiphong, B-52s flew 729 sorties and dropped over 15,237 tons of bombs over two weeks.<sup>13</sup>

These aggregate numbers, spread over an eight year period, and involving operations in four countries mask two distinctly different bombing patterns, especially for B-52s. Massive bombing

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<sup>11</sup> *Air Force Manual (AFM) 1-1, Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force*, 16 March 1984, p. 3-2, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA229829.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Table 2. below draws on the near contemporary research of the Air War Study Group, Cornell University, *The Air War in Indochina*, Ralph Littauer and Norman Uphoff, (eds.), (Beacon Press, rev. ed., 1972), Appendix SS-6. ‘B-52 Activity: a. B-52 Sorties for Southeast Asia; b. Distribution of B-52 Missions, South Vietnam, DMZ, and North Vietnam, and c. Average Ordnance Tonnage per B-52 Sortie.’ Note that this data from *The Air War in Indochina* does not include bombing of North Vietnam after 1969, nor of Cambodia and Laos for any period. For the U.S. Air Force Bombing Survey of LINEBACKER II over Hanoi and Haiphong between 18-29 December 1972, see Herman L. Gilster, *The Air War in Southeast Asia: Case Studies of Selected Campaigns*, (Air University Press, October 1993), pp. 75-115. For a recent discussion of data sources on U.S. bombing in all five target countries of U.S. bombing in the Indochina war from 1965-1975, see Holly High, James R. Curran, Gareth Robinson, ‘Electronic Records of the Air War Over Southeast Asia: A Database Analysis’, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, (Vol. 8, No. 4), 2013, pp. 86–124.

<sup>13</sup> ‘More than 55 percent of these sorties were flown in South Vietnam, 27 percent in Laos, 12 percent in Cambodia, and 6 percent in NVN. Altogether, the USAF lost 31 B-52s, 18 to enemy fire over NVN. Half of the American money spent on the war, about \$200 billion, was spent on U.S. aerial operations.’ William P. Head, *War from Above the Clouds: B-52 Operations during the Second Indochina War and the Effects of the Air War on Theory and Doctrine*, (Air University Press, July, 2002), pp. 17-32, 93-95, at [https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/AUPress/Papers/FP\\_0007\\_HEAD\\_WAR\\_FROM\\_ABOVE\\_CLOUD\\_S.PDF](https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/AUPress/Papers/FP_0007_HEAD_WAR_FROM_ABOVE_CLOUD_S.PDF); and Gregory J. Berlan, *Forward Offense: Preparing the B-52 For Conventional Warfare*, Research Report AU-ARI-88-6, Air University Press, February 1989, pp. 40-41, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA205248.pdf>.

in the south, unopposed by substantial air defence, represented ‘a new form of area bombing’, whereas air operations over strongly defended North Vietnam, with the Chinese border close, and two very large cities that were off-limits to bombing until late in the war, ‘placed a premium on precision’.<sup>14</sup>

The profound enduring environmental and social impact of highly inaccurate B-52 pattern bombing in the South Vietnam campaign was a matter of geography, the state of targeting technology, and U.S. government policy. In August 1965 Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara told a Senate Appropriations committee that

‘We are faced with very, very heavy jungle in certain portions of South Vietnam, jungle so heavy that is impossible to find an aiming point in it. We know some of these jungles are used by the Vietcong for base camps and for storage areas....You can imagine that without an ability to find an aiming point there, there is only one way of bombing it and that is with a random pattern...With the force we had (B-52s) trained as it was in pattern bombing...the military commanders felt – and I believe this was a proper use of the weapons – that these strikes would destroy certain Viet Cong base areas, and as a matter of fact, they did...There is no other feasible way of doing it.’<sup>15</sup>

McNamara was speaking in the early period of the large scale bombing offensive in mid-1965 that became Operation Arc Light, at a time when senior Strategic Air Command officers, highly focussed on the primary SIOP nuclear role of the B-52 strategic bomber force, were reluctant to agree to the importunings of General Westmoreland, Commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) to allow large-scale use of B-52s for conventional bombing and in particular for high altitude pattern bombing by B-52s ‘to deliver an even pattern of bombs over a large area in a short period of time.’<sup>16</sup> In April 1965,

‘the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and CINCSAC that, in light of the current situation, the B-52s could be used for area saturation attacks against known Viet Cong occupied installations and facilities for which precise target data for pinpoint bombing strikes was not available.’<sup>17</sup>

Whether in the areas of saturation bombing mainly in the south, or the somewhat more precise targeted bombing in the northern cities, the psychological effects of the B-52s conventional

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<sup>14</sup> The two campaigns amounted to ‘an intricate gavotte between strategic advantage and political calculation, each of which required careful (precise) political calculation.’ Derek Gregory, ‘Lines of descent’, *openDemocracy*, 8 November 2011, at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/lines-of-descent/>.

<sup>15</sup> Carl Berger, (ed.), *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973: An Illustrated Account*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1977), p. 149, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA045012.pdf>.

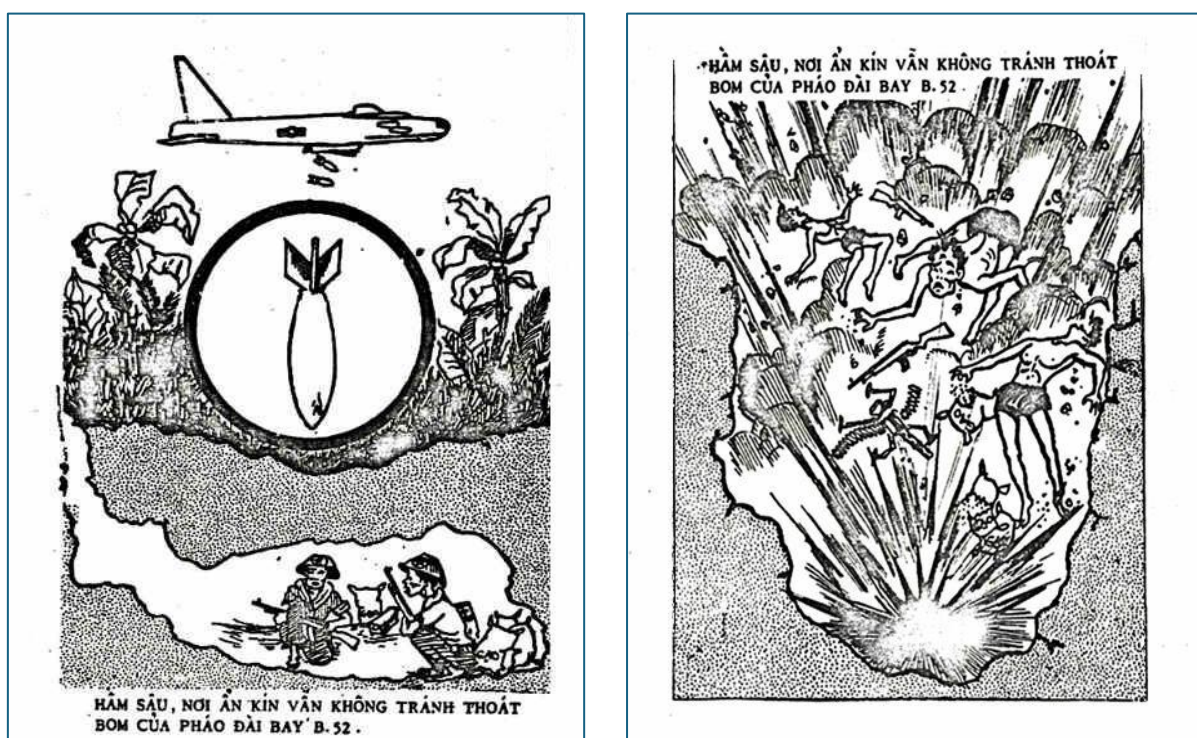
<sup>16</sup> John Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam The Years of the Offensive 1965-1968* [*The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia*], (University Press of the Pacific, 2002; original 1998), pp. 50-51, at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-D301-PURL-LPS49304/pdf/GOVPUB-D301-PURL-LPS49304.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam - 1960-1968, Part 2*, (Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2012), p. 297, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA557393.pdf>.

bombing was as great as its physical effects.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the war, the silent destructiveness of high altitude B-52 pattern bombing was intentionally exploited as a theme in substantial U.S. psychological warfare operations (Figure 1). The Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) Minister of Justice Truong Nhu Tang recalled:

‘The first few times I experienced a B-52 attack it seemed, as I strained to press myself into the bunker floor, that I had been caught in the Apocalypse. The terror was complete. One lost control of bodily functions as the mind screamed incomprehensible orders to get out.’<sup>19</sup>

Figure 1. Vietnam, 1966: ‘The B-52 can search out its enemy anywhere’



Source: Leaflet 151-66, produced by the 244th PSYOP Company as part of the I Corps Tactical Zone Joint PSYWAR Civil Affairs Center, in Herb Friedman, ‘The strategic bomber and American psyop’, *Psychological Operations*, [accessed 11 February 2025], at <https://www.psywarrior.com/B52leaflets.html>.

Despite the conversion of many of Strategic Air Command’s B-52s for conventional bombing for the Indochina campaigns, the nuclear mission remained the primary focus for SAC throughout the Vietnam War and beyond. This continued to be the case until the 1991 Gulf War when changes in air power tactics and technology convincingly demonstrated the utility of the bomber force for conventional deep strike interdiction. Combined with a reduced Soviet nuclear threat and increasing concern for theatre conflict, the experience of the Gulf War solidified a

<sup>18</sup> See ‘Vietnam’, in SSM Herb Friedman, ‘The strategic bomber and American psyop’, *Psychological Operations*, [accessed 11 February 2025], at <https://www.psywarrior.com/B52leaflets.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Mark Clodfelter, *The limits of air power: the American bombing of North Vietnam*, (University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 101.



growing awareness within SAC that had been growing from the mid to late 1980s for a larger conventional role for strategic bomber aircraft, especially in the absence of effective air defences.<sup>20</sup>

Table 2. B-52 bombing of South and North Vietnam, 1965-1971\*

Year	Annual number of B-52 missions	Average bomb tonnage per B-52 mission	Annual B-52 tonnage
1965	1,500	17	25,500
1966	5,200	20	104,000
1967	9,700	24	232,800
1968	20,500	26	533,000
1969	19,500	27	526,500
1970	15,100	28	422,800
1971	12,500	28	350,000
<b>TOTAL</b>			2,194,600

\* Data does not include bombing of North Vietnam after 1969, nor of Laos and Cambodia in any period.

Source: Air War Study Group, Cornell University, (Ralph Littauer and Norman Uphoff, editors), *The Air War in Indochina, (revised edition)*, (Beacon Press, 1972), Appendix SS-6. 'B-52 Activity: a. B-52 Sorties for Southeast Asia; b. Distribution of B-52 Missions, South Vietnam, DMZ, and North Vietnam, and c. Average Ordnance Tonnage per B-52 Sortie.'

The second development for the strategic offensive role of the B-52 to emerge from the Vietnam War derived from the confirmation that the bomber was vulnerable to detection and attack by advanced air defence systems. Since the early 1960s SAC had recognized the threat posed to high altitude bombers from formidable Soviet air defence systems, leading it to mandate that all active B-52s,

‘would have to be capable of penetrating enemy defences at an altitude of 500 feet or lower, in any kind of weathers and without impairing the bomber’s inherent high speed at high altitude.’<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Christopher D. McConnell, *Strategic Bombing: How Precision Bombing Doctrine Affects Training*, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, Air University, June 2018, pp. 48-50, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/AD1079494>

<sup>21</sup> Marcelle Size Knaack, *Encyclopedia of U.S. Air Force Aircraft and Missile Systems, Volume II: Post-World War II Bombers 1945-1973*, (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History, USAF, 1988), p. 252, at <https://media.defense.gov/2010/May/26/2001330264/-1/-1/0/AFD-100526-026.pdf>. For discussion of structural redesign and refitting for low-level operations on B-52D, B-52F, B-52G, and B-52H models, see pp. 250-290.

Achieving this mandated capability for low-level operations was far from technologically straightforward, involving understanding of strains on the aircraft quite different from the high-altitude mission for which it was originally designed. Structural fatigue issues were not fully understood, and

‘the extent of the damage could not be fully predicted, but gusts at 800 feet were 200 times more frequent than at 30,000 feet. At best it was believed that low-level manoeuvres and gust loads would speed the B-52s structural deterioration by a minimum quotient of 8.’<sup>22</sup>

As a result SAC mandated a series of structural modifications and upgrading of electronic countermeasures in the 1960s to meet the new requirement for a dual capability for both low-level SIOP operations as well as high level operations.

However, the air war in Indochina from 1965 to 1975 overwhelmingly involved conventional bombing, and was rarely conducted against targets protected by modern air defences. Early in the war Hanoi was regarded by the USAF as ‘the world’s most heavily defended city’, with a fighter wing commander describing North Vietnam in 1967 as ‘the center of Hell, with Hanoi as its hub’.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided against the use of B-52s against Hanoi and Haiphong.

Only late in the American war in Vietnam did the U.S. Air Force have to face the reality of the vulnerability of highflying B-52s during strikes against North Vietnamese industrial and urban targets around Hanoi and Haiphong. After several days of losses of serious numbers of B-52s over Hanoi and Haiphong early in LINEBACKER II in late 1972, improved B-52 cell-formation tactics and advances in electronic counter-measures (ECMs) overcame the Vietnamese air defences.<sup>24</sup> But a longer term solution involved a three-part shift: B-52 low-level nuclear and conventional penetration tactics with improved navigation and air defence technologies; the development of a stand-off missile capability to allow attack from a greater distance; and by the end of the 1980s, the deployment of the B-1B bomber to take over the aerial nuclear delivery role from the B-52s. By the mid-1980s, AGM-86B long-range air-launched nuclear-armed cruise missiles with terrain-contour matching began to enable the B-52 strategic offensive role to include a nuclear stand-off mission, alleviating complete reliance on what was by then necessarily a low-level strategic penetration role.<sup>25</sup>

However, the key issues were not only technological, but also organisational, particularly in terms of training regimes for two quite different types of missions. For Pacific Command during most

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<sup>22</sup> Marcelle Size Knaack, *Encyclopedia of U.S. Air Force Aircraft and Missile Systems, Volume II*, (n. 21), p. 254.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Clodfelter, *The limits of air power: the American bombing of North Vietnam*, (n. 19), p. 75.

<sup>24</sup> On B-52 electronic counter-measures and offensive avionics during the 1970s, see Walter Boyne, *Boeing B-52- A Documentary History*, (Jane's, 1981), pp. 116-122, at [https://archive.org/details/b52\\_20190904/B-52/page/n1/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/b52_20190904/B-52/page/n1/mode/2up).

<sup>25</sup> Nuclear-armed AGM-86B ALCMs achieved initial operating capability in the with B-52 fleet in December 1982. The conventionally-armed version, the AGM-86C, achieved initial operating capability in January 1991. ‘AGM-86B/C/D Missiles’, *Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center*, August 2009, at <https://www.afnwc.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Article/2060308/agm-86bcd-missiles/>.



of the 1980s, despite the increased maritime conventional role, the primary B-52 strategic offensive penetration role for which it trained and rehearsed most was the nuclear mission, with training requirements geared to the unique no-fail, 'assured destruction' requirements of the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP). That the same skills could be applied to the strategic conventional penetration role against adversaries protected by less-advanced air defence systems was a useful side benefit.

Under the nuclear-focussed planning and organisational culture developed by SAC from the 1950s onwards, and still the primary training goal in the 1980s, 'perfection – and 100% compliance' required repeated and continually maintained fulfilment of a highly standardised and centralised suite of training regimes.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the Indochina conventional bombing campaigns, SAC discovered that the complex skill and practice requirements for conventional bombing 'precision targeting' operations and the need to innovate tactics in the face of modern air defence, while at the same time minimizing attrition rates, meant diminishing 'the ability for aircrew to train and remain certified for SAC's SIOP responsibilities.'<sup>27</sup>

'Throughout the Arc Light and Linebacker II missions, the importance of nuclear readiness was always apparent. As the number of B-52 aircrews and aircraft increased in theater relative to the total available for nuclear response, the requirement to maintain radar bombing proficiency and the aircraft's synchronous bombing certification for nuclear missions increased. One aspect of nuclear certification was the aircraft's synchronous bombing certification that was required to be completed by aircrew every 45 days.'<sup>28</sup>

Strategic Air Command's organisational focus on producing and maintaining a disciplined nuclear bomber force itself generated a mentality that did not fit well with the rapidly evolving skill and technical requirements of conventional bombing campaigns in Indochina. For the nuclear missions:

'It was widely understood and accepted that the crew force's job was not to think; they were simply to execute SAC's plans. SAC provided detailed instructions and demanded strict adherence to checklists during flying operations... Displays of initiative were discouraged. A last indicator of the uncompromising dynamic of SAC was the impact of their inspections. At the squadron, group and wing command-level, the consequences of failing a no-notice operational readiness inspection were abrupt and usually included the immediate firing of the wing commander.'<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Charles A. McElvaine, *B-52 Transformation Challenge: Maintaining Conventional Relevancy in a Nuclear-Focused Major Command*, Air Command and Staff College, Air University, April 2010, AU/ACSC/MCELVAINE/AY10, p. 1, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/AD1018428.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher D. McConnell, *Strategic Bombing*, (n. 20), p. 44.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher D. McConnell, *Strategic Bombing*, (n. 20), p. 44. 'Because of this requirement, a radar bomb scoring (RBS) system was established in the Philippines in June 1972 for aircrew returning from Vietnam to train to the synchronous bombing contingencies. The strain placed on nuclear readiness by Arc Light sorties increased as crews lost over 50 percent of their RBS logged activities resulting in eighty-two G model aircraft and forty-two D model aircraft in theater being decertified to a non-synchronous, non-nuclear status.'

<sup>29</sup> Charles A. McElvaine, *B-52 Transformation Challenge*, (n. 26), p. 10.

As one B-52 trainer wrote in 1982,

‘After the war, SAC sought to rebuild its nuclear capability and refocused B-52 training almost entirely on the traditional nuclear role. In the past several years, however, it has again taken advantage of the B-52’s versatility by including both nuclear and nonnuclear roles in its wartime mission.’<sup>30</sup>

Even short of combat conditions, the normal operational challenges facing B-52 crews were substantial. According to former B-52 pilot Walter Boyne:

‘Despite the great bulk of the fuselage, very little room is provided for the crew, who are dressed almost as uncomfortably as are astronauts. The cabin temperature varies from freezing cold to intensely hot, depending upon the time of day, position of the sun and inclination of the man in charge of the temperature controls. The pressurized air is bone dry, as is the oxygen the crew breathes when wearing masks, so sinuses become dry and irritated. The changes in pressure from surges in the pressurization system, changes in altitude and so on do not help. Add to this a high ambient noise level, the constant hum of electronic equipment, the static of radios and intercom and the intensity of concentration required for most jobs and you have a prescription for fatigue.’<sup>31</sup>

On low-level terrain avoidance missions, these challenges were even greater, and the dangers palpable. The B-52 was designed to fly at altitudes of over 15,000 metres, and while extremely low altitude flight was possible, structural re-design, and new skills as well as simple endurance on the part of the crew were required, with one pilot describing the turbulence at low altitude as ‘flying a bunch of loose parts in formation’.<sup>32</sup>

A Boeing test pilot recounted the experience of flying a B-52 terrain avoidance mission

‘at an average altitude of 300 feet [91 metres] from Southern Texas to North Dakota, at speeds of from 325 to 400 knots [600 to 740 kilometres per hour]. We ran into bugs, birds and turbulence. Everyone on board breathed a sigh of relief when each low level flight was over because we had an intuitive feeling that it was not safe. The navigator and bombardier were particularly upset with their situation as they sat on downward ejection seats. Of course at low altitude, the chances of anyone getting out were pretty slim in the case of structural failure.’<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Bruce Eickhoff, ‘SAC Trains the Way It Would Fight’, *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, (Vol. 65, No. 2), February 1982, p. 62. Eickhoff was writing a year after the creation of the SAC Strategic Projection Force to support the Carter administration’s Rapid Deployment Force focussed on the Middle East: ‘The Strategic Projection Force capability was displayed for the whole world during November’s Exercise Bright Star in Egypt, when six B-52Hs of the SPF flew nonstop from North Dakota to the Western Desert of Egypt. After entering Egyptian airspace, the crews practiced low-level tactics and ECM against Egyptian fighters. Upon reaching the target, the B-52s dropped their conventional bomb loads and returned nonstop to home base, thus successfully completing a thirty-two-hour mission with five aerial refuelings.’

<sup>31</sup> Walter Boyne, *Boeing B-52- A Documentary History*, (n. 24), p.140.

<sup>32</sup> Walter Boyne, *Boeing B-52- A Documentary History*, (n. 24), p.142.

<sup>33</sup> James H. Goodsell, in Walter Boyne, *Boeing B-52- A Documentary History*, (n. 24), p. 141.

Not surprisingly, given the threats of combat combined with the difficulties of simply flying the massive aircraft at low altitudes, one B-52 training specialist concluded:

‘Strategic penetration of a high-threat area is probably the most difficult challenge for a B-52 or any other aircraft.’<sup>34</sup>

Training requirements were correspondingly demanding, requiring ‘an enormous amount of time, effort, and expense’.<sup>35</sup>

Despite continual improvements in electronic counter-measures, including reductions in the aircraft’s vulnerability in the infrared, visible and radar spectrums, improved offensive avionics, command and control capabilities, and iterative development in terrain avoidance and visual terrain-following technologies, strategic offensive penetration missions remained dependent on high crew performance at low-level terrain avoidance. One pilot summarised the minimum skill sets required for the conventional strategic offensive penetration mission:

‘The penetrating aircrew must be proficient in air-refueling, low-level navigation, terrain avoidance, a variety of ECM skills, bombing, and aerial gunnery. Additionally, low-level cell formation, visual terrain following procedures (with or without night-vision goggles), multiple axes near simultaneous bomb delivery, destructive ECM (direct engagement and attack of enemy defences), and other enhanced conventional skills would be required.’<sup>36</sup>

Long, intensive training and repeated practice were essential requirements. Yet, according to Berlan in 1989, even after more than a decade of the SAC terrain-avoidance training regime,

‘the number of crews capable of achieving and maintaining this proficiency would be equal to somewhat less than one-third of the crews currently available. (This is based on the assumption that it would take at least two years’ experience in each seat to achieve proficiency.)’<sup>37</sup>

### 2.2.1 The region-wide demand for access to terrain-avoidance training routes

For all of these reasons Strategic Air Command had been pressing for access outside the United States – in politically appropriate allied countries – to suitable, realistic training locations several thousand kilometers in length. Access to training routes outside the United States was particularly important to familiarize crews with foreign parts and practices, relays of refuelling operations and experience of the small number of suitable overseas airfields capable of handling the requirements of the enormous aircraft.

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<sup>34</sup> Gregory J. Berlan, *Forward Offense*, (n. 13), p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Gregory J. Berlan, *Forward Offense*, (n. 13), pp. 4, 27.

<sup>36</sup> Gregory J. Berlan, *Forward Offense*, (n. 13), p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Gregory J. Berlan, *Forward Offense*, (n. 13), p. 5.

Between 1981 and 1983, the last year for which detailed Pacific Command History material is available in unredacted form, CINCPAC oversaw at last five sets of B-52 terrain avoidance and/or fighter interception training for crews and aircraft based in Guam or in the continental United States and staging through Guam and Darwin:

- Australia
  - BUSY BOOMERANG low-level terrain-avoidance training missions and simulated bombing runs overflying northern Australia from Guam
  - BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA low-level terrain-avoidance missions overflying northern Australia, staging through Darwin
- Korea
  - KOREAN LOW-LEVEL - terrain-avoidance, high and low-level bombing simulation and intercept day and night training missions flown from Guam twice weekly.
  - BUSY ADVENTURE - terrain-avoidance and intercept day and night training missions from the continental United States, just once in 1981
- Japan
  - Bombing simulation and intercept training using B-52s en route to Korea.

In addition to these five programs operating for varying periods, while CINCPAC was developing and conducting BUSY BOOMERANG and GLAD CUSTOMER operations over and through Australia, the U.S. government was continually pressing other governments in Japan, Papua New Guinea, and the Philippines to accept or expand B-52 training missions, either for low-level terrain-avoidance or for fighter intercept training.

### 2.2.2 Papua-New Guinea

In December 1978 the United States proposed low-level training routes to the government of newly independent Papua New Guinea led by the country's first prime minister, Michael Somare, a plan set aside two months later due to the political sensitivity of the proposal in Papua New Guinea, and to the fact that the U.S. was simultaneously conducting 'more favourable negotiations' with the Fraser government in Australia. The issue was broached again with the Papua New Guinea government of Prime Minister Julius Chan in January 1982, when CINCPAC noted that,

'routes in PNG would offer over 2 hours of excellent B-52 terrain avoidance training on an unrefueled 8-hour mission.'<sup>38</sup>

In January 1983 CINCPAC met with Prime Minister Somare, who had recently returned to power, in Hawaii, receiving 'a positive response' when he broached the subject of B-52 overflights. Six months later the head of Pacific Command wrote personally to the Papua New Guinea prime minister with an outline of proposed routes inland from the north coast. Once or

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<sup>38</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1982, p. 324.

twice a week a pair of B-52s would fly for about 90 minutes at 500 ft [150 ] above ground in mountainous areas and 300 ft [90 m.] above ground in non-mountainous areas.

‘The route would initially cross the shoreline between Reiss Point and Lepsius Point on the Vitiary Strait on the north coast of New Guinea, continue inland about 30 miles, then head roughly parallel to the coast in a northwesterly direction until crossing the coastline outbound between Aitape and Paup.’<sup>39</sup>

Had they eventuated, most PNG terrain avoidance training flights would have been operating less than a 100 m. over mountains 2,500 m. high, and some another thousand metres higher (Figures 2 and 3).

In late August 1983 the Somare government announced its continued opposition to the B-52s proposal, and on 27 September informed the U.S. embassy that the CINCPAC proposal would contradict positions on nuclear-related matters Papua New Guinea was putting to the South Pacific Forum – including a ban on the entry of nuclear-armed ships.<sup>40</sup>

Yet, this rebuff did not end the matter:

‘USCINCPAC advised the U.S. ambassador that they should not let this setback discourage them from pursuing the issue at a later date, when the ambassador judged the time to be right. This did not occur in 1983.’<sup>41</sup>

Later CINCPAC command histories are silent on any subsequent agreement by the Papua New Guinea government to CINCPAC requests for terrain-avoidance training routes. But a Strategic Air Command in-house magazine article published in February 1982 reported that at that time B-52s en route from Andersen AFB to conduct BUSY BOOMERANG operations over north Queensland in Australia overflow PNG territory and conducted simulated bombing runs over an island off the country’s north coast.

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<sup>39</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1983, p. 345-6.

<sup>40</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History* 1982, p. 346; and Michael Hamel-Green, *The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty: a critical assessment*, (Peace Research Centre, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1990), pp. 88, 102, at <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/111864>).

<sup>41</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History* CY 1982, p. 346. For further discussion of the positions adopted by Papua New Guinea and other Pacific island states during the development of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone see Michael Hamel-Green, *The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty*, (n. 40), pp. 88, 102; and Michael Hamel-Green, ‘Regional Arms Control in the South Pacific: Island State Responses to Australia’s Nuclear Free Zone Initiative’, *The Contemporary Pacific*, (Vol. 3, No. 1), Spring 1991.



Figure 2. USAF Papua-New Guinea B-52H terrain avoidance training proposed and inland scenario routes (schematic)

**USAF proposed route** - Lepsius Point; 48 kms inland from coast; heading c.300 degrees parallel to coast; exiting between Aitape and Paup (c. 670 kms)



**Inland scenario route** - Lepsius Point; 48 kms inland from coast; heading c.285 degrees, crossing near Kifamu Mission, Mount Hagen and Porgera; exiting between Aitape and Paup (880 kms).

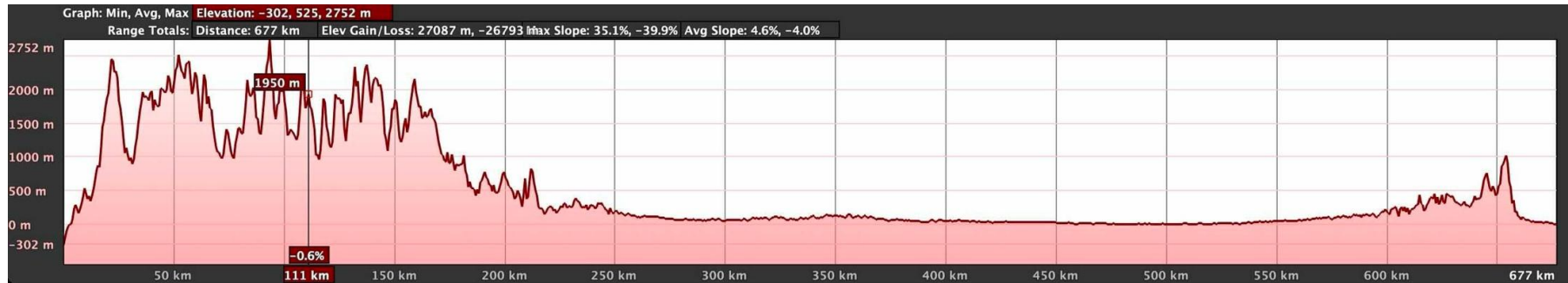


Sources: *Google Earth*. For USAF proposed route, see CINCPAC, *Command History*, p. 324. For scenario inland route, variation in heading from proposed route generated by the authors.



Figure 3. USAF Papua-New Guinea B-52H terrain avoidance training proposed and inland scenario routes - elevation profiles (schematic)

USAF proposed route - Lepsius Point; 48 kms inland from coast; heading c.300 degrees parallel to coast; exiting between Aitape and Paup (c. 670 kms)



Inland scenario route - Lepsius Point; 48 kms inland from coast; heading c.285 degrees, crossing near Kifamu Mission, Mount Hagen, and Porgera; exiting between Aitape and Paup (c.880 kms).



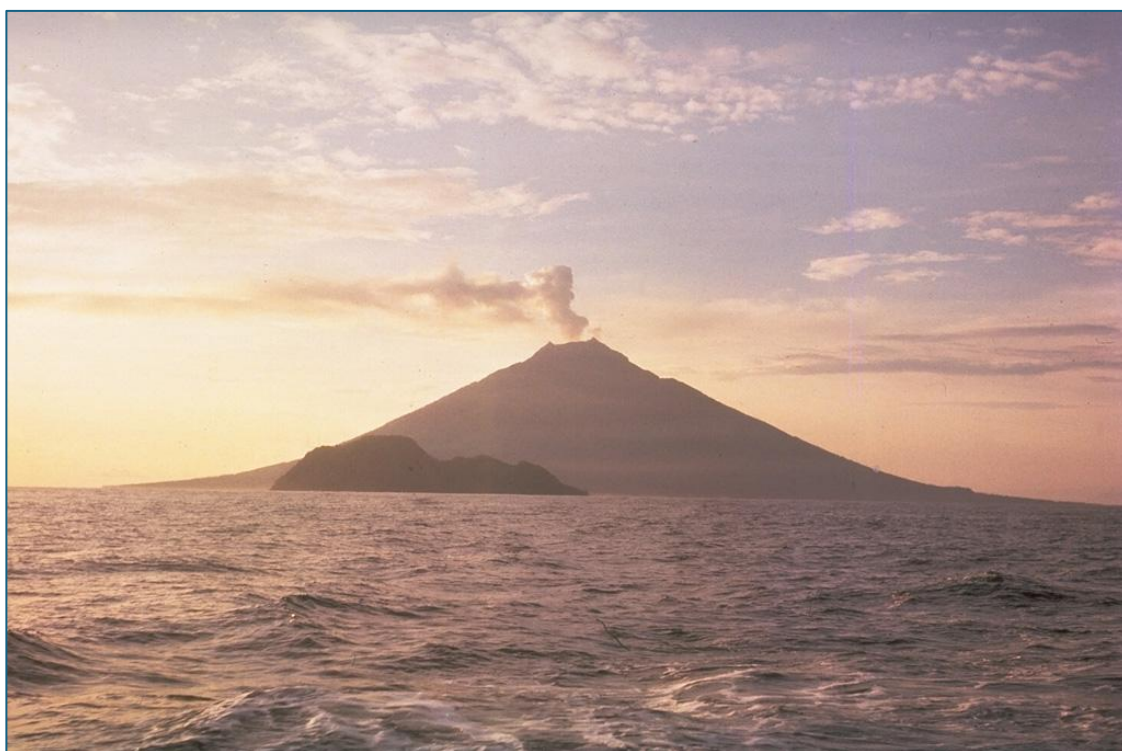
Sources: *Google Earth*. For USAF proposed route: CINCPAC, *Command History* 1982, p. 324, For scenario inland route, variation in heading from proposed route generated by the authors.

In recounting the low-level terrain avoidance training missions to Australia, 1st Lt. Donald A. Welch, 60th Bombardment Squadron, describes carrying out a simulated ‘contingency high [bombing] run’ on Manam Island, an active volcano off the northern coast of Papua New Guinea, both en route to Australia and again on the return journey to Guam.<sup>42</sup>

The first simulated bomb run comes approximately 50 minutes after air refueling and three hours and five minutes into the mission. ...The lead bomber uses synchronous procedures while number two simulates radar malfunctions and uses an alternate procedure.’

Bombing runs using ‘synchronous procedures’ involved a lead bomber guiding one or more bombers in a cell: the lead bomber would use its ground radar matched to pre-existing ground imagery data to locate the target point and, after confirming the precise location, guide the following aircraft to a point where it should simulate a release of its bombs on a trajectory to ‘hit’ the target.<sup>43</sup>

Figure 4. Manam Island, Papua New Guinea, with Boisa Island in foreground



Source: Photo by Tony Taylor, 1963, courtesy of Wally Johnson, Australia Bureau of Mineral Resources, in ‘Manam’, Global Volcanism Program, Smithsonian Institution, at <https://volcano.si.edu/volcano.cfm?vn=251020>; made available under the Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 license, at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

<sup>42</sup> Donald A. Welch, ‘Low Level Down Under’, *Combat Crew, Magazine of the Strategic Air Command*, (Vol. XXXII, No. 2), February 1982, pp. 7 and 20, pp. 7 and 20. Welch incorrectly describes the volcano as ‘inactive’. According to the Smithsonian Institution’s Global Volcanism Project, Manam was frequently active in the 1980s: ‘Bulletin Reports – Index’, at <https://volcano.si.edu/volcano.cfm?vn=251020>.

<sup>43</sup> On synchronous bombing, sometimes known as the ‘buddy system’, see W. Howard Plunkett, ‘Radar bombing during Rolling Thunder--Part 1: Ryan's raiders’, *Air Power History*, (Vol. 53, Issue 1), Spring 2006, pp. 7-8.

‘After the bomb run, the flight continues south across Papua, New Guinea, to a cell break-up point, from which each bomber continues on its separate routing to the primary entry control point, approximately four hours and fifteen minutes after take-off... The number two aircraft for the first half of the mission leads the return flight. Another contingency high bomb run is completed on Manam Island.’<sup>44</sup>

The timing of this Strategic Air Command magazine article suggests that approval for overflight of the country and simulated bombing of Manam was authorized by the Chan government that held power between March 1980 and August 1982. It is not known whether the second Somare government which held power until 1985, or its successor led by Paias Wingti until 1988, continued to allow these extensions of BUSY BOOMERANG and BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA operations until the end of the decade.

### 2.2.3 The Philippines

In May 1979 CINCPAC approached the Joint Chiefs of Staff with a proposal for B-52 training operations over the Philippines. The JCS recommended a delay in approaching the Philippines government due to inauspicious political timing, but three months later,

‘CINCPAC reiterated the urgency of the proposal and requested that every effort be made to obtain Washington level approval to approach the Philippines on the initiative.’

In May of 1980 CINCPAC pressed the JCS again, citing Vietnam-based Soviet Tu-95 strategic bomber incursions into Philippines airspace. During meetings with senior Philippines officials, including President Ferdinand Marcos, CINCPAC proposed ‘low-visibility’, ‘high altitude flights’, ‘not more than twice a week’ that would not land in the Philippines.

However, the U.S. embassy in Manila noted its political concerns about CINCPAC’s longer-term plans. The concept of operations handed to the Philippines government the following month marked the plan as ‘initially limited to high altitude tactics’, but continued to suggest ‘Additional training may be added after appropriate coordination.’

High-level training flights initially tied to joint US-Philippines exercises began in December 1980,

‘described as part of a regional undertaking, with similar flights over Australia and Korea, and was not to exceed twice-a-week missions at high altitude (a cell of 2-3 B-52s was considered one mission). Low-level flights were not authorized through 1981’.<sup>45</sup>

During 1982 and 1983 Pacific Command persistently pressed the Joint Chiefs of Staff for support to approach the Philippines government for permission for what were seen as increasingly urgent Strategic Air Command requirements for low-level terrain-avoidance training opportunities. The Philippines was attractive to CINCPAC because, unlike the by then well-established and accepted missions over Australia and the Republic of Korea, flying from Guam

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<sup>44</sup> Donald A. Welch, ‘Low Level Down Under’, (n. 42), pp. 7-20.

<sup>45</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1980, pp. 194-197; and CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1982, p. 322.

to the Philippines would not require tanker support. Strategic Air Command stressed that more terrain-avoidance training routes in the western Pacific were ‘sorely needed’ – there were simply not enough routes available to enable SAC crews in the Pacific to reach the skill levels required. In the Philippines at that point, B-52 crews based at Clark Air Base ‘received only two such missions per quarter, compared to ten per quarter for CONUS aircrews.’<sup>46</sup>

In November 1982, CINCPAC once again pressed Washington for approval to propose terrain-avoidance routes to the Philippines government. However, although the Joint Chiefs of Staff supported the CINCPAC and SAC proposal, over the following year ongoing political concerns within both the Defence and State Departments – especially following the assassination of Philippines opposition leader Benigno Aquino in August – led to the terrain-avoidance proposal being held in abeyance.

CINCPAC advised the commander of Strategic Air Command at the end of 1983 that ‘he would again surface the issue at a more propitious time’.<sup>47</sup>

## 2.2.4 Republic of Korea

Not surprisingly, severe tension between the United States and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (D.P.R.K.) characterized both the initiation of B-52 low level operations on the Korean peninsula and the terrain avoidance training that continued for many years. These SAC operations began during the intense crisis of August 1976, when D.P.R.K. soldiers killed two U.S. Army officers supervising the pruning of a poplar tree in the Demilitarized Zone. The next day, the Joint Chiefs of Staff elevated the U.S. Defence Readiness Condition and declared DEFCON Three (two steps below imminent nuclear war) for all U.S. forces in Korea. In the days that followed, B-52s based on Guam flew training sorties over the Republic of Korea in a show of force that the D.P.R.K. government could not but notice. Although unarmed, the B-52s flew close to the DMZ on simulated bombing runs, flying high enough to be detected by North Korean radar just over the border. Shortly afterwards, SAC mandated the formation of a low-level terrain avoidance route for B-52s over the Republic of Korea, together with a Radar Bombing Simulation bombing range.<sup>48</sup>

While the CINCPAC Command Histories are silent on the KOREAN LOW-LEVEL B-52 mission, beyond listing the fact of its existence, Strategic Air Command documents and Navy command histories make clear that, amongst the many B-52 missions to the Korean peninsula originating from Andersen AFB from 1976 through to the early 1980s, cells of B-52s flew on extreme low-level terrain-avoidance training and bombing simulation missions. These flights extended from the southern coast of the Republic of Korea to within a few kilometers of the Demilitarized Zone marking the armistice line between the two Koreas.

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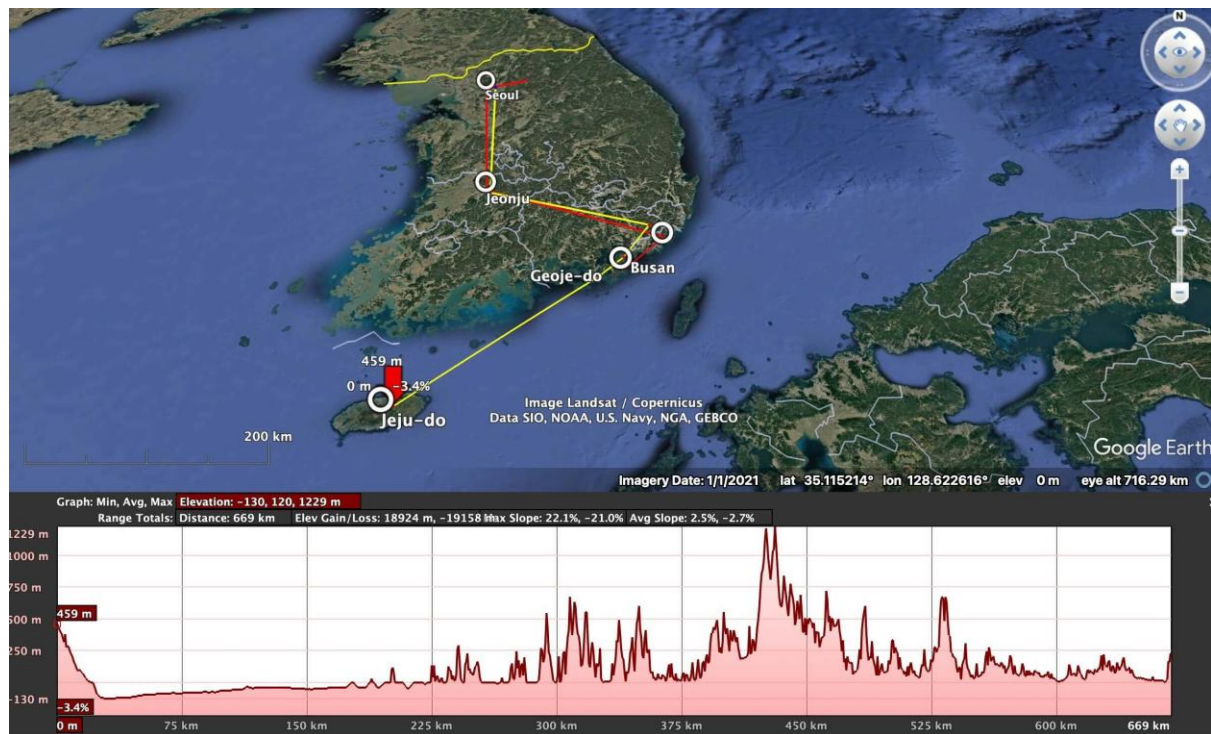
<sup>46</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1982, p. 323.

<sup>47</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1982, pp. 322-323; CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1983, pp. 344-345.

<sup>48</sup> Office of the Historian, Headquarters Strategic Air Command, *History of Strategic Air Command, 1 July 1975 -31 December 1976*, Historical Study No. 161, Volume I, 15 July 1977, Top Secret, excised copy, excerpt, p. 213, at <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/20589949/27.pdf>.



Figure 5. KOREAN – LOW LEVEL B-52 Instrument Route-982 terrain avoidance and bombing simulation training route and elevation profile, (schematic), 1982



Sources: Google Earth and Mike Wright, 'Update Korea', *Combat Crew, Magazine of the Strategic Air Command*, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, October 1982, p. 4-5.

One pilot reported a typical mission in 1982.<sup>49</sup> A twelve hour mission from Guam would begin with a high altitude rendezvous with a tanker aircraft after take-off, heading for the south of the Korean peninsula. Sometimes a simulated bombing would be conducted over southern Japan, before preparations for low-level flight. A navigation fix on a VHF beacon high over Jeju Island marked the start of one terrain-avoidance route, a U.S. Military Training Route for instrument flight codenamed IR-982, heading east from Jeju-do along the coast (Figure 5).

'A terrain avoidance calibration peak check is done on Geoje-do Island and a turn inland is made north of Busan. Some challenging mountainous TA is flown westbound until a turn is made near Jeonju. Portside bomb plot is contacted and the target complex is hit just 30 miles south of Seoul.'

The pilot's laconic remark about the 'challenging mountainous terrain avoidance' on the leg running north west between the southern cities of Busan and Jeonju is belied by the elevation profile of these flights at heights of 90-150 metres above the ground, with the elevation jumping 900 metres in a few kilometres, followed moments later by an acute descent, before climbing vertiginously again (Figure 5).

<sup>49</sup> Mike Wright, 'Update Korea', *Combat Crew, Magazine of the Strategic Air Command*, (Vol. XXXII, No. 1), October 1982, pp. 4-5.

Fifty kilometres short of Seoul, all electronic countermeasures were switched off to prevent monitoring by D.P.R.K. forces, and a tightly controlled racetrack pattern began in an extremely sensitive electronic security environment. A right turn out of the path

‘flies you right along the DMZ, where some unusual ECM signals can be picked up. If you relax on this exit and wander north of course some disastrous results can happen, as you could quickly find yourself in unfriendly territory.’

The return trip down the Korean peninsula was not described, other than to say ‘a few more simulated targets can be bombed in Korea high level.’ Were the return towards Busan from around Chuncheon to be undertaken as low-level, the flight path would have been a longer version of the ‘challenging’ Busan-Jeonju segment (Figure 5).

The attractions for SAC of the KOREA LOW-LEVEL terrain-avoidance and simulated bombing training mission were clear:

‘Where in the U. S. do you get real enemy SAM signals, potentially fatal MIJI incidents and unknown fighters intercepting you out of nowhere anytime you are in country. Even Red Flag missions cannot match up to this type of intense training found only in a country on continuous red alert.’<sup>50</sup>

### 2.2.5 Japan

In June 1979 the Pacific Air Force called for CINCPAC to establish a formal agreement with the Japan Air Self Defence Force for ‘combined intercept training between JASDF F-104 and USAF B-52 aircraft’. More than a year later a memorandum of understanding was signed, but ‘subsequent political considerations precluded implementation’. A year later the U.S. Military Command in Japan proposed a three stage plan, beginning with ‘unilateral U.S. intercept training over international waters’. A second stage would phase JASDF fighters into the training alongside the B-52s, followed by a final stage involving combined intercept exercises in Japanese airspace. The first and second stages commenced during 1982. In the first stage, B-52s from Guam en route to the southern part of the Korean peninsula for terrain avoidance training rendezvoused with JASDF F-51 aircraft from Okinawa for intercept training. In 1983 CINCPAC pressure on both the JDSF and the U.S. State Department to proceed to the more sensitive third stage was placed on hold pending President Reagan’s visit to Japan.<sup>51</sup>

As noted above, B-52s from Guam en route to and returning from terrain-avoidance bombing simulation training over the Republic of Korea carried out bombing simulation over ‘southern Japan’.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> MIJI: Meaconing Intrusion Jamming and Interference. Meaconing is the practice of intercepting and rebroadcasting navigation system so as to interfere with the original broadcast source.

<sup>51</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1981, p. 261; *CINCPAC Command History*, CY 1982, p. 324-326; CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1983, pp. 346-347.

<sup>52</sup> Mike Wright, ‘Update Korea’, (n. 49), pp. 4-5.



## 2.3 The maritime surveillance mission

### 2.3.1 Strategic drivers

Soviet naval deployments in the Indian Ocean began in 1968, and by 1969 there was a permanent, though limited, presence consisting of four to six ships and two or three submarines, with numbers increasing during periods of crisis.<sup>53</sup> The British withdrawal ‘east of Suez’ from the 1960s and littoral political shifts complicated U.S. access to bases. Soviet ambitions for a blue water naval role with global reach together with U.S. nuclear deployments in the region reportedly induced the Soviet Union to attempt ‘a large naval presence in the Indian Ocean in competition with the United States.’<sup>54</sup>

Whatever Soviet ambitions may have been, by the early 1980s, a classified National Intelligence Estimate made a more tempered estimate:

‘For the past year or so, the squadron generally has consisted of about 25 ships including two to four principal surface combatants; up to two attack submarines, one of which may carry cruise missiles; one or two amphibious ships; a mine warfare ship; an intelligence collector; three or four research ships; and about 14 auxiliaries. The squadron suffers from the same general defects of other Soviet naval forces deployed to distant areas: lack of adequate air defence, limited logistics support, and a poor capability for antisubmarine warfare.’<sup>55</sup>

Despite the fears of threats to oil-supply routes from the Middle East strongly articulated by U.S. military planners and political leaders, the Soviet regional position was weaker than numbers alone may have suggested, and was judged so by a classified National Intelligence Estimate in 1984:

‘Before the Soviet Indian Ocean squadron could seriously challenge Western naval forces in the area, threaten US sea lines of communication, or make any significant contribution to a Soviet land campaign in the Southern TVD, it would require substantial augmentation.’<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Rajan Menon, ‘Soviet Policy in the Indian Ocean Region’, *Current History*, (Vol. 76, No. 446), April 1979, pp. 178-179.

<sup>54</sup> David Brewster, ‘The People’s Liberation Army and Operational Access in the Indian Ocean Region: Geographic Constraints and Lessons from the Cold War’, in Roger Cliff and Roy D. Kamphausen (eds.), *Enabling a More Externally Focused and Operational PLA*, (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2022), pp. 70-71, at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep42811>.

<sup>55</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, ‘Soviet Global Military Reach’, National Intelligence Estimate 11-6-84/S (13 September 1984), at [https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000278544.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000278544.pdf). See also David Brewster, ‘The People’s Liberation Army’, (n. 54), pp. 72-73.

<sup>56</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, ‘Soviet Global Military Reach’, (n. 55), p. 30. According to an NIE the previous year, the Soviet ‘Southern TVD’ refers to ‘the region from eastern Turkey through Iran and the Persian Gulf region, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and contiguous waters.’ Central Intelligence Agency, ‘Soviet Forces and Capabilities in the Southern Theater of Military Operations’, National Intelligence Estimate 11/39-83, (19 October 1983), p. 1, at [https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000278543.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000278543.pdf).

The Soviet Union had no direct access to the Indian Ocean, and the distances from home ports created significant logistical issues. While the Soviet Union did have partners in the region, Soviet bases, unlike U.S. naval deployments, were limited in number and capacity, and often politically tenuous – for example, Aden and Socotra in South Yemen, Berbera in Somalia, and Massawa in Ethiopia (now Eritrea). More directly, Soviet aircraft carrier groups in the region were rare and never permanent:

‘the Soviet fleet generally lacked organic airpower, and the large number of auxiliary vessels indicates the logistical difficulties they faced. The high number of surface vessels and small number of submarines might also suggest the mission was largely a political rather than combat-oriented one.’<sup>57</sup>

While the use of long-range Soviet naval aircraft in the Indian Ocean was hampered by access to suitable and stable bases, from the 1970s the Soviet Union did develop some capacity to at least surveil and harass U.S. naval ships and aircraft, especially in the 1980s after the invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>58</sup>

The strategic imperatives driving the Soviet Union’s ultimately unsuccessful Indian Ocean expansion were more complex and limited than typically presented by either the U.S. or Australian governments. David Brewster lists these, evolving over time, to include ‘restricting or preventing the U.S. use of the Indian Ocean as a base for conducting nuclear strikes’; securing of sea routes to and from the Soviet Far East; ‘posing a limited threat to U.S. energy supplies and the movement of U.S. forces into the region’; seaborne support for Soviet space activities including satellite tracking and recovery; extending political influence into the region and support for liberation movements; limiting harassment of the Soviet fishing fleet; and to gain ‘sailing experience in distant waters under different climatic conditions’.<sup>59</sup>

### 2.3.2 Limitations of P-3 Orion maritime surveillance

US concern for heightened surveillance of increasing Soviet naval capabilities and operations in the Arabian Sea, the Horn of Africa, and the Indian Ocean more broadly was influenced by limitations on the primary U.S. Navy maritime surveillance platform in the Indian Ocean since the 1960s – the Lockheed P-3 Orion long-range aircraft.

From the early 1960s, the P-3 Orion served as the mainstay of U.S. maritime surveillance in the Indian Ocean. During the last decade of the Cold War, P-3 variants were operated in large numbers in the Pacific Command area not only by the U.S. Navy and Japan, but also, in smaller numbers, by Australia, Iran, and Thailand.<sup>60</sup> While the aircraft had substantial endurance and offered significant capabilities for anti-submarine and anti-shipping surveillance and attack, its

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<sup>57</sup> David Brewster, ‘The People’s Liberation Army’, (n. 54), pp. 72-73.

<sup>58</sup> Brewster notes support for operations in the Horn of Africa by long range Tu-95 Bears and shorter range Il-38 surveillance aircraft from Soviet staging bases at ‘Berbera, Somalia (1974–77); and Asmara, Ethiopia (now Eritrea) (1977–84); and access to secondary staging points in Mozambique (beginning in 1977).’ David Brewster, ‘The People’s Liberation Army’, (n. 54), pp. 73.

<sup>59</sup> David Brewster, ‘The People’s Liberation Army’, (n. 54), pp. 69-70.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Hayes, Lyuba Zarsky, and Walden Bello, *American Lake: Nuclear Peril in the Pacific*, (Penguin Books, 1986), Appendix C7 - Aerial maritime reconnaissance.

combat radius was limited, depending on mission loading and operational altitude, to about 2,400-3,000 kms, with about three hours on station at low altitude.<sup>61</sup>

These limitations apart, in 1979 CINCPAC made clear that P-3 maritime patrol operations were

‘the primary source of accurate, reliable, and responsive maritime intelligence in the Indian Ocean. The information obtained by those flights provided intelligence support and threat warning to the Commander of the Mid-East force. This information included the location, identification, and activity of Soviet naval surface combatants, submarines, auxiliaries and merchant shipping, as well as regional acoustic and oceanographic data for the development of environmental forecast data bases. Primary areas of interest were the Malacca Strait, the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Aden, and the major shipping routes connecting them.’<sup>62</sup>

By the mid-1970s, Indian Ocean P-3 operations by the United States and Australia were being conducted from the U Tapao Air Base at Pattaya on the Gulf of Thailand, the newly established U.S. base at Diego Garcia, the Australian-controlled Cocos Island and Butterworth in Malaysia, and the Iranian base at Bandar Abbas on the Straits of Hormuz.<sup>63</sup> Surveillance operations by the U.S. and Australia in the Pacific could monitor Soviet naval deployments to the Indian Ocean from ports on the Soviet Union’s Pacific coast (Vladivostok and Avacha Bay) and from Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam (starting in 1979).<sup>64</sup>

In April 1979 the Soviet *Kiev*-class aircraft carrier *Minsk* led a Soviet naval battle group into the Indian Ocean at the Cape of Good Hope. CINCPAC believed it was possible that some or all of the *Minsk* battle group may operate in the western Indian Ocean or Arabian Sea, most likely initially in the region off the island of Socotra, controlled by the Democratic People’s Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), facing the entrance to the Red Sea. CINCPAC advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff that

‘To enhance and reinforce Soviet perception of allied maritime solidarity we have planned a coordinated, allied and surface ship surveillance effort’.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> U.S. Navy, *Standard Aircraft Characteristics: P-3C Update II*, May 1984, pp. 10-11, at <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/dam/nhhc/research/histories/naval-aviation/naval-aircraft/current-aircraft-inventory/pdf/p-3c.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1979, p. 207.

<sup>63</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1975, pp. 282-284. By the late 1970s, the U.S. had secured authority to operate limited P-3 operations from Dhahran in Saudi Arabia and the French colony of Djibouti: CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1979, p. 208. See also ‘Operation Gateway: Prosecuting Soviet Naval Movements in the Cold War’, *Pathfinder*, No. 162, in Chris Clark and Sanu Kainikara (eds.), *Pathfinder Collection*, Vol. 5, (Air Power Development Centre, 2012), pp. 137-139, at <https://airpower.airforce.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/PFV05-Pathfinder-Collection-Volume-5.pdf>; and ‘Operation Gateway’, *Air Force*, [accessed 29 August 2023], at <https://www.airforce.gov.au/about-us/history/our-journey/operation-gateway>.

<sup>64</sup> David Brewster, ‘The People’s Liberation Army’, (n. 54), p. 70. In mid-1975, CINCPAC reported, P-3 flights included 10 flights a month over the eastern Indian Ocean (nine from Diego Garcia, and one from Cocos Island); 30 from Diego Garcia and Bandar Abbas over the western Indian Ocean, and ‘10-12 logistics and aircraft repositioning flights were flown monthly between U-Tapao, Banda Abbas, and Diego Garcia’. CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1975, p. 281-282.

<sup>65</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1979, p. 204.

Between April and June 1979, U.S.-led combined surveillance operations targeting the Soviet *Minsk* battle group involved surveillance by surface vessels and submarines, and U.S. P-3C long-range maritime surveillance aircraft operating from the French colony of La Reunion. These operations were supplemented by Australian P-3Cs operating from Diego Garcia and Butterworth in Malaysia, responsible for surveillance once the *Minsk* group passed 75° East, and a New Zealand P-3C based at Tengah in Malaysia once the group exited the Malacca Strait. However, the limited range of P-3s made questions of regional base access increasingly critical (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Point to point great circle routes, Indian Ocean area (CINCPAC, 1975)

Airfield, Country	ICAO* Code	Cocos Islands	Diego Garcia	Djibouti	Gan	Learmonth	Masirah	Plaisance	Seychelles	U-Tapao	Point Ash 22°-30'N, 78°E	Parir Abbas	Sootra
Bandaranaike Sri Lanka	VCCN	1540	978	2188 <sup>e</sup>	621	2675	1720 <sup>c</sup>	2112	1623	1414	1670 <sup>c</sup>	2095 <sup>c</sup>	1560
Cocos Islands Australia	ACCC	-	1473	3499 <sup>e</sup>	1569	1156	2982	2302	2490	1648 <sup>ad</sup>	2933 <sup>c</sup>	3355 <sup>c</sup>	2949
Diego Garcia	HVKY		-	2079 <sup>e</sup>	399	2568	1858	1163	1020	2122 <sup>d</sup>	1890	2313	1617
Djibouti Afars & Issas	HFFF			-	1932 <sup>e</sup>	4635 <sup>e</sup>	1058 <sup>e</sup>	2102 <sup>e</sup>	1221 <sup>e</sup>	3579 <sup>de</sup>	1261 <sup>e</sup>	1685 <sup>be</sup>	638
Gan Island Maldives	VRRR				-	2716	1532	1492	1083	1913 <sup>d</sup>	1537	1942	1388
Learmonth Australia	-					-	4131	3135	3553	2583 <sup>ad</sup>	4085 <sup>c</sup>	4507 <sup>c</sup>	4101
Masirah Oman	OOMA						-	2468	1534	3052 <sup>cd</sup>	204	846	566
Plaisance Mauritius	FDDF							-	954	3263	2586	3011 <sup>b</sup>	1988
Victoria Seychelles	FSSS								-	2992 <sup>d</sup>	1674	2097 <sup>b</sup>	1034
U-Tapao Thailand	VTEU									-	3002 <sup>c</sup>	3424 <sup>cd</sup>	3062

a. Denotes via western Malacca Strait pivot point 06°N-095°E  
b. Denotes via Point Ash, 22°-30'N, 78°E  
c. Denotes via Indian Ocean pivot point 04°N-78°E  
d. Denotes via Phuket, Thailand  
e. Denotes overflies a third country

\* International Civil Aviation Organization

SOURCE: J314, 25 Feb 75

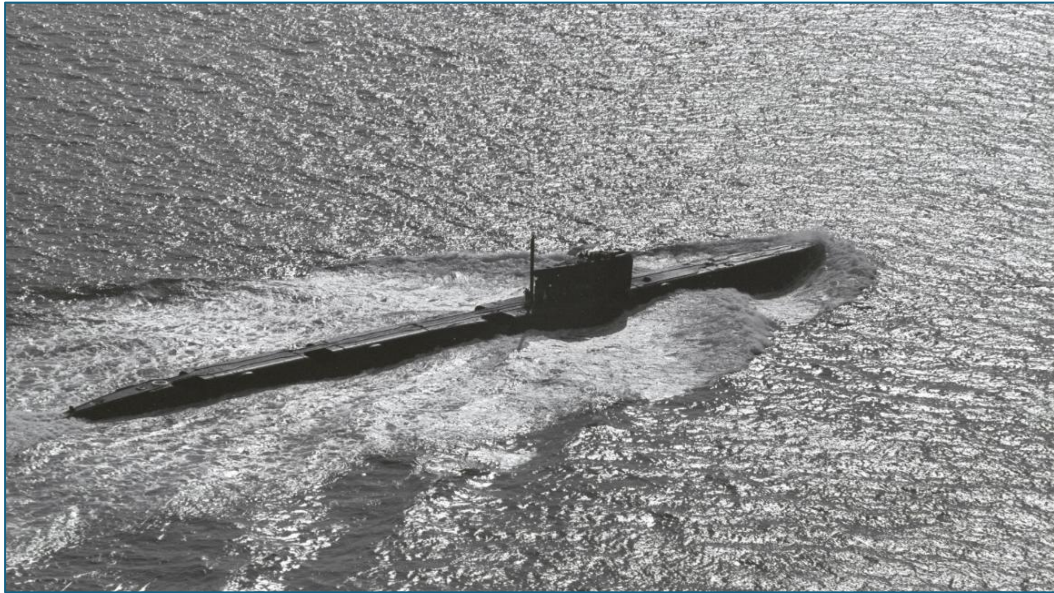
Source: CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1975, p. 283.

As early as 1974, regional political developments began to constrain U.S. options for P-3 operations in the Indian Ocean. In 1974 the Thai government curtailed U.S. P-3 operations originating at U-Tapao. In the same year the ongoing British military withdrawal 'east of Suez' threatened to cut off possible U.S. access to the British airbases on the Oman island of Masirah



and Gan in the Maldives.<sup>66</sup> Operations from a longtime Iranian base in Bandar Abbas on the Straits of Hormuz were suspended in early 1979.

Figure 7. ‘Prosecution’ of Soviet *Echo-II* class submarine transiting the Malacca Straits to the Indian Ocean by Butterworth-based RAAF P-3B, Operation GATEWAY, 21 February 1982.



Source: ‘Operation Gateway’, *Air Force*, [accessed 29 August 2023], at <https://www.airforce.gov.au/about-us/history/our-journey/operation-gateway>.

Options for replacement bases in the region were limited. The French government allowed a limited number of P-3 ‘visits’ to its Djibouti base, increasing somewhat as the number of major Soviet ships increased. However, the CINCPAC naval commander was concerned that northern and eastern areas of the western Indian Ocean were out of P-3 range from Djibouti. Weekly flights from Seeb on the north coast of Oman began in late 1979, but could not meet Pacific Command’s increasingly urgent requirements for ‘accurate, reliable, and responsive maritime intelligence in the Indian Ocean’.<sup>67</sup>

During the 1970s, Australian Indian Ocean maritime surveillance activities had been, as an RAAF historian described them, ‘off and on’. In early 1980 the Fraser government decided to establish a long-term P-3 capability at Butterworth. In December, the Malaysian government agreed to the permanent deployment of up to three P-3 aircraft at Butterworth. Operation *Gateway* began on 1 February 1981, focussing on entry and exit points to the Malacca Straits in

‘the never-ending struggle to detect, localise, track, and identify Soviet submarines—a process known as a “prosecution”...These missions were carried out with all the

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<sup>66</sup> ‘Masirah Air Base facilities included an 8,200-foot asphalt runway, TACAN and GCA navigational aids, POL [petroleum, oil and lubricants] storage (an estimated capacity of 5-million gallons on-base and 31-million off-base, and billeting facilities for approximately 800 personnel.’ CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1975, p. 284.

<sup>67</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1979, pp. 207-210.

determination that would normally be associated with attacking enemy surface and sub-surface targets during time of war, short of live weapons release.<sup>68</sup>

Operation Gateway continued through the 1980s, and thereafter at a less intense rate, but remains a key RAAF mission to this day.<sup>69</sup>

### 2.3.3 B-52 maritime surveillance, attack support and interdiction roles

From at least the mid-1970s, one proposed solution had been emerging from a series of inter-service negotiations in Washington between the U.S. Navy and Air Force aimed at providing a doctrinal and technical foundation for use of B-52 bombers in maritime operations. In 1974 the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested CINCPAC to explore the feasibility of using B-52s with refuelling tankers for maritime surveillance in the Indian Ocean region.<sup>70</sup>

Planning for novel maritime roles for B-52s was formalized by a 1975 Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. Navy and Air Force. The 1975 MOU set out secondary or collateral maritime surveillance roles for the Air Force in sea surveillance, attack of surface and air units, and aerial minelaying, all of which were to involve B-52s, and all of which required substantial shifts in Strategic Air Command B-52 training regimes.<sup>71</sup>

The 1975 interservice MOU recognized the disparity between the ‘scope of sea control operations and the degree of existing Air Force maritime capability’, and set out an initial set of tasks ‘considered appropriate’, centering initially on maritime surveillance and aerial minelaying operations. The surveillance function was specified as ‘location, identification, determination of movement and reporting of enemy or potential enemy surface combatants and merchant ships’, especially at chokepoints and in areas beyond the reach of naval task forces.

Interdiction capabilities were a subsequent possibility. Aerial minelaying using B-52s was a relatively straightforward matter, compared to both surveillance and interdiction. A P-3 had a maximum payload of 16 standard 500 lb (227 kg) aerial mines, but a B-52D could carry 56 mines, at little cost for adjustments to internal and external bomb racks.<sup>72</sup> Minelaying was functionally similar to B-52 bombing operations, and adapting aircraft posed no great difficulty.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> ‘Operation Gateway: Prosecuting Soviet Naval Movements in the Cold War’, (n. 63), pp. 137.

<sup>69</sup> For a detailed history, see Ian Pearson, *Cold War Warriors: Royal Australian Air Force P-3 Orion Operations 1968-1991*, (Big Sky Publishing, 2021).

<sup>70</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1974, p. 258

<sup>71</sup> ‘Chief of Naval Staff and Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force, Memorandum of Agreement on the Concept of Operations for USAF Forces Collateral Functions Training, February, 1975’, Document 34 in Richard I. Wolf, *The United States Air Force: Basic Documents On Roles And Missions*, (Air Staff Historical Study, 1987, Document 34), pp. 391-400, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA206194.pdf>. See also Thomas A. Keaney, *Strategic Bombers and Conventional Weapons - Airpower Options*, National Security Affairs Monograph Series 84-4, (Washington, National Defense University Press, 1984), pp. 32-33.

<sup>72</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing chief of operations, Lt-Col. Thomas Keaney: ‘The navy welcomed using B-52s in a mine-laying role because of the flexibility and carrying ability of the B-52s relative to any of their systems.’ Kevin Wright, ‘B-52 Cold War European ops’, *Key.Aero*, 21 September 2017, at <https://www.key.aero/article/b-52-cold-war-european-ops>. Berlan reported that ‘Mines carried by B-52s included ‘51 DST-36, 51 Mk 117D, 10 Mk 40 DST, 22 Mk 52, 18 Mk 19 55, 18 Mk 56, and 18 Mk 60.’ Gregory J. Berlan, *Forward Offense*, (n. 13), pp. 19-20.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Aircrew skills used in dropping mines are very similar to basic low-level bombing procedures. Consequently, all bomber crews would be able to lay mines with only a minor amount of additional training,’ Gregory J. Berlan, *Forward Offense*, (n. 13), pp. 19-20. On B-52s and minelaying see Dale Autry and Donald G. Norton, *The Increasing*

By September 1979, SAC B-52Ds were participating in CONUS-based training operations dropping dummy mines over northern European chokepoints in cooperation with NATO navies.

‘The navy were quite excited about the mission... we departed across the Atlantic, flying at high level until we gradually descended to our 1,000ft operating altitude as we approached the Baltic Sea. Liaising with either Danish or Norwegian naval vessels, they gave U.S. box co-ordinates where we then dropped our dummy mines – 22 in each aircraft...’<sup>74</sup>

In the Indian Ocean, B-52s mine-laying coordinating in exercises with carrier-based E-2C Hawkeye airborne early warning and control aircraft became a regular feature of Indian Ocean aircraft carrier deployments.<sup>75</sup>

Following the 1975 MOU, the B-52 maritime surveillance role commenced modestly with a requirement that the USAF ‘fly a minimum of four ocean reconnaissance training missions every six months’ – meaning just 30-60 such flights a year in total worldwide. Under SAC Operations Plan 28-76 the BUSY OBSERVER program commenced with operations in both Europe and the Indian Ocean.

‘In Busy Observer I, B-52 aircrews went on training missions every six months to search for, locate, and identify designated U.S. Navy ships. In Busy Observer II, B-52 aircrews cooperated with the USN's Second Fleet in the Atlantic and Third Fleet in the Pacific to search for Soviet Navy ships.’<sup>76</sup>

The combined impact of the increased Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean and the Iranian revolution dramatically elevated BUSY OBSERVER operations, with ‘large numbers of B-52 crews becoming familiar with the sea surveillance roles and with fleet activities.’<sup>77</sup> In 1979 the U.S. Seventh Fleet requested assistance from SAC with aerial reconnaissance in the western Indian Ocean.<sup>78</sup> Pacific Command commenced regional B-52 maritime surveillance and

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*Maritime Role of the U.S. Air Force*, Air War College, Air University, May 1989, pp. 21-26, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a217654.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> Chief of operations, 7<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing chief of operations, Lt-Col. Thomas Keaney, in Kevin Wright, ‘B-52 Cold War European ops’, (n. 72).

<sup>75</sup> *Command History CY 1980 - Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron One Hundred Sixteen (VAW-116)*, VAW-116/024/SVR 5750, Ser CO4, 4 March 1981, at <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/dam/nhhc/research/archives/command-operation-reports/aviation-squadron-command-operation-reports/vaw/vaw-116/pdf/1980.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup> William S. Hanable, *Case studies in the use of land-based aerial forces in maritime operations, 1939-1990*, Air Force History & Museums Program Washington, D.C. September 1998, p. 169, at <https://media.defense.gov/2013/Sep/16/2001329865/-1/-1/0/AFD-130916-005.PDF>.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas A. Keaney, *Strategic Bombers and Conventional Weapons*, (n. 71), p. 35.

<sup>78</sup> William S. Hanable, *Case studies in the use of land-based aerial forces in maritime operations*, (n. 76), p. 169.



minelaying operations, based in Guam with relays of refuelling tankers, supported by U.S. Navy carrier-based fighter escorts.<sup>79</sup>

BUSY OBSERVER surveillance and minelaying operations were designed to exploit the extraordinary range and endurance of B-52s. A pair of B-52 aircraft working in formation could search almost 400,000 sq. kms (154,000 sq. miles) of ocean in every hour on station.<sup>80</sup> Strategic Air Command regulations stated

‘that the purpose of Sea Reconnaissance/Surveillance (SR/S) operations is to provide theater commanders with the ability to track potentially hostile naval force. Searching for and reporting the location of enemy forces may be conducted before and/or after the initiation of hostilities.’

SAC Regulation 3-1 identified four elements of surveillance operations performed by B-52s: search, shadow, identify, and attack support. In any given mission, B-52 aircrew could be tasked with any one or all of these operations.<sup>81</sup>

One 1979 account of BUSY OBSERVER tactics set out a standard operating mission, which

‘often involved two aircraft transiting to a pre-designated patrol zone 240 nm [445 km.] by 200 nm [370 km.]. The aircraft’s radar saw out to around 65 nm [120 km.] at 28,000 ft [8,500 m.] with an initial “snapshot” giving a good indication of nearby shipping.’

‘The pair divided the area into a grid, splitting the contacts between them to maximise the training opportunity for each B-52. Patrolling at around 16,000 ft [4,876 m.], largely flying parallel courses, they descended to identify and photograph individual targets, approaching them at around 2,500 ft [760 m.].’

‘In 1979 the “closest point of approach” distances to shipping were reduced to 2,000 ft [610 m.] vertically and displaced 1,000 ft [300 m.] either side of the target to enable better identification photography.’<sup>82</sup>

Indian Ocean B-52 surveillance operations involved cooperation with Seventh Fleet carrier battle groups for intercept training, with B-52s simulating Soviet supersonic Tupolev Tu-95 *Bear* and Tu-22M *Backfire* bombers, and U.S. early warning aircraft providing the required assistance for targeting beyond the B-52s limited radar range. In the northern Pacific, long-range *Backfires*, with

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<sup>79</sup> Peter M. Swartz with Karin Duggan, *The U.S. Navy in the World (1970-1980): Context for U.S. Navy Capstone Strategies and Concepts*, CNA, MISC D0026418.A1/Final December 2011, slide 166, at <https://www.cna.org/reports/2011/d0026418.a1%20%281%29.pdf>.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas A. Keaney, *Strategic Bombers and Conventional Weapons*, (n. 71), p. 37.

<sup>81</sup> Larry T. McDaniel, *Logistics Implications of the B-52G in a conventional role in support of the Air Land Battle and Beyond*, Air War College, Air University, May 1988, pp. 21-22, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA216932.pdf>.

<sup>82</sup> Kevin Wright, ‘B-52 Cold War European ops’, (n. 72).

a speed of up to 1.62 Mach, made practice attacks against U.S. carriers, simulating attack patterns for launch of AS-4 (*Kitchen*) missiles with a range of 260 km.<sup>83</sup>

Figure 8. USAF BUSY OBSERVER B-52D surveillance interception of Soviet aircraft carrier *Kiev*



Source: 'A Strategic Air Command B-52D Stratofortress aircraft overflies the Soviet aircraft carrier Kiev while on a routine maritime reconnaissance mission over international waters', n.d., *NARA DVIDS Public Domain Archive*, Combined Military Service Digital Photographic Files, released to public, at <https://nara.getarchive.net/media/a-strategic-air-command-b-52d-stratofortress-aircraft-overflies-the-soviet-6941ec>.

The leader of a 1979 Red Force exercise against the USS Nimitz carrier group in the Mediterranean explained B-52 tactics, 'flying pretty much like the Soviets did':

'About an hour before what we knew to be H-hour, we deliberately entered the outer edge of their radar coverage so we could locate the carrier, and they us. Then we turned away, descended to low level and turned off all our electronics to avoid detection by the fighters. The carrier knew we were about, but couldn't locate us. We received updates on its position and direction from other "Red Air" aircraft in the vicinity to update our targeting. At H-hour we made our run at the carrier, popping up to launch altitude for our simulated missile release, much as the Soviets would have done, and announced the launch on the radio. Having staged the attack, we then proceeded to fly alongside the USS Nimitz, our first "visual" on the ship.'<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Thomas A. Keaney, *Strategic Bombers and Conventional Weapons*, (n. 71), p. 35; and 'Backfires attack U.S. carriers', *Flight International*, 14–20 November 1982. See also Peter M. Swartz with Karin Duggan, *The U.S. Navy in the World*, (n. 79), slide 166.

<sup>84</sup> Kevin Wright, 'B-52 Cold War European ops', (n.72).

Figure 9. B-52 passing below deck height of USS Ranger, Persian Gulf, 1990



Source: U.S. Navy photograph, in Dave O'Malley, 'Lower Than A Snake's Belly In A Wagon Rut', *Vintage Wings of Canada*, 9 December 2021, at <https://www.vintagewings.ca/stories/lower-than-a-snakes-belly>.

The 'attack support' role specified in SAC regulations for sea surveillance operations could involve extreme low-level approach to Soviet warships for purposes of intimidation short of attack. During the Iran hostage crisis in December 1979 a pair of Guam-based B-52s, refuelled by tankers from Diego Garcia, undertook a long range surveillance mission ending with a 'strategic display' of B-52s sea-skimming attack capabilities in the Persian Gulf.

'We were tasked by the [Joint Chiefs of Staff] to fly a mission deep into the Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf to surveil the Soviet fleet. At this time, the U.S. 7th Fleet was in the area being shadowed by the Soviets, and their Bear bombers, launching from Afghanistan, were harassing our carriers. The JCS evidently wanted to show the Soviets and the Iranians that our strategic air power could reach them that far out...The crews made contact with the U.S. Navy and were vectored to the Soviet fleet. On their first pass, the Soviet crew were on deck waving, at first assuming the aircraft were their Bear bombers. On the second pass, not one member of the Soviet navy was to be seen.'<sup>85</sup>

By mid-1981 when the first GLAD CUSTOMER B-52 cell flew out of Darwin for a maritime surveillance operation in the western Indian Ocean near Yemen and the entrance to the Red Sea, CINCPAC had already conducted 33 such missions in the region since about 1979, flying from bases in the continental United States, staging through Guam.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup> 'These Madmen Flew B-52 Bombers at Wave-Top Heights', *War Is Boring*, 22 July 2013, at <https://warisboring.com/these-madmen-flew-b-52-bombers-at-wave-top-heights/>; and Dave O'Malley, 'Lower Than A Snake's Belly In A Wagon Rut', *Vintage Wings of Canada*, [accessed 4 December 2023], at <https://www.vintagewings.ca/stories/lower-than-a-snakes-belly>.

<sup>86</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1981, pp. 254-256.

As the first GLAD CUSTOMER operations got underway June 1981, pilots on Guam in the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Wing, including squadron commander Lt-Col. Thomas Keaney, explained the versatility of the aircraft to an Australian journalist, stressing

‘the variety of roles that can be undertaken, especially the sea surveillance role that will be carried out by the B-52H models from Darwin in operation Glad Customer. In the scale of military response, a mine blockade could be an easy first step, even before an armed conflict has broken out, in say, a conflict like the Iran hostage crisis.’<sup>87</sup>

### 2.3.4 An open question: did GLAD CUSTOMER maritime surveillance operations in the late 1980s include interdiction capability?

The CINCPAC 1983 Command History introduced an account of the deepening maritime role of B-52s beyond sea surveillance – both training and operations – pointing to new USAF responsibilities to use the Pacific-based B-52s for offensive operations.

Figure 10. USAF B-52G armed with AGM-84 Harpoon missile (visible under the wing), 20 April 1986



Source: A U.S. Air Force B-52G Stratofortress aircraft from the 42nd Bomb Wing, Loring Air Force Base, Maine, flies into position to fire an AGM-84 Harpoon missile (visible under the wing) at a target hulk during HARPOONEX, a phase of Exercise FLEETEX 2-86, 20 April 1986, National Archives Catalog, NAID 6405537, at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/6405537>.

In April 1982 Pacific Command naval and air force commanders signed an MOU concerning both more training for maritime operations and heightened interoperability between the two services:

‘The primary goal of the joint training was to enhance the ability of the Navy and Air Force to counter potential enemies at sea. Toward that end the parties agree to develop joint tactics for interdiction of enemy sea power, antiair warfare/counterair operations, protection of shipping, aerial minelaying, and air delivery of unconventional warfare forces.’

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<sup>87</sup> Hamish McDonald, ‘The boys of B-52 Brigade’, *The Age*, 19 June 1981.



The prospect of a Soviet naval threat to sea lines of communications in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean ‘intensified the need for a joint effort’, with such joint missions ‘increasingly commonplace in both THIRD and SEVENTH Fleet areas’:

‘CINCSAC and the JCS agreed to provide 10 conventionally configured B-52s from Guam which could perform such maritime roles as mining, antishipping and surveillance. While the aircraft from Guam flew missions in the western Pacific, other B-52s from Mather AFB CA, Dyess AFB TX, and Fairchild AFB WA, flew missions in the Eastern Pacific.’<sup>88</sup>

On 30 June 1985 SAC declared two B-52 squadrons at full operational status for maritime interdiction operations deployed to Loring in Maine and to Guam, each with 15 B-52s: the 69<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron of the 42nd Bomb Wing at Loring, and the 60<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron of the 43rd Bombardment Wing at Andersen AFB.

At the same time four E-3A Sentry AWACS aircraft were assigned in support of the B-52s on maritime operations to assist with target detection, location, and identification.<sup>89</sup> Two key limitations of the B-52s were their huge radar cross-section – measured in square meters about 100 times the radar reflectivity of the next generation B-1 bomber – and the inadequate range and discrimination capability of the B-52’s own radar.<sup>90</sup>

Under ideal conditions a Soviet ship with a radar antenna mounted 23 m. above the waterline could detect a plane or a missile flying at an altitude of 300 m. at a distance of 95 kms; but a plane flying at 30 m. above the water could be detected only at a distance of 40 kms.<sup>91</sup> To compensate for these difficulties, land-based E-3A Sentry and carrier-based E-2C AWACS aircraft were able to coordinate attacks at long distances. The early warning aircraft would be able to remain outside the range of Soviet air defence systems and provide precise and accurate targeting guidance for B-52s flying under the target ship’s radars until the last moment.

This development followed successful tests to equip B-52s with Harpoon anti-ship missiles and a concept of operations for B-52s attacking surface vessels. There were limitations to be overcome before this plan could be fully implemented, including developing a discriminating radar that would allow a B-52 to identify a target at a range of 50 miles – the maximum range of a Harpoon missile.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1983, p. 348.

<sup>89</sup> William S. Hanable, *Case studies in the use of land-based aerial forces in maritime operations*, (n.76); and ‘AGM-84 Harpoon SLAM [Stand-Off Land Attack Missile]’, *Federation of American Scientists*, [last updated 11 April 2024], at <https://man.fas.org/dod-101/sys/smart/agm-84.htm>.

<sup>90</sup> For discussion and indicative values of relevant radar cross-sections, see Konstantinos Zikidis, Alexios Skondras, and Charisios Tokas, ‘Low Observable Principles, Stealth Aircraft and Anti-Stealth Technologies’, *Journal of Computations & Modelling*, (Vol.4, No.1), 2014, pp. 129-165.

<sup>91</sup> Donald G. Cook, Charles H. Horne, and Walter W. Manning, *B-52 Maritime Operations: The Anti-Surface Warfare Mission (ASUW)*, Air War College, Air University, AU-AWC-87-043, March 1987, p. 11, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a186624.pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas A. Keaney, *Strategic Bombers and Conventional Weapons*, (n. 71), pp. 37-38.

While there is no evidence to suggest that B-52s on GLAD CUSTOMER missions staging through Darwin carried HARPOON missiles in violation of the Fraser agreements, there is also no reason to believe that GLAD CUSTOMER operations after 1985 excluded the use of HARPOON *training* missiles. Since such training missiles would not have been classified as armament, their use would not have contravened the agreements with the Australian government. E-2C Hawkeye AWACS aircraft were normally carried on U.S. Seventh Fleet aircraft carriers operating in the Indian Ocean throughout the 1980s.

Figure 11. Grumman E-2C Hawkeye surveillance aircraft (foreground) on USS Enterprise, off the Western Australian coast, 1982



Source: Geoff Goodall, 'US Aircraft Carriers - Indian Ocean and Perth', *Geoff Goodall's Aviation History Site*, reproduced with permission of Ron Cuskelly, [accessed 14 October 2024], at <https://www.goodall.com.au/photographs/us-carriers-perth-indian-ocean-80/80scarriers.html>.



Figure 12. Grumman E-2C Hawkeye surveillance aircraft landing on USS Kittyhawk, off Western Australian coast, July 1981



Source: Geoff Goodall, 'US Aircraft Carriers - Indian Ocean and Perth', *Geoff Goodall's Aviation History Site*, reproduced with permission of Ron Cuskelly, [accessed 14 October 2024], at <https://www.goodall.com.au/photographs/us-carriers-perth-indian-ocean-80/80scarriers.html>.

## 2.4 Summary

CINCPAC Command Histories for the period 1974 – 1985 make clear a number of characteristics of the two missions involving B-52 overflight and staging operations in Australia between 1980 and 1991:

- The initiative for the introduction and development of the missions came from the United States, and developed as a result of ongoing U.S. pressure over the whole period.
- US B-52 operations in Australia for both terrain-avoidance training and maritime surveillance missions were components in a wider set of Pacific Command and Strategic Air Command planning for both sets of missions involving a number of countries in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean.
- The primary purpose of both BUSY BOOMERANG and BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA was to provide training for B-52 squadrons in the difficult task of flying for protracted periods at combat speeds between 90 to 150 metres above highly variable

terrain to enable radar-avoiding low-level penetration of the Soviet Union.<sup>93</sup> These flights took place over northern Queensland, Cape York (and Torres Strait), and, in later years, over northern parts of Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

- By the end of the decade, a senior USAF intelligence officer who had served as Commander of the RAAF Target Intelligence Centre while on exchange in Australia, judged the BUSY BOOMERANG routes as providing ‘the only good places for Air Force aircrews to practice terrain avoidance in the South Pacific region.’<sup>94</sup>
- While the principal purposes of GLAD CUSTOMER operations were to carry out ocean surveillance and navigation training (including coordination with Seventh Fleet carrier task groups for intercept/intrusion training), en route to staging in Darwin prior to the sea surveillance mission, at least some GLAD CUSTOMER aircraft also conducted low-level terrain-avoidance activities over Australia.
- GLAD CUSTOMER had been preceded from 1979 by frequent B-52 maritime surveillance operations in the western Indian Ocean staging through Guam.
- BUSY OBSERVER maritime surveillance operations based in Guam continued for much of the period of GLAD CUSTOMER operations through Darwin.
- Over the first years of the 1980s, a series of U.S. inter-service agreements expanded the roles of conventionally-armed B-52s based in Guam from surveillance and mine-laying to include armed interdiction of enemy sea power, and by 1985 were equipped with HARPOON antishipping missiles with a standoff range of about 120 kms.
- While there is no evidence to suggest that B-52s on GLAD CUSTOMER missions staging through Darwin carried HARPOON missiles in violation of the Fraser agreements, there is also no reason to believe that GLAD CUSTOMER operations after 1985 excluded the use of HARPOON *training* missiles. E-2C Hawkeye AWACS aircraft were normally carried on U.S. Seventh Fleet aircraft carriers operating in the Indian Ocean throughout the 1980s.

### 3. B-52s in Australia in the 1980s – the Australian story

#### 3.1 Introduction

Setting the defence policy decisions of the Fraser cabinet in 1980-82 in the wider context of U.S. planning and policy makes the process of Australian decision-making and its most important characteristics a great deal more clear, and memorable, than both contemporary accounts and the glimpses provided in Australian political histories. Two sets of documents in particular have been fruitful in providing a parallel understanding of these events: the cabinet documents of the Fraser government between 1980 and 1982, and the CINCPAC Command Histories.

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<sup>93</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History CY 1983*, p. 345-6. See discussion of the CINCPAC 1983 proposal to Papua New Guinea below. In 1986, Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, speaking as Minister representing the Minister of Defence, told Parliament that ‘B52 aircraft regularly fly along pre-arranged and publicised low jet routes in northern Australia. They normally fly at an altitude of 800 ft above ground level, although this may vary according to terrain.’ CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 641: Flights by United States’ Aircraft over Australia, 11 March 1986, 829.

<sup>94</sup> Frank P. Donnini, *ANZUS in Revision: Changing Defense Features of Australia and New Zealand in the Mid-1980s*, (Air University Press, February 1991), p. 14, at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-D301-PURL-LPS46776/pdf/GOVPUB-D301-PURL-LPS46776.pdf>.

This chapter discusses the Australian history firstly by considering the initial agreement authorising the BUSY BOOMERANG mission. A second section details the considerations of the Fraser cabinet between mid-1980 and early 1981. A third deals with the 11 March 1981 announcement of an agreement about B-52s staging through Darwin for Indian Ocean maritime surveillance and the conditions applying to both that mission and the BUSY BOOMERANG terrain avoidance training mission. A discussion of the 1982 BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA mission decision is followed by analyses of the routes and frequencies of the three missions. Section 3 ends with a discussion of the responses of the Labor Party to the Fraser decisions, both in opposition and after the Hawke cabinet came to power in early 1983. Appendix 2 sets out the timeline of the major events in the first phase of the Australian engagement with B-52s from its first formal decisions in 1979 until its conclusion in late 1991.<sup>95</sup>

In mid-1979 the United States requested the Australian government to allow B-52 aircraft to carry out two missions involving B-52 Stratofortress aircraft: overflights for low level terrain avoidance training, and use of Australian airbases for maritime surveillance operations in the Indian Ocean.<sup>96</sup> The Australian response to the two USAF requests for what became the BUSY BOOMERANG and GLAD CUSTOMER missions moved at different speeds: the terrain avoidance training overflights were approved expeditiously within a few months by the Fraser cabinet, while the maritime surveillance mission, together with agreement about the conditions attached to both missions, became the subject of a year of sensitive and sometimes robust negotiations.

The combined unfolding strategic shocks to the United States of the Iranian Revolution at the beginning of 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in its last days precipitated the announcement of a major reorientation of U.S. Middle Eastern policy, under what was immediately dubbed the Carter Doctrine in the State of the Union address to Congress on 23 January 1980.

Calling for close cooperation from ‘all those who rely on oil from the Middle East and who are concerned with global peace and stability, President Carter sought to make the U.S. position ‘absolutely clear’:

‘An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.’<sup>97</sup>

Towards the end of 1979 the U.S. Air Force chief of staff and Strategic Air Command and Pacific Command officials held extensive internal discussions on requirements for B-52

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<sup>95</sup> Appendix 1 lists cabinet documents cited from National Archives of Australia files, the citation format used, the file sources, and the common name used in the text for particular items.

<sup>96</sup> Department of Defence, *Defence Report 1980*, (n. 2), p. 6; and CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, pp. 253-254.

<sup>97</sup> Office of the Historian, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula*, Document 45. Editorial Note.

operations in Australia, prior to opening negotiations with the Australian government.<sup>98</sup> The massive size, weight and logistical requirements of fuel-hungry B-52s led SAC in April 1980 to request permission to conduct a survey of Australian air bases for possible transit or staging operations.<sup>99</sup>

However, on the Australian side, it was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on the 24 December 1979 that more directly triggered the Fraser government's Australian initiatives. A week after Carter's declaration of the new doctrine, Fraser led an Australian mission to Washington for consultations with Carter administration officials on January 31<sup>st</sup>, returning for a private meeting with Carter a week later.<sup>100</sup> On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, even before Prime Minister Fraser returned to Australia, Defence Minister Jim Killen announced approval for the U.S. request for low-level navigation training flights of pairs of B-52 bombers.<sup>101</sup>

U.S. formal approaches to Australia concerning B-52s began in May 1979 and February 1980. The first initiative concerned low-level B-52 overflights over Australian territory. In May the U.S. made a formal request to conduct joint USAF and RAAF exercises including 'low-level training flights by USAF B52 aircraft in Australia', 'subsequently modified to provide for unarmed B52 aircraft based at Guam to conduct low-level navigation flights at fortnightly intervals over Cape York'.<sup>102</sup> In February 1980, the U.S. made its first request concerning B-52s possibly staging through Australian airfields for operations in the Indian Ocean: CINCPAC made an oral request for 'transit of Australia by B52 aircraft travelling to the Indian Ocean area for the purpose of applying US air power there'.<sup>103</sup>

Throughout the period from 1979 to 1991, arrangements governing the two B-52 missions in Australia were based on three agreements with the United States undertaken by the Fraser government, subsequently confirmed and expanded by the Hawke government. The agreements were announced through:

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<sup>98</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, pp. 253-254, 253-254.

<sup>99</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 254. Later visits of USAF officials to assess logistics requirements and the suitability of airfields at Darwin, Learmonth and Townsville were reported in the *Canberra Times* on 5 July 1980 and 29 November 1980.

<sup>100</sup> According to the official U.S. record of 31 January 1980 meeting, Fraser was mainly focussed on the possibilities of U.S. naval access to HMAS Stirling in Western Australia, but the question of airfield access was also discussed in the context of U.S. basing difficulties in the Middle East following the Iranian revolution and the ambivalence of possible alternative host countries. Office of the Historian, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula*, Document 268. Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, January 31, 1980, 10:15 a.m.

<sup>101</sup> Department of Defence, 'Training in Australia by U.S. Air Force B52s', *Defence Press Release No. 8/80*, 3 February 1980, at [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/HPR08005939/upload\\_binary/HPR08005939.pdf](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/HPR08005939/upload_binary/HPR08005939.pdf); 'Qld B52 routes to begin', *Canberra Times*, 19 February 1980; 'B-52s in Australia', *RAAF News*, 1 March 1980; and CINCPAC *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 254.

<sup>102</sup> National Archives of Australia: Cabinet Office, Series number: A12909, Control symbol: 4245, Submission No 4245: US military use of Australian territory and/or facilities - Related to Decision No 12508 (FAD), 29 July 1980 - 15 August 1980; hereafter cited as NAA A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245. See Appendix 1 concerning citation of NAA files. See also Department of Defence, *Defence Report 1980*, (n. 2), p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> NAA A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, Attachment B, para. 3.



- a Press Release of 3 February 1980 by the Minister for Defence, Jim Killen, establishing the BUSY BOOMERANG low-level navigation overflight mission;
- a Parliamentary Statement of 11 March 1981 by the Prime Minister announcing the staging through Darwin of B-52s on GLAD CUSTOMER Indian Ocean maritime surveillance missions, and by at least some BUSY BOOMERANG flights, and the conditions applying to both missions, and which had applied to the BUSY BOOMERANG mission over the previous year; and
- a Press Release of 16 October 1982 by the Minister for Defence, Ian Sinclair, announcing six new routes for terrain avoidance training flights, and staging of some of these flights through Darwin.

Figure 13. Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and President Jimmy Carter



Source: Photographer: Marion S. Trikosko, Washington D.C., 2 January 1979, in *Library of Congress*, Control number 2019636804, at <https://www.loc.gov/item/2019636804/>.

### 3.2 The first agreement: BUSY BOOMERANG, February 1980

When Prime Minister Fraser returned from his discussions with the Carter administration following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, he made a major speech to parliament on 19 February 1980 on his assessment of the events and Australia's response.<sup>104</sup> Fraser opened dramatically: 'In the first weeks of 1980 the world is facing probably its most dangerous international crisis since World War II.' The distinctive characteristics of the crisis, Fraser maintained, concerned the threat to 'the world's oil supplies' and the Soviet Union's rough nuclear parity and conventional military superiority.

The central issue, Fraser argued, was Afghanistan, its horrors and strategic implications:

'The crisis has come about because, and only because, in the last week of 1979 the Soviet Union sent thousands of its troops across the border into Afghanistan... To say that it has acted, and is acting, brutally is not to engage in rhetoric. It is merely to state the facts. When in the Second World War the Nazis wiped out the whole male population of the Czechoslovakian village of Lidice – some 400-500 men – in reprisal for the assassination of Heydrich, the whole civilised world recoiled in horror. Now it is reported, on evidence provided by the women and children who survived, that well over twice that number were murdered in cold blood, and under Russian supervision, in the Afghan village of Kerela [sic].'<sup>105</sup>

Interpretations of the invasion of Afghanistan, or rather the meaning of the Soviet action, became an emotional – and tactical – touchstone in the parliament. Fraser went on:

'In the English language the accepted and proper words for this kind of action are not interference or intervention but invasion, occupation and suppression.'

Yet for all his suspicion of the Soviet Union, Fraser rejected a return to 'the simplicities of bipolarity... There are too many centres of power, too many ideological permutations for that to happen.'

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<sup>104</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Afghanistan: Australia's Assessment and Response: Ministerial statement, 19 February 1980, 17-27, (Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister).

<sup>105</sup> Several weeks before Fraser's speech, an American correspondent published a report of a mass killing on 19-20 April 1979 in the village of Kerala, in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province. Soldiers from the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan government, under the direction of government officials and Soviet advisers reportedly carried out the killings in reprisal for a mujahideen assault on the provincial capital: Edward Giradet, 'A grim chapter in Afghanistan war', *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 February 1980. Giradet's eyewitness report was followed by stories in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. According to a 2005 study 'the operation resulted in many civilian casualties, as they shot indiscriminately. Testimony describes the killing of women, children, the aged and infirm during this search operation. Two mass graves of the victims from this search operation are located in the residential area. Accounts place the total number killed at over 1,000.' Afghanistan Justice Project, *Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity - 1978-2001*, (Open Society Foundations, 2005), pp. 19-20, at <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/casting-shadows-war-crimes-and-crimes-against-humanity-1978-2001>. Giradet's article included the Lidice parallel. See also Edward Giradet, *Killing the Cranes: A Reporter's Journey Through Three Decades of War in Afghanistan*, (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2011), pp. 90-97.



The response Fraser called for, in Australia and globally, fused both the moral and strategic realist strains of his thinking:

‘In my view it is imperative that countries which value their own independence and world peace should respond to this crisis with firmness and in a sustained way. If they do not, the prospects for the 1980s will be bleak.’

Fraser reported a long list of his government’s responses to the invasion, both immediate and longer-term, most famously a boycott of Australian participation in the Moscow Olympic Games.<sup>106</sup>

‘Some of these were substantive, some symbolic. Their essential purpose was to ensure that Australia’s attitude towards the Soviet actions should be registered with absolute clarity.’

Fraser listed a number of substantial defence measures, especially in Indian Ocean operations, both independently and in concert with the United States. On the latter, Fraser announced that Defence was discussing with U.S. authorities measures that

‘could include use of staging facilities, of the new naval base in Western Australia and of our exercise areas, and support from our repair and maintenance facilities.’

Yet there was an anomaly in Fraser’s Afghanistan statement on 19<sup>th</sup> February. Two weeks earlier, on 3 February, even before Prime Minister Fraser returned to Australia from talks in Washington, Defence Minister Killen had announced approval for a U.S. request initiated in May the year before for low-level navigation training flights of B-52 bombers flying round trips in pairs from Guam.<sup>107</sup> Remarkably, Fraser made no reference to Killen’s announcement about the B-52 overflights agreement two weeks earlier, or to a Defence Department press release the day before which carried details of the routes, much of which was repeated in a report in the capital’s newspaper on the morning of Fraser’s speech. Quoting from Killen’s press release more than two weeks earlier, the *Canberra Times* reported on 19 February:

‘Low-level navigation training flights by US Air Force B52 aircraft over northern Queensland are to begin on February 27. A Department of Defence statement yesterday said two aircraft would make the flights. The Minister for Defence, Mr Killen ... said the

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<sup>106</sup> For a characteristically lucid review of the strategic and domestic aspects of the government’s response to the J.A.A. Stockwin, ‘Problems in Australian Foreign Policy - January-June 1980’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, (Vol. 26, Issue 2), December 1980, pp. 339-354. Stockwin summarized the key elements of Fraser’s sense of crisis, with infusing ‘It would be an exaggeration to suggest that Mr Fraser’s innate suspicions of the Soviet Union and its political leadership constitute a sufficient explanation for the Australian government’s reactions. Soviet actions in Afghanistan sent shock waves right around the western world, and there was widespread agreement in western capitals that a tough and coordinated response was required. Central, however, to the manner in which the Fraser government sought to respond was an acute sense of urgency and a conviction that the Soviet Union was embarked upon a coherent strategy of expansion in disparate parts of the world.’ (p. 340)

<sup>107</sup> Department of Defence, ‘Training in Australia by U.S. Air Force B52s’, (n. 101); and CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 254.

bombers, based at Guam, would be unarmed during the exercise. Two routes would be used about a fortnight.’

More information about the routes and procedures of the B-52s overflights appeared in an Australian Air Force periodical on March 1<sup>st</sup>, which in addition to confirming the routes and the Killen statement that ‘the aircraft would be unarmed and will not carry bombs’, reported:

‘The US request was for two B- 52 aircraft to fly the agreed routes once a fortnight at speeds of about 400 knots [740 kph]. It was not envisaged that the aircraft would land in Australia. They would make an 11-hour round flight from Guam. The approval met the US Air Force need for access to long routes and rugged terrain.’<sup>108</sup>

Curiously, through most of 1980, there was little criticism of the overflights in the Australian media, and apparently, little or no comment on the matter by the opposition Labor Party.<sup>109</sup>

There were important differences in the language used about the missions by the Australian and United States governments. The U.S. Air Force code-named these terrain avoidance training overflights BUSY BOOMERANG. This term (and later, GLAD CUSTOMER and BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA) appeared very rarely in Australia at the time.<sup>110</sup> More importantly, while Australian government documents and media reporting described these flights as ‘low-level navigation training’, in internal documents the United States used the more accurate description of terrain avoidance training overflights.

Replacing ‘terrain avoidance’ with ‘low-level navigation’ had the political benefit of assuaging concerns about the obvious dangers of visual- and instruments-only flight over mountainous terrain at a height of 100-150 metres and at speeds of 600-740 kph. But more importantly in the long run for U.S. authorities, the unthreatening mission of navigation practice distracted attention from the reasons for the urgency of the terrain avoidance mission – pressed on governments of at least five countries in the Asia-Pacific region – to restore a majority of Strategic Air Command B-52 pilots and aircrew to the requisite capability to execute the Strategic Nuclear Low-Level Penetration mission that the all-encompassing Single Integrated Operational Plan for nuclear war with the Soviet Union and China required. As a result, while from 1980 there was criticism of the presence of B-52s in Australia, commentary was rarely informed by an

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<sup>108</sup> The *Canberra Times* also informed those interested that the aircraft would be ‘arriving over the Queensland coast about 1pm’. ‘Qld B52 routes to begin’, *Canberra Times*, (n. 101); Department of Defence, ‘US Air Force B-52 Flights’, (n. 2); and, ‘B-52s in Australia’, (n. 101).

<sup>109</sup> For discussion of U.S. silence on the Australian government’s announcement that the BUSY BOOMERANG flights would be ‘unarmed and carrying no bombs’, see section 4.2, fn. 207 below.

<sup>110</sup> The only contemporary journalist to report the GLAD CUSTOMER codename and to report carefully and accurately on key aspects of both missions was Hamish McDonald, in his report from Guam, ‘The boys of B-52 Brigade’, (n. 87). The U.S. codenames were used in parliament only twice, in May 1985. On 5 May the minister representing the Minister for Defence briefly but accurately described each of the three missions. The codenames were then quoted in a speech later that month by a crossbench critic of the government, Don Chipp. See CPD, House of Representatives, Answers to Questions, No. 986. Visits of ships and aircraft, 9 May 1985, 1945; and CPD, Senate, *Australian Air Space (Nuclear Weapons Prohibition) Bill 1985*, 30 May 1985, 2842. (Don Chipp).

understanding of the actual rationale for the Pentagon's pressure for access to Australian skies, let alone to those of other regional countries with suitable terrain.<sup>111</sup>

Moreover, it is not clear that Australian officials at the highest level fully understood or appreciated the critical importance of the nuclear training mission that lay behind the B-52 terrain avoidance missions to Australia. Two of the most important and detailed submissions to the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee by Defence Minister Killen on questions concerning the deployments of B-52s – largely reflecting recommendations of the Defence Committee, made up of departmental officials and service chiefs – were those of 29 July 1980 (Submission 4245) and 14 August 1980 (Submission 4292).<sup>112</sup> While many aspects of the BUSY BOOMERANG and GLAD CUSTOMER missions to Australia were considered in the submissions, the sole strategic concern raised on the issue of U.S. nuclear war planning was the possibility that the U.S. may see value in making use of Australian facilities to deploy B-52s for nuclear strategic display during a future regional crisis. At that point in time, however, the Defence Committee 'understood' the U.S. interest in the use of Australian facilities for B-52 operations to be limited to 'navigation training flights', including the present 'low-level training flights' over Cape York, 'surveillance missions', displays of regional military power for 'political purposes', and 'landings in an emergency'. It was noted further that Australian facilities were not 'essential' for these operations 'but could offer some advantages of economy and convenience' and 'flexibility' for the United States.<sup>113</sup>

While not wrong about the claim that a specifically Australian location for training was not essential to the United States, neither submission provides any evidence to indicate that Defence was aware of the critical importance CINCPAC placed on the B-52 mission in Australia for the United States to achieve its essential training goals to maintain nuclear readiness. Neither is there any evidence to suggest that Cabinet or Defence was aware of the extent of the region-wide diplomatic effort the United States was engaged in to secure foreign base access for terrain avoidance training operations.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> A major article in February 1980 by the defence and aviation correspondent of the *Canberra Times* mocked the 'unrealistic' nature of the low-level navigation missions, since Australia had no capacity to offer 'hostile' electronic air defence systems for the B-52s to practice against. The most they would be offered would be 'demonstrating to their USAF commanders that they can find Australia from Guam and "hit" particular parts of it'. Frank Cranston, 'Unrealistic practice against a blind and naked foe - B52 training flights over north-eastern Australia', *Canberra Times*, 5 February 1980. The Cranston article was accompanying by a cartoon by Geoff Pryor that became famous, which worked off a trope of 'outback' humour showing a hard scrabble farming couple under the shadow of the giant aircraft, lamenting 'It may be a cogent example of our new commitment to increased American-Australian defence...But what's it going to do to the bloody chooks.' Archived at National Library of Australia, Bib ID 1116186, *Pryor collection of cartoons and drawings [picture]* / Geoff Pryor.

<sup>112</sup> NAA, A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, pp. 11-42; and Decision No. 12508, Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Canberra, 15 August 1980, pp. 2-4, in NAA, A12909, 4292, Submission No 4292, 14 August 1980 – 15 August 1980. Appendix 4 below lists the main contents of the submissions.

<sup>113</sup> NAA, A12909, 4292, Submission No 4292, 14 August 1980 – 15 August 1980.

<sup>114</sup> Notably, the only contemporary commentator to make direct and accurate reference to the role of the terrain-avoidance training mission and practice for 'deep penetration bombing attacks in either conventional or nuclear war' was Hamish McDonald, the Tokyo correspondent for the Fairfax news group, in 'The boys of B-52 Brigade', (n. 87).

### 3.3 The development of the final Australian negotiating position on B-52 missions – the Cabinet papers, July – September 1980.

While the first decision about B-52 training overflights under BUSY BOOMERANG was taken quickly by February 1980, discussions over staging of B-52s through Australian bases for maritime surveillance operations – and the precise conditions for the training overflights already underway – proceeded much more slowly, and were eventually only concluded after more than a year.

These discussions dealing with both terrain avoidance training overflights and staging for maritime surveillance operations would culminate in Fraser's ministerial statement on 11 March 1981, and an accompanying diplomatic Note exchanged with the United States. Cabinet papers make clear that the positions and conditions finally announced by Fraser were developed early in the process by the Fraser cabinet by mid-1980, which then formed the basis of robust and protracted but ultimately successful negotiations with the Carter and incoming Reagan administrations.

After the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff and the heads of Strategic Air Command and Pacific Command recommended negotiations over staging, the first practical step in early 1980 involved a SAC team visiting Australia to conduct a technical survey of possibly suitable Australian bases, reporting in July that only RAAF Base Darwin met the stringent requirements for B-52 operations.<sup>115</sup>

With the key U.S. technical requirement resolved, Cabinet commenced substantive discussions on the possible conditions of B-52 staging operations. On 22 July the Prime Minister reported orally to the Cabinet Co-ordination Committee on discussions concerning staging he had held with U.S. officials.<sup>116</sup> The Committee noted that the Defence Committee, made up of departmental officials and service chiefs, was to present a report on the matter, but that the Co-ordination Committee was at that point 'disposed to favour the proposition'.

On 29 July Defence Minister Killen presented a detailed submission to the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, on the basis of which on 5 August the committee reported it had adopted a 'favourable attitude' to the proposal, subject to conditions to be specified.<sup>117</sup>

Killen's 29 July submission was to be one of the two most detailed and nuanced assessments of the issues involved in the B-52 deployments to Australia, and set out the basis of the negotiating

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<sup>115</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1981, p. 253-4; and NAA, A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980B, para. 10.

<sup>116</sup> CPD, Cabinet Minute. Decision No 12371(C) - Landing rights for B52 bombers - Without Submission, Co-ordination Committee, Canberra, 22 July 1980.

<sup>117</sup> NAA, A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980. This submission included four detailed attachments: Attachment A. Homeporting of US Navy ships at Cockburn Sound. Attachment B. Staging of US aircraft through Australia. Attachment C. Policy implications of United States B52 aircraft use of Australian territory and facilities. Attachment D. Conclusions of the Defence Committee regarding US Military Use of Australian Territory and Facilities.

position adopted two months later.<sup>118</sup> The submission contained four attachments. The first dealt with what was then seen as a longer-term and somewhat uncertain prospect of homeporting of U.S. Navy ships at Cockburn Sound. The most substantive and important sections of the submission dealt with the B-52s deployment – explicitly in one [Attachment B], and as the primary concern in a wider discussion of ‘Policy implications of United States B52 aircraft use of Australian territory and facilities’ [Attachment C]. The fourth presented the conclusions of the Defence Committee [Attachment D].

Overall, the 29 July Submission 4245, and the committee’s subsequent favourable provisional recommendation, was positive and supportive of an Australian contribution to a shared objective of deterring what was seen as destabilising Soviet expansion into Afghanistan. The USSR, it was noted, would well understand that ‘the B-52 as a system can readily be switched from a conventional to a nuclear role’, and that even a few hours of B-52s on station was seen by the U.S. Air Force as ‘a worthwhile display of interest and capability’. [Attachment C, para 4.] Such a deterrent effect would be beneficial to Australia; however, it was also recognized that ‘the US deployments could, and no doubt would, still occur and have substantially the same deterrent effect without Australian support.’ [Attachment C, para 8.]

The principal policy concern in the submission, however, concerned the balance of benefits and risks for Australia. A certain level of costs and risks may have to be borne for the longer-term Australian interest: ‘support of so large a power as the US unavoidably entails risks beyond, and even on occasion in conflict with, purely national interests.’ [Attachment C, para 33.]

Nonetheless, the risks were emphasized, beginning with recognition of the severe limitations of Australian government knowledge of SAC operational planning for the B-52s in Indian Ocean operations:

‘We have at this time no direct knowledge of how they would be employed were hostilities to occur.’ [Attachment C, para 5.]

The report recognized the possibility of U.S. military initiatives regarding hostages then held by Iran, or the thinking expressed by CINCPAC that in the face of a threat to Middle Eastern oil fields, it would be necessary for the United States ‘to move in and actually occupy an oil-producing state’s territory so as to ensure supply.’ [Attachment C, para 12.]

Moreover, the Defence submission made clear that this veil of ignorance was not from lack of Australian effort:

‘We do not know in what operations and with what objectives US forces using Australian facilities might be used.’ [Attachment C, para 13.]

In 1980, it is unlikely that the defence establishment had entirely forgotten Australia’s involvement in the Indochina wars – particularly Prime Minister Fraser’s sense that the United

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<sup>118</sup> NAA, A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980.



States had misled its ally about the Vietnam War – when Cabinet deliberations took place. The submission went on to critique the potential divergence of U.S. policy from the shared objective of containing the USSR, a concern evidently informed by prior experience:

‘Difficulties for Australian policy arise from the prospect that... although military capability and manifest will can be an important condition of effective political policy, there could be undue reliance on military force to deal with essentially political problems. This could make situations worse. By expanding our involvement with the US through the provision of operational facilities, Australia could become directly associated with US policies and operations supporting objectives different from that that lead the Government to make its offer.’ [Attachment C, paras 15-16.]

After acknowledging the possibility of an elevation to ‘the existing risk of becoming a nuclear target in a US/Soviet conflict’ the submission turned to an extended review of issues of impingement on Australian sovereignty resulting from the deployment of B-52s:

‘All international cooperation involves some loss of sovereignty and national independence. The basing of US military units in Australia and their conduct of military operations from Australia would subject Australia to the fluctuations of US policy and domestic politics much more directly than is now the case. Over the many years that the US is likely to want to utilise any substantial investment in facilities, it is unlikely that Australian governments will always agree with US policy and wish to be associated with it and supporting it. On occasion opposition to US policy can be anticipated. [Attachment C, para 31.]

‘The US would certainly not accept that its military operations, where supported by our facilities, should be subject to the approval of the Australian government from day to day. The Australian government could not assume that it could exercise influence to modify US policy where major US interests were seen to be at stake, let alone to have them be abandoned. The operation of US military units from Australian territory, could, therefore, involve a reduction of national control over Australia’s international involvements.’ [Attachment C, para 32.]

The conclusions offered to the Cabinet by the Defence Committee (Attachment D) were favourable, though in words of limp praise:

‘Though not necessary for the defence of Australia itself, such arrangements, supporting the ANZUS alliance, could be advantageous to the security of Australia and the region.’ [Attachment D, para b.]

The conditions the Defence Committee recommended were pointed and clear:

- ‘There should be no commitment to the development in Australia of facilities which could be identified as unreservedly available to US use.’ [Attachment D, para 1.c.]

- Australia must have ‘full and timely information about strategic and operational developments relevant to the facility and their significance for Australian national interests’. [Attachment D, para 1.d.]
- ‘Unless there is specific agreement to the contrary, US use of the facilities should not include the introduction on to Australian land territory of nuclear weapons or the maintenance and repair in Australian waters of the nuclear reactors of nuclear-propelled vessels.’ [Attachment D, para 1.f.]

The Defence Committee then recommended these positions to the cabinet’s Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, but not before ‘pointing to’ several provisos, unusual in tone for ordinarily strong supporters of the American alliance, including

- ‘the departure from past Australian defence policy in acceptance of the basing of US military units in Australia or their regular staging through Australia in peace-time’;
- ‘public anxiety about the risks of nuclear attack, and prejudice to the independence of Australian policy’;
- ‘the possibility that the new arrangements might divide Australian political and public opinion and stimulate opposition to US use of defence facilities in Australia – whether new or long established’; and, most notably
- ‘the possibility that a significant section of the Australian community would welcome a visible US presence in Australia, without necessarily being able to evaluate its strategic effects.’ [Attachment D, para 1.g.]

On August 15<sup>th</sup>, the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee of Cabinet accepted (Decision 12508) Defence Minister Jim Killen’s second major submission on B-52s, Submission 4292, dated 14 August, resulting from a report prepared by the Defence Committee on the basis for ‘conditions to be negotiated by Australia in any agreement with the United States on the staging of U.S. aircraft through Australia.’<sup>119</sup>

The conditions set out in the 15 August Decision 12508 were to become the foundation of the agreement announced by Fraser half a year later, though with some significant variations, and much delay as a consequence.

Killen’s 14 August Submission 4292 raised the possibility that the United States might see value in utilising Australian facilities for B-52 bombing and minelaying operations against a hostile power or in support of a regional government facing internal or external attack. The submission also directly addressed the issue of nuclear weapons, ‘with which B52s are identified’, noting that the proposed ‘strategic display’ mission for B-52s could, ‘in time of hostilities’ lead to the United States wanting

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<sup>119</sup> NAA, A12909, 4292, Submission No 4292, including Attachment A, pp. 13-20.

‘to display a strategic nuclear capability in the area to back up its conventional and tactical nuclear capability’, for example, ‘against the threat of a Soviet move against the Gulf oil fields’. [Attachment A, paras 3, 5.]

Noting U.S. policy to neither confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons on its ships and aircraft, the Defence submission argued:

‘It will be important to sustain the position proposed by the Defence Committee, that unless there is specific agreement to the contrary, U.S. use of facilities in Australia should not include the introduction of nuclear weapons – without preempting the question of future policy in altered circumstances.’ [Attachment A, para 7.]

In Cabinet Decision 12508 on 15 August 1980 the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee set out the conditions to be negotiated in any agreement, including that:

- staging would be limited to
  - agreed airfields;
  - ‘operations in the Indian Ocean area directed towards the common objective of deterrence of Soviet military expansion’;
  - a normal frequency of ‘staging operations’ of ‘two per month’, with the number of ‘landings’ to be negotiated between officials;
- staging could include some U.S. support personnel and equipment at a RAAF facility as a ‘lodger-unit’, subject to the application of the 1963 Status of Forces Agreement;
- operations other than for ‘navigation training, surveillance or strategic display’ would require prior Australian agreement, as would ‘operations addressed to concerns outside the common objective of deterrence of the Soviet Union’;
- ‘no circumstances arising from an agreement would affect’ Australian title, authority and control of bases concerned, whatever financial arrangements may be involved;
- staging arrangements should be subject consultation arrangements on ‘strategic and operational developments’ based on those in place for the North West Cape Naval Communications Station’;
- ‘aircraft would introduce nuclear weapons into Australia only if separate and specific agreement had first been given by the Australian government’;
- in considering any U.S. request to alter the terms of an agreement the government would ‘give weight to’ the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Australia’s ANZUS commitments, and ‘its understanding of U.S. strategic and operational policies and activities derived from consultations’ with the United States; and that
- ‘the status of an arrangement between the U.S. and Australia would be the subject of separate discussions after a U.S. proposal; the Australian Government would consider it desirable that the agreed terms be made public’.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Decision No. 12508, Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Canberra, 15 August 1980, pp. 2-4, in NAA, A12909, 4292, Submission No 4292, 14 August 1980 – 15 August 1980.

This last condition, insisting on a preference for the terms of any future agreement to be made public, would turn out to be decisive.

Three weeks later, on 8 September, Killen submitted to Fraser a draft diplomatic Note responding to the U.S. request, accompanied by a two page set of Guidelines and Principles. Most of the draft Guidelines followed the language of the 15 August recommendations. Three days later, on Thursday, 11 September, the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee agreed with the draft Note and Guidelines and Principles, subject to clarifications to be sought in discussions with the United States (see Appendix 4 below).<sup>121</sup>

Firstly, while the draft Note and Guidelines and Principles states that the frequency of deployments through RAAF airfields could ‘easily amount to two or three deployments per month’, the Committee sought to clarify that the frequency ‘not necessarily be limited to three per month and the airfields to be used not necessarily be limited to Darwin’.<sup>122</sup>

Secondly, in line with Fraser’s insistence on minimizing the risk that ambiguity in drafting may diminish Australian sovereignty, the committee sharpened the draft’s language by specifying that Australian government agreement to any operations beyond ‘sea surveillance and navigation training and strategic display’ would be ‘required’ rather than merely ‘assumed’.

Thirdly, all airfields were ‘to remain under Australian control’.

Fourthly, the committee required ‘the item on the carrying of nuclear weapons to be clarified’. Whereas the 15 August draft negotiating conditions required ‘separate and specific’ agreement before ‘aircraft would introduce nuclear weapons into Australia’, Article 9 of the finalised Guidelines and Principles specified that

‘Aircraft flying over or landing in Australia would not carry nuclear weapons unless separate and specific agreement had first been given by the Australian Government.’

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<sup>121</sup> Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee Cabinet Decision No 12737(FAD), 11 September 1980, with one attachment (Guidelines and Principles); hereafter NAA, A13075, 12737/FAD, Cabinet Decision No 12737(FAD), 11 September 1980.

<sup>122</sup> The Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee had been exploring the possibility of developing a second airfield for U.S. B-52 operations since 26 August 1980 when in principle support was given to the development a new airfield for the RAAF at Derby South, including works to enable ‘limited B52-type operations’. This in principle support was elevated on 17 February 1981 by the decision that ‘a second airfield should be developed for the RAAF, in addition to that at Darwin, with a runway and taxiway system capable of handling B52 aircraft.’ However, after examining the options, D.J. Killen, Minister for Defence, advised the Committee in a submission on 22 July 1981 that the decision be ‘reconsidered’. Apart from the issue of cost, Killen pointed to the fact that ‘the U.S. has not sought an alternative airfield to Darwin for B52 deployments in Australia’ and that the Chief of Staff of the USAF had indicated in talks with the RAAF in November 1980 that the USAF had judged Darwin as ‘the only feasible option for staging B52s through Australia’. On 19 January 1982, the Committee agreed that there was ‘no present need to develop a second airfield for regular B52 deployments’ but ‘supported the concept of developing a second airfield for occasional B52 use’. Construction at the Derby South site (now RAAF Base Curtin) commenced in 1983 without provision for facilities to handle B-52 operations. National Archives of Australia, Series number A12909, Control symbol 4989, Item ID 30837866, Submission No 4989, Second Airfield B52 aircraft operations, 22 July 1981, 16 July 1981 - 9 March 1982.

After clearance with the Prime Minister, the clarifications were incorporated into a revised version of the Note and Guidelines and Principles to be forwarded to the U.S. government ‘immediately’.<sup>123</sup> The Committee required the Australian ambassador in Washington

‘to press with the United States at a high level the need for an early response to the Australian Note, and in any case for a clearance by Tuesday [16 September] on the basic principles of the Note and guidelines so that questions could be answered in the Parliament.’

The urgency of the pursuit of U.S. acceptance of the Note and its attached conditions was tied to Fraser’s intention to announce a federal election. Parliament was in fact dissolved at the end of the following week, 19 September. Following the election in October, the coalition government led by Fraser was returned, though with a reduced majority, and negotiations resumed.<sup>124</sup>

However, a combination of four key aspects of the final Note gave rise to protracted concern by the U.S. government, and ‘intensive’ negotiations, first with the Carter administration, and then, following the November 1980 election, with the Reagan administration:

- the terms of the Note and the Guidelines;
- the tightened drafting language;
- the specific requirement for U.S. acceptance of the condition that ‘Aircraft flying over or landing in Australia would not carry nuclear weapons’, in a contradiction of the by then long-standing and strictly maintained neither confirm nor deny policy; and
- in a more remarkable challenge to neither confirm nor deny global practice, the reiterated preference of the Australian government that ‘the agreed terms be made public’.

In late 1980, these issues were by no means settled. After the Australian election, Killen publicly confirmed that negotiations were underway, but warned that ‘these negotiations would take some months.’ Moreover, Killen stated, the question of

‘whether nuclear weapons would be carried by B-52s over Australia had yet to be settled.’<sup>125</sup>

### 3.4 The second agreement: 11 March 1981 – B-52 staging operations through Darwin, and guidelines and principles for all B-52 operations

It was to be more than a year after the February 1980 decision to allow B-52 terrain avoidance overflights before agreement was eventually reached on the issues outstanding between Australia

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<sup>123</sup> NAA, A13075, 12737/FAD, Cabinet Decision No 12737(FAD), 11 September 1980.

<sup>124</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 254.

<sup>125</sup> ‘In Brief - US talks on B-52s’, *Canberra Times*, 15 October 1980.



and the United States on staging operations through Darwin for maritime surveillance operations and the conditions attached to all B-52 operations.

On 11 March 1981, following discussions between the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tony Street, and the Secretary of State for the Reagan administration, former general Alexander Haig, Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser issued a formal ministerial statement in parliament announcing three new developments:

- the commencement of a second B-52 mission for maritime surveillance in the Indian Ocean;
- arrangements for staging through RAAF Base Darwin of B-52s on both the maritime surveillance mission and the terrain-avoidance training mission; and
- details of the agreement with the U.S. of the conditions under which both sets of missions were to be conducted.<sup>126</sup>

Fraser summarized the agreement, based on an Exchange of Notes, as follows:

‘The B52 flights shall be for sea surveillance in the Indian Ocean area and for navigation training; the agreement of the Australian Government would need to be obtained before the facilities at RAAF Base, Darwin, could be used in support of any other category of operations; the B52 aircraft on surveillance flights will be supported by KC135 tanker aircraft for aerial refuelling and the operations shall consist of periodic deployments of up to three B52 and six KC135 aircraft; about 100 U.S. Air Force personnel and associated equipment will support the staging operations and some of these may be stationed at RAAF Base, Darwin; there will be no change in the status of RAAF Base, Darwin, as an Australian facility under Australian control.’

In the remainder of his ministerial statement, Fraser went considerably further than the content of the Notes, saying firstly that ‘as is the case with the current navigational missions, the flights landing at Darwin will be unarmed and will carry no bombs.’

B-52 staging operations would involve both a modified program for some of the existing BUSY BOOMERANG terrain-avoidance overflights and the entirely new maritime surveillance operations. Some of the terrain avoidance flights from Guam to overfly north Queensland would land at Darwin, refuel and allow crew recovery time, returning to Guam over the north Queensland routes.

Fraser’s statement said little about the strategic purpose and structure of operations of the maritime surveillance mission, beyond the facts of B-52s staging through Darwin en route to surveil parts of the Indian Ocean. What Fraser did emphasize was the ‘determination’ he shared with the United States, including both the Carter Administration and the incoming Reagan administration,

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<sup>126</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 664-666, (Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister).

‘to take all steps within its power to deter further Soviet expansionism. We stand ready to lend our ANZUS partner what assistance we can in pursuit of our common aims. The provision of staging facilities at Darwin for these U.S. aircraft will facilitate the surveillance and training operations they are carrying out in an area of prime security concern to Australia.’

The maritime surveillance flights would

‘consist of periodic deployments of up to three B52 and six KC135 aircraft; about 100 U.S. Air Force personnel and associated equipment will support the staging operations and some of these may be stationed at RAAF Base, Darwin.’

As with existing terrain avoidance training overflights, all B-52s landing at Darwin, for both terrain avoidance training and maritime surveillance, would be ‘unarmed and will carry no bombs’.

Remarkably, in contrast to the practices of subsequent Australian governments, Fraser outlined ‘the basis on which the agreement of the Australian Government would be given to such other operations’ in terms that were considerably more public, explicit and robust than those found in later agreements with the United States concerning nuclear-capable aircraft – most notably the United States Force Posture Agreement of 2014, and related agreements.

‘Australia would need to know’, Fraser stated,

‘firstly, what the strategic and tactical objectives are – Australia would need to be in agreement with these – and, secondly, what weapons are being carried and in particular whether nuclear weapons are being carried.’

Even more striking in both the historical and current contexts of U.S. policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on its surface vessels, submarines and aircraft, Fraser continued:

‘The Australian Government has a firm policy that aircraft carrying nuclear weapons will not be allowed to fly over or stage through Australia without its prior knowledge and agreement. Nothing less than this is or would be consistent with the maintenance of our national sovereignty.’

Fraser’s next sentence underlined his commitment to this interpretation of the B-52 agreement when he alluded to the extended period of discussions with U.S. officials that had apparently been required:

‘I am particularly pleased that it has been possible to reach finality on this question so soon in the term of the new Administration.’

In all but one matter Fraser's ministerial statement aligned closely with the Cabinet's 11 September Guidelines and Principles, indicating U.S. acceptance of the Australian negotiating position. Whereas the Cabinet document specified the accepted B-52 activities as 'sea surveillance and navigation training and strategic display', Fraser's statement omitted 'strategic display' – a phrase that could convey offensive demonstration of capacity short of armed conflict. It is not clear why the objective was dropped, or by which side of the negotiations. One possibility is redundancy: any adversary observing GLAD CUSTOMER flights would understand U.S. power projection capabilities in the event the B-52s were to be armed on such operations. Another possibility – particularly given the Fraser cabinet's emphasis on limiting the scope of operations for which agreement was being granted, and the clear stipulation that any extension or alteration would require separate approval – is that during the latter stage of negotiations, the Australian government sensed a strong interest in such an extension on the part of either the post-detente Carter administration or the incoming, more militant Reagan administration. The term 'strategic display' may have appeared too vague a description for operations that, in times of crisis, could pull Australia into conflicts beyond 'the common objective of deterrence of the Soviet Union'.

Speaking in response a few hours after Fraser's statement, the Labor opposition mocked the essence of Fraser's claims, with the Labor shadow minister for foreign affairs, Lionel Bowen, asserting that Fraser's claim that the aircraft would not be carrying nuclear weapons was a 'mistake' on the part of the Americans, because neither confirm nor deny was a worldwide U.S. requirement:

'Last year the Americans apparently indicated to this Government that they would inform it in advance whether any of its B52s were carrying nuclear weapons. This was a mistake...They will not do it.'<sup>127</sup>

Two weeks later, the fact that the B-52s were to be unarmed was confirmed by the U.S. embassy in Canberra in a 28 March statement approved by Washington, the transcript of which Fraser incorporated into Hansard on 2 April.<sup>128</sup> A U.S. embassy spokesperson was asked about Fraser's 11 March announcement of a requirement that the Australian government:

'would need to be informed concerning whether nuclear weapons were being carried. Can you comment on this?'

'ANSWER: No comment other than to point out that the Agreement specifies Australian Government approval be obtained before the facilities are used for any other category of operations. Furthermore, it remains the policy of this Government neither to confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons on particular missions.'

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<sup>127</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 664-666, (Lionel Bowen).

<sup>128</sup> CPD, (House of Representatives), Question without notice: B-52 bombers, 2 April 1981, 1234; incorporating Embassy of the United States of America Canberra, ACT, *Australia Press Guidance-US-Australian Agreement on B-52's*, 28 March 1981.

American mistake or not – and it is implausible that the Reagan administration agreed in a fit of absence of mind – Fraser had seized on the political and strategic possibilities offered, and pulled the ‘mistake’ into position as the foundation of a wider sovereignty-based policy of pushing back against the neither confirm nor deny policy.<sup>129</sup>

Fraser, a former defence minister, was well-known for his strong views on many aspects of defence policy and for command of his brief. It is unlikely, given his wide personal contacts in Washington, that he was not fully conversant with the U.S. policy on neither confirm nor deny – a policy by then three decades old and the subject of well known controversies in other U.S. allied states. The burgeoning ANZUS controversy over visits of nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered U.S. ships to New Zealand ports had been well under way since the late 1970s, and the centrality of the neither confirm nor deny policy was well-understood by governments and peace movements in both New Zealand and Australia.

The arrangement announced by Fraser in his 11 March 1980 ministerial statement made clear that the United States had accepted all elements of the Note and the Guidelines and Principles of Australia’s negotiating position finalised six months earlier.

The statement on 28 March from the U.S. embassy in Canberra confirming the controversial aspects of the agreement, which Fraser incorporated into the parliamentary record on 2 April, left no doubt about the U.S. government’s public acceptance of compliance with the ‘unarmed and carrying no bombs’ policy.

Fraser took his government’s decision to be fully informed about the tactical and strategic objectives of B-52 missions in Australia, including knowledge about the weaponry they carried, to be a matter of national sovereignty. An armed mission launched from Darwin would plainly have serious strategic implications for Australia. Consequently, Fraser informed Parliament that:

‘It would be quite wrong, a derogation of Australia’s sovereignty and a derogation of responsibility of this Government and this Parliament, if any government were to agree to such a mission if the government did not agree with the objectives of the mission.’<sup>130</sup>

When questioned about whether the United States would withhold such information from Australia, Fraser, characteristically, replied that ‘They will tell *me*’.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> The fact this represented a violation of the US doctrine of neither confirm nor deny was acknowledged by subsequent, albeit rare and incomplete, scholarly and historical accounts. Writing on the B-52 agreement and other basing issues at the time, William T. Tow contended that ‘Washington has set a significant strategic precedent by committing itself to secure the Australian government’s approval before arming the B-52s. This is a significant revision of normal US policy which precludes host-country knowledge of its air or naval systems’ weapons payloads.’ William T. Tow, ‘ANZUS and American security’, *Survival*, (Vol. 23, No. 6), 1981, pp. 264-5. Writing several years later in a dedicated study on nuclear issues in the ANZUS alliance, Michael C. Pugh submitted that the significance of B-52 agreement ‘is that it involved a breach of NCND’. Michael C. Pugh, *The ANZUS crisis, nuclear visiting and deterrence*, (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 57.

<sup>130</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Questions without Notice: B52 Bombers, 12 March 1981, p. 711.

<sup>131</sup> Alan Renouf, *Malcolm Fraser and Australian foreign policy*, (Australian Professional Publications, 1986), p. 123.

And clearly the United States did so, to its chagrin.

Unsurprisingly, there was consternation in U.S. government circles with the implications of several aspects of Fraser's statement. In his detailed chronological review of the development of the U.S. neither confirm nor deny policy worldwide, Hans Kristensen noted that

'Mindful of the explosive nature of the issue in relation to naval port visits, U.S. diplomats in Tokyo and naval officers at Pacific Command headquarters in Hawaii reportedly had been appalled when U.S. Air Force representatives told the Australian Fraser government that B-52s transiting Australia on training missions would not carry nuclear weapons.'<sup>132</sup>

Two years after Fraser's announcement, the Commander in Chief of Pacific Command's Top Secret *1982 Command History* made clear CINCPAC's unhappiness with this contradiction of what it termed

'the standard worldwide U.S. practice of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons'.

Not only, the *CINCPAC 1982 Command History* noted, had these conditions been imposed by the Fraser government during protracted negotiations in 1979-80, but that in political and diplomatic terms, there was no question of the Fraser government removing these conditions subsequently. The *CINCPAC Command History 1982* stated that in July 1982:

'The Australian Defence Department also advised that it regarded these new arrangements to be an extension of those originally made for navigation training over Queensland under BUSY BOOMERANG and had agreed to them on the understanding that the B-52 aircraft taking part would be "unarmed and not carry bombs"...

'This last statement was contrary to the standard worldwide U.S. practice of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons. However, as pointed out by the U.S. Ambassador in Canberra, as a result of the intensive negotiations the two governments had agreed in 1980 that the Australians could use the "unarmed-and- carry-no-bombs" phrase, and Australian approval was conditional on reaching agreement on this issue. Any change would be immediately noticed in Australia and would imply a change in armament. The Secretary of State therefore agreed with the Ambassador that it was inadvisable to seek a change in the language for the time being...

'CINCPAC concurred.'<sup>133</sup>

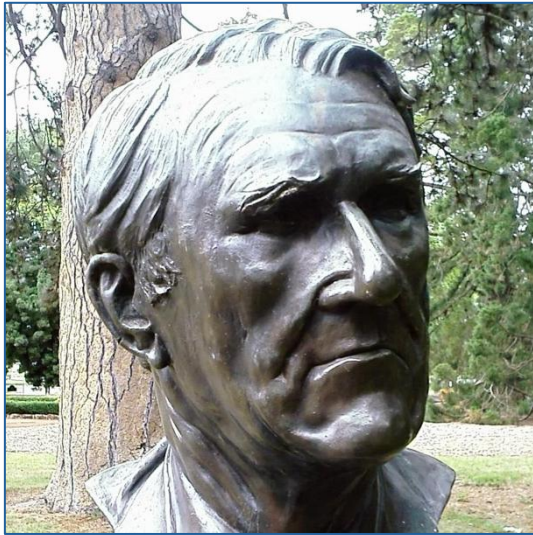
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<sup>132</sup> Hans M. Kristensen, *The Neither Confirm Nor Deny Policy: Nuclear Diplomacy At Work - A Working Paper*, Federation of American Scientists, February 2006, p. 20, at <https://www.nukestrat.com/pubs/NCND.pdf>.

<sup>133</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1982, pp. 320-322.



Figure 14. Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister  
1975-1983



Source: Peter Nicolson, bust of Malcolm Fraser; photo (cropped) by WikiTownsvillian, at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Malcolm\\_Fraser\\_bust.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Malcolm_Fraser_bust.jpg); CC-BY-SA-3.0,2.5,2.0,1.0; Released under the w:en:GNU Free Documentation License.

Figure 15. Jim Killen, Minister for  
Defence, 1975-1982



Source: D.J. Killen, 1974, National Archives of Australia, A6135, K25/7/74/135Z. Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia.

Figure 16. Gareth Evans, Minister for  
Foreign Affairs, 1988-1993



Source: National Archives of Australia, A6180, 13/5/91/7, Personalities – Gareth Evans - Australia-Japan Ministerial Committee Meeting, 13 May 1991. Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia.

Figure 17. Kim Beazley, Minister  
for Defence, 1984-1990



Source: Photo (cropped) by PH2 Paul T. Erickson, aboard USS Missouri, Sydney, 1 September 1986, *NARA DVIDS Public Domain Archive*, Combined Military Service Digital Photographic Files, released to public, at <https://nara.getarchive.net/media/gunners-mate-first-class-vw-allen-explains-operations-inside-the-no-1-gun-turret-2e49a1>

### 3.5 The third Fraser agreement – BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA, October 1982

In October 1981, after GLAD CUSTOMER quarterly maritime surveillance transits at Darwin had commenced in mid-year, the U.S. Air Force proposed an evolution of BUSY BOOMERANG involving landing B-52D Queensland overflights from Guam in Darwin up to twice per quarter, under the rubric of BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA. This proposal was itself a response to the USAF decision to eliminate its Guam B-52 Task Group, but also reflected a political concern by CINCPAC in so doing to ‘maintain U.S. level of presence in Australia’.<sup>134</sup>

On 14 April 1982 the Defence Department granted interim approval through the CINCPAC Representative Canberra to land BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA flights in Darwin.<sup>135</sup> From 22 July, the Defence Department authorised BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA landings at Darwin, to be made up of two B-52s, together with three KC-135 refuelling tankers, returning to Guam via ‘routes to be selected near Darwin’ for terrain-avoidance flight training.<sup>136</sup>

These arrangements were made public several months later. On 16 October Ian Sinclair, Minister of Defence, announced a third B-52s agreement with the United States, following on from the February 1980 low-level navigation overflight agreement announced by Sinclair’s predecessor, Jim Killen, and the 11 March 1981 statement by Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser announcing the maritime surveillance mission through Darwin, and the conditions applying to both missions.<sup>137</sup>

The third agreement modified the arrangements for BUSY BOOMERANG overflights by authorising a certain number of B-52s from Guam

‘to carry out navigation training flights over northern Queensland, then land at Darwin and subsequently conduct more low-level training over selected low jet routes in the Northern Territory and Western Australia before returning to Guam.’

These additional low-level terrain avoidance training flights landing at Darwin would be, like the flights under the first two agreements, ‘unarmed and carry no bombs’.

The number and frequency of flights, Sinclair stated, would depend on a range of factors such as overall U.S. operational requirements, maintenance issues, and weather, but

‘Altogether a monthly maximum of about 16 B52 flights might be made through Australia for navigation training and sea surveillance purposes although in practice the actual number was likely to be substantially fewer than this. Of these, up to three B52s a month may land at Darwin.’

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<sup>134</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1981, p. 256; and CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1982, p. 321.

<sup>135</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1982, p. 321.

<sup>136</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1982, pp. 321-322.

<sup>137</sup> Department of Defence, ‘B52 operations in Australia’, *Defence News Release*, (n. 137); and CPD, Senate, B52 Flights Across Australia, 21 October 1982, 1701.

According to Frank Donnini, a USAF intelligence specialist who had served with the RAAF on exchange in Australia in 1981-83:

‘Since November 1986 these aircraft have been able to fly missions in which they depart, fly, and then return to Darwin. The Australian government ostensibly approved this SAC program because it was cost-effective for the United States. The U.S. (and SAC) position was to be appreciative of these special training arrangements.’<sup>138</sup>

### 3.6. Routes and frequency of the Australian B-52 missions

Information about the routes flown by B-52s on the three sets of B-52 missions over or through Australia in the 1980s and their frequency is scarce and fragmentary. In the case of routes, what is known is drawn from just three brief sources, one for each of the three missions – BUSY BOOMERANG, BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA, and GLAD CUSTOMER.

The Australian government released information on the routes to be flown on the two terrain-avoidance missions at the same time as the first announcements of the two missions were made in February 1980 and August 1982. No further details were ever announced.

In the case of the GLAD CUSTOMER maritime surveillance mission the Australian government told the public only that the surveillance was to be conducted ‘over the Indian Ocean’. The United States released no public information of any detail about the Australian maritime surveillance mission, but the secret 1981 CINCPAC Command History outlined the route for the first GLAD CUSTOMER operation in June 1981, though no details of further operations. Consequently it is not known how representative this route was of the many subsequent GLAD CUSTOMER operations between 1981 and 1991.

#### 3.6.1 Routes - BUSY BOOMERANG - February 1980-1990

BUSY BOOMERANG overflights commenced in February 1980, with one pair of B-52s flying each week over the Cape York peninsula and the Great Dividing Range of northern Queensland. On February 18<sup>th</sup> the Defence Department issued a single Media Release with a two sentence summary of the turning points of two routes for BUSY BOOMERANG flights.

The initial two BUSY BOOMERANG routes involved flights from Guam to the Torres Strait, and the top of Cape York, heading south in two routes between 900 and 1,200 kms in length, down the mountainous areas inland just west of Cooktown and Cairns, before returning along a similar route and heading back towards Guam over the Coral Sea.

‘One[aircraft] will take the route which starts over Mt Adolphus Island, passes east of Coen, turns north to pass over Racecourse Mountain and then passes west of Cooktown before heading out to sea over Princess Charlotte Bay. The other aircraft will fly the route which starts over Shelburne Bay and follows the coast before turning south to pass

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<sup>138</sup> Frank P. Donnini, *ANZUS in Revision*, (n. 94), p. 14.

west of Cooktown, crosses Walters Plains Lake before turning north, passes Cooktown again to the west and leaves the coast at Lookout Point.’<sup>139</sup>

This Australian official account of the routes describes the aircrafts’ paths only in very general terms, focusing on a few rough turning points. Secret internal U.S. Air Force documents provided a little more information. One B-52 navigator from the 60<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron recounted his experience flying the BUSY BOOMERANG mission in a 1982 magazine for Strategic Air Command. The SAC publication, *Combat Crew*, makes clear that the terrain avoidance routes culminated in simulated bombing runs on pre-planned target ranges, both over Australia, and also over Papua New Guinea, as well as simulated minelaying during the return flight to Guam.

Even though the two BUSY BOOMERANG routes involved flights over Australian territory, they were designated by the US Air Force as Military Training Routes (MTR), and in particular as Instrument Flying Routes IR-984 and IR-985.<sup>140</sup> Each took approximately two and a half hours to complete at an airspeed varying from 320 to 350 knots [590 - 650 kph]. Each route was aligned to a corridor ‘four to six nautical miles [7 to 11 kms] either side of the center line’.

‘Each route begins with a short leg over land during which the descent is accomplished and is followed by an approximate 70- to 75-mile [112 – 120 kms] leg over water at the end of which a terrain avoidance equipment calibration is completed. Following the TA calibration, both routes continue over land.’

One of the routes, IR-984, was more challenging than the other since segments of the leg crossed land areas ‘where relief data is incomplete’, and terrain elevation and the precise location of terrain features ‘are unknown’.

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<sup>139</sup> Department of Defence, ‘US Air Force B-52 Flights’, (n.2). The same information was reprinted two weeks later in ‘B-52s in Australia’, *RAAF News*, (n. 101).

<sup>140</sup> Donald A. Welch, ‘Low Level Down Under’, (n. 42), pp. 7, 20. In 2025 in the United States itself, four ‘USAF bomber routes’ designated for instrument flight training – IR-473, IR-485, IR-492 and IR-499 – were centred on Ellsworth AFB in South Dakota, close to Minot AFB and the 5<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing. U.S. Military Training Routes for National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, *Flight Information Publication: Area Planning Military Training Routes North and South America, Effective 0001L 26 DEC 2024 TO 0001L 20 FEB 2025*, AP/1B, at <https://www.daip.jcs.mil/pdf/ap1b.pdf>. Each Instrument Route entry sets out the route, including segments and heights above ground level, conditions of terrain following operations, and special operating conditions, with a proviso that ‘Altitudes at which “Terrain Following” is authorized MAY NOT guarantee obstacle clearance (regardless of weather conditions)’. (p. I-3)



Figure 18. Schematic route maps of first USAF B-52 terrain avoidance training overflights over northern Queensland, March 1980

Route 1 - Mount Adolphus Island – Coen –  
Racecourse Mountain –  
Princess Charlotte Bay (c. 892kms)



Route 2 - Shelburne Bay, west of Cooktown,  
Walters Plains Lake, west of Cooktown,  
Lookout Point (c. 1214 kms)



Source: Google Earth; and Department of Defence, 'US Air Force B-52 Flights', *Defence Media Release*, 18 February 1980.

"The only means of navigation through these segments of the route [IR-984] is dead reckoning. This means starting a stopwatch at the beginning of the leg at a known return and trusting your dead reckoning for a turn 15 minutes later into the bomb run. Heading must be exact to the degree, and airspeed must be monitored continuously. During the bomb run, the navigator must call out timing initiation point plus times to the radar navigator so that he knows when to expect offsets to appear at planned ranges and bearing for proper identification. All bomb runs are scored using radar camera photography."<sup>141</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Donald A. Welch, 'Low Level Down Under', (n. 42), p. 7.



Figure 19. USAF B-52 terrain avoidance training routes from Guam over Far North Queensland, March 1980 - elevation profiles

Route 1 - Mount Adolphus Island – Coen – Racecourse Mountain – Princess Charlotte Bay (892 kms)



Route 2 - Shelburne Bay, west of Cooktown, Walters Plains Lake, west of Cooktown, Lookout Point (c. 1214 kms)



- Source: Google Earth; and Department of Defence, 'US Air Force B-52 Flights', *Defence Media Release*, 18 February 1980.

The Strategic Air Command publication makes clear that the terrain avoidance routes culminated in simulated bombing runs on pre-planned target ranges, both over Queensland and over Papua New Guinea. En route to Australia, three and a half hours after leaving Guam, the two B-52s carried out a simulated ‘contingency high [bombing] run’ on Manam Island, an active volcano with an 1,800 metre high cone off the northern coast of Papua New Guinea. On the return journey to Guam, the two B-52s repeated the high altitude simulated bombing of Manam after clearing the northern coast of Papua New Guinea.

The *Combat Crew* article also revealed one aspect of the routes of B-52 operations in Australia never revealed by the Australian government: simulated minelaying. Welch provides some indication of the sequencing of low-level terrain avoidance flying and simulated bombing for each of the two aircraft:

‘After two hours of flying terrain avoidance or pilot visual contour, each route has a final leg over water with a simulated minelaying run.’

This suggests that the ‘final leg over water with a simulated minelaying run’ for Instrument Flying Routes IR-984 and IR-985 took place after the terrain avoidance flights passed north over the Queensland coast at either Princess Charlotte Bay or Lookout Point. According to Welch,

‘the cell rejoins at a common point using a modified point parallel rendezvous, seven and a half hours into the mission.’

The mission as a whole took a total of approximately eleven hours from take-off to landing.<sup>142</sup>

A question arises as to whether the simulated minelaying took place over Australian waters, and was presumably approved by the Defence Department, or over Papua New Guinea waters, or in international waters.

Figure 18 presents a schematic ‘straight-line’ depiction of the initial routes announced by the Australian government in February 1980. Figure 19 employs the Google Earth ‘Elevation Profile’ mapping function to provide a similarly schematic but still informative depiction of the vertical dimension of the terrain avoidance mission over Queensland. Over the following decade, no further details were provided of the precise turning points, how direct the ‘straight line’ schematic routes actually were, the width of pathways over Queensland within which aircraft were permitted to manoeuvre, or acceptable ‘exits’ from the routes in emergency. Contra the ‘outback’ image redolent of *terra nullius*, these aircraft were not overflying unpopulated areas at 700 kph at less than 150 metres. These would all have been matters of interest to Australian civil aviation authorities – and to the populations over whose territories the B-52s flew so frequently and disturbingly.





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<sup>142</sup> Donald A. Welch, ‘Low Level Down Under’, (n. 42), pp. 7, 20.

### 3.6.2 Routes - BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA, 1982-1990

On 16 October 1982 Defence Minister Ian Sinclair announced four new B-52 terrain avoidance training routes over the Northern Territory and northern Western Australia, in addition to the two north Queensland routes announced in February 1980 (Figures 20 and 22):

Figure 20. B-52H BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA terrain avoidance training routes, October 1982 – c.1991

Route A. Junction Bay, Katherine, Kununurra, Daly River. (1,058 kms)	Route B. Wyndham, Mt Bedford, King Sound. (724 kms)
	
Route C. Roper Valley, Katherine, Cape Scott. (483 kms)	Route D. Cape Leveque, Mt Bedford, Wyndham. (818 kms)
	

Source: *Google Earth*; Department of Defence, 'B52 operations in Australia', *Defence News Release*, No. 163/82, 16 October 1982.

- Route A commenced south of Junction Bay, heading south passing to the east and south of Katherine, turning west to pass south of Kununurra, then north-east to terminate south of Daly River Mission;
- Route B crossed the coast north of Wyndham, headed south to Mt Bedford and then proceeded west to the coast at King Sound;
- Route C commenced south of Roper Valley, headed westerly, passing south of Katherine, and crossed the coast at Cape Scott;

- d. Route D crossed the coast at Cape Leveque, headed easterly to Mt Bedford, then turned north, crossing the coast again north of Wyndham.<sup>143</sup>

Figure 21. Chips Mackinolty, 'No B-52s'



Source: Chips Mackinolty, *No B52s*, 31 March 1982, courtesy of the artist. Source: chipsmackinolty, 'NO B52s', *Instagram*, at <https://www.instagram.com/p/Ckkt7W7BVKa/>.

### 3.6.3 Simulated bombing and minelaying in CINCPAC terrain-avoidance training.

Announcing the start of the first B-52 low-level navigation flights over north Queensland in February 1980, Defence Minister Jim Killen sought to assuage possible public concern about planned 'simulated bomb releases' by assuring the Australian public that 'these would not involve the use of bombs, live or dummy'.<sup>144</sup> The minister's announcement was correct – both about the simulated training and the absence of physical bombing runs of any sort.

On the other hand, that was the last mention to the Australian public of anything of the kind – simulated bombing was a topic avoided by all government officials for the next decade. In fact, simulated bombing was a normal component of CINCPAC B-52 low-level terrain avoidance training operations in the Pacific region in the 1980s – in the Republic of Korea, Japan, Australia, and Papua New Guinea.

<sup>143</sup> Note: authors' route names. Department of Defence, 'B52 operations in Australia', (n. 137); and CPD, Senate, B52 Flights Across Australia, 21 October 1982, 1701.

<sup>144</sup> Department of Defence, 'Training in Australia by U.S. Air Force B52s', (n. 101); 'Qld B52 routes to begin', (n. 101); 'B-52s in Australia', *RAAF News*, (n. 101); and *CINCPAC Command History*, CY 1981, p. 254.



Figure 22. B-52H BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA terrain avoidance training route elevation profiles, October 1982 – c. 1991

Route A. Junction Bay, Katherine, Kununurra, Daly River.



Route B. Wyndham, Mt Bedford, King Sound.





Route C. Roper Valley, Katherine, Cape Scott.



Route D. Cape Leveque, Mt Bedford, Wyndham.



Source: *Google Earth*; and CPD, Senate, B52 Flights Across Australia, 21 October 1982, 1701.

Terrain avoidance training operations carried out over northern Australia under the USAF BUSY BOOMERANG mission beginning in February 1980 included simulated bombing activities. Each of two BUSY BOOMERANG training routes over Queensland, designated IR-984 and IR-985, ended with a simulated bombing run. En route to the northern Queensland low-level training routes, the aircraft also carried out high-level simulated bombing over the active volcano of Manam Island off the northern coast of Papua New Guinea en route to Australia, and again on the return journey to Guam.<sup>145</sup> Although there is at present no documentary evidence, it is highly likely that the six terrain avoidance routes over northern Western Australia and the Northern Territory under BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA from 1982 until the end of the decade also involved simulated bombing.

Simulated bombing training required the development of high standards for aircrew in two separate matters: navigation and target location on the one hand, and on the other, accuracy of bombing by each aircraft. In practice, the functions of navigation and bombing release were integrated in the hands of a radar/navigator who operated a combined bombing/navigation system that integrated navigation, radar, and aircraft control during bomb runs. However, as one BUSY BOOMERANG pilot noted in 1952,

‘Good dead reckoning is important, since celestial procedures may not be accomplished until after air refueling.’<sup>146</sup>

From 1957 through to the 1970s B-52E, F and G models were fitted with the analog and highly automated AN/ASQ 38 bombing and navigation system which consisted of four separate parts: an automatic astrocompass, a ‘true heading computer system’, a Doppler radar, and a bombing navigation system.<sup>147</sup> Critically for bombing accuracy, as well as navigation, the Doppler radar fed ground speed and drift information into the bombing/navigation system. Successive upgrades in the remaining B-52G and B-52H models in the 1970s and early 1980s replaced the analog elements with digital systems, considerably improving the low-level performance of the aircraft through three-dimensional radar showing the ground ahead and terrain height, and an Electro-optical Viewing System with small screens showing images from either a low-light television sensor or a forward-looking infrared (FLIR) sensor:

‘Data that can be presented on these screens includes overlaid terrain avoidance profile trace in both TV or FLIR mode, alphanumeric symbology which includes a height reading from the radar altimeter and time-to-go before weapons release, as well as indicated airspeed, heading error and bank steering, artificial horizon overlay and attitude and position of the sensor in use.’<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Donald A. Welch, ‘Low Level Down Under’, (n. 42)), pp. 7, 20.

<sup>146</sup> Donald A. Welch, ‘Low Level Down Under’, (n. 42), p. 7.

<sup>147</sup> Joe Baugher, ‘Boeing B-52E Stratofortress’, *JoeBaugher.com*, last revised 6 November 2019, at [https://www.joebaugher.com/usaf\\_bombers/b52\\_11.html](https://www.joebaugher.com/usaf_bombers/b52_11.html).

<sup>148</sup> Joe Baugher, ‘Boeing B-52H Stratofortress’, *JoeBaugher.com*, last revised 12 July 2022, at [https://www.joebaugher.com/usaf\\_bombers/b52\\_17.html](https://www.joebaugher.com/usaf_bombers/b52_17.html). See also Joe Baugher, ‘Boeing B-52G Stratofortress’, *Joe Baugher.com*, last revised 12 April 2021, at [https://www.joebaugher.com/usaf\\_bombers/b52\\_15.html](https://www.joebaugher.com/usaf_bombers/b52_15.html).

As outlined above in the case of simulated bombing over Papua New Guinea en route to northern Australia and on return towards Guam, BUSY BOOMERANG flights, at least until 1982, largely relied on celestial navigation combined with synchronous bombing procedures, by which the lead aircraft approaching the target area precisely located the target with its ground radar, and then guiding accompanying aircraft to the appropriate bombing release point.<sup>149</sup>

Yet, no matter how accurate the navigation to reach the intended bomb release point, the accuracy of the bombing itself was a separate matter. Assessing the timing and precise location of the release of bombs – whether live or inert, physical or simulated – had long been an essential Strategic Air Command organizational requirement. In the 1970s and the 1980s evaluation of the accuracy of Air Force bombers dropping unguided bombs was the responsibility of the Strategic Air Command's 1<sup>st</sup> Combat Evaluation Group (1CEV or 1CEVG), based at Barksdale AFB and formed in 1961 out of earlier units with their origins in the Second World War and the Korean War. Demand for accuracy in conventional bombing operations was further heightened by the conventional bombing campaigns of the Vietnam War.<sup>150</sup>

Ground-based radar monitoring largely replaced aircraft physically dropping dummy bombs early in the postwar period, offering the additional benefits of flexibility and reduced costs. These radar facilities, by monitoring aircraft in flight, could provide a prediction of the simulated trajectory and point of impact of a bomb relative to the intended target. If the radar was sufficiently accurate to calculate the location, velocity, and acceleration of the aircraft and the bomb at point of release – and if combined with input of data about the weight, diameter and configuration of the bomb, as well as meteorological data and data supplied from the aircraft about its ground and speeds – accurate impact data could be reliably computed without use of physical explosives or even dummy bombs.<sup>151</sup>

Throughout the 1980s the Australian government was wholly silent on the question of the fact of, and procedures for, assessment of simulated bombing accuracy. U.S. government sources made only one, somewhat cryptic, reference to bombing assessment: in 1982 an article on BUSY BOOMERANG in *Combat Crew*, the Strategic Air Command house magazine, stated that 'All bomb runs are scored using radar camera photography.'<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> W. Howard Plunkett, 'Radar bombing during Rolling Thunder--Part 1: Ryan's raiders', (n. 43), pp. 7-8.

<sup>150</sup> Office of History, 1st Combat Evaluation Group, *Radar Bomb Scoring Historical Summary - RBS Comes of Age*, Barksdale AFB, Louisiana, 9 November 1983, at [http://www.mobileradar.org/Documents/hist\\_sum\\_rad\\_bom\\_scr.pdf](http://www.mobileradar.org/Documents/hist_sum_rad_bom_scr.pdf); and 'Radar bomb scoring', *Wikipedia*, [accessed 10 February 2025], at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radar\\_Bomb\\_Scoring](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radar_Bomb_Scoring).

<sup>151</sup> Donald R. Barr, Thomas D. Burnett, and K. L. Keene, *A Radar Bomb Scoring Method*, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, 1976, pp. 3-4, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA026257.pdf>. The same technology used in reverse often provided the basis for ground radar-directed bombing: 'Reeves AN/MSQ-77 Bomb Directing Central', *Wikipedia*, [accessed 10 February 2025]; and Alan C. Jost, Raytheon, 'ConOps: The Cryptex to Operational System Mission Success', *Crosstalk - The Journal of Defense Software Engineering*, October 2007, p. 15; and Robert R. Kritt, 'B-52 ARC LIGHT operations', in Carl Berger, (ed.), *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973: An Illustrated Account*, (Office of Air Force History, 1977), pp. 149-167, at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA045012.pdf>. See also the experience of a detachment of 1CEVG at 'Det 22 1st Combat Evaluation Group', *The Pleiku Airbase Association, Pleiku AB, South Vietnam 1966 – 1972*, [accessed 11 February 2025], at <http://pleikuab.com/Det-22-1st-Combat-Evaluation-Group/29>.

<sup>152</sup> Donald A. Welch, 'Low Level Down Under', (n. 42), pp. 7, 20.

Just what was meant by this phrase is unclear. During the 1970s and 1980s radar bomb scoring technology progressed from an early reliance on a combination of vacuum tube computing technology and manual entry of data to automated solid state computing. SAC deployed 1CEVG squadrons and detachments at fixed radar sites and mobile detachments in the United States and overseas, including in the Republic of Korea, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, and, during the Indochina War, in Vietnam and Thailand.<sup>153</sup> Many of these 1CEVG overseas radar bomb scoring detachments during the Vietnam War became primarily employed for a secondary purpose: providing the technological basis for forward-deployed ground-based radar direction for tactical and strategic bombing attacks – a purpose which outgrew its RBS progenitor. Thereafter, until the advent of laser- and GPS-guided bombs, the technologies and organisation of radar bomb scoring and ground radar directed bombing evolved together.

One such dual purpose mobile system was the air-transportable Radar Bomb Scoring Central AN/MSQ-35, which comprised three trailers the size of shipping containers, one of which carried the acquisition radar, another a maintenance van, and the AN/MSQ-54 radar scoring operations trailer containing the ‘tracking radar, ballistic and tracking computers, plotting boards, acquisition radar’:

“The purpose of the Central is to acquire and track a designated aircraft, permanently record its flight path, and compute the trajectory of a simulated bomb it releases. In addition to providing a continuous plot of aircraft position in the horizontal and vertical planes, weapon trajectory is computed and plotted in the same coordinates. Score data of the mission is computed and the results pointed out on tape.”<sup>154</sup>

The tracking and acquisition radars and the computing system had a scoring range of 200,000 yards (183,000 m.), and were complemented by a television camera system.

In the 1970s 1CEVG began to replace the AN/MSQ-35 with the more capable and fully computerized AN/TPQ-43 *Seek Score* automatic tracking radar:

‘can automatically “score” simulated bomb releases electronically or it can provide tracking data for navigation termination activity. Using computer targeting coordinates, the Seek Score computer performs a complete ballistics computation on any type of simulated weapon release from where the tracked aircraft is at release, to where the “target” is. This computation provides a Miss Distance score that is accurate to the foot.

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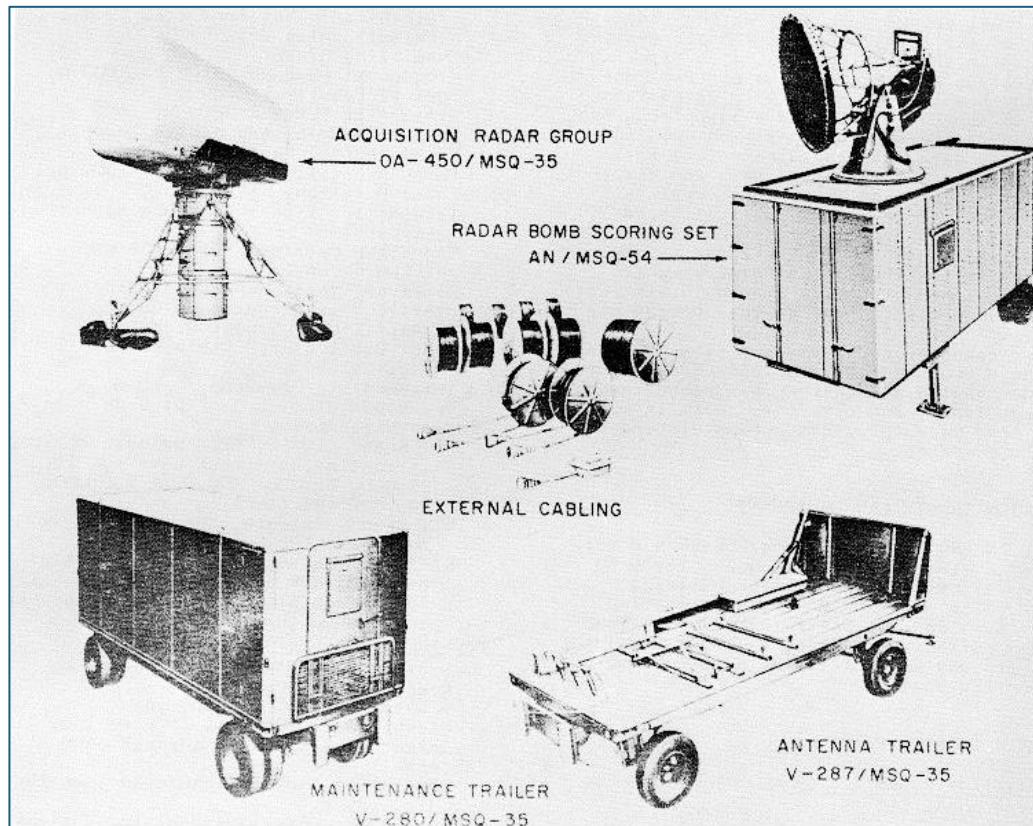
<sup>153</sup> During the Indochina War 1CEVG radar bomb scoring systems were turned to a second use: providing the basis for forward-deployed ground-based radar direction for bombing attacks, especially in Vietnam. Office of History, 1st Combat Evaluation Group, *Radar Bomb Scoring Historical Summary*, (n.148); and ‘99 Range Group’, *Organizational Histories*, Department of the Air Force, p. 100, at <https://usafunithistory.com/PDF/75-100/99%20RANGE%20GP.pdf>.

<sup>154</sup> ‘MSQ-35’, *Military Standardization Handbook 162-A: United States, Volume 1 Radar Equipment, Technical Manual 11-487C-1 (MIL-HDBK-162A)*, Department of the Army, 15 December 1965, pp. AN/MSQ-35: 1–6, [https://radionerds.com/images/e/ea/TM\\_11-487C-1 DEC\\_1965.pdf](https://radionerds.com/images/e/ea/TM_11-487C-1_DEC_1965.pdf). ‘In addition, the computer group predicts accelerations that would normally cause tracking lags and supplies aided tracking rates to the radar. Complementary to the three major groups is the communications group for ground-to-aircraft voice communication during the bombing mission.’



This claimed ‘precision tracking capability’ allowed Seek Score to be used together with other electronic warfare training systems to simulate a more ‘realistic’ air defence electronic environment: the Threat Reaction Analysis Indicator System (TRAINS) and the Multiple Threat Emitter System (MUTES), and jamming systems.<sup>155</sup>

Figure 23. Air-mobile Radar Bomb Scoring Central AN/MSQ-35



Source: ‘MSQ-35’, *Military Standardization Handbook 162-A: United States, Volume 1 Radar Equipment, Technical Manual 11-487C-1 (MIL-HDBK-162A)*, Department of the Army, 15 December 1965, p. AN/MSQ-35: 1, [https://radionerds.com/images/e/ea/TM\\_11-487C-1 DEC. 1965.pdf](https://radionerds.com/images/e/ea/TM_11-487C-1_DEC_1965.pdf).

It is not clear whether Welch’s reference to bombing assessment on BUSY BOOMERANG using ‘radar camera photography’ refers to either of these two systems of radar bomb scoring used for B-52s in the 1970s and 1980s by the 1<sup>st</sup> Combat Evaluation Group, or another system – or relying simply on estimates of bombing accuracy from the aircraft itself. The last seems unlikely, at least for the greater part of the decade-long flights of BUSY BOOMERANG and BUSY BOOMERANG, with the latter adding six Western Australian and Northern Territory routes to the initial pair of IR-984 and IR-985.

<sup>155</sup> Alan C. Jost, Raytheon, ‘ConOps’, (n. 151), p. 15; ‘AN/TPQ-43 SEEK SCORE’, *GlobalSecurity.org*, [accessed 9 February 2025], at <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/systems/an-tpq-43.htm>; and ‘Radar (AN/TPQ-43 Seek Score)’, *Command: Modern Operations / Modern Air Naval Operations*, [accessed 9 February 2025], at <https://cmano-db.com/facility/141/>.



Neither the Australian nor United States governments released details of the bomb scoring technology used in Australia and Papua New Guinea in B-52 simulated bombing in BUSY BOOMERANG or BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA operations, or the SAC 1CEVG units that may have been deployed to remote sites in Australia.

Although neither Australian nor U.S. government sources mentioned the matter elsewhere, the SAC publication also stated that in addition to both high-level and low-level simulated bombing, the Australian B-52 terrain avoidance mission included simulated minelaying. Without specifying the precise location of the minelaying practice – whether over Australian or Papua New Guinea territory or in international waters, the SAC publication made clear in BUSY BOOMERANG missions, ‘each route has a final leg over water with a simulated minelaying run’.<sup>156</sup>

Figure 24. Sierra Technologies AN/TPQ-43 SEEK SCORE automatic tracking radar



Source: ‘AN/TPQ-43 SEEK SCORE’, *radartutorial.eu*, [accessed 15 July 2025], at <https://www.radartutorial.eu/19.kartei/11.ancient7/pic/img117-084-01.jpg>, released under *Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported* licence, at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>.

### 3.6.4 Routes - GLAD CUSTOMER, 1981 - 1991

GLAD CUSTOMER initial operations involved three B-52 aircraft accompanied by six KC-135 refuelling tankers. Flying from bases in the continental US, the B-52s and their tankers staged at Guam before flying onto Darwin in preparation for the 26 hour operation over the Indian Ocean.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Donald A. Welch, ‘Low Level Down Under’, (n. 42), pp. 7, 20.

<sup>157</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1981, pp. 254-256.

Neither the United States nor the Australian government released public information about the routes of the B-52 maritime surveillance missions over the Indian Ocean and that staged through Darwin at any time during the decade between the start of operations in June 1981 and their conclusion at the end of the decade.

However, the secret CINCPAC Command History for 1981 outlined the route and objectives of the first GLAD CUSTOMER operation on 22-23 June 1981 (Figures 25 and 26).

‘The route of the 26-hour flight was west out of Australia, north past Diego Garcia to a point over Task Group 70.9, then into a surveillance area 120 NM north of Socotra Island, and finally return to Darwin over the same route. The B-52s accomplished interface training with F-14 and EA-6B aircraft from TG 70.9 and a sea reconnaissance exercise in the Arabian Sea north of Socotra Island.’<sup>158</sup>

There is no information as to what other routes were subsequently flown over the remainder of the decade – which could plausibly have included maritime areas further to the north of the Arabian Sea towards Pakistan and Oman, and since both countries were closely aligned to Washington, utilising the Gulf of Oman to venture close to the Straits of Hormuz bordering Iran.

In parallel with the Darwin-based Indian Ocean operations, U.S. Strategic Air Command explored alternative staging options from South Africa to enhance operational flexibility and regional presence. On 3 April 1981, CINCSAC apprised the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the time might be right to use D.F. Malan Airport in South Africa (now Cape Town International Airport) as a staging base for B-52 Indian Ocean missions in support of CINCPAC operations. The proposal was intended to increase U.S. visibility in the region, including airspace over the Mozambique–Madagascar–Mauritius corridor, where the Soviet Navy had made approximately 45 port calls since 1978. The mission envisioned flying,

‘two B-52Hs from K.I. Sawyer AFB, Michigan, to D.F. Malan, receiving one air refuelling en route from CONUS KC-135s. After remaining overnight they would launch, top off with fuel from tankers deployed to D.F. Malan from the CONUS, proceed up the eastern coast of Africa, be refuelled a second time by tankers deployed to Diego Garcia from the Pacific and the CONUS, fly two hours of on-station surveillance, and recover at Andersen AFB 26 hours plus 40 minutes after takeoff, having been refuelled by tankers from Diego Garcia and Clark AB. Support requirement at D.F. Malan would consist of approximately 45 personnel and 18 tons of equipment, with airlift being provided by the KC-135s deploying there.’<sup>159</sup>

The State Department, however, amid an ongoing review of U.S. policy toward South Africa, offered no clear endorsement. On 13 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCSAC that

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<sup>158</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, pp. 254-256.

<sup>159</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 257

the outcome of this review might clarify the operation's political viability. Ultimately, no such mission was carried out in 1981. The apparent failure of the South African option – likely due to political sensitivities surrounding apartheid – underscored the strategic value of Darwin as a dependable and politically acceptable staging ground for B-52 operations in the Indian Ocean.

Other basing options within the Indian Ocean were similarly constrained. In November 1980, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had requested CINCPAC's views on approaching the United Kingdom for approval to conduct limited B-52 operations out of Diego Garcia. While CINCPAC supported the idea in principle, it was noted that Diego Garcia was not configured to support B-52 sorties. The airfield's limited ramp space, narrow runway, high operational tempo, and ongoing construction made it inadequate for sustained or even limited B-52 operations at the time. Although future upgrades were expected to alleviate these issues, CINCPAC recommended deferring diplomatic engagement with the United Kingdom until those improvements were in place or unless an urgent operational requirement emerged. The Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred, opting to keep the option open but inactive. Thus, Diego Garcia, despite its strategic location, was not a feasible alternative for routine B-52 missions during this period.<sup>160</sup>

Together, the political constraints on South Africa and the logistical limitations of Diego Garcia significantly narrowed U.S. basing options in the Indian Ocean. In this context, Darwin's reliability, permissiveness, and geographic positioning gave it disproportionate strategic importance in enabling the U.S. to project strategic air power and conduct maritime surveillance across the region throughout the 1980s.

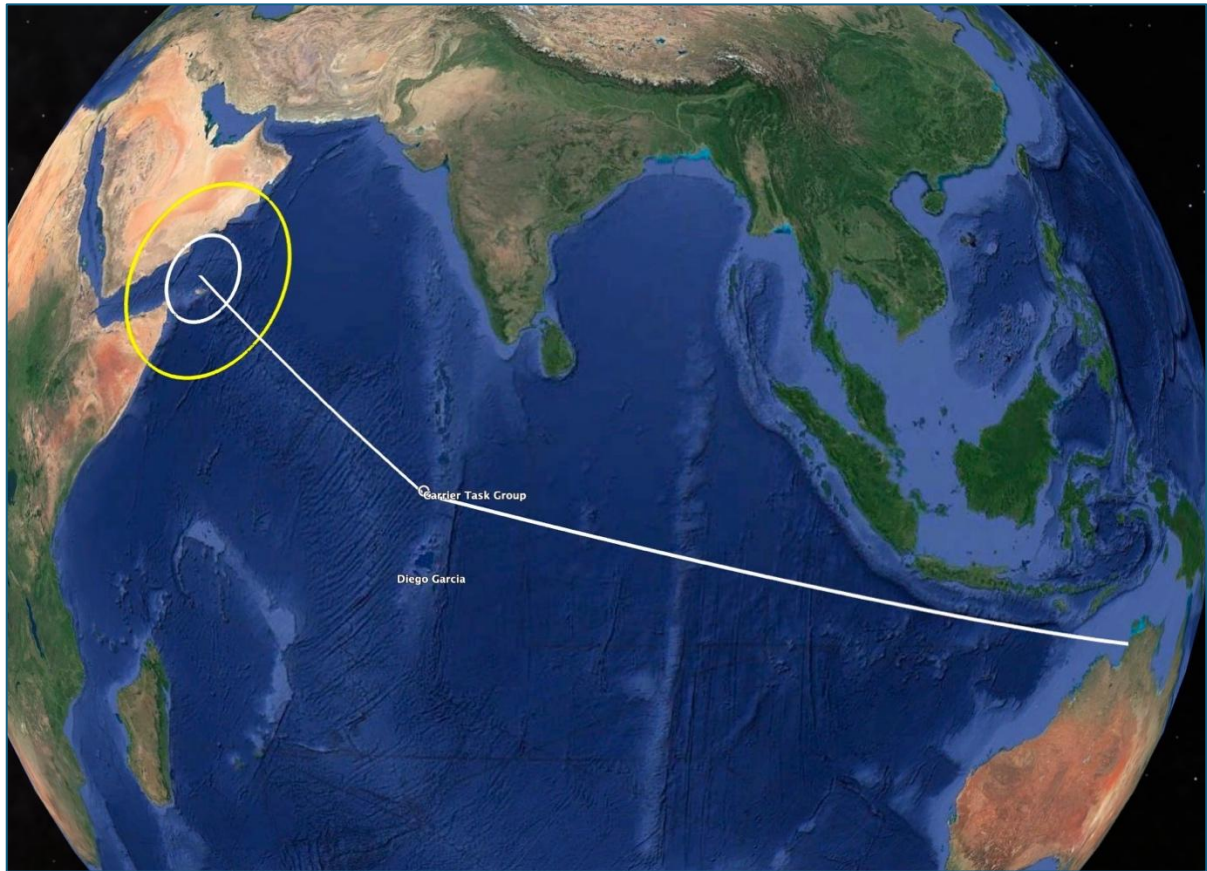
These basing constraints coincided with constant Soviet maritime and signals intelligence activities in Indian Ocean shipping lanes and Red Sea and Persian Gulf chokepoints, highlighting the critical surveillance environment that U.S. operations sought to monitor. The focus of the initial surveillance area in June 1981 near the island of Socotra and the coast of Yemen is telling. Through the 1980s, the Soviet Union established access for its Il-38 *May* maritime surveillance and anti-submarine warfare aircraft on Socotra, as well as at Aden in Yemen and Asmara and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. The Il-38s often coordinated with Tupolev Tu-95 *Bear* long range maritime patrol aircraft and AN-12 *Cub* electronic intelligence aircraft flying from bases in Crimea across Iran to the Indian Ocean. According to Desmond Ball, the Soviet Union's second largest signals intelligence complex outside the USSR was located in Yemen, with major elements at near Aden's present international airport and 'along the central mountain range of Socotra', complemented by facilities in Addis Ababa and Asmara, and further away, Iran and Syria.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 258

<sup>161</sup> Desmond Ball, *Soviet Signals Intelligence (SIGINT)*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, No. 47, 1989, p. 29; and Desmond Ball, *The Intelligence War in the Gulf*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, No. 78, 1991, pp. 54-61. See also Central Intelligence Agency, 'Soviet Global Military Reach', (n. 55), pp. 107-116, at [https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000278544.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000278544.pdf).

Figure 25. Route of the first Glad Customer B-52 Indian Ocean maritime surveillance mission, June 1981, with carrier task group rendezvous for intercept training, and surveillance area coverage (schematic)



Notes: Based on approximate route turning points and operational area of first GLAD CUSTOMER flight, 22-23 June 1981, rendezvousing with U.S. Navy Carrier Task Group 70.9 for intercept training north of Diego Garcia, with surveillance operations for two aircraft centred north of Socotra. White circle = area surveilled in one hour on station; yellow circle = area surveilled in five hours on station. Source: Google Earth, and CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1981, pp. 254-256.

U.S. and Australian concerns about the Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988 overlapped with concerns about the Soviet presence in the region, particularly in relation to the ‘tanker war’ over the same period, bringing the possibility of severe threat to oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz. In 1984, more than 20 attacks on tankers in the Persian Gulf, mainly by Iraqi missiles, deepened U.S. surveillance requirements. In March 1984 President Reagan’s National Security Advisor was advised that the Joint Chiefs of Staff ‘is addressing increasing the frequency of maritime surveillance flights of B-52s in the Indian Ocean/Arabian Sea.’<sup>162</sup>

However, to reiterate, neither the Australian nor the U.S. government ever released any public information about the areas of concern for surveillance coverage by B-52s flying out of Darwin

<sup>162</sup> Memorandum for Mr. Robert C. McFarlane, Subject: Iran-Iraq War: summary of CPPG Review, National Security Planning Group, 29 March 1984, in Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Digital Library Collections. Collection: Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Planning Group (NSPG): Records, 1981-1987, Folder Title: NSPG 0087 03/30/1984, Box: 91307, at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/2023-01/40-748-12026383-R36-061-2022.pdf>.



beyond ‘the Indian Ocean’, or any information about any of the dozens of flights beyond the announcement of the first flight. Clearly, the Soviet Union would have been in a position to know a great deal more than the Australian public about the B-52 mission routes and their activities – and quite likely, more than the Australian government understood.

Figure 26. B-52H 61-0025 landing at RAAF Darwin on GLAD CUSTOMER mission, 6 January 1982



Source: Photo credit TSGT Alex R. Tanningco, ‘A ground crewman marshals a B-52H Stratofortress aircraft into a parking position. The aircraft, assigned to the 37th Bomb Squadron, is participating in Exercise Glad Customer “82”’, *NARA DVIDS Public Domain Archive*, Combined Military Service Digital Photographic Files, released to public, [accessed 18 April 2024], at <https://nara.getarchive.net/media/a-ground-crewman-marshals-a-b-52h-stratofortress-aircraft-into-a-parking-position-fe9df9>.

### 3.6.5 Frequency – terrain-avoidance training and bombing simulation missions

Reliable public data on the frequency and total number of B-52 terrain-avoidance training flights and maritime surveillance missions do not exist. The only contemporary public sources were provided by Australian government ministers in response to parliamentary questions on notice. However, the reliability and usefulness of official sources was impaired by imprecision in the answers provided and continual variation in the categories of data employed.

*Appendix 2. Australian B-52 Stratofortress deployment decisions and events, 1979-1991* notes all known shifts in B-52 operations based largely on CINCPAC documents, supplemented by Australian official statements. *Appendix 3. B-52 overflights and landings, 1980-1991 - Australian official data* sets out data provided in five answers to questions in parliament provided between 1981 and 1991,

where four ministers variously cited data relating to ‘Operations’, ‘Staged through Darwin’, ‘Landings at Darwin’, and ‘Visits to Darwin’. Some answers distinguished ‘Low level navigation training’ from ‘Staging through Darwin’, but without clarifying, for the periods after the commencement of BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA in mid-1982, which ‘landings’ or ‘visits’ were terrain-avoidance operations and which were maritime surveillance operations. Moreover, these activity categories – operations, landings, staging, visits – do not actually clarify the number of B-52 aircraft that were involved. For example, terrain-avoidance training usually involved at least a pair of B-52s in each separate operation. Maritime surveillance operations usually involved a cell of three B-52 aircraft accompanied by six KC-135 refuelling tankers, but the number of aircraft associated with ‘landings’ or ‘visits’ for either mission was never specified when those terms were used in official statements.

The most clear set of time series data concerns terrain-avoidance operations between 1980 and 1984, as set out in Table 3 and Figure 27. These data show a continual increase in operations over five years – increasing four-fold from the 23 operations in 1981 to 93 in 1984. On the basis of the remaining data collated in Appendix 3 it is not possible to reliably judge the number of terrain avoidance training flights for the rest of the decade, since the answers to parliamentary questions after 1984 only refer to landings/visits/staging through Darwin. These would have included some BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA operations, but not all.

**Table 3. B-52 Australian terrain-avoidance training operations, 1980-1984**

Year	Number of low-level navigation training operations
1980	23
1981	42
1982	40
1983	63
1984	94

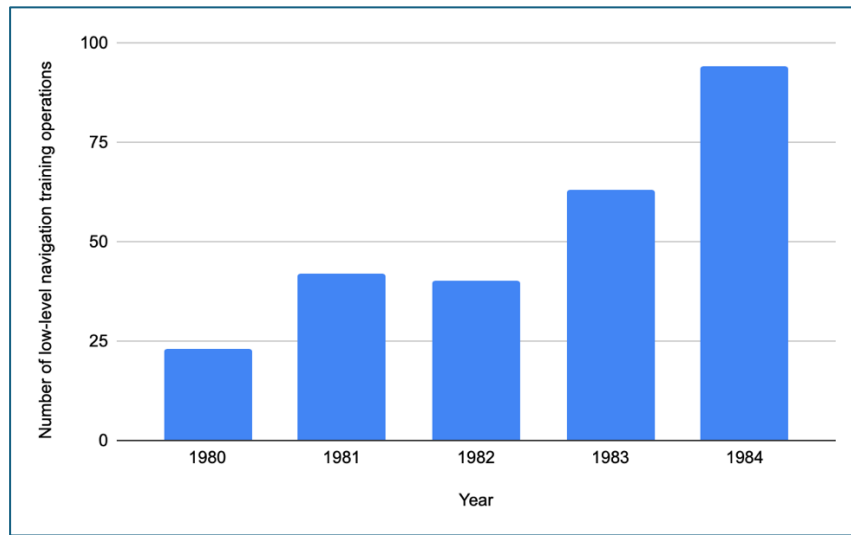
Sources: CPD, House of Representatives, Answers to Questions, No. 2155. United States Aircraft. Operations Over Australia, 7 May 1981, 1574; and CPD, House of Representatives, Answers to Questions, No. 1622. American B-52 Aircraft, 3 October 1984, 3 October 1984, 1574.

All that can be reliably said about the number of terrain avoidance training operations is that their frequency escalated from their commencement under the Fraser government, continued and increased rapidly under the Hawke government, declined somewhat in the middle 1980s, and ceased at the end of the decade. In March 1990 a Canberra newspaper report, most likely based on official sources, reported ‘the last flight from Guam’ for ‘flights over northern Australia’ on 12 March 1990.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>163</sup> ‘B52s fly away’, *Canberra Times*, 13 March 1990, p. 4. In parliamentary answers to questions in October 1990 and November 1991, Minister for Defence Robert Ray reported that eleven of fifteen ‘visits to Darwin’ in 1990 had been for ‘crew training’, as was one of four visits in 1991. CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 178: B52



Figure 27. B-52 Australian terrain-avoidance training operations, 1980-1984



Sources: CPD, House of Representatives, Answers to Questions, No. 2155. United States Aircraft: Operations Over Australia, 7 May 1981, 1574; and CPD, House of Representatives, Answers to Questions, No. 1622. American B-52 Aircraft, 3 October 1984, 1574.

### 3.6.6 Frequency – GLAD CUSTOMER

There are no reliable Australian government data on GLAD CUSTOMER B-52 Indian Ocean maritime surveillance operations beyond Fraser's March 1981 ministerial statement in which he indicated that operations involving three B-52s and up to six KC-135 refuelling tankers would take place quarterly. The CINCPAC Command History for 1983 confirmed these numbers in that year, noting that these missions were flown from the continental United States, staging through Guam.<sup>164</sup> There is no further data on the frequency of maritime surveillance operations beyond this point. However, it is possible that the sparse and ambiguous character of official Australian data from answers to parliamentary questions after 1983 obscures an increased number of GLAD CUSTOMER operations after 1983, at least for a certain period.

The first GLAD CUSTOMER mission took place over 22-23 June 1981, with a cell of two B-52s.<sup>165</sup> Through the remainder of 1981, 1982 and 1983, GLAD CUSTOMER flights took place

Bombers: Visits to Darwin, 10 October 1990, 2859; and CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 1294: Visits by B52 Bombers, 6 November 1991, 2602.

<sup>164</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 664-666, (Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister); and *CINCPAC Command History, CY 1983*, p. 343. Note that after this discussion of GLAD CUSTOMER more than half a page of the entry on 'Australia' is redacted.

<sup>165</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Jimmy B. Ellis from the 906<sup>th</sup> Air Refuelling Squadron (AREFS), Minot, flew with one of four Pacific Tanker Task Force (PTTF) crews on the first GLAD CUSTOMER mission (GLAD CUSTOMER 82-3H). Ellis's KC-135 tanker was the first to fly to Darwin for this mission, carrying people and cargo for maintenance support for three B-52 bomber crews. Ellis recounts departing Andersen Air Force Base on 19 June and landing in Darwin the same day, rendezvousing en route with three RAAF F-111s at a predetermined location south of Papua New Guinea. Pre-mission briefings began on 22 June and the Indian Ocean surveillance mission itself took place on 23 June. The four KC-135 tankers rendezvoused with three B-52s just 'two minutes after level off' from Darwin. Only two B-52s were refuelled with 85,000 pounds from each tanker for a total of 170,000 pounds before the bombers continued on their 31 hour recon mission. The third B-52 was an air spare and returned to Darwin with the four tankers. All five aircraft returned to Guam the next day. Jimmy B. Ellis, 'Down Under Operations', *Combat Crew, Magazine of the Strategic Air Command*, Volume XXXII, Number 12, December 1982, pp 8-9.

quarterly out of Darwin. U.S. Navy command histories for a number of aircraft carriers and their early warning aircraft squadrons active in the Indian Ocean document B-52s collaborating in interception simulation exercises through to at least 1988 (Table 4). GLAD CUSTOMER most likely continued until the end of the decade, and possibly up to the commencement of DESERT SHIELD in August 1990.<sup>166</sup>

If B-52 maritime surveillance operations staged through Darwin are assumed to have continued quarterly until 1989, there would have been 35 GLAD CUSTOMER operations, involving 70 to 100 B-52 flights, and up to 600 tankers operating out of Darwin.

One guide to the importance of maritime surveillance missions to Strategic Air Command is that the first GLAD CUSTOMER mission was ‘the 34<sup>th</sup> B-52 mission by SAC into the Indian Ocean’ – all of which flew from bases in the continental United States staging through Guam.<sup>167</sup> These missions likely commenced around 1979.

If so, over the two and a half years prior to the commencement of GLAD CUSTOMER, SAC would have been conducting Indian Ocean surveillance missions at a rate of at least one per month.<sup>168</sup> This raises the question of whether SAC conducted separate B-52 maritime surveillance missions in the western Indian Ocean from Guam after GLAD CUSTOMER began in June 1981 – whether under the auspices of BUSY OBSERVER or other arrangements. The argument that the overall increase in U.S. Indian Ocean operations from 1979 and heightened attention to maritime surveillance requirements had the effect that ‘large numbers of B-52 crews became familiar with the sea surveillance role and with fleet activities’ may support this possibility.

### 3.7 Labor and the B-52s

The first response of the Labor Party opposition to the February 1980 announcement of the beginning of the terrain avoidance training overflights was muted at best – barely registering the fact. By contrast, the response to the Darwin staging agreement a year later was mixed – acquiescence in general terms, vociferous scepticism on the adequacy of the agreement itself, and indications of intent to reverse course.

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<sup>166</sup> Command histories cited in Table 4. record three different names for five B-52 simulations of Soviet attacks on carriers between 1983 and 1988 in the Indian Ocean: GLAD CUSTOMER, GLAD WARRIOR, and BUSY CUSTOMER. All three are treated here as GLAD CUSTOMER exercises, and are distinguished from BUSY OBSERVER exercises in the eastern Pacific.

<sup>167</sup> CINCPAC *Command History, CY 1981*, pp. 254-256. See Thomas A. Keaney, *Strategic Bombers and Conventional Weapons*, (n. 71), p. 35 on missions initiated by the Iranian developments in 1978-79.

<sup>168</sup> Keaney notes that one 1979 mission, ‘designed to demonstrate the B-52’s capabilities, saw two B-52Hs launch from K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base, Michigan, fly east to take part in surveillance training in the Indian Ocean, and then continue around the world to land again at K.I. Sawyer, nonstop.’ Thomas A. Keaney, *Strategic Bombers and Conventional Weapons*, (n. 71), p. 35.

Table 4. U.S. Navy command histories: GLAD CUSTOMER and BUSY OBSERVER exercises

Exercise name	Carrier	Date	Location /route	Remarks
GLAD CUSTOMER	CV 70 Carl Vinson	7-18 May 1983 <sup>a</sup>	Near Diego Garcia	'GLAD CUSTOMER 83-4H'. 'Tomcats with Hawkeye and tankers intercepted at 400 nautical miles.'
GLAD WARRIOR	CV 70 Carl Vinson	15 March 1985 <sup>b</sup>	Gulf of Oman	'an anti-ship strike exercise whereby B-52s simulated Soviet bombers attacking the carrier.'
GLAD CUSTOMER	CV 63 Kitty Hawk	15 November 1985 <sup>c</sup>	Eastern Indian Ocean	VAW 112 E-2Cs
BUSY CUSTOMER	CV 70 Carl Vinson	15-16 December 1986 <sup>d</sup>	Near Diego Garcia	'Busy Customer 87-1'
BUSY CUSTOMER	CV 41 Midway	16 February 1988 <sup>e</sup>	Indian Ocean	VAW 115 E-2Cs
BUSY OBSERVER	CV 63 Kitty Hawk	17 January 1984 <sup>f</sup>	Eastern Pacific	
BUSY OBSERVER	CV 70 Carl Vinson	18 October - 6 November 1984 <sup>g</sup>	Eastern Pacific	Four exercises. 'The Russians monitored the ship from the outset and Tomcats from VF-51 and VF-111 intercepted a pair of Bear D's 229 nautical miles out on the very first day. Apparently, aggressive flying prevented the Russians – who closed to 95 nautical miles before changing course – from locating the carrier.'
BUSY OBSERVER	CV 63 Kitty Hawk	29 July 1985 <sup>h</sup>	Eastern Pacific	VAW 112 E-2Cs

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> 'CVN 70 - USS Carl Vinson', *Seaforces.online*, [accessed 4 June 2025], at <https://www.seaforces.org/usnships/cvn/CVN-70-USS-Carl-Vinson.htm>.

<sup>b</sup> 'CVN 70 - USS Carl Vinson', *Seaforces.online*.

<sup>c</sup> Department of the Navy, *Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron One One Two, (VAW-112) Command History for Calendar Year 1985*, Ser 020/C-3, 28 February 1986, at <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/dam/nhhc/research/archives/command-operation-reports/aviation-squadron-command-operation-reports/vaw/vaw-112/pdf/1985.pdf>.

<sup>d</sup> 'CVN 70 - USS Carl Vinson', *Seaforces.online*.

<sup>e</sup> Department of the Navy, *Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron 115, Command History 1988*, 5750, Ser ADMIN/C005, 4 April 1989, at <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/dam/nhhc/research/archives/command-operation-reports/aviation-squadron-command-operation-reports/vaw/vaw-115/pdf/1988.pdf>.

<sup>f</sup> Department of the Navy, *USS Kitty Hawk (CV-63), Command History 1984*, 5750, Ser 32/C-5, 8 March 1985, at <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/dam/nhhc/research/archives/command-operation-reports/ship-command-operation-reports/k/kitty-hawk-cv-63-ii/1984.pdf>.

<sup>g</sup> 'CVN 70 - USS Carl Vinson', *Seaforces.online*.

<sup>h</sup> Department of the Navy, *Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron One One Two, (VAW-112), Command History for Calendar Year 1985*.

Led by Bob Hawke, a new Labor government swept to power in March 1983, after seven years of Liberal-National Country Party rule strongly identified with its leader Malcolm Fraser. Once in government, Labor abandoned its prior opposition to the Fraser government's position on the B-52s, expressed so vociferously in 1981. B-52 operations under Labor continued at least until

the end of the decade and the end of the Cold War – lasting more than twice the duration of the B-52 operations initiated by the Fraser government.

### 3.7.1 The Labor response to the February 1980 agreement

In the months following Killen's announcement on 3 February 1980 of the commencement of fortnightly terrain avoidance training flights over northern Queensland by pairs of B-52s there was little public comment or debate in parliament.<sup>169</sup> Later in the year, as news of the discussions with the United States for what became the Darwin staging agreement emerged, occasional serious commentary in newspapers such as the *Canberra Times* was reported. Community opposition also began to appear – a telex to the prime minister by a group of Melbourne academics and clerics was reported, with more public objections once the campaign for the October 1980 election campaign got underway. But almost all of this material dealt with the prospect of the use of Australian airfields, and with the possibility of nuclear armament on the American bombers operating from Australian bases.<sup>170</sup>

Three days before the 18 October election, Killen was reported in the *Canberra Times* as saying that negotiations with the United States over a second B-52 agreement would likely take some months to conclude, and that the issue of nuclear armament 'had yet to be settled.'<sup>171</sup> The article carried a single line reminding readers that

'The Government recently gave approval to the US to carry out low-level navigational flights over Australia.'

Remarkably, however, there was almost no commentary on the actual B-52 overflights over Queensland that Killen had announced in February.<sup>172</sup> The strategic objectives of the B-52 overflights appeared to have escaped attention. The official description of 'low-level navigation training' treated the matter as merely technical, a matter of practice, with no reference to the role of terrain avoidance in the SIOP strategic penetration mission, nor any mention of simulated bombing and minelaying over northern Australia and Papua New Guinea.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> The singular frequent exception was the often detailed commentary in *Tribune*, published by the Communist Party of Australia.

<sup>170</sup> 'Editorial: Bombers and airfields', *Canberra Times*, 8 July 1980; and 'Telex sent to prime minister: B-52s "a threat to Australia"', *Canberra Times*, 12 July 1980.

<sup>171</sup> 'In Brief - US talks on B-52s', *Canberra Times*, 15 October 1980.

<sup>172</sup> One exception, noted above (p.67), was Frank Cranston, 'Unrealistic practice against a blind and naked foe - B52 training flights over north-eastern Australia', *Canberra Times*, 5 February 1980, accompanied by a cartoon that became famous by Geoff Pryor, which worked off a trope of 'outback' humour showing a hard scrabble farming couple under the shadow of the giant aircraft, lamenting 'It may be a cogent example of our new commitment to increased American-Australian defence...But what's it going to do to the bloody chooks.'

<sup>173</sup> Cranston's 5 February 1980 article titled 'Unrealistic practice against a blind and naked foe - B52 training flights over north-eastern Australia' commenting in detail on Killen's announcement showed some awareness of the strategic purpose, but Cranston misunderstood the purpose of the mission, assuming that what the USAF required was practice in evading RAAF air defences. Since these would have been minimal, Cranston argued the B-52 overflights 'might not give the USAF much more information than that their aircrews can find their way to particular points on the earth's surface'.

This silence is doubly curious because of the acrimonious atmosphere in the parliament around the question of Afghanistan in the weeks after the prime minister's statement on 19 February. Observing proceedings, Arthur Stockwin noted, with some understatement, that

‘relations between the prime minister and the leader of the opposition sank to a level well below that which is normal in the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate.’<sup>174</sup>

Fraser was not averse to using provocation to manoeuvre opponents into trouble.<sup>175</sup> In the House of Representatives on 26 February, Fraser quoted a remark by the Labor member Paul Keating to the effect that (in Fraser's words):

‘Afghanistan is far away from our area of interest and Australia is not threatened. It is extremely unlikely that the Soviet Union will attack Pakistan or Iran. After all, who would want Pakistan? For that matter, who would want Afghanistan?’

Fraser, unsurprisingly, seized on the reported remark to invoke the memory of Neville Chamberlain's dismissal of the 1938 Sudeten crisis in Czechoslovakia as a ‘quarrel in a far away country, between people of whom we know nothing’, to allude to a significant argument about the ongoing debate in parliament:

‘(t)here has been a thread through the Australian Labor Party which, quite plainly, has wanted to find excuses for the Soviet Union's actions . . . If it has not been a question of finding excuses for the Soviet Union's actions, it has been a question of finding reasons why we should do nothing.

Hayden sprang to Keating's defence, describing Fraser's attack as ‘the desperate claim of a desperate liar’:

‘He is a compulsive liar. Why should we have to sit here and listen to this man lying? This man, during Question Time, has continually misrepresented in a malicious way the attitudes of the Party. We will not accept imputation of our patriotism or our commitment to civil liberties. It is up to you, Mr Speaker, to guarantee that decent standards are maintained in this House. If that statement stands unchallenged, that man is a liar. He has proved before that he is a liar.’<sup>176</sup>

The question of whether or not Keating did make the statement Fraser quoted is not clear, but that is not the key issue here. Fraser was correct in noting that for some on the Australian left, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan could not be compared to the U.S. invasion of Vietnam a decade earlier, and reports of the atrocious behaviour of the Red Army occupation force should not be of great concern to supporters of global human rights. Put differently, parts of the

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<sup>174</sup> J.A.A. Stockwin, ‘Problems in Australian Foreign Policy’, (n. 106), pp. 345.

<sup>175</sup> Graham Little's psychological portrait of Fraser's version of ‘strong leadership’ is apposite here: ‘He is a man who even when he makes a sincere attempt at unity carries a cheese wire in his hand.’ Graham Little, *Strong Leadership: Thatcher, Reagan, and an Eminent Person*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 180.

<sup>176</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Questions without Notice: Soviet expansionism, 26 February 1980, 341-347.



Australian left had difficulty in understanding that the invasion of Afghanistan made clear that there were two imperialist powers shaping the global environment, and the environment of Australian foreign policy.<sup>177</sup>

This acrimonious climate dominated the parliament and media comment for some time, while the fortnightly B-52 BUSY BOOMERANG terrain avoidance flights were gathering pace. Given the actual strategic rationale for the terrain avoidance training mission from the American perspective, Labor might have been expected to adopt a somewhat critical attitude – particularly given the broader concerns surrounding U.S. nuclear policy under the Carter administration. But this was not the case. Killen’s announcement and the start of the BUSY BOOMERANG contribution to the U.S. Air Force’s restoration of capability to execute its planned SIOP role was met largely with either silence or uninterest.

### 3.7.2 The Labor response to the March 1981 Fraser statement

On the evening of 11 March, the Labor parliamentary opposition responded to Fraser’s ministerial statement a few hours earlier. Bill Hayden, Leader of the Opposition, gave the ALP’s opening response in which he declared,

‘the statement of the Prime Minister (Mr Malcolm Fraser) on this matter is succinct and firm. In a general way one would commend it.’

Hayden was clearly impressed with Fraser’s ability to extract from the Americans an explicit commitment to deploy only unarmed B-52s to Australia. ‘That is the sort of tough statement that we want to hear,’ Hayden applauded.<sup>178</sup>

While the opposition was in general agreement with the government’s policy that any aircraft carrying nuclear weapons should not be permitted to fly over or stage through Australia without the government’s prior knowledge and agreement, the primary Labor concern was the potential for the operations to extend beyond these limited missions, and especially that this might occur without the prior agreement of the Australian government.

The ALP believed that they had detected a potential loophole in Fraser’s position that could conceivably open the possibility of a significant change in U.S. B-52 operations without the Australian government’s prior agreement, despite Prime Minister Fraser having clarified in his statement to Parliament the conditions that would need to be satisfied before the Australian government gave its consent to any other category of operations.

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<sup>177</sup> The same evening Fraser was tackled directly in his use of provocation by television journalist Laurie Wilson: ‘QUESTION: Time may eventually show that the stance the Labor Party was wrong, but is it not provocative to paint the sort of picture that gives the sort of feeling that you did to Parliament today suggesting there was a pro-Soviet feeling in the Opposition. FRASER: ‘Now that is exhibiting a lack of concern, a lack of interest in people whose life is just as valuable as yours or mine. If the invasion was closer to us, would they take a different attitude. I am not saying that the Labor Party is supporting obviously that would be absurd and a terrible charge to make supporting the Soviet Union. But what I do say is that is if they seek to condemn the Soviet Union as they have, then in the circumstances that prevail, that is not enough.’ PM Transcripts, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, ‘Press Office Transcript, Tuesday, February 26, 1980. Prime Minister Interviewed On Parliamentary Proceedings - Laurie Wilson’, at <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-5271>.

<sup>178</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 664, (Bill Hayden).

The second reservation held by the ALP was the absence from the text of the treaty of the condition requiring B-52s to be unarmed and carry no bombs. This condition came in the form of a private assurance to Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tony Street, by the U.S. Secretary of State, Alexander Haig.<sup>179</sup>

While Hayden acknowledged the United States as Australia's 'most important ally' and reiterated Labor's firm commitment to the alliance, it would nevertheless be a mistake, he argued, to simply take the Americans on their word on these matters. This was the difference, Hayden proclaimed, between 'a master-servant relationship and one based on equal respect'.<sup>180</sup> 'The record is not good', Hayden stated bluntly, justifying the ALP's position that it was 'not prepared to be mute, uncritical endorsers of a proposition which is as vague and as uncertain as this one which has been presented before us.'<sup>181</sup>

Hayden's measured and conditional approval of Fraser's position was followed by a vociferous critique by the Labor shadow foreign minister, Lionel Bowen, who asserted that Fraser's claim that the aircraft would be unarmed and carrying no bombs was a 'mistake' on the part of the Americans, because neither confirm nor deny was a worldwide U.S. requirement:

'Last year the Americans apparently indicated to this Government that they would inform it in advance whether any of its B52s were carrying nuclear weapons. We understand that that was a mistake on their part because they are not able to give that assurance. They do not give it to the Japanese or the West Germans so why would they put themselves in that position for the first time? Why would they inform Australia whether their B52s are carrying nuclear weapons? They will not do it. They will not do it.'<sup>182</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact of the matter was that Fraser had indeed negotiated a globally unique exception to the U.S. policy of neither confirm nor deny.

The following day in parliament Fraser sought to allay the ALP's concerns, assuring the Opposition that there was nothing unusual about Article VII in the agreement requiring consultations on what could conceivably be a wide variety of strategic and operational developments. This article did not override any other article in the treaty, including that requiring prior agreement from the Australian government before any other category of operations was

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<sup>179</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 665-666, (Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister). Further clarification on this matter was provided in parliament on 12 March 1981, when Foreign Minister Street revealed under questioning from the ALP that the assurance the Australian government received from U.S. Secretary Haig was recorded in the form of a document, 'That document is not a signed document. It was an agreed form of words exchanged between U.S. which is in the keeping of the Australian Embassy in Washington. The form of the words was agreed and exchanged before witnesses.' CPD, House of Representatives, Questions without Notice: B52 Bombers, 12 March 1981, 704-705.

<sup>180</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 667.

<sup>181</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 667-668.

<sup>182</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 670.

approved. ‘That is absolute’, insisted Fraser.<sup>183</sup> The Australian government’s understanding of the inviolability of this requirement was confirmed by the U.S. embassy in Canberra in a 28 March statement approved by Washington, and incorporated by Fraser into *Hansard*: ‘The requirement for prior consent contained in Article I is unequivocal and absolute’.<sup>184</sup> Given the clear direction provided by the Defence Committee and Cabinet on this matter during negotiations and the joint confirmation subsequently provided by both the Australian and U.S. governments, it appears as though this was indeed, as Fraser submitted, a ‘misunderstanding’ on the part of the ALP.<sup>185</sup>

Significantly, Fraser also went one step further than he had the day before when presenting the agreement to parliament, providing a commitment to inform parliament of any such change:

‘I also indicate to the House that if the agreement of the Government of Australia were sought and given for any other category of operations I, or the Minister, would advise the House at the time of its being done. The Parliament would be able to debate that agreement if it wished to do so.’<sup>186</sup>

This assurance added an important degree of democratic transparency and accountability to the agreement by ensuring that any change in the category of operations to the deployment of B-52s to Australia, if not the terms of that change, would be made public and subject to debate. Fraser was in fact making an unprecedented – and never repeated – break with Australian political tradition by committing to involve parliament in the application of war powers.<sup>187</sup>

During the intense debate that took place in parliament over the B-52 staging agreement during the months of March and April 1981, ALP members expressed criticism not just of the terms of the agreement but also its strategic rationale, questioning the value of the B-52 arrangement for Australia’s defence. Deputy Opposition Leader Lionel Bowen, for example, declared that the agreement did not align with Australia’s security interests:

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<sup>183</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Questions without Notice: B52 Bombers, 12 March 1981, 703. This was the phrase also used in the U.S. embassy press statement, to the point where it may seem as if the Australian government wrote that part of the U.S. embassy statement: ‘The requirement for prior consent contained in Article I is unequivocal and absolute. It is not in any sense diluted by the consultations contemplated by Article VII. It is, in fact, strengthened by Article VIII which elaborates on the right of the Government of Australia to grant or withhold its consent to an alteration of the Agreement. There is absolutely no support in the text of the Agreement or in its negotiating history for the construction advanced by Labor Party spokesmen.’

<sup>184</sup> CPD, (House of Representatives), Question without Notice: B-52 bombers, 2 April 1981, 1234; incorporating of the United States of America, Canberra, ACT, *Australia Press Guidance-US-Australian Agreement on B-52's*, 28 March 1981.

<sup>185</sup> CPD, (House of Representatives), Questions without Notice: B52 Bombers, 12 March 1981, 710-713.

<sup>186</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Questions without Notice: B52 Bombers, 12 March 1981, 703.

<sup>187</sup> In later life, as co-founder and patron of the Campaign for an Iraq War Inquiry, (subsequently re-named Australians for War Powers Reform), Fraser maintained and broadened this position: ‘The process by which Australia goes to war is archaic, outdated and totally undemocratic.’ ‘Fraser Calls for Iraq War Inquiry, *9News*, 16 August 2012, at <https://www.9news.com.au/national/former-pm-calls-for-new-war-laws/39853481-7d5a-43b5-8e15-412c3fd9ab8c>. See Malcolm Fraser, ‘Foreword’, in *Why Did We Go to War in Iraq? A Call for an Australian Inquiry*, (Carlton: Iraq War Inquiry Group, 2012), pp. 6-8.

‘The first and fundamental question to be asked about this agreement is whether it serves Australia and Australian security interests. I submit that it does not. We are talking about long range strategic nuclear bombers which have been specifically designed for carrying and dropping nuclear weapons and not for training flights. That is important when we consider the Prime Minister's statement to the House.’<sup>188</sup>

Bowen was the most vociferous of the Labor parliamentary leaders in his attacks on the government, but he was not well informed on the strategic issues. Nor did he have a firm grasp of the military operations and strategic purposes the training was to serve.

Neither of his two major criticisms were tenable. The maritime surveillance mission, which Bowen did not mention, was not a matter of training, innocent of operational significance for Strategic Air Command. The terrain-avoidance mission was indeed a training mission, and Bowen did not grasp the actual purpose of the practice for deep penetration nuclear and conventional attack involved: had Bowen done so he would have been able to mount a far more damaging attack. Three years later, the Hawke government, with Bowen as Deputy Prime Minister, affirmed its confidence in the Fraser government's assurances that the aircraft were unarmed and carrying no bombs.

Perhaps the best informed Labor criticism came from the Western Australian politician, Kim Beazley, elected just half a year before, who would go on to be the long running Minister for Defence from 1984 until 1990. Beazley rooted his advocacy of the Labor effort to tighten the terms of the agreement within the context of a bipartisan foreign policy. His stance was grounded in a deeper understanding of the enduring strengths of the American alliance and ‘the general relationship between the facility and the American nuclear weapons system’. ‘I do not think’, argued Beazley,

‘that there is a proper understanding, either in this country or in this House, of the relationship of American B52 deployments with current features of American strategic nuclear deployments - particularly changes in American nuclear strategy.’<sup>189</sup>

In an important but complicated exposition made confusing by its brevity, Beazley was referring to shifts in U.S. nuclear policy under the Carter administration, openly presenting alternatives to U.S. massive nuclear retaliation through ‘more usable’ options, including limited nuclear war. Beazley noted the limitations of B-52s in the face of advanced air defence systems, rendering the B-52s ‘essentially as tactical, not strategic, bombers using both conventional and nuclear weapons’ – though Beazley appeared to ignore the then fresh memories of the more than 120,000 B-52 sorties over eight years in the four countries of Indochina and dropping over two million tons of bombs.

Just which elements of this extraordinarily intense, long running and largely indiscriminate suite of bombing campaigns were appropriately to be understood as ‘strategic’ and which ‘tactical’,

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<sup>188</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 669-670 (Lionel Bowen).

<sup>189</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 680, (Kim Beazley).

may come down to questions of definition. But two elements were undoubtedly strategic in their scale and explicit intent. The LINEBACKER campaigns of mid- and late-1972 had clear strategic goals in terms of drastically diminishing, in short periods of time, the capabilities of North Vietnam to prosecute the war in the south. Most explicitly, the December 1972 LINEBACKER II 'Christmas bombing' of the North Vietnamese cities of Hanoi and Haiphong, where B-52s flew 729 sorties and dropped over 15,237 tons of bombs over two weeks, was aimed at forcing the North Vietnamese leadership to resume participation in the Paris peace talks. Yet the larger part of the massive long running ARC LIGHT area bombing in South Vietnam, as well as later area saturation campaigns in Laos and Cambodia, involved vastly greater tonnages of bombs, the nature of which was overall anything but 'tactical' (Table 1).

Most plausibly and significantly, Beazley argued, the United States was considering uses for strategic bombers in wars other than nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union, especially in the Middle East – for which forward bases closer than those in the continental U.S. would be important. The important objective would be to ensure that no Australian government allowed itself to be unwisely drawn into agreeing to use of the B-52s in the Middle East in support of U.S. strategic objectives that Australia may well find not in its interests. The opposition's intention, Beazley argued, was to strengthen the 'sensible' intention of the prime minister's position, to exclude by treaty the possibility inherent in the existing agreement that 'purely surveillance flights' may become 'flights for other purposes'.

Beazley was walking a delicate line in a parliamentary debate aimed at demolishing a government policy, seeming to foreshadow an understanding of the alliance similar to Fraser's own, insofar as Fraser had, commendably in Beazley's view, negotiated successfully with the United States over matters important to the United States., but without rupturing the alliance:

'This agreement represents – even to those of us who are extremely enthusiastic about the Western alliance – the upper end of our relationship with the United States. If we want a strategic relationship with the United States, this is the most negotiable end of the strategic relationship. It is an end which is not essential to basic American purposes and therefore an end on which, in the process of negotiations, we will not be seriously challenged when we assert our sovereignty over any particular areas of consideration. Of course the area of consideration that our amendment suggests is that area of sovereignty which will determine that no military operations, other than those of a surveillance nature, will be conducted from Australia.'<sup>190</sup>

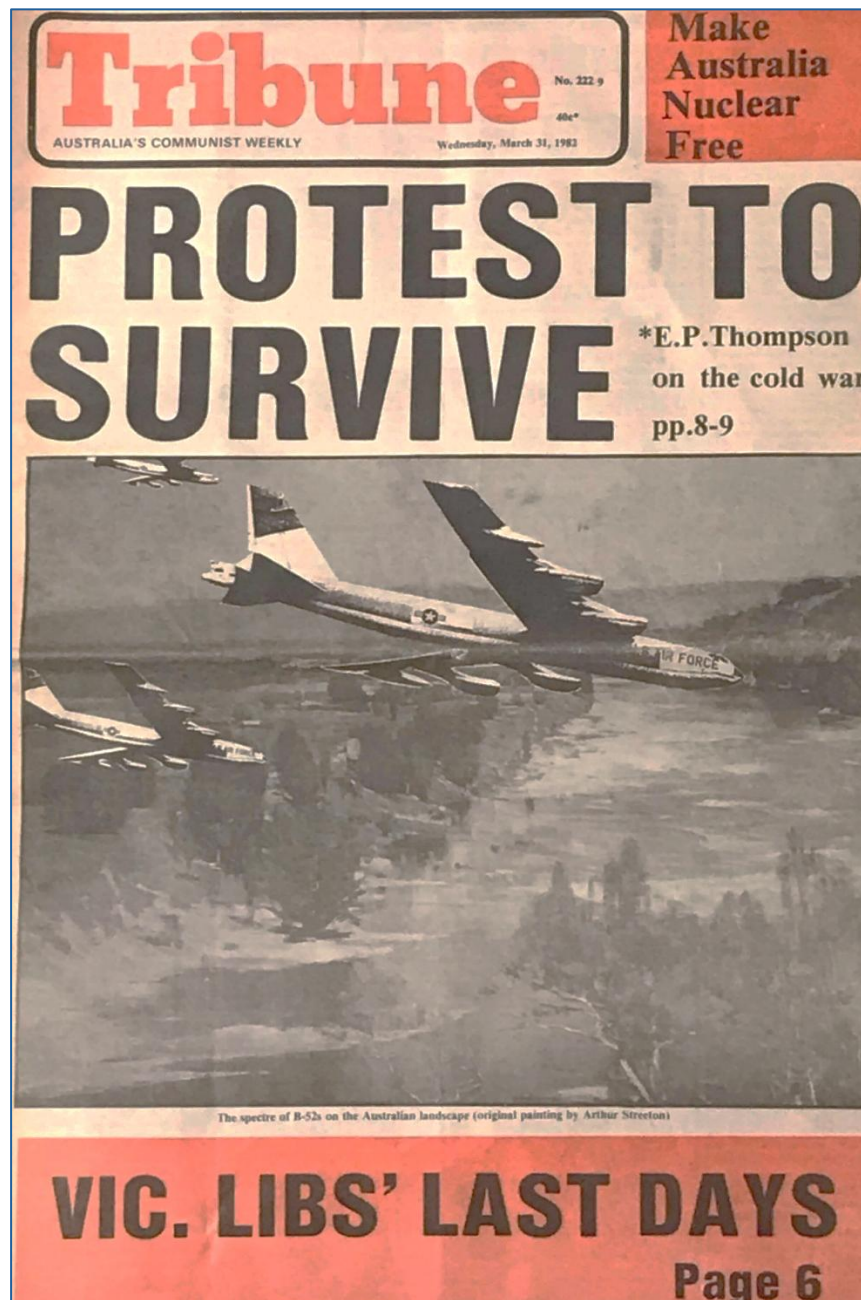
With Labor in power, Defence Minister Beazley was to become the most ardent defender of the B-52 missions.

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<sup>190</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 680, (Kim Beazley).



Figure 28. Ann Stephen, *The spectre of B-52s on the Australian landscape*



Source: *Tribune*, No. 222, 31 March 1982, based on Arthur Streeton, *The purple noon's transparent might*, (1896), (image courtesy of Ann Stephen).

The intense parliamentary debates of March and April did not continue, but Labor Party MPs presented a large number of petitions to parliament protesting the Darwin deployments, reflecting wider community concern.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>191</sup> The petitions (6 May – 28 October) called for the government to withdraw from the agreement to use Darwin, or any other base, for staging B-52 bombers; claimed the agreement increased the risk of Darwin becoming a nuclear target, impeded the sovereignty of Australia, violated Australia's independence and the potential for an independent foreign policy; undermined democratic procedures by committing Australia to future wars without due consultation; jeopardised the welfare of citizens of Darwin due to noise pollution and potential radioactive fallout; and would violate the Non Proliferation Treaty.

Outside Canberra, community activism began to build, especially amongst peace and church groups, and the left of the Labor Party and the declining Communist Party of Australia. This was a period of upsurge in political poster art and collage in Australia, much of it dealing with the threat of nuclear war and policies of the Fraser government. In March 1982 the Darwin artist Chips Mackinolty and friends painted the roof of their share house in Coconut Grove with a large Aboriginal flag recognising indigenous sovereignty, overlaid with a giant sign reading 'NO B52s' – an image that was to become deservedly regarded as iconic (Figure 22). The Sydney artist Ann Stephen provided a collage image of 'The spectre of B-52s on the Australian landscape' for the Communist party weekly *Tribune* in a collage of B-52s over Arthur Streeton's widely reproduced 1896 painting 'The purple noon's transparent might', and another based on Streeton's 1926 'Land of the Golden Fleece' (Figure 28 and cover image).

### 3.7.3 'Cast iron assurances': B-52s under Labor in office, 1983-1991

Within months of assuming office, the attitude of the incoming Labor government to the B-52s deployment was shown to be markedly different from the deep hostility of the Labor opposition to the policies Fraser had announced on 11 March 1981.<sup>192</sup> Until the conclusion of both terrain avoidance training and maritime surveillance operations at the end of the Cold War, the Hawke government maintained and aggressively defended the Fraser policies, expanding the number of flights, and describing the Fraser arrangements of B-52s flying 'unarmed and without carrying bombs', nuclear or otherwise, as 'a cast iron guarantee'.

Despite the vituperative and comprehensive attack the opposition launched against Fraser when he introduced the 1981 agreement authorising staging through Darwin for the maritime surveillance mission, Labor under Prime Minister Hawke embraced both missions, allowing not just the continuation of the arrangements put in place by Fraser for another seven years, but responded to U.S. requests for more access by authorising a dramatic increase in the number of B-52 overflights and landings.

When Labor came to power in March 1983, both the terrain avoidance overflight training mission and the maritime surveillance mission were in full swing. During 1982, 40 navigation training flights had taken place, and 16 landings at Darwin (including landings for both missions). In 1983 these numbers increased to 63 and 28 terrain avoidance training flights and Darwin landings respectively, and in 1984, the first full year under Labor, jumped again to 94 overflights in the first nine months of the year, with 28 landings for the two missions in the year.<sup>193</sup> Thereafter, under Labor, Australian data becomes very skimpy, restricted to summary and ambiguous statements about 'landings' and 'visits', with numbers of overflights and landings appearing to decline slowly.

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<sup>192</sup> Scholarly accounts at the time interpreted the depth of the dispute over the 1981 B-52 agreement as such that it left the government and opposition 'more divided on the alliance than at any time since the Labor party lost office' in 1975. F. A. Mediansky, 'Problems in Australian Foreign Policy: January-June 1981', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, (Vol. 27, Issue 3), December 1981, p. 296.

<sup>193</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Answers to Questions, No. 1622. American B52 Aircraft, 3 October 1984, 1574; and CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 1451 - B52 Bombers, 17 February 1987, 22.

The end points for the 1980s Australian B-52 terrain avoidance training and maritime surveillance missions were never announced publicly, and remain uncertain, but neither long survived the end of the Cold War in 1989. The beginning of the Gulf War, which Labor enthusiastically supported, marks a transition. In 1990 Defence Minister Robert Ray reported there had been 32 B-52 ‘visits’ to Darwin in 1989, following a 50% increase in the number of overflights and landings foreshadowed by his predecessor, Kim Beazley, at the beginning of that year.<sup>194</sup>

While not distinguishing between the two types of Australian missions, in January 1990 the *Australian Financial Review* reported:

‘Australian defence analysts believe the U.S. would be considering shifting back to the U.S. mainland some of the B-52 bomber operations that overfly Australia from Guam.’<sup>195</sup>

On 6 November 1991, in a last answer to a parliamentary question on B-52s during the lifetime of the Hawke government, Defence Minister Ray reported that during 1990 there had been 11 ‘visits’ to Darwin for ‘crew training’.<sup>196</sup> To that point in 1991, Ray stated, there had been just one B-52 ‘visit’ for crew training, on 7-12 September 1991.

Ray’s references to ‘visits’ to Darwin for ‘crew training’ in 1990 and 1991 suggest that GLAD CUSTOMER maritime surveillance flights from Darwin had ended prior to 1990, and that BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA terrain avoidance training appeared to end in September 1991.

Compared to the Fraser years, detailed public information on the B-52 policies of the Hawke Labor government is scarce, for at least two reasons.

Firstly, during the incumbency of the Hawke government, substantial accounts of B-52 operations in the Pacific shrink and then disappear from the CINCPAC Command Histories. All pages of the CY 1984 Command History dealing with ‘SAC B-52 Operations in PACOM’ are redacted entirely. In CY 1985, the entire CINCPAC Command History was shrunk from over 500 pages in previous editions, to just 51 pages, with a two page section on ‘Air Operations’ redacted completely.

Secondly, ministers in the Hawke government made no ministerial statements or substantive parliamentary statements relating to the B-52s, other than in answer to parliamentary questions, in contrast to the practices of the preceding conservative government.

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<sup>194</sup> CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 178: B52 Bombers: Visits to Darwin, 10 October 1990, 2859; and Guy McKanna, ‘The Nation’, *Australian Financial Review*, 26 January 1989.

<sup>195</sup> David Lague, ‘Pentagon to cut Pacific forces’, *Australian Financial Review*, 3 January 1990.

<sup>196</sup> CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 1294: Visits by B52 Bombers, 6 November 1991, 2602. Ray reported a total of 13 visits in 1990, of which 11 were classified as for ‘crew training’, three for Exercise Pitch Black, and one for installation in a Darwin aviation museum. To November 1991, Ray reported, there was one visit for crew training and three for Exercise Pitch Black.

Soon after the Labor defeat of the Fraser coalition government in March 1983, the Labor government faced hostile questioning from its own members, reflecting the widespread support for the criticism of the Fraser policies expressed with such virulence by the Labor leadership while in opposition.

In May 1983 Attorney-General Gareth Evans, as minister representing the Defence Minister in the Senate, was asked a question without notice about a statement by the Defence Minister, Gordon Scholes:

‘As with other low-level training flights, these B52s will be unarmed and carry no bombs.’

Labor senator Ruth Coleman asked Evans whether this meant the United States had abandoned its neither confirm nor deny policy?

‘If not, can the Minister inform us how he knows the weapons status of United States military aircraft while in Australia?’

Evans’ carefully phrased and detailed answer is worth quoting in full, since it indicates that the new Labor government had already prepared a response to such a hostile question from its own caucus within a few months of taking office:

‘The situation is that the new Government has not modified in any way the arrangements previously in force which permit United States B52s to conduct low-level navigation flights over northern Australia and surveillance operations from Australia over the Indian Ocean. These flights, we are assured and accept are unarmed and carry no bombs. The agreement of the Australian Government would need to be obtained for the B52s to carry out any other category of operations from or over Australia. As I understand it, no such agreement has been either sought or obtained. There is no present intention, on behalf of the present Government, to review the detailed arrangements under which these aircraft are allowed to operate in Australia. As with our other co-operative arrangements with the United States, the broad issues will be considered in the context of the Government’s review of the ANZUS alliance.’<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> CPD, Senate, Questions without Notice: United States B52 Flights Over Australia, 26 May 1983, 892. On 13 September 1983, Bill Hayden, now Foreign Affairs Minister, was asked by a Labor backbencher whether the government had ‘full information on the carriage and storage of nuclear weapons on ships, aircraft and other vehicles visiting Australia or its territories or passing through its airspace’. Hayden replied somewhat circumspectly: ‘The nuclear powers whose naval ships have visited or are likely to visit Australian ports follow a policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on board a particular ship. The same policy is generally followed in respect of nuclear capable aircraft, although I am advised that the U.S. Air Force B-52 aircraft passing through Australian air space or landing at Darwin are involved exclusively in training and ocean surveillance activities and are not armed. I do not have available to me any additional information to the above.’ CPD, House of Representatives, Answers to Questions, No. 125. Disarmament and Nuclear Weapons, 13 September 1983, 719.

While over the next three years, Labor ministers, including Evans, were to respond to similar criticism and questioning in much the same way, this prepared statement presented by Evans was the essence of the position of strong support for both B-52 missions adopted by Labor in power for the rest of the decade.

At this time, soon after taking office, the Labor government:

- had not modified the Fraser government's arrangements;
- had accepted the U.S. assurance that the aircraft were 'unarmed and carry no bombs';
- had received no request from the United States to carry out operations other than the terrain avoidance training and maritime surveillance missions; and
- had no intention of modifying the Fraser government's arrangements.

While small details were occasionally added, the Labor government's approach thereafter was to both double down on these claims, and to limit the amount of actual information on B-52 operations provided.

When asked in September 1985 by Senator Don Chipp, leader of the Australian Democrats, whether the government would support the terms of the Fraser government's 1981 agreement in terms of B-52s being 'unarmed and carrying no bombs', Evans replied

'It is the unequivocal position of the present Government that we will simply not contemplate the transit of nuclear weapons over Australian soil by way of B52 bombers, pursuant to the agreement.'

Following a testy interchange between Evans and Chipp, the most prominent crossbench critic of the government, Chipp went on to ask whether Evans could

'totally rule out the possibility that B52 bombers are now armed or are carrying nuclear weapons over Australian soil'.

Evans reaffirmed his May 1983 statement in terms both more expansive and markedly more intransigent, telling the Senate that

'There are no grounds whatsoever for any conceivable suspicion that B52 bombers are armed and carrying nuclear weapons over Australian soil. We have accepted absolutely the assurances of the U.S. government in this respect and continue to propose to rely on those assurances.'<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> CPD, Senate, Questions without Notice: B52 Bomber Agreement, 11 September 1985, 446.



A few months later Kim Beazley, Minister for Defence, was reported as saying that the 1981 Fraser agreement contained ‘cast iron assurances’ that B-52 aircraft participating in exercises ‘would be unarmed and carry no bombs’.

Beazley then opened a new line of argument against the scepticism of critics:

‘Any deception would be detected and the result would seriously damage U.S. - Australian relations.’<sup>199</sup>

While Beazley did not elaborate at the time on how such a deception on the presence of nuclear weapons would be detected, a month later on 20 February 1986 Evans did so in answer to a detailed set of parliamentary questions:

‘The Australian Government is confident that all USAF aircraft staged through Australia have in fact been unarmed. This confidence is derived not only from our firm belief in the good faith of our ally, but also from the particular operational characteristics of the agreed B52 activities. For safety reasons, it is not practice to carry weapons of any sort in aircraft undertaking low level navigation flights. Moreover, the stringent security measures which the U.S. Air Force always takes to protect its nuclear weapons while on the ground are not applied when B52s stage through Darwin. In light of this the Australian Government sees no requirement for verification arrangements.’<sup>200</sup>

Evans, who was speaking as Minister representing the Minister for Defence, and therefore speaking primarily on the basis of draft material prepared for him by the Defence Department, was adducing three reasons for accepting U.S. assurances and not requiring verification arrangements:

- ‘our firm belief in the good faith of our ally’;
- U.S. policy to not ‘carry weapons of any sort in aircraft undertaking low level navigation flights’; and

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<sup>199</sup> ‘No warheads on B-52s: Beazley’, *Canberra Times*, 17 January 1986.

<sup>200</sup> CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 322: Operations of B52 Bombers’, 20 February 1986, 741. See also CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 641: Flights by United States’ Aircraft over Australia’, 11 March 1986, 829. The state of the unclassified field in Australia in the mid-1980s on passive verification of nuclear materials on aircraft was set out in Gary Brown, *Detection of Nuclear Weapons and the US Non-Disclosure Policy*, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Working Paper 107, 1986, drawing on the work of the Swiss physicist, A. Gsponer, in his study ‘Technical feasibility of the detection of nuclear weapons’, in Sverre Lodgaard and Marke Thee, (ed.), *Nuclear Disengagement in Europe*, (Taylor & Francis, 1983), pp. 209-219, which stressed the practical difficulties. After reviewing the evidence from Gsponer and other studies, Brown concluded that evidence for ‘remote sensing of nuclear weapons exists and is available in one form or another to both the superpowers and perhaps to lesser powers aware of the potential as well.’ Brown’s most salient conclusion for this discussion was that ‘If true, this would seriously undermine the non-disclosure policy [NCND] and the stated reasons for it’ – since both superpowers could surveil suspected weapons platforms of the other. Brown, *Detection of Nuclear Weapons and the US Non-Disclosure Policy*, p. 16.

- the absence of ‘the stringent security measures which the U.S. Air Force always takes to protect its nuclear weapons while on the ground’.<sup>201</sup>

There were difficulties for each of these justifications.

- The record of the U.S. government deceiving host governments about the covert or denied entry of nuclear weapons was by that time already well established – certainly in the Danish and Japanese cases.<sup>202</sup>
- While the claim that following a series of B-52 terrain-avoidance training crashes after severe structural failures in the United States, B-52s on low-level training operations were flown without armaments was subsequently known to be correct for B-52s, no documentation was produced for this claim at the time or subsequently, either by Evans or by the Defence Department itself.<sup>203</sup>
- Moreover, if this fact had been known to the Defence Department over the previous five years since negotiations began in late 1979, it is surprising, on the face of it, that the justification was not publicly adduced earlier. Why was this undocumented claim produced in 1986 rather than in 1979 or 1981?
- Furthermore, while the Defence assertion through Evans about U.S. Air Force safety rules precluding carriage of weapons on B-52s training flights may have in fact applied to low-level terrain avoidance training flights, that did not in itself mean such a rule also applied to the maritime surveillance flights over the Indian Ocean. These were definitely not training flights, but rather large scale, operationally complex, expensive and strategically important military operations that made regular contact with Soviet ships and aircraft, often with harassment in both directions.

In the event, Evans’ February 1986 remarks were to be the last statement of any substance in the parliament about the B-52s missions under the Hawke government.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Evans also stated that ‘The arrangements which cover B52s staging through Australia do not contravene the U.S. policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on board its ships and aircraft since the B52s are unarmed and carry no bombs.’ CPD, Senate, Answer to questions, No. 322: Operations of B52 Bombers, 20 February 1986, 741. As noted above, this was certainly not the view of Pacific Command and Strategic Air Command, which spent considerable time contemplating ways of persuading the Fraser government to reverse its policy. See CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1982*, pp. 321-322.

<sup>202</sup> See Section 4.6 below, and Vince Scappatura and Richard Tanter, *Nuclear-capable B-52H Stratofortress strategic bombers*, (n.7), pp. 51-53 and Appendix 5.

<sup>203</sup> Six B-52s crashed while on low-level flight between 1959 and 1981. ‘Boeing B-52 Stratofortress’, *Aviation Safety Network*, <https://asn.flightsafety.org/asndb/type/B52>; and ‘List of accidents and incidents involving the Boeing B-52 Stratofortress’, *Wikipedia*, [accessed 20 December 2024], at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_accidents\\_and\\_incidents\\_involving\\_the\\_Boeing\\_B-52\\_Stratofortress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_accidents_and_incidents_involving_the_Boeing_B-52_Stratofortress).

<sup>204</sup> The last occasion on which the Labor government confirmed that the B-52s fly ‘routine training exercises’ ‘unarmed and carrying no bombs’ was in December 1987, in a statement by Kim Beazley, Minister for Defence: CPD, House of Representatives, Question on Notice, No. 101: United States Aircraft: Carrying of Nuclear Weapons, Hansard, (House of Representatives), 10 December 1987, 3289, (Peter Milton to Kim Beazley, Minister for Defence).

## 4. Fraser's nuclear heterodoxy and its fate

### 4.1 Introduction

Speaking to the United Nations General Assembly's Committee on Disarmament and International Security (First Committee) in October 1985, the Swedish parliamentarian and Ambassador for Disarmament Policy, Maj Britt Theorin, pointed to the violation of the principle of self-determination by the international system dominated by the nuclear weapons states, under which 'during the past 40 years almost imperceptibly every nation on earth has lost ultimate control over its own life and death.' Theorin continued,

'We can never accept a colonial system where the ultimate fate of our nations is determined by a few dominant nuclear powers. We cannot accept being made hostage to the perceived security of the nuclear-weapon states.'

One particular instrument of this colonial global attenuation of self-determination, Theorin went on to say, was the policy to neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons:

'The policy to neither confirm nor deny does not build confidence between states. Quite the opposite. It is in fact a confidence-blocking practice that should be abandoned.'<sup>205</sup>

The decision by the Fraser government to welcome the deployment of B-52s was triggered by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, opening Australian participation in what came to be regarded as the most dangerous period of the Cold War.

To be sure, the Australian rejection of the hegemony of neither confirm nor deny policy was not a wholesale repudiation of the practice, nor a rejection of the place of nuclear weapons in international relations or in the defence of Australia. Fraser accepted the general principle that neither confirm nor deny was an appropriate and necessary practice for nuclear powers to employ to protect vital tactical and strategic information against adversaries. However, when neither confirm nor deny came into sharp conflict with the principle of national sovereignty, Fraser vigorously prioritised the latter.

The Fraser government's challenge to the global application by the United States of its denial of the right of citizens and governments of countries hosting nuclear-capable weapons platforms to know whether nuclear weapons were being introduced provided a basis for democratic accountability for host countries – albeit imperfect.

While in later life, Fraser supported campaigns for the abolition of nuclear weapons, his government's rejection of neither confirm nor deny represented a democratic managerialist approach to nuclear weapons, an attempt to control one dimension of reliance on nuclear

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<sup>205</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, Fortieth Session, 4th Plenary Meeting of the First Committee, United Nations Document A/C.1/40/PV.4, 15 October 1985, pp. 2-14, at <https://disarmament.unoda.org/publications/library/40-ga-fc/>.

alliance – the abandonment of host countries’ right to know of, and decide for themselves, the introduction of nuclear weapons that might conceivably be employed in a mission against a foreign target from one’s national territory.

Limited though that goal may appear in the face of the hegemonic grip of a global security system founded on nuclear weapons, the fate of the New Zealand government’s subsequent challenge on nuclear-armed ships – and the complete absence anywhere in the world of a reprise of the Fraser policy – underscore the significance of that limited, managerialist achievement. Fraser’s nuclear heterodoxy provides a model of what a U.S. ally can achieve within the confines of nuclear alliance. That achievement ought to be able to be replicated by U.S. allied host states today.

## 4.2. The five dimensions of Fraser’s nuclear heterodoxy

There were five main dimensions to Malcolm Fraser’s nuclear heterodoxy clearly evident in the March 1981 statement, each of which was an affront to the hold of the neither confirm nor deny framework over other allied governments hosting U.S. nuclear weapons.

Firstly, the announcement that the nuclear-capable B-52s overflying or staging through Australia were unarmed violated U.S. neither confirm nor deny orthodoxy which was otherwise applied strenuously worldwide, and in Japan at a particularly delicate point: hence the reported consternation in the U.S. embassy in Tokyo and the enduring concern in Pacific Command about the Australian exception.

Secondly, Fraser’s specification of an Australian ‘need to know...whether nuclear weapons are being carried’ as a precondition to approving any new agreement in B-52 operations signalled to the United States that the Australian rejection of the neither confirm nor deny requirement would be ongoing, and would not be a one-off affair, at least in the case of nuclear-capable aircraft.

Thirdly, the announcement that the Australian government ‘has a firm policy that aircraft carrying nuclear weapons will not be allowed to fly over or stage through Australia without its prior knowledge and agreement’ not only contradicted the neither confirm nor deny policy, but also gave forewarning to the United States that not only would de facto or covert introduction of nuclear-armed B-52s be unacceptable, but that there would be no automatic acceptance of B-52 nuclear operations by Australia in the event of armed conflict – all would have to be negotiated, and publicly reported.

Fourthly, Fraser insisted on, and committed his government to, a degree of democratic transparency and accountability when he declared in parliament that should his government accept any future request from the United States to carry out any other category of B-52 operations, including nuclear operations, the House would be informed of the agreement and provided with the opportunity to debate it.

Fifthly, this heterodox rejection of the neither confirm nor deny policy was articulated within an explicit framework of protection of Australian sovereign decision-making capability: 'Nothing less than this is or would be consistent with the maintenance of our national sovereignty.'<sup>206</sup>

It was this last dimension that explains how Fraser's nuclear heterodoxy concerning B-52 operations was consistent with his government's continued support for the policy of neither confirm nor deny with respect to visiting warships. Fraser accepted limitations on the right to know if such ships were nuclear armed because, to his mind, these operations entailed very different implications for Australian sovereignty. American vessels docking at Australian ports for rest and replenishment were undertaken in support of U.S. Navy patrolling operations in the Pacific and Indian oceans. There was no question, he argued, of these vessels using Australian territory to launch specific missions, including nuclear armed missions, against a foreign target.<sup>207</sup>

This was quite different to the B-52 staging arrangement. Rejecting the government's right to know, and to be in agreement with, the category of operations and objectives of B-52 missions launched from Australian territory would be, in Fraser's words, nothing less than 'a derogation of Australia's sovereignty'.<sup>208</sup>

The deployment of B-52s authorised by the Fraser cabinet in three agreements with the United States between 1979 and 1982 would always, in the Australian public eye, be associated with nuclear weapons, whether or not the aircraft were actually so armed. Defence Minister Killen confirmed the government's awareness of this association in his 14 August 1980 cabinet submission, making clear that the government could conceive of situations in which the United States could seek to deploy nuclear-armed B-52s from Australian bases.

While the Killen submission went on to reiterate that 'unless there is specific agreement to the contrary, U.S. use of facilities in Australia should not include the introduction of nuclear weapons', this requirement would be 'without pre-empting the question of future policy in altered circumstances'.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 666, (Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister).

<sup>207</sup> Implicitly, this argument depended on the distances likely to be involved. Interestingly, this approach inverted the foundation of the argument by critics of the plausibility of neither confirm nor deny in the case of U.S. nuclear-capable warships visiting New Zealand, Japan, or northern European ports. Using access to publicly available records of U.S. nuclear-capable warships' port visits, Robert E. White and Hans Kristensen both argued convincingly that it was highly unlikely that such ships unloaded their nuclear weapons prior to such visits, and then reloaded them to resume normal operations. This view supported the claims by former U.S. nuclear warship commanders that, in their experience, nuclear weapons were in fact routinely carried by warships visiting ports in allied states with national policies prohibiting entry of nuclear-armed vessels.

<sup>208</sup> Fraser's framing of the issue as one entirely dictated by national sovereignty concerns is complicated by his explicit offer to the Carter administration in January 1980 to homeport a U.S. nuclear-armed carrier task force at Cockburn Sound in Western Australia. The offer was not taken up by the U.S. government and it is unclear what position Fraser would have adopted during negotiations if an agreement had eventuated. However, Fraser gave some indication of his position when asked in Parliament if he would impose conditions limiting the use of Cockburn Sound to exclude nuclear weapons: 'If the United States wished to consult with us over these particular matters and if it wished to use our bases, the nature of the ships, weaponry and whatever protections were needed would be fully and well understood.' CPD, House of Representatives, Questions without Notice: United States Navy: Australian Port Facilities, 18 March 1980, 838.

<sup>209</sup> NAA, A12909, 4292, Submission No 4292, 14 August 1980 – 15 August 1980, Attachment A, paras. 3-4, 7.



Throughout the policy development process evident in the 1980 cabinet papers, there is a clear tension: the Australian government wished to accept the deployment of nuclear-capable B-52 bombers for specific, explicitly defined, strategic purposes, but sought to constrain expectations by the United States that such a policy amounted to, or encouraged de facto or de jure, any intention to accept the deployment of nuclear weapons.

The resolution of this tension lay in the Fraser cabinet's historically unique success in requiring the United States to accede to three conditions of deployment of nuclear-capable strategic weapons. In abstract terms, these conditions were:

- the United States informs the host government its nuclear-capable aircraft are not carrying nuclear weapons;
- the host government informs the host country public of this situation; and
- the United States confirms the host's stated understanding in public.<sup>210</sup>

This third important characteristic of the Australian NCND model applies definitively from March-April 1981 onwards following Fraser's April statement in parliament publicizing U.S. acknowledgement of the 'unarmed and carrying no bombs' policy statements. A year earlier, when Killen announced the beginning of B-52 overflights in February 1980 as 'unarmed and carrying no bombs' there was little public commentary in Australia and no comment at all from U.S. official sources. Yet the CY1982 CINCPAC History made clear that U.S. government and military unhappiness with Fraser's position applied to the entire period following the start of negotiations in 1979. The difference in public response may be explicable by U.S. indifference to a host government making a claim in contradiction of U.S. NCND policy, so long as the U.S. itself was not required to confirm the matter publicly. As shown above, the Fraser cabinet sought to impose this third condition – U.S. public acknowledgement – throughout the development of its negotiating positions from at least mid-1980 onwards.

These requirements were developed explicitly as a part of a set of Cabinet-approved guidelines by the Fraser cabinet halfway through almost a year of negotiations. Cabinet documents confirm the pursuit of these and other conditions, and secret CINCPAC documents confirm both their achievement and the inability of the Reagan administration to subsequently alter the NCND arrangements, despite a strong CINCPAC preference to do so, especially in the face of dissatisfaction on the part of Japan.

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<sup>210</sup> This third important characteristic of the Australian NCND model applies definitively from March-April 1981 onwards following Fraser's April statement in parliament publicizing U.S. acknowledgement of the 'unarmed and carrying no bombs' policy statements. A year earlier, when Killen announced the beginning of B-52 overflights in February 1980 as 'unarmed and carrying no bombs' there was little public commentary in Australia and no comment at all from U.S. official sources. Yet the CY1982 CINCPAC History made clear that U.S. government and military unhappiness with Fraser's position applied to the entire period following the start of negotiations in 1979. The difference in public response may be explicable by U.S. indifference to a host government making a claim in contradiction of U.S. NCND policy, so long as the U.S. itself was not required to confirm the matter publicly. As shown above, the Fraser cabinet sought to impose this third condition – U.S. public acknowledgement – throughout the development of its negotiating positions from at least mid-1980 onwards.

### 4.3. Fraser and nuclear weapons

For Malcolm Fraser, the deployment of nuclear-capable B-52 bombers brought together a suite of notionally distinct but in practise, interlinked set of issues involving nuclear weapons.

In late 1980 and early 1981, as the Australian cabinet under Malcolm Fraser developed its policies and negotiating position on conditions for hosting and extending the missions of nuclear-capable B-52 bombers, other aspects of Australia's involvement with nuclear weapons were on the prime minister's mind and under consideration by Cabinet.

On 2 April 1981, just a few weeks after his announcement of the expanded role of B-52s in Australia, Malcolm Fraser chaired a meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee of Cabinet, addressing an intelligence assessment on 'the effects of nuclear war on Australia'.<sup>211</sup> Fraser had commissioned a study of the issue several months earlier from the Office of National Assessments, and the brief final report completed in conjunction with the Defence Department's Joint Intelligence Report was forwarded to the Prime Minister on 8 December 1980.

This is not the place to do more than note the fact of the report's existence, the timing of the Cabinet committee's consideration of the issue, and the evident seriousness of the report's findings on key matters. The report, though little more than an executive summary for a lay audience, is well-informed and would have been deeply concerning to anyone reading it seriously.

'Nuclear war between the superpowers is a possible but unlikely event' the study concluded, distinguishing escalation potential between 'low-level' use of tactical weapons, and use of 'strategic intercontinental weapons', which 'could then escalate up to total nuclear war involving devastating intercontinental nuclear exchanges'.<sup>212</sup>

A central theme of the report to Cabinet concerned the nature and probabilities of incentives and capabilities of nuclear-armed states in wartime to control escalation of nuclear weapons use. The report's conclusion was devastatingly clear about the balance of risk in any situation beyond the most 'limited' use of nuclear weapons:

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<sup>211</sup> *A preliminary appraisal of the effects on Australia of nuclear war*, Office of National Assessments, 8 December 1980, in National Archive of Australia, Series number A10756, Control symbol LC5130, Item ID 7584267, Policy Paper on Effects of a Nuclear War on Australia, 08 Dec 1980 - 10 Mar 1983; hereafter cited as NAA, A10756, LC5130, 8 December 1980 – 10 March 1983. Citations of pages below refer to the pages on the NAA file: for example, p. 10 of 56, National Archives of Australia: A10756, LC5130. Note that this NAA file includes the ONA and Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO) summary and main text; a longer section detailing transmission of the report from ONA, handling by the Cabinet Office for the meeting on 2 April 1981, distribution to the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee; instructions for possible reading time for a second meeting (15 minutes) that on 10 April (that may not have eventuated); and retrieval of copies for destruction (p. 12 and 17 of 56.). Remarkably, the file includes an implausibly sanguine draft answer prepared half a year later, on 20 October 1981 by an unnamed author, to a 'possible question' on the adequacy of Australia's civil defence preparation in the face of nuclear war, and the government's proposed actions (p. 10 of 56). On the basis of the surviving text of the draft answer, it appears unlikely the author of the draft read the ONA report in any depth.

<sup>212</sup> NAA, A10756, LC5130, 'A preliminary appraisal of the effects on Australia of nuclear war', 8 December 1980 – 10 March 1983, p. 24 of 56.

‘Both sides would be aware of the enormous damage of total strategic war, and so escalation may not be inevitable; but we consider its prevention would be extremely difficult.’<sup>213</sup>

On the specific Australian situation the ONA study was, up to a point, more sanguine. In the case of general war, radiological effects would largely be confined to the northern hemisphere. The joint U.S.-Australian facilities would undoubtedly be of concern to the Soviet Union, and North West Cape a likely early target; Pine Gap and Nurrungar less so – but the situation would be different in the event of escalation to general nuclear war.

In a limited, regionally restricted war with use of tactical nuclear weapons, the joint facilities would be ‘unlikely’ targets:

‘Even though strategic nuclear weapons had begun to be used to a limited degree, each superpower could possibly see reciprocal advantages in retention of facilities such as North West Cape, Pine Gap and Nurrungar. The risk of escalation could thus be reduced. We cannot, however, discount the possibility given Soviet war-fighting doctrine – which places a high value on pre-emption – that the US facilities in Australia might be targeted relatively early in a strategic nuclear war.’<sup>214</sup>

The ONA study was classified ‘SECRET’ / AUSTEO’ – for Australian eyes only. Even within the defence and security establishment the study was seen by very few people (Figure 29). The Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Department was made aware of the study, but not given access. ONA provided 15 copies to the Cabinet Secretary: 12 of which went to ministers on the Cabinet committee that considered the document.<sup>215</sup>

While rumours of the document’s existence circulated in Canberra, it was not declassified and released to the public until twelve years into the new century. Once released, over three decades later, former ministers and senior defence officials admitted they knew of the report and its assessment, but distanced themselves from what former head of strategic policy in the Defence Department Paul Dibb described in his assessment of the report as ‘an overly optimistic view of the potential impact of a Soviet nuclear attack on Australia’.<sup>216</sup> Wrote Dibb in 2013:

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<sup>213</sup> NAA, A10756, LC5130, ‘A preliminary appraisal of the effects on Australia of nuclear war’, 8 December 1980 – 10 March 1983, p. 26 of 56.

<sup>214</sup> The detailed discussion of the likelihood and consequences of attacks on the joint facilities is in NAA, A10756, LC5130, ‘A preliminary appraisal of the effects on Australia of nuclear war’, 8 December 1980 – 10 March 1983, pp. 26-28 and 35-37 of 56.

<sup>215</sup> The limited access allowed for both ministers and officials to the ONA study for the purpose of cabinet assessment on these two occasions is striking confirmation of Christine Leah’s argument that Australian officials and security practitioners were remarkably uninformed about US nuclear targeting doctrine – partly a matter of being incurious, and partly, as pro-alliance defence planners such as Paul Dibb and Bill Pritchett were to discover when they sought briefings, strenuously rebuffed. Christine M. Leah, *Australia and the Bomb*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), Chapter 5.

<sup>216</sup> Paul Dibb, ‘The nuclear war scare of 1983: How serious was it?’, *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, (October 2013), p. 6, at [http://www.aspi.org.au/publications/publication\\_details.aspx?ContentID=385](http://www.aspi.org.au/publications/publication_details.aspx?ContentID=385).

‘We judged, for example, that the SS-11 ICBM site at Svobodny in Siberia was capable of inflicting one million instant deaths and 750,000 radiation deaths on Sydney. And you would not have wanted to live in Alice Springs, Woomera or Exmouth — or even Adelaide.’<sup>217</sup>

In 1997, just a year after leaving office as Deputy Prime Minister, Kim Beazley went much further than the then still secret ONA study, when he told a parliamentary committee seminar that

‘We accepted that the joint facilities were probably targets.’

However, following the line of argument Fraser would have shared when in office,

‘we accepted the risk of that for what we saw as the benefits of global stability.’<sup>218</sup>

In contrast to the assessment of the value of the nuclear command, control, communication and intelligence (NC3I) facilities at North West Cape, Pine Gap and Nurrungar, the balance of risks versus potential benefits to global stability by basing and/or staging of actual U.S. nuclear-capable forces in Australia – as was the case during the 1980s B-52 deployments – was much less clear. This was conceded by Defence in a brief nuclear risk assessment presented to Cabinet in July 1980 as part of a wider and more comprehensive submission addressing the potential strategic and political issues of the U.S. military use of Australian territory and facilities.<sup>219</sup> The assessment was conducted in the early phase of cabinet discussions and negotiations over the terms of the B-52 staging agreement but notably *after* Fraser had already offered the U.S. government the possible use of Australian facilities for both the staging of B-52 aircraft in northern Australia and the home porting of US naval vessels at Cockburn Sound in Western Australia, the latter of which never eventuated.<sup>220</sup>

The submission by the Defence Committee contained just three brief but telling paragraphs on the potential nuclear risks involved in what was acknowledged as a ‘departure from past defence policy’ involving the actual ‘basing of US military units in Australia or their regular staging through it in peace-time’. [Attachment D. para 1 (g).] The assessment begins with a reiteration of the conventional wisdom that the existence of the NC3I facilities made Australia a possible

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<sup>217</sup> Paul Dibb, ‘America has always kept us in the loop’, *The Australian*, 10 September 2005.

<sup>218</sup> Parliament of Australia, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Report and transcript of a Seminar on the ANZUS alliance, 11-12 August 1997, Kim Beazley, ‘Australian observations’, p. 51.

<sup>219</sup> NAA, A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980.

<sup>220</sup> Fraser was taken to task for this in parliament when he was persistently confronted with the question of whether an assessment had been made of the risk of the Perth area becoming a nuclear target before he had offered the use of Cockburn Sound as a home-porting facility for US naval forces: CPD, Senate, Questions without Notice: United States Navy: Australian Port Facilities’, 18 March 1980, 707. When the issue was broached for a second time in a follow-up question through Senator Durack, the Prime Minister conceded that the government had only given ‘consideration’ to the issue and ‘taken into account’ potential security concerns: ‘The Government gave full consideration to this matter prior to my departure overseas in January this year. The offer to the US to make use of Cockburn Sound facilities took into account the full range of Australian security concerns.’ CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions: United States Navy: Australian Port Facilities, 1 April 1980, 1321, (Peter Durack, Minister representing the prime minister).

nuclear target in any U.S./Soviet conflict but that successive governments had judged this risk to be outweighed by the benefits to US global deterrence. However, the Defence submission also acknowledged, in what is surely unwarranted qualified terms, that ‘this argument could be less persuasive in respect of the use by US military units of Australian home-porting and staging facilities.’ [Attachment C, paras 22-23.] While the contribution to global deterrence was deemed questionable, basing and/or staging nuclear-capable forces in Australia was understood to introduce a new dimension of risk:

‘Our hosting of a major US naval deployment and/or facilities regularly used by B52s could heighten the existing risk of our becoming a nuclear target in a US/Soviet conflict. The location of US home-porting near the major population centre of Perth would introduce a new dimension into this risk, and could disturb public confidence.’

Figure 29. Distribution list for Cabinet Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee discussion of Office of National Assessments study titled ‘A preliminary appraisal of the effects on Australia of nuclear war’, 2 April 1981

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14	Senator Guilfoyle	<i>D 9/3/83</i>	34.	FAS Cabinet		
	Mr Viner		35.	AS Cabinet		
15	Senator Durack	<i>D 9/3/83</i>	36.	AS Programming		
	Senator Chaney		37.	Mr Atkinson		
	Mr Hunt		38.	Mr Sligar		
	Mr MacKellar		39.	Ms Panning		
	Mr Fife		40.	Mr Berendsen		
	Mr Macphee		41.	Ms Belcher		
	Mr Thomson		42.	Mr Cooper		

Source: ‘A preliminary appraisal of the effects on Australia of nuclear war’, Office of National Assessments, NAA, A10756, LC5130, 8 December 1980 – 10 March 1983, p. 8. Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia.

#### 4.4. Fraser: a true Menzies man?

Fraser's general attitude to nuclear weapons while in office owed somewhat to the position of long serving Australian prime minister Robert Menzies, for whom Fraser evinced considerable respect. In 1957 Menzies set out the essence of this approach, in terms similar to those Fraser later employed to describe his own attitude while in office:

'There is advantage for the world in having nuclear and thermo-nuclear weapons in the hands of the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, and in no others. These Great Powers, apart from their enormous resources, are sufficiently informed about the deadly character of these weapons to find themselves reluctant to cause a war in which they are used. The possession of these violent forces is, in the case of these great nations, a deterrent not only to prospective enemies but to themselves.'<sup>221</sup>

In 2012 Fraser explained the essence of his contemporary sense of the Cold War:

'One of the strange things about the Cold War – even at the time as far as I am concerned – with the possible exception of a day or two in relation to the Cuban crisis – I never felt a great sense of unease. The western side, America, was governed, mostly by substantial people, and they were not going to provoke a war. Over Cuba I think Kennedy went a long way out of his way to try and make sure some mad general or mad admiral did not provoke an incident of which Kennedy knew nothing. He wanted to have total control over everything that was happening at that time. Kennedy put his people in place to make sure that nothing could come out from under the carpet in a sudden and secret way that he did not know about.

'I think we also believed that the Soviet Union – despite the horror of its philosophy and its broad general attitudes – knew that nuclear war would mean total destruction. The Soviet Union didn't want that. America didn't want that. So it made Pine Gap, North West Cape, and Nurrungar pretty small beer in the large equation of the time.

'And I was never fussed about us being on the edge of a Cold War, except perhaps for a few days in the Cuban crisis, which was a crisis of a few days. But even then there was belief that Khrushchev wasn't going to push it so far that it would go over the edge. Because in many ways it was a clear cut case. He knew America was not going to accept it. And while the Soviets would push and push, they never – from the days of the Berlin blockade they got that in place, and maybe they were lucky with that. They didn't shove their tanks into West Berlin. If they had, it would have been on. They knew when to stop pushing. They knew when – they had a fair sense of where the line was; what would trigger a total American reaction. And if you believe that the leaders of the two great power blocs have this understanding of reality, the Cold War was a safer time than the time we have now.'<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Australian Defence: Ministerial Statement, 19 September 1957, 795, (Robert Menzies, Prime Minister).

<sup>222</sup> Malcolm Fraser, interview with Richard Tanter, Melbourne, 15 November 2012.



Rod Lyon and Christine Leah used Menzies as the model for the what they termed the Menzian' approach to nuclear weapons, in terms of understanding world politics and in the defence of Australia, which they maintain dominated Australian government thinking in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>223</sup> Lyon and summarized four dimensions of this approach, in contrast to the less common 'Gortonian' and 'Disarmers' approaches.

'Menzians' believed, Lyon and Leah argued,

- that nuclear weapons are 'instruments of global strategic management', which can be a stabilizing force in international relations if wielded by responsible great powers;
- that nuclear weapons and their central deterrence role indirectly serve Australian interests as instruments that help hold global order in place;
- that nuclear weapons should be considered as primarily instruments of strategic, rather than tactical design, and accordingly are unattracted to 'Gortonian' proposals for indigenous Australian nuclear weapons; and
- that arms control is a matter largely to be limited to support for management of great power relations, and the restraining of nuclear proliferation.<sup>224</sup>

In later life, Fraser made quite clear that changes in the international system, and in particular, in the character of the dominant political forces in the United States, vitiated any possibility of continued confidence in such views.<sup>225</sup> However, while in government, Fraser also made clear four limiting conditions to any ahistorical commendation of the Menzian model.

The first limiting condition was Fraser's historically constrained confidence in the reliability of U.S. governing elites during the Cold War – those he regarded at the time with shared patrician confidence as 'substantial people' – who were 'not going to provoke a war.' What may have been a reasonable assessment at that time would not necessarily hold true subsequently.

The second was that Fraser's insistence that Australian governments would take matters of sovereignty in foreign policy seriously, coupling commitment to the necessity of alliance with willingness to be sceptical about any automatic identity of Australian and American interests. In his first major foreign policy statement as prime minister Fraser had set out the case for an interest-based realist foreign policy supporting the western alliance, but from an explicit assertion of a sovereignty-based understanding of Australian interests:

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<sup>223</sup> Christine Leah and Rod Lyon, 'Three visions of the bomb: Australian thinking about nuclear weapons and strategy', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, (2010), (Vol. 64, No. 4), pp. 449-477; and Michael Clarke, Stephan Frühling, and Andrew O'Neil, *Australia's Nuclear Policy: Reconciling Strategic, Economic and Normative Interests*, (Ashgate, 2015), chapters 2-3.

<sup>224</sup> Leah explores the issues outlined in 'Three visions of the Bomb' in greater depth and with nuance in her *Australia and the Bomb*, (n. 215).

<sup>225</sup> Malcolm Fraser, with Cain Roberts, *Dangerous Allies*, (Melbourne University Press, 2014).

‘The interests of the United States and the interests of Australia are not necessarily identical. In our relations with the United States, as in our relations with other great powers, our first responsibility is independently to assess our own interests.’<sup>226</sup>

The third limiting condition was Fraser’s belief that while constraints on the expansionism of the Soviet Union were central to returning to a sustainable strategic balance after the invasion of Afghanistan, global politics after three and a half decades of the Cold War would not then be a simple return to the bipolar model, with many other states pursuing their own interests to be taken into account and coordinated with:

‘The essence of the present situation is that condemnation is coming independently and unorchestrated from a diversity of sources from the Third World, from the non-aligned, from the Islamic countries, as well as from the developed countries of the West.’<sup>227</sup>

Australia, in Fraser’s view, had to complement the demands of alliance with recognition of an interest in the positions of other power centres.

Lastly, Fraser in office coupled ‘Menzian’ reliance on the ‘good sense’ of the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union to avoid nuclear catastrophe with a sovereignty-based assertion of not only the possible non-identity of Australian and U.S. interests, but also a need for proactive Australian middle power diplomacy to participate in the shaping of global outcomes. In the first month after the invasion of Afghanistan Fraser consulted personally in visits with leaders of

‘four of the major Western countries, and the Foreign Minister (Mr Peacock) has made to seven countries in South and South East Asia leaders’.<sup>228</sup>

While Fraser visited Washington twice in a week in late January 1980 to offer Australian basing support to the US Navy and Air Force, his often derided personal and direct diplomatic initiatives demonstrate that Australia did not take American presumptions of global leadership or assertions of strategic ‘fact’ at face value. Rather, Australia was equally concerned to exemplify the element of agency needed to put flesh on the bones of a sovereignty-based pursuit of what it identified as Australian interests.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Australia And The World Situation: Ministerial Statement, 1 June 1976, 2735, (Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister).

<sup>227</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Afghanistan: Australia’s Assessment and Response: Ministerial statement, 19 February 1980, 17-27, (Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister).

<sup>228</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Afghanistan: Australia’s Assessment and Response: Ministerial statement, 19 February 1980, 19, (Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister). ‘The fact that 104 countries, most of them nonaligned, voted in the UN General Assembly to condemn the Soviet action clearly reflected that change. So did the resolutions passed by the extraordinary session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers at the end of January which, again, condemned the Soviet action as military aggression, demanded the immediate and total withdrawal of Soviet troops and suspended Afghanistan from membership of the Islamic Conference.’

<sup>229</sup> For a critical view of Fraser’s insistence on direct and frequent contacts with policymakers, see Alan Renouf, *Malcolm Fraser and Australian foreign policy*, (n. 131), p. 110.

These qualities evident in the approach of the Fraser cabinet to the deployment of B-52s make clear that, admirer of Menzies though its leader was in a general sense, Fraser sought, successfully, an agency-based mitigation of complaisant attitudes of nuclear permissiveness that Australian governments had displayed to that point – and were to revert to subsequently after Fraser left office.

#### 4.5. Intimations of a new sovereignty? Flawed predictions of future alliance flexibility

Though largely unnoticed at the time, there were two contemporary observers with close knowledge of U.S. government thinking on these matters who noted the core anomaly of apparent U.S. acceptance of Fraser's heterodox position. Both suggested that Fraser's achievement was a potential precedent for future policy, or possibly a sign of what may be possible in other areas of the alliance relationship.

As already noted, one of these observers was the Labor junior MP and later Defence Minister, Kim Beazley. The other was William Tow, an American observer of Australia who demonstrated close knowledge of official U.S. policy making. Both Beazley and Tow predicted that the Fraser initiative foreshadowed either a continuation of new-found U.S. flexibility on other aspects of deployment of nuclear-capable platforms in Australia, or an extension of such an attitude into other areas of alliance relations of greater consequence to the United States. In fact, sensitive though both observers were as to the significance of the U.S. acceptance of the Fraser position, such possibilities did not eventuate.

Less than a year after the March 1981 ministerial statement, Tow set the Australian deployment of B-52s in strategic context, writing in *Survival*, the premier British strategic studies journal that:

'Perhaps the most crucial American strategic requirement in the Asian-Pacific theatre is to strengthen US long-range surveillance capabilities in ways that are designed to guarantee continued access to petroleum production centres in the Middle East and to safeguard Western commercial and/or naval shipping against Soviet anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities or other means of interdiction against critical sea lines of communication (SLOCs).'<sup>230</sup>

It was this sense of strategic urgency, Tow argued, that led the Reagan administration to demonstrate 'at least some understanding of Antipodean sensitivities'. Consequently, Tow concluded 'after discussions with US officials', that

'Australia was able to negotiate a precedential disclosure agreement regarding US B-52 operations.'<sup>231</sup>

American strategic need, in this view, meant giving way to Fraser's insistence on public acknowledgement by the U.S. government of its willingness to at least suspend in the Australian

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<sup>230</sup> William T. Tow, 'ANZUS and American security', (n. 129), p. 262.

<sup>231</sup> William T. Tow, 'ANZUS and American security', (n. 129), p. 263.

case a decades-old worldwide policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons – creating an alliance precedent of wider significance. Fraser’s ‘precedential’ initiative, Tow was suggesting, implied a U.S. recognition that, should strategic imperatives require, host governments for nuclear-capable B-52 deployments could be allowed to accept or reject neither confirm nor deny doctrine. In fact, as the contemporary secret CINCPAC documents show, this was not the dominant U.S. position, and the Fraser ‘precedent’ was never repeated, in Australia or elsewhere.

Beazley’s reply to Fraser’s 11 March ministerial statement, when he had been in the parliament for just under a year, exhibited greater knowledge of developments in U.S. strategic policy than any other speaker in that debate, pointing to the beginnings of his long and exceptionally close relationship with U.S. defence policymakers on both sides of Congress. While Beazley’s colleagues mocked Fraser’s claim to have extracted agreement of the ‘unarmed and carrying no bombs’ policy from the Reagan administration, Beazley recognized and approved of the achievement. As already noted, Beazley argued that the agreement represented

‘the upper end of our relationship with the United States ... the most negotiable end of the strategic relationship... an end not essential to basic American purposes and therefore an end on which, in the process of negotiations, we will not be seriously challenged when we assert our sovereignty.’<sup>232</sup>

Essentially Beazley was arguing that Fraser had correctly identified a possibility, potentially ongoing, within the otherwise tight constraints of alliance. Beazley’s approbation of Fraser’s success suggested that the opening Fraser had initiated would be an enduring feature of the alliance. A decade and a half later after leaving office in 1996, Beazley wrote that the two elements of the alliance the United States valued most were the Joint Facilities and ‘the extensive array of defence collaborative arrangements’.

Between 1983 and 1987, these collaborative arrangements included, Beazley summarized,

‘an array of exercises, personnel exchanges, a substantial programme of ship visits considered important in the New Zealand context, B-52 exercise over-flights, low flying jet routes for carrier-based aircraft and prepositioning fuel for the air-wings of carrier battlegroups at HMAS Stirling.’<sup>233</sup>

Each of these bilateral arrangements had their origins in the decisions of the Fraser cabinet in 1980-82, but were embraced with enthusiasm by the Hawke government. There is no evidence that on any of these collaborative arrangements that the Hawke government was able to repeat an equivalent of Fraser’s achievement on B-52 armament policy, and no deepening or broadening of the conditions on the deployment of the B-52.

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<sup>232</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 680, (Kim Beazley).

<sup>233</sup> Kim Beazley, ‘Operation Sandglass: Old History, Contemporary Lessons’, *Security Challenges*, Spring 2008, (Vol. 4, No. 3), Spring 2008, p. 31, at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26459189.pdf>.

However, Beazley maintained, as far as the United States was concerned, operations at the Joint Facilities (at that time, Pine Gap, Nurrungar and North West Cape), ‘dwarfed in significance any other alliance related activities’. It was on the bases, Beazley argued, that the Hawke government was able to expand ‘the most negotiable end of the strategic relationship’ that Fraser had marked out. As a result of technical changes at each of these facilities, the U.S. interest in and concern for ‘enhanced security of tenure’ afforded the Hawke government the opportunity to make the facilities something approaching ‘joint’ in more than name.

At Pine Gap and Nurrungar in particular, Beazley stated, the Hawke government was able

‘to put flesh on the bones of Australia’s requirement to have “full knowledge” and “consent” in regard to the functions of the facilities, Australian personnel were significantly increased in number and integrated into all operations.’<sup>234</sup>

In the case of the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap, Beazley’s claims of the success of the Hawke government in rendering the premier U.S. signals intelligence facility outside the United States more substantively ‘joint’ were confirmed in a 2016 historical study of *Australia’s Participation in the Pine Gap enterprise*:

‘Australian participation in the operation of Pine Gap is effectively complete, with access to all areas of the base except the US National Cryptographic Room. The senior Australian Defence officials who negotiated the original implementing agreement with the CIA sought and obtained access to all ‘product’ from the facility. After initial discriminatory restrictions on Australians employed in the Operations Room, by the end of the 1970s Australians were employed in all of its sections. Compared with arrangements at Pine Gap’s companion station in the United Kingdom, RAF Menwith Hill, Australian officials believe they have achieved a much more genuinely ‘joint’ facility, with command and employment arrangements exemplifying this.’<sup>235</sup>

With the caveat that considerable ground work had been laid under the Fraser government, the success of the Hawke government, including Beazley’s own part in that achievement, was considerable.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Kim Beazley, ‘Operation Sandglass’, (n. 234), p. 31.

<sup>235</sup> Desmond Ball, Bill Robinson, and Richard Tanter, *Australia’s participation in the Pine Gap enterprise*, Nautilus Institute Special Report, 8 June 2016, p. 2, at <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/australias-participation-in-the-pine-gap-enterprise/>.

<sup>236</sup> One area where the Fraser government sought to at least begin the process of establishing Australian sovereignty over U.S. nuclear intelligence facilities in Australia concerned what was from 1978 onward termed Joint Geological and Geophysical Research Station at Alice Springs. Established in 1955 as a highly secret seismic detection facility under U.S. Air Force auspices as Project Oak Tree, the facility was operated by the Air Force’s secretive Air Force Technical Application Center’s Detachment 421. After 1978, the JGGRS continued to be operated by Detachment 421 personnel, with nominal administrative support from the Australian government, but without staff or budgetary involvement. See ‘Annex D: The Oak Tree Notes. Exchange of notes between Australia and the United States constituting an agreement on Detachment 421’, in Desmond Ball, *A Suitable Piece of Real Estate: American Installations in Australia*, (Hale & Iremonger, 1980), pp. 171-2; and Exchange of Notes constituting an Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the United States of America regarding the Management and Operation of the Joint Geological and Geophysical Research Station at Alice Springs, (Canberra, 28 February 1978), Australian Treaty Series 1978 No 3, at <https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/ATS/1978/3.html>.

However, Beazley's claim that these changes represented an aspect of the alliance that Fraser had successfully quarried,

‘on which, in the process of negotiations, we will not be seriously challenged when we assert our sovereignty’,

is difficult to accept.

The authors of the 2016 Pine Gap study noted that shifts in policy reflected both the efforts of Australian governments and changes in the strategic relationship between the United States and Australia. As Beazley and Tow argued, these two factors in both the case of the joint facilities and the case of the B-52s worked to allow Australia to exploit a small degree of freedom of manoeuvre in the alliance. But the outcome in the case of the joint facilities revealed that greater participation in the activities in the operations of the bases did not equate to greater sovereignty over the base's operations:

‘Indeed, the pervasive Australian participation in the activities of Pine Gap now epitomises the networked, but fundamentally asymmetric character of the ANZUS alliance today. Australians may participate in all aspects of the base's operations, including tasking satellite operations, but the fundamental realities are that not only does the vast bulk of tasking of satellites come from the United States and reflect its strategic priorities, but Australian participation in the base's greatly expanded range of operations brings with it a measure of responsibility for the consequences of those operations.’<sup>237</sup>

Moreover, it was specifically over the nuclear dimensions of activities at Pine Gap that this combination of expanded Australian participation and the absence of control over the uses to which the facility was put that contrasted with the Fraser approach to more narrow in scope but still potentially portentous B-52s deployment.

Two separate research studies of one particular part of Pine Gap, the Relay Ground Station for U.S. infrared satellites providing early warning of ballistic missile launch, reinforced doubts about Beazley's claims that reforms in Australian participation at Pine Gap amounted to an expansion of sovereignty in terms of fleshing out the substance of ‘full knowledge and concurrence’. In reality, those developments based on expanding Australian participation consciously moved Australia into much deeper and more direct involvement into U.S. nuclear war-fighting planning and operations – but without any compensatory sovereign ability for Australia to limit or restrict or withhold cooperation.

Following the U.S. decision to close the Joint Space Communications Facility (JSCF) at Nurrungar, a large stand-alone ground control station for U.S. infrared satellites in geosynchronous orbit providing early warning of the launch and trajectory of ballistic missiles, the Howard government agreed in 1997 to permit the establishment of a Relay Ground Station

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<sup>237</sup> Desmond Ball, Bill Robinson, and Richard Tanter, *Australia's participation in the Pine Gap enterprise*, (n. 236), p. 9.



at Pine Gap for geosynchronous early warning satellites which was to be remotely controlled from the continental United States and almost wholly automatic in operation.

Stephan Frühling's 2003 study of Australian involvement in U.S. missile defence systems pointed to the close involvement of the RGS in providing data downlinked from the infrared satellites in providing not only early warning of missile launch but also critical, close-to-real-time initial data on missile trajectories to guide targeting radars of US missile defence systems. The RGS would receive data downlinked from U.S. early warning satellites to be automatically transferred to the United States: the ageing Defence Satellite Program (DSP) satellites and then rapidly developing more powerful Space-Based Infra Red System (SBIRS) satellites. Considering the meaning of Australian claims to 'full knowledge and concurrence' at the new facility, Frühling compared the possibilities of an Australian government controlling the uses to which the Relay Ground Station could be put to the well-documented failure of the U.S. to permit such control in the case of submarine communications at North West Cape during the Cold War:

'The RGS will soon be part of a US combat system which will, sooner or later be involved in combat operations against a third country, possibly in a conflict to which Australia is not directly a party. Since Australia taps into the SBIRS data flow at Pine Gap (and has personnel stationed in Colorado who analyse data relevant to Australia), it could be argued that the system is at least partly "Australian owned". Yet, as the North West Cape communications station during the Cold War showed, such a fiction is difficult to maintain in many cases. It might become much more of a problem today since the likelihood of BMD being used is arguably much greater than a use of the North West Cape Station ever was.'<sup>238</sup>

A 2019 study of the Howard government's 1997 cabinet decision to allow the establishment of the Relay Ground Station revealed that defence officials were well aware that technical characteristics of the automatically and remotely operated station posed serious problems for the Australian government's confidence in the 'full knowledge and concurrence' formula to secure public acceptance of the legitimacy of the U.S. facility,

'including the possibility of drawing Australia into culpability for assisting with not only the use of nuclear weapons for deterrence, but also for nuclear war-fighting.'<sup>239</sup>

While both Frühling's 2003 ballistic missile study and the 2019 study of the 1997 decision to establish the Relay Ground Station technically dealt with decisions by the Howard government, both raised matters that applied quite precisely to policies of the preceding Hawke and Keating governments. These earlier policies were intended to exemplify Beazley's claim that those governments were able to follow Fraser's lead in expanding sovereignty by giving real substance

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<sup>238</sup> Stephan Frühling, *Ballistic Missile Defence for Australia: Policies, Requirements and Options*, Canberra papers on Strategy and Defence, No. 151, Australian National University, 2003, pp. 60-61.

<sup>239</sup> Richard Tanter, *Hiding from the light: The establishment of the Joint Australia-United States Relay Ground Station at Pine Gap*, Special Report, Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, 2 November 2019, p. 19, at <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/hiding-from-the-light-the-establishment-of-the-joint-australia-united-states-relay-ground-station-at-pine-gap/?view=pdf>.

to the principle of ‘full knowledge and concurrence’. In fact, all governments since Fraser’s have deepened Australia’s involvement in nuclear planning, but, unlike Fraser’s initiative on strategic bombers, without any corresponding development of policy tools to manage the culpability inherent in that expanded participation.

#### 4.6 Was the 1981 Fraser agreement a uniquely successful repudiation of neither confirm nor deny?

The policy heart of Australia’s political decision to allow the deployment of B-52 bombers in the early 1980s was the resistance of the Fraser government to the otherwise global imposition by the United States of its policy to neither confirm nor deny the presence or absence of nuclear weapons on its aircraft.

First codified in the late 1950s, the U.S. policy to neither confirm nor deny was well established by the time of Fraser’s challenge in the 1980s, although it had certainly encountered significant resistance. Dozens of countries, including NATO countries such as Denmark and Norway, close East Asian allies such as Japan, and numerous non-allied countries such as Sri Lanka and Ireland, had policies excluding nuclear weapons from home soil and in territorial waters.

However, few of these nominal bans apparently contradicting U.S. neither confirm nor deny policies actually prevented the entry of nuclear weapons, largely for two sets of reasons. In some cases, apparently comprehensive national prohibitions were weakened by formal limiting conditions or reservations, particularly in the case of NATO allies that had long accepted and participated in alliance preparations for nuclear war. In other cases, the prohibitions were undermined by largely covert or informal bilateral agreements that nullified them in practise.

While this study is primarily concerned with evaluating challenges to U.S. neither confirm nor deny policies in the case of aircraft, most policy accounts of national prohibitions centre on controversies involving port visits by U.S. naval vessels during the 1980s. Drawing on a detailed study by the late Robert E. White, Table 5. presents data from 23 countries which had policies nominally prohibiting the entry of nuclear-capable foreign warships into their territorial waters or ports.<sup>240</sup> White presents data on the presence or absence of U.S. naval visits to each country, drawing on U.S. Navy data ‘for visits to all ports in the world for 1984 and 1985’, and the types of nuclear-capable ships involved.

A comparison of countries with declared prohibition policies with actual U.S. nuclear-capable ship visits reveals which countries had prohibition policies in name only. Only a small number of prohibition states had no visits by nuclear-capable U.S. warships in that period: Iceland, Iran, New Zealand, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The great majority of prohibition states were in fact visited by such vessels. In most cases, these permissive prohibition states received a small number of visits annually – mostly in single digits or low double digits in ship days. NATO allies in strategic locations, such as Denmark and Norway, received significantly more visits in 1984

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<sup>240</sup> Robert E. White, *Nuclear Ship Visits: Policies and Data for 55 Countries*, (Dunedin: Tarkwode Press, 1989). Appendix 6 below documents the explanations offered in each case. For three landlocked states, the prohibition was applied to nuclear-armed aircraft: Austria, Laos and Switzerland.

and 1985: 38 and 62, and 63 and 44 respectively. Other U.S. allies in more critical strategic locations received extremely high numbers in the same years: 761 and 826 in the case of NATO member Spain, and 2,895 and 2,662 in the case of Japan.

While these figures include all U.S. Navy warship visits to each country, and not all of these vessels were nuclear-capable, many clearly were. More importantly, while nuclear-capable does not necessarily mean nuclear-armed, in a separate major study based on detailed case studies of Denmark, Norway and Japan in particular, White found it reasonable to conclude that

‘nuclear capable ships of the US Navy and by implication of other nuclear navies while on active duty generally carry their normal complement of nuclear weapons.’

Considering the possibility that such ships offloaded their nuclear armaments before entering a port of a prohibition state, thus honouring the host government policy, White concluded further:

‘It is assumed in the following study of specific United States ship visit histories that off-loading from, and reloading to, nuclear capable ships is very unlikely for visits to ports banning nuclear weapons, except at nuclear storage depots.’<sup>241</sup>

Since there were only a handful of U.S. naval nuclear storage depots outside the continental United States – and safety regulations made at-sea transfer of nuclear weapons a rare and risky event – White concluded that it was likely that large numbers of U.S. nuclear-capable warships were carrying nuclear weapons when they entered the ports of prohibition states far from nuclear storage depots.<sup>242</sup>

European U.S allies such as Norway and Denmark with national policies of banning the entry or presence of nuclear weapons in their territories and waters were nonetheless long highly integrated into U.S.-auspiced nuclear operations planning and preparations. By limiting application of the prohibitions to ‘peacetime’ (Norway) or ‘under present conditions’ (Denmark), these countries placed so many reservations on the application of the nuclear ban policies, as Lodgaard and Gleditsch remarked of Norway, that the prohibition was ‘an empty provision... placing no restraint on American use of nuclear weapons’.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Robert E. White, *The Neither Confirm Nor Deny Policy: Oppressive, Obstructive, and Obsolete*, Working Paper No. 1, Physics Department, Auckland University, May 1990, pp. 6-7, at <http://legacy.disarmsecure.org/The%20Neither%20Confirm%20Nor%20Deny%20Policy%20Oppressive,%20Obstructive,%20and%20Obsolete.pdf>. This view supported the claims by former U.S. nuclear warship commanders that, in their experience, nuclear weapons were in fact routinely carried by warships visiting ports in allied states with national policies prohibiting entry of nuclear-armed vessels. See Hans M. Kristensen, *The Neither Confirm Nor Deny Policy*, (n. 132), pp. 7.

<sup>242</sup> See White’s detailed analysis of the Danish, Norwegian and Japanese cases in Robert E. White, *The Neither Confirm Nor Deny Policy*, (n. 242), pp. 8-35.

<sup>243</sup> Sverre Lodgaard and Nils Petter Gleditsch, ‘Norway - the Not So Reluctant Ally’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, (Vol. 12, Issue 4), 1977, p. 214. For more detailed recent accounts on Norway see Stephan Frühling and Andrew O’Neil, ‘Local accommodation - Norway and nuclear weapons cooperation in NATO’, in their *Partners in deterrence- US nuclear weapons and alliances in Europe and Asia*, (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 2021); Jacob Borresen, ‘Alliance Naval Strategies and Norway in the Final Years of the Cold War’, *Naval College Review*, Vol. 64, No. 2, Article 2, (Spring 2011); and Rolf Tamnes, *The United States and the Cold War in the High North*, (Aldershot: Dartmouth: 1991). The Danish history has two distinct, though related elements: port visits by U.S. nuclear-capable warships, and overflights

Table 5. Countries with prohibitions of visits by nuclear-armed ships: basis of acceptance of visits and numbers of visits (in ship days)\*

Abbreviations:

CV, CVN	Multi-purpose aircraft carrier	FFG	Guided missile frigate
BB	Battleship	FF	Frigate
CG, CGN	Guided missile cruiser	SS, SSN	Attack submarine
DDG	Guided missile cruiser	SSBN	Ballistic missile submarine
DD	Destroyer		

Country	Prohibit	Visits	Compliance expected/assumed and no checks <sup>a</sup>	U.S. ship visits (ship days) <sup>b</sup>
Austria	Y	NA <sup>c</sup>	NA	NA
China	Y	Y	N	1986: 15 (including nuclear-capable CG, DD, FFG)
Denmark	Y	Y	Y	1984: 38 1985: 62 (including nuclear-capable BB, CG, DDG, FF)
Egypt	Y	Y	Y	1984: 26 1985: 7 (including CVN, CVG, DDG, DD)
Faroe Islands <sup>d</sup>	Y	Y	Y	
Finland	Y	Y	Y	1984: 10 1985: 0 (including nuclear-capable DD)
Iceland	Y	—	Y	1984: 0 1985: 0
India	Y	Y	Y	1984: 6 1985: 3 (including nuclear-capable FFG)
Iran	Y	—	NA	
Ireland	Y	Y	Y	1984: 12 1985: 13

and landings in Greenland by U.S. nuclear-armed aircraft. See Thorsten Borring Olesen, 'Tango for Thule', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Spring 2011, Vol. 13, No. 2, Spring 2011, pp. 116-147, drawing on the analysis and documents of the report published by the Danish Institute of International Affairs at the request of the Danish government, the 51 page conclusion of which is available in English as *Greenland during the Cold War: Danish and American Security Policy 1945-68*, at <https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/wps/dup03>. On both the Danish port visits and nuclear weapons in Greenland see also the work of Hans M. Kristensen drawing on previously unavailable U.S. classified documents: 'USS Randolph and the Nuclear Diplomatic Incident', *The Nuclear Information Project*, Federation of American Scientists, 20 December 2006, at <https://www.nukestrat.com/dk/randolph.htm>; Hans M. Kristensen, 'The 1988 National Election', *The Nuclear Information Project*, Federation of American Scientists, 2004, at <https://www.nukestrat.com/dk/election.htm>; and, 'Denmark's Thulegate: U.S. Nuclear Operations in Greenland', *The Nuclear Information Project*, Federation of American Scientists, 2004, at <https://www.nukestrat.com/dk/gr.htm>. See also William Burr, (ed.), *The United States and Greenland, Part I: Episodes in Nuclear History 1947-1968*, National Security Archive, Briefing Book 895, 3 June 2025, at <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/nuclear-vault/2025-06-03/united-states-and-greenland-part-i-episodes-nuclear-history>.

				(including nuclear-capable FF)
Japan	Y	Y	Y	1984: 2,895 1985: 2,662 (including CVN, CGN, SSN, CV, CG, DDG, DD, FF)
Laos	Y	NA <sup>e</sup>	NA	NA
Malta	Y	Y	Y	1984: 0 1985: 0
New Zealand	Y	–	N	1984: 23 (including SSN, FFG, FF) None after mid-1984.
Nigeria	Y	Y	Y	1983: 3 1985: 2 (including nuclear-capable FFG in both cases)
Norway	Y	Y	Y	1984: 63 1985: 44 (including nuclear-capable CGN, SSN, BB, CB, DDG, FFG, DD, FF)
Seychelles	Y	Y	Y	1984: 4 195: 21 (including nuclear-capable CG, DD)
Solomon Islands	Y	–	N	1984: 2 1985: 0 (including nuclear-capable FF)
Spain	Y	Y	Y	1984: 761 1985: 826 (including nuclear-capable CVN, CVG, SSN, CV, CG, DDG, FFG, DD, FF)
Sri Lanka	Y	Y	Y	1984: 5 1985: 16 (including CV, CG, DDG, FFG, FF)
Sweden	Y	Y	Y	1984: 15 1985: 12 (including nuclear-capable CG, DDF, FF)
Switzerland	Y	NA <sup>f</sup>	NA	NA
Vanuatu	Y	–	N	–

\*Source: Robert E. White, *Nuclear Ship Visits: Policies and Data for 55 Countries*, (Dunedin: Tarkwode Press, 1989).

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> Single quotation marks indicate comments by White on status issues. Double quotation marks indicate official responses to White's inquiries. Further details of the latter are cited in an expanded version of this table in Appendix 6.

<sup>b</sup> 'Ship days means one ship in port for one day.'

<sup>c</sup> 'Austria: "The non-admission of nuclear-armed aircraft flows from Austria's status of permanent neutrality." No information on aircraft visits.'

<sup>d</sup> Faroe Islands: Denmark policy applied.

<sup>e</sup> Laos: "We will never allow ships or aircraft carrying nuclear weapons into our territory." No information available concerning aircraft visits.'

<sup>f</sup> 'Policy: "Due to Switzerland's neutrality, foreign military powers do not use our airstrips or our airspace." No information on aircraft visits.'

Lodgaard and Gleditsch's 1977 conclusion about the illusory nature of Norway's nuclear ban policy with reservations applied until its final abandonment in 1992, and has wider application still half a century later:

‘Acceptance by Norwegian authorities is certainly a requirement for using nuclear weapons on or from Norwegian territory. Whether this is more than a formality in a crisis situation, no one can predict with certainty. However, this type of decision can never be fully shared, and a Norwegian government which has approved of NATO nuclear strategy in peacetime can have no illusion about its ability to say no at the outbreak of war.’<sup>244</sup>

#### 4.6.1 Robert McNamara: ‘the need to develop tacit understandings’

Beyond such formal limitations or reservations on national policies, there were a number of cases, including both Norway and Denmark, but also Japan, where what the U.S. Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara, described as ‘tacit understandings’ were called for – and established.

In 1963-64, the United States was faced with an upsurge in the number of countries considering prohibitions on the entry of nuclear-armed ships and aircraft, either unilaterally (such as Ceylon), or on a multilateral or regional basis through the formation of what would come to be termed nuclear weapon-free zones (Africa and Latin America).

In April 1963 Mexican President López Mateos, together with the presidents of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Ecuador called for a denuclearized zone in Latin America, with the intention of taking the issue to the forthcoming Second Non-Aligned Conference in Cairo.<sup>245</sup> The following month the 32 African states represented at the inaugural meeting of the Organisation of African Unity at Addis Ababa in Ethiopia unanimously adopted resolutions for the denuclearization of Africa, the removal of all foreign bases, and a ban on nuclear tests on the continent.<sup>246</sup>

The United States responded vigorously, reiterating publicly and internally, the necessity of, and the strategic and diplomatic rationales for, the global application of neither confirm nor deny. A State Department *Circular Airgram to All Posts* on 26 March 1964 explained the policy and its rationale:

‘Our policy is based on overriding operational and security considerations. We consider armament of naval ship or aircraft to be an integral part of it and not being “transported” into national territory in sense which Mexico has in mind, or increasing “spread of nuclear weapons” in Ceylonese sense. We cannot accept any requirement that we identify

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<sup>244</sup> Sverre Lodgaard and Nils Petter Gleditsch, ‘Norway - the Not So Reluctant Ally’, (n. 244), p. 217.

<sup>245</sup> Ambassador Emeritus Alfonso García Roble, ‘The prohibition of nuclear weapons in Latin America: Summary of the main working phases’, OPANAL - General Conference of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America, <https://www.opanal.org/en/the-prohibition-of-nuclear-weapons-in-latin-america/>.

<sup>246</sup> *Resolutions Adopted by the First Conference of Independent African Heads of State and Government held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 22 to 25 May 1963*, Organization Of African Unity, Secretariat, Addis Ababa, CIAS/Plen.2/Rev.2, Agenda Item III: General Disarmament, at [https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/32247-1963\\_cias\\_plen\\_2-3\\_cias\\_res\\_1-2\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/32247-1963_cias_plen_2-3_cias_res_1-2_e.pdf).



or deny nuclear armament of naval ship or aircraft, for to do so would breach important information regarding extent of our deterrent, and seriously hamper the mobility of the US Forces by dividing them into nuclear and non-nuclear elements. We consider that any conventional ship or aircraft can be fitted with nuclear weapons and given nuclear delivery capability; and, furthermore, that any ship or aircraft can be “equipped for nuclear warfare” if only to defend itself. We are not prepared give blanket assurance to any government, in order gain approval for port entry of naval ships or landings of military aircraft, that no nuclear weapons are carried or would be carried in the future. We consider that such self-imposed limitation on types of aircraft or ships for which we might wish request port entry or landing right neither realistic or in best interests of US.<sup>247</sup>

In a letter a few months earlier to the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara had pointed to the unacceptable constraints on global mobility of U.S. nuclear weapons such initiatives could produce:

‘Obviously we could not ignore such a move and the US might find itself in the serious position of being denied nuclear weapons transit rights and being required to certify that our naval vessels do not have nuclear weapons aboard as a prerequisite for diplomatic clearance to visit ports of the area.’<sup>248</sup>

Continuing, McNamara pointed to a device to avoid direct confrontation, which could simultaneously uphold U.S. neither confirm nor deny policy in practise and also protect the domestic political positions of host country governments:

‘This aspect of the problem points up the need to develop at least tacit understanding with certain key African countries not to raise the nuclear question insofar as transit rights and ship visits are concerned.’<sup>249</sup>

What McNamara termed ‘tacit understandings’ were, in the cases of Norway, Denmark and Japan, blends of public or overt agreements and secret or covert agreements – including ‘unspoken mutual understandings’ and carefully crafted public statements by both the United States and the host nation – that permitted the United States to maintain that NCND was being upheld while enabling the host to assert that national policies banning or restricting the entry of NWs were also being upheld.

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<sup>247</sup> *Circular Airgram From the Department of State to All Posts, CA-9837*, ‘US Policy of Neither Confirming or Denying Presence of Nuclear Weapons on Board US Naval Ships or Aircraft Visiting Foreign Territory.’ 26 March 1964, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Vol. X, National Security Policy*, Document 23, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), pp. 65–68, at <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/x/9016.htm>. Telegram language as in the original.

<sup>248</sup> Hans M. Kristensen, *The Neither Confirm Nor Deny Policy*, (n. 132), p. 7, citing Letter, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, 30 November 1963, p. 2. Filed in Record Group 200, Entry: McNamara Papers, Reading File November 1963. National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>249</sup> McNamara cited in Hans M. Kristensen, *The Neither Confirm Nor Deny Policy*, (n. 132), pp. 7.

#### 4.6.2 Strategic cover-ups: how the United States maintained nuclear access amidst host nation prohibitions

One illustrative example of how the United States responded to national nuclear prohibition policies is Fiji, where an initially firm and enforced stance requiring formal nuclear declarations was gradually reversed through calibrated U.S. diplomatic pressure.<sup>250</sup> U.S. Navy ships had routinely visited Suva prior to 1980, when the Fijian government announced that nuclear-powered ships or those carrying nuclear weapons would no longer be permitted to enter its waters. Yet in February 1982, two U.S. Navy frigates successfully visited Suva without incident. The following month, however, Fiji moved to enforce the prohibition by requiring visiting warships to issue a nuclear weapons-free declaration and refusing entry to those vessels that would neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons. This requirement was extended to military aircraft, which were similarly denied diplomatic clearance for landings unless accompanied by such a declaration. Following months of U.S. diplomatic pressure and a successful visit to CINCPAC Headquarters by Prime Minister Kamisese Mara in September 1982, the United States tested Fiji's resolve by submitting a diplomatic clearance request for a December port call by a U.S. Coast Guard vessel. In response to Fijian inquiries regarding the vessel's nuclear status, the U.S. Embassy would only confirm that the ship was conventionally powered and reiterated the U.S. Navy position to neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons (since Coast Guard vessels would fall under Navy command in wartime).

Despite this, and signalling that U.S. diplomatic efforts were gaining traction, Fiji granted unconditional clearance for the Coast Guard vessel. Additionally, clearance was granted for a U.S. Air Force C-130 military transport aircraft visit in the same month for a satellite communications testing mission. Earlier in October, a U.S. Navy P-3 maritime patrol aircraft had transported Fijian and Tongan troops from Hawaii to Fiji without being required to provide an armament declaration. These clearances paved the way for a series of subsequent visits by a U.S. Navy destroyer tender in March 1983 and guided missile destroyer the following month, all of which occurred without nuclear declarations. By granting unconditional diplomatic clearances to both U.S. Navy and Air Force elements Fiji had, in the words of the U.S. Ambassador, taken a 'giant step' in the direction of reversing its anti-nuclear ship and air visit policy.<sup>251</sup>

Nevertheless, the Fijian government remained divided on the issue. The U.S. Navy was compelled to cancel a scheduled visit by a nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser on 21 July due to the lack of diplomatic clearance. A special Cabinet meeting convened to resolve the issue and eliminate the nuclear weapons declaration requirement failed to reach consensus. However, by the end of July, the deadlock was overcome and the Fijian government announced it would lift the nuclear ban that it had imposed since 1980. According to Prime Minister Mara, the reversal took into account 'a number of very important political, defence, security, and economic considerations.'<sup>252</sup> The policy reversal formally reopened Fiji to unrestricted U.S. naval and air visits.

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<sup>250</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1982, pp. 307-308; CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1983, pp. 336-337.

<sup>251</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1982, pp. 308.

<sup>252</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1983, pp. 337.

The Fiji case illustrates how the United States sought to circumvent or neutralise national nuclear prohibition policies. When such a policy was declared but not actively enforced, the United States would continue routine visits as though the restriction did not exist. However, when enforcement mechanisms were introduced, such as requiring a formal nuclear-free declaration, Washington responded with targeted diplomatic pressure, followed by test visits to assess the host government's resolve. This proved to be a successful strategy, but it was not the only one. While the Fiji case illustrates how national anti-nuclear policies could be tested and eventually reversed under diplomatic pressure, Norway's experience reveals how such policies could persist as symbolic assertions, even in the absence of meaningful enforcement mechanisms.

In Norway, there was a long-running conflict over the admission to Norwegian ports of nuclear-capable warships which demonstrated the fundamental issue: would Norway seek to enforce its ban by direct, explicit inquiry to the captains of visiting ships on compliance? In 1975, Prime Minister Trygve Bratteli announced his government's policy:

‘Our assumption, as foreign ships visit, has been and is that nuclear weapons are not carried on board. Norwegian authorities anticipate that allied, as well as other nuclear powers, respect this assumption.’

Both the United States and the Norwegian military opposed the ‘Bratelli doctrine’ – the latter for fear the result would be a reduction of U.S. naval visits. ‘The doctrine was thus allowed to slip silently into oblivion’, with approval documents admitting foreign ships simply not mentioning the matter. When, a decade later a new defence minister, Johan Jørgen Holst, sought to ‘reinstate the doctrine, by once more referring to it in diplomatic clearances issued for ship visits’, a new round of U.S. pressure was ‘immediate and strong, and Holst had to back down and accept a compromise whereby reference to the doctrine was only indirect.’<sup>253</sup>

The weakness of the Norwegian nuclear-armed ships ban is of interest as a sustained illusion for at least three reasons:

- there was never any host government attempt at independent determination or verification of the presence or absence of nuclear weapons on any particular ship or aircraft;
- direct reminders to commanders of visiting warships of the expectation that their ships would be compliant with Norwegian nuclear prohibition policy were only issued for a short period before being abandoned; and
- there were never direct inquiries to commanders of visiting warships requiring them to give an assurance in their particular instance that the vessel complied with Norwegian policy.

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<sup>253</sup> Jacob Børresen, ‘Alliance Naval Strategies and Norway’, (n. 244), p. 103. The Norwegian government was responding to sustained popular pressure for the nuclear ship bans. In 1989 the peak trade union organisation called for foreign ships and aircraft to be required ‘to declare whether or not they have nuclear weapons with them.’ Hans M. Kristensen, *The Neither Confirm Nor Deny Policy*, (n. 132), p. 67.

But there is a fourth reason for interest in the formation of an illusory Norwegian ban on nuclear-armed ships visits, which was best stated by Johan Jørgen Holst, the Defence Minister responsible for its last iteration and then its total abandonment. Holst explained the situation whereby, as Kristensen summarized, ‘two different policies can continue parallel, without affecting the other’. In Holst’s words:

‘Norway maintains the qualification that foreign naval vessels must not carry nuclear weapons during visits to Norwegian ports. A general reference is made to Norwegian qualifications when clearing such visits. Similarly, the nuclear-weapon state allied of Norway adhere to the qualification of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on board their naval vessels; the main reason being one of security. They are unwilling therefore to issue declarations concerning their weapon loads. In accordance with international law, naval vessels have immunity and cannot be subjected to mandatory inspection. Hence, we have a situation which is characterized by a “double qualification”, one is maintained by the flag state and the other by the port state. It is situation which is acceptable to both parties.’<sup>254</sup>

This outcome, recounted not without an element of political pride by the responsible Norwegian official, saw the successful installation of a “double qualification”... acceptable to both parties’, and to the political benefit of each. McNamara’s prescription was exemplified: the United States retained its requirement of unimpeded mobility of nuclear forces, and the leaders of the host government retained the politically beneficial promise of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence, and more directly, domestic political stability and maintenance in power. For the United States, such ‘tacit understandings’ were essential to maintaining control over the propensity of host countries to raise public questions about the global mobility of U.S. nuclear weapons platforms.

White’s review of the rationales offered by the great majority of nominally prohibitionist states – which permitted the United States to maintain that neither confirm nor deny was being maintained even as evidently nuclear-armed ships entered their harbours – shows that most relied on formulations that ‘assumed’ that the U.S. understood and respected the national prohibition policy. At the same time, these states deliberately chose to neither question commanders about the armament of particular ships, nor sought to conduct any kind of verification inspection from a distance. ‘Trust’, ‘expect’, and ‘respect’ were the watchwords of the policies, and the comparison between policy and practice in the majority of cases points to what some would call hypocrisy, and what the New Zealand anthropologist Michael Goldsmith termed

‘a diplomatically useful ambiguity between stated policies and actual practices. It is the slippage between policies and practices which allows the U. S. Government to state that its NCND policy is respected, that it works. and that it is understood.’<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Holst cited in Hans M. Kristensen, *The Neither Confirm Nor Deny Policy*, (n. 132) p. 70.

<sup>255</sup> Michael Goldsmith, *Neither Confirm Nor Deny: Language, Logic and Morality in Foreign Policy*, Centre for Peace Studies, Auckland University, Working Paper No. 2, May 1993, p. 5, at

Japan was the country that by far received the greatest number of visits by nuclear-capable ships, accompanied by the most extreme and sustained levels of deception by a host government towards its citizens. The Japanese example emphasises the agency of both the United States government and the Japanese government to achieve that ‘slippage’ through a process of creating ‘dual confidentiality arrangements’ and ‘double secret agreements’ that enable plausible deniability. Drawing on recently declassified Japanese and U.S. government records, as well as analyses of previous classified documentary collections released by the Japanese government over a decade ago, Komine Yukinori sought to explore

‘the interconnectedness between public and private security assurances made during the 1957-1960 revision of the U.S.- Japan Security Treaty. The role of secret agreements is conceptualized as a form of covert operations in U.S.-Japan allied secret diplomacy. ... In essence, secret agreements lay at the heart of the U.S.-Japan asymmetric alliance.’<sup>256</sup>

Komine’s study leaves little doubt of the normality of the employment by the United States of

‘dual confidentiality arrangements [that] enabled the transit of nuclear armed U.S. vessels and warplanes into Japanese territorial waters and airspace, along with the free-use of U.S. bases in Japan for Korean contingencies. The U.S. employed overt and covert mechanisms to preserve its extended deterrent capabilities in East Asia as well as to meet Congressional and military requirements to preserve U.S. base rights in Japan. Japanese officials utilized covert strategies, including concealing the existence of secret agreements, thereby denying alleged public deception and ensuring their political survival for decades.’<sup>257</sup>

Even within the Japanese government there were varying levels of awareness of covert activities. There were secret agreements, narrowly construed, which were explicitly recorded in secret government documents. But there were also more secret agreements in a broader sense – those that may not have been recorded anywhere but were instead ‘based on unspoken mutual understandings’. Noting the prevalence and significance of the latter on critical aspects of nuclear permissiveness, Komine noted that

‘The emergency re-introduction of nuclear weapons into Okinawa was treated as a private arrangement (which Prime Minister Eisaku Sato did not share with his successors).’

Following John Mearsheimer’s approach to leaders’ lies to their publics as ‘strategic cover-ups’ undertaken for motives of national interest rather than personal benefit, Komine points to the

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[https://www.academia.edu/27256309/Neither\\_Confirm\\_Nor\\_Deny\\_Language\\_Logic\\_and\\_Morality\\_in\\_Foreign\\_Policy](https://www.academia.edu/27256309/Neither_Confirm_Nor_Deny_Language_Logic_and_Morality_in_Foreign_Policy).

<sup>256</sup> Yukinori Komine, ‘To Assure and Conceal: Revisiting Secret Agreements (*Mitsuyaku*) in the U.S.-Japan Alliance’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, (2024), Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 116.

<sup>257</sup> Yukinori Komine, ‘To Assure and Conceal’, (n. 257), pp. 117-118.

political and diplomatic benefits of being able to ‘plausibly deny’ knowledge of and responsibility for previously secret agreements.

Komine notes that earlier studies had documented the fact that ‘successive Japanese administrations had been dishonest and lied to the Japanese public’. His own work explores rhetorical dances of cooperative ambiguity by asymmetric alliance partners and the secret and covert agreements between and within governments that enable construction of plausible deniability by ‘concealing the existence of secret agreements, thereby denying alleged public deception’. This analysis fleshes out the hypothetical case in the heuristic model of possible NCND states already outlined, whereby the U.S. secretly and/or selectively informs host government leaders of the presence or absence of nuclear weapons on U.S. nuclear-capable platforms.

#### 4.6.3 The limits of trust in nuclear diplomacy

The question of deception colours all discussions of claims of the presence or absence of nuclear weapons – rightly or wrongly, whether based on hard fact or anxiety-fed fantasy. In the mid-1980s, two ministers in the Hawke Labor government dealt with opponents voicing doubts about the veracity of claims – based on the Fraser agreements – that B-52s overflying and staging through Australia were unarmed and carrying no nuclear bombs, by invoking the comforts of shared norms of allied diplomacy.

In January 1986 the Defence Minister Kim Beazley replied to one such critic by deploying the common tactic of deauthorising his interlocutor’s claim to knowledge of accepted norms:

‘If Senator Chipp believes, as he claims, that any arrangements endorsed at this level have no substance, he knows nothing about international relations.’<sup>258</sup>

A year earlier, his colleague, Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, also dismissed the same critic, though seeking legitimacy from agreed diplomatic norms:

‘We believe the United States is not in the habit of breaching agreements of this kind.’<sup>259</sup>

Though there was in fact no reason to believe the United States was misleading Australia on the matter of the B-52s, and that the Fraser agreements were, in Beazley’s words on another occasion, ‘a cast iron guarantee’, Evans’ historically correct assumption about his government’s practise was in fact overly optimistic, when measured against the global history of U.S. neither confirm nor deny policy.

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<sup>258</sup> ‘No warheads on B-52s: Beazley’, *Canberra Times*, 17 January 1986.

<sup>259</sup> The relevant paragraph of Evans’ reply reads: ‘All I can say is that it is our understanding that any flights over Australia are being conducted pursuant to the agreement of 1979 which is that such flights would be unarmed and certainly carry no nuclear bombs. We believe that the United States is not in the habit of breaching agreements of this kind and I imagine on that basis I could give Senator Chipp the guarantee he seeks.’ CPD, Senate, Questions without Notice: United States B52 Bomber Flights, 27 March 1985, 878.



In 1992, at the point of abandoning any resistance to the idea he had previously championed of pressing the United States on neither confirm nor deny policy, Norwegian defence minister Johan Jørgen Holst articulated the fundamental issue with any serious prohibitionist policy, by voicing what he presented as a compelling argument from the norms of alliance community:

‘Norway cannot conduct a policy whereby its allies must prove that they are not criminals.’<sup>260</sup>

Yet that was precisely the core problem obviated by Fraser’s demand to the United States. In Holst’s words, McNamara’s call for an intra-alliance norm of tacit understandings (or silently agreed ‘misunderstandings’) was a construction of a bilateral political form built, at a minimum, on deceiving citizenries. This was protected by the thin and ultimately corrosive veil of plausible deniability, and more fundamentally, constituted collusion to impair and diminish national law on the entry of nuclear weapons into national territories and waters – conduct that more than arguably amounted to criminality in its nature. An intra-alliance norm of nuclear permissiveness emerged, dependent on what can be best described as dissimulation, and more commonly as outright deception, and was, as Maj Britt Theorin put it, hostile to committed attempts to build international – and domestic – confidence in capacity to regulate nuclear weapons.

Had the United States possessed more confidence in the solidity of alliance support for the overt presence of nuclear weapons in Australia and other allied states, it may have found a more soundly-based normative consensus, with trust based on openness as a tool to assuage public doubt of authority.

But it did not – Fraser’s achievement on the basis of a greater degree of transparency and democratic accountability in alliance relations was not to be repeated.

Applying Komine’s framework of the interaction of overt and covert agreements between United States and host governments to the Australian case makes clear the uniqueness of the Fraser cabinet’s three-part policy:

that the United States informs the Australian government that its nuclear-capable aircraft are not carrying nuclear weapons; that the Australian government then informs the Australian public; and that the U.S. government publicly confirms its understanding of this position.

What is important in both the theoretically possible cases, and in the apparently unique Australian case, is not whether or not nuclear weapons were or were not deployed. What matters politically is whether the worldwide U.S. position of upholding the neither confirm nor deny policy was maintained. The Fraser NCND policy wholly sidestepped both the deceptions of the Japanese and Danish cases or the dissembling of ‘We do not know’ and/or ‘We do not ask’, or expression of ‘respect for and understanding of’ U.S. policy.

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<sup>260</sup> Jacob Børresen, ‘Alliance Naval Strategies and Norway’, (n. 244), p. 103.

## 4.7 Standing apart: Explaining Malcolm Fraser's successful challenge to the global NCND norm

By the mid-1980s, United States government initiatives from the mid-1960s to persuade host governments of nuclear-armed ship and aircraft deployments, visits or transits, to accept its global policy to neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons had achieved the status of an established norm. Among U.S. allies in good standing, this policy was accepted without public challenge.<sup>261</sup>

Of approximately 55 countries surveyed in the mid-1980s on the matter of approval or prohibition of nuclear-armed ship or aircraft visits, around 23 had some type of national prohibition policy in place. Excluding three landlocked states, 15 of the remaining 20 countries with prohibition policies nonetheless received visits from nuclear-capable U.S. warships in 1984-1985. Amongst the prohibition states with ports, only Iceland, Iran, New Zealand, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu refused such visits, with New Zealand disciplined by suspension from alliance benefits.

From Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara's 1968 directive instructing U.S. officials to urge host governments to tacitly accept the neither confirm nor deny policy without challenge, through decades of diplomatic negotiations and secret agreements with Norway, Denmark and Japan, culminating with the suspension of the U.S. alliance with New Zealand in 1986, a dominant norm emerged in the 1980s amongst governments of U.S. allies receiving visits of U.S. Navy nuclear-capable warships. This norm consisted of five key features:

- a. Most governments did not prohibit nuclear-armed ships or aircraft, and received visits by nuclear-capable ships.
- b. A smaller but still large number of 20 maritime countries maintained policies prohibiting visits by nuclear-armed ships.
- c. Of those 20 prohibition states, 14 nonetheless received visits from nuclear-capable warships.<sup>262</sup>
- d. All the governments of these 14 prohibitionist states that received U.S. nuclear-capable ship visits publicly professed an expectation that the U.S. government understood and respected their national policies prohibiting visits by nuclear-armed vessels.
- e. However, apart from China, none of these governments professing national prohibition policies took active steps to ensure U.S. compliance. They neither requested directly to captains of such ships to confirm they were not carrying nuclear weapons as they entered host countries' waters and harbours, nor did they employ

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<sup>261</sup> As a classic of U.S.-originated international relations theory came to define such the idea of norms, acceptance of NCND had become 'a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity'. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization*, (Vol. 52, No. 4), Autumn 1998, p. 891.

<sup>262</sup> China, which was a prohibitionist state that received visits by U.S. nuclear-capable warships, is believed to have formed on a secret bilateral agreement with the U.S. to guarantee that visiting U.S. nuclear-capable warships would not be carrying nuclear weapons.

passive remote nuclear detection methods to enable an independent and informed determination on the presence or absence of nuclear armament.

It was in this global context that Malcolm Fraser's ability to challenge U.S. orthodoxy stood out. Despite Australia's alliance with the United States and its participation in broader Western security architecture, Fraser's government successfully resisted the NCND norm in specific and strategic ways during negotiations over B-52 staging rights.

Fraser was, ironically, likely seen by both the Carter and Reagan administrations as the allied leader least likely to rebel against U.S.-auspiced nuclear norms. Constitutionally suspicious of the Soviet Union, Fraser responded to the Carter doctrine and President Carter's characterisation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as 'a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil' with a vociferous denunciation and critique of the invasion. In the late 1970s Fraser had publicly and personally harried the U.S. president and senior officials over what he regarded as the misguided U.S. approach to détente, including vigorously opposing Carter's support for an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace. Furthermore, Fraser responded to the Soviet invasion by launching a high profile (and politically damaging) campaign against Australian participation in the 1980 Moscow Olympics. His record of opposing Carter on détente, coupled with his prominent role in the dismissal of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, likely would have soothed any residual Republican anxieties stemming from the Nixon and Ford years.

Importantly, Fraser's critique of the U.S. policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons was both precise and limited in scope. While in office, Fraser was neither a critic of U.S. nuclear weapons policy in general, nor of its application to Australia. On the contrary, Fraser made it clear to both the Carter and Reagan administrations that his government not only welcomed visits by US nuclear-capable warships but also supported proposals for the establishment of a U.S. naval base in Western Australia. His objections focused narrowly on the lack of Australian control and information over specific operational arrangements relating to B-52s staging through Darwin that he viewed as having potentially profound strategic implications for Australia. At the start of what came to be called the Second Cold War, Fraser's approach to U.S. neither confirm nor deny policy enabled him to simultaneously uphold the alliance while defending national sovereignty.

Fraser's ability to challenge the U.S. position was rooted not only in his diplomatic resolve but also in the strategic clarity with which his government approached the B-52 negotiations. In developing Australia's final negotiating position in mid-1980, Cabinet endorsed the view of the Defence Committee that its recommendation to prohibit the introduction of U.S. nuclear weapons on B-52s was closely tied to the specific strategic objectives of the staging agreement, but 'without preempting the question of future policy in altered circumstances.' The United States was aware that the Fraser government envisaged the possibility that a future Australian government might adopt a different position on the introduction of nuclear weapons, as indeed was to be the case.

Fraser's experience as Army and Defence Minister during the Vietnam War likely also played a role in his successful defiance of the U.S. neither confirm nor deny policy. During this time

Fraser had developed a reputation as an energetic and well-informed policymaker, albeit a strong-willed interventionist minister when he deemed it necessary. He also developed a close personal knowledge of policymaking and influence in Washington, which as minister and later prime minister, he did not hesitate to draw on over the heads of officials.<sup>263</sup> In later life Fraser took personal responsibility for his ministerial role in Australia's war in Vietnam, arguing publicly that the Australian government position, and his own, had been wrong in its conception and aims. Fraser attributed these failures, in part, to an overreliance on uncritical acceptance of U.S. strategic policy, even as the authors of U.S. policy withheld from Australia their knowledge of facts to the contrary, especially intelligence. This experience may very well have reinforced Fraser's commitment to national sovereignty and independent judgement during the B-52 negotiations.

There is good reason to believe that, in this regard, the views of the Defence Committee (chaired by Arthur Tange as Defence Secretary until August 1979, a figure with whom Fraser had been close and who was succeeded by William Pritchett) and those of the Defence Minister, were aligned with the position of the prime minister. As noted already, the Defence Minister's Submission No. 4245 to Cabinet on 29 July 1980, following consideration by the Defence Committee, stressed limiting the U.S. role through strict adherence to agreed, specified strategic goals, namely 'containment of the USSR'. After noting that 'US thinking about a military role in the Indian Ocean littoral is confused and far from settled', the Defence submission continued:

'although military capability and manifest will can be an important condition of effective political policy, there could be undue reliance on military force to deal with essentially political problems. This could make situations worse. By expanding our involvement with the US through the provision of operational facilities, Australia could become directly associated with US policies and operations supporting objectives different from that that lead the Government to make its offer.'<sup>264</sup>

This insistence on clarity and control over U.S. operations reflected a deeper commitment in Fraser's leadership: a consistent prioritisation of what he understood to be Australian sovereignty in strategic decision-making. Strongly committed to the U.S. alliance, Fraser publicly advocated caution about an automatic identification of Australian national interests with those of the United States. This was evident during the 1979-1981 development of Australia's policy on B-52 staging, in which Fraser stressed the need to preserve national sovereignty and retain Australian control over any active involvement in U.S. strategic operations. This position was emphasised in both general terms and in particular policy statements. For example, on 11 March 1981, Fraser stated in his speech announcing the B-52 staging agreement:

'The Australian Government has a firm policy that aircraft carrying nuclear weapons will not be allowed to fly over or stage through Australia without its prior knowledge and

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<sup>263</sup> See the discussion below of negotiations with U.S. Defense Secretary Melvin Laird over the F-111 strike bomber, and Fraser's threat to offer a hostile congressional committee possibly inflammatory testimony by Australian technical specialists accompanying his mission.

<sup>264</sup> NAA, A12909, 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980, [Attachment C, paras 15-16.]

agreement. Nothing less than this is consistent with the maintenance of our national sovereignty.’

Similarly, in Cabinet submission 4245, the defence minister, reflecting the views of the Defence Committee, wrote:

‘The US would certainly not accept that its military operations, where supported by our facilities, should be subject to the approval of the Australian government from day to day. The Australian government could not assume that it could exercise influence to modify US policy where major US interests were seen to be at stake, let alone to have them be abandoned. The operation of US military units from Australian territory, could, therefore, involve a reduction of national control over Australia’s international involvements.’ [Attachment C, para 32.]

Fraser’s commitment to sovereignty translated into a firm and strategically executed negotiating stance during the B-52 staging talks, and Fraser’s characteristic determination and forcefulness played a key role in shaping this process.<sup>265</sup> When it was suggested that the United States would not deviate from its global policy of neither confirm nor deny by informing the Australian government on whether B-52s staging through Darwin would carry nuclear weapons, Fraser was characteristically adamant: ‘They will tell *me*.’<sup>266</sup>

In the context of this set of institutional and strategic pressures, Fraser’s character is a key enabling element. Graham Little’s *Strong Leadership: Thatcher, Reagan, and an Eminent Person*, a psychoanalytic study of Fraser as a ‘strong leader’, is the most sustained examination of the structure and sources of Fraser’s political and cognitive style. As an example of one type of ‘strong leader’ (as opposed to ‘group leaders’, such as Bill Hayden), Little identifies Fraser’s thinking as that of ‘a strategist’ rather than ‘a philosopher-leader, where ‘the line between principle and practical effect’ is beneficially (for a politician) blurred:

“‘Strategic thinking’ – a cast of mind, a set of intellectual skills and habits, a store of selected knowledge – aims at this, a harmony between values and practical advantage, between virtue and profit. Thus, surprising as it may seem, at the heart of the Strong Leader’s “realistic” response to the world is a religious-like belief that principle and power can be reconciled. There is a balanced strategy somewhere that that will let us hold up our heads as moral people *and* simultaneously protect us – pragmatically, opportunistically, no holds barred if necessary from our enemies. Fraser’s East-West/North-South linkage encapsulates such a dream, and it is irrelevant to ask if he is cynical (pro-African to keep the Soviets out) or idealistic...It is nevertheless an example

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<sup>265</sup> Graham Little, *Strong Leadership*, (n. 176), pp. 205, 222 on Fraser’s noted determination and pressure on colleagues and officials, and in international negotiations.

<sup>266</sup> Alan Renouf, *Malcolm Fraser and Australian foreign policy*, (n. 131), p. 123. ‘In mid-1978 a headline read “EEC baffled by Australia’s ‘wild buffalo’ diplomacy”, and the story in the *Australian Financial Review* was that “Officials have bestowed on Mr Fraser a unique title: the most hostile Head of State encountered over the past twenty years” Graham Little, *Strong Leadership*, (n. 176), p. 221.

of how strategic thinking can project, on the distant horizon, a kind of vision.’ (pp. 201-202).

If, in that quotation, ‘Fraser’s East-West/North-South linkage’ is replaced by ‘Fraser’s resistance to the neither confirm nor deny policy for B-52s’, then Little is close to identifying the psychological source of an element of Fraser’s cognitive and political outlook that played a key enabling role in negotiations with the United States. There was principle, especially Fraser’s emphasis on sovereign decision-making, and there was political advantage in harrying the Labor opposition and drawing the United States closer to the defence of Australia – in both aspects, pressing on a possibility inherent, in Beazley’s phrase, at ‘the upper end of our relationship with the United States’.

Little pointed to one well-known achievement of Fraser’s time as Defence Minister to illustrate his argument that Fraser was particularly comfortable negotiating with foreign leaders: Fraser’s own account of his successful negotiations with the Ford administration about the RAAF’s acquisition of F-111 long-range strike aircraft. The F-111 bomber, ordered off the design drawings in 1963 by the Menzies government, by the late 1960s had become, in the words of a U.S. congressional investigation in 1970, ‘a fiasco’ and ‘a fiscal blunder of the greatest magnitude’, and a byword for stubbornly apparently irremediable technical failings, with all F-111s indefinitely grounded. A protracted political embarrassment for the Ford administration, the congressional investigation eventually summarized the technically very ambitious F-111 as ‘a \$7.8 bn. failure producing about 500 aircraft of which only around 100 (the F-111F model) came close to meeting the original specifications’.<sup>267</sup> The problem was that 24 model F-111C built to Australian requirements, for which Australia had already paid almost \$200 mn., were also grounded in long-term storage in the United States, with the prospect of cancellation costing Australia another \$100 mn. and leaving it without any prospect of another long-range strike aircraft for a decade. As Defence Minister in the Gorton government, Fraser inherited the by then seven year-old undelivered program as a nested set of technical, fiscal, and strategic dilemmas.

Fraser took direct charge of negotiations with Secretary of Defence Melvin Laird in Washington in early April. Little uses Fraser’s approach to talks with Laird as an example of Fraser’s approach more broadly:

‘[Fraser] was then Minister for Defence, and drew the lesson, often pointed out to Whitlam (when the latter would criticize the Americans), that support in public and tough bargaining was the way to handle our great and powerful friend.’<sup>268</sup>

The scheduled four days of negotiations stretched to a difficult ten, with the Australian team accompanying Fraser being in the unusual position of being at least as knowledgeable as their American counterparts on matters such as innovative but brittle steel alloys and metal fatigue on

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<sup>267</sup> Mark Lax, *From Controversy to Cutting Edge: A history of the F-111 in Australian Service*, Big Sky Publishing, 2021, pp. 90-91.

<sup>268</sup> Graham Little, *Strong Leadership*, (n. 176), pp. 220-223.



the F-111. With the congressional committee hearings still underway, 'Fraser used the threat to appear before the hearings to force an agreement'. On the tenth day of talks, Laird invited Fraser to a baseball game: in the words of Secretary of Defence, Arthur Tange who was part of Fraser's team of advisers, 'Perched on uncomfortable benches among shouting spectators, in an atmosphere redolent of hotdogs, the two negotiators went about their business.' By the end of the afternoon, a single typed page initialled by both gave Fraser most of what he had been seeking.<sup>269</sup>

Little appeared to know little about the complexities of the policy or technical issues involved, but went on to qualify Fraser's success in the F-111 negotiations:

'This may be Strong Leadership at its best, but note the conditions: a friendly Goliath, a plucky David; a clear and tangible goal; no fundamentally divisive issues involved.'<sup>270</sup>

However correct this assessment may have been about the F-111 negotiations, the successful resistance to imposition of neither confirm nor deny policy to the acceptance of the B-52s was an achievement of a different order, and a great deal more significant in the long run, both in Australia and beyond.

For the Reagan administration, Fraser was seen as a strong and reliable ally, vociferously hostile to the Soviet Union and supportive of U.S. strategic aims – but by 1981 time was pressing. By March 1980 when the Haig-Street agreement was signed, Strategic Command and Pacific Command had already been waiting for more than a year and a half to secure B-52 staging rights for Indian Ocean maritime surveillance flights. Negotiations had also delayed settling the conditions applying to the terrain avoidance mission that had already begun in early 1980. There was no viable alternative to Darwin as a B-52 staging point for the maritime surveillance mission, and negotiations over alternative terrain avoidance training locations in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines were stalled. SAC was pressing Defence and the State Department to continue to secure access for new terrain avoidance training routes to achieve SIOP nuclear planning requirements for B-52 aircrews. Faced with the possibility of further delay and Australian obduracy, the Reagan administration may have decided that half a cake was better than none, and that it could obfuscate the damage done to neither confirm nor deny policy, as it had elsewhere.

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<sup>269</sup> Tange cited in Mark Lax, *From Controversy to Cutting Edge*, (n. 268), p. 97. On this episode and on the long Australian experience with the F-111, Lax's extensive account is illuminating and well-documented. In a conversation about the same episode with one of the authors, Fraser said his threat concerning the congressional hearings had involved offering the Senate committee hearings testimony from at least one of the Australian technical specialists, in the knowledge that the U.S. media would feast on new technical revelations of the aircraft's problems.

<sup>270</sup> Graham Little, *Strong Leadership*, (n. 176), p. 222. Little's dismissal of Fraser's response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as 'a combination of "I told you so" and sheer alarm' similarly ignores the question of the extent to which Fraser's moral and strategic positions on the invasion were supportable. Fraser's view of the strategic threat to Australia was overblown, but was a view shared by the U.S. government and those of other regional allies, and the long-term strategic consequences remain with us today. The degree and nature of strategic error in Fraser's assessment has to be demonstrated, not simply taken as 'obvious' or 'sheer alarm'. As Fraser's 19 February 1980 speech in response to the invasion shows, there was a moral case to be answered, as the history of next ten years of the Soviet invasion, and its echoes through the subsequent disasters for Afghanistan. Graham Little, *Strong Leadership*, (n. 176), p. 192.

A final factor that could have enabled the Fraser government to maintain its negotiating position in defiance of U.S. neither confirm nor deny policy was the likely level of awareness within the Australian government of analogous situations in other allied states, particularly NATO countries, and especially Japan, where the United States had introduced nuclear weapons despite these governments maintaining a prohibition policy. From the mid-1950s through to the late 1980s, Japanese officials were denying reports that the U.S. was violating Japan's prohibition policy by bringing nuclear weapons into the country. By 1974, the U.S. violation of Japanese policy had become an open secret in Japan. Former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence, Morton Halperin, in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, explained the logic behind the neither confirm nor deny policy:

'[It] is aimed at the public in allied countries, and at governments prepared to let the US store nuclear weapons on their soil, or to have ships with nuclear weapons call at their ports; provided that their people do not find out... Just take one example which will illustrate this ... which I think is probably the less kept secret of all our nuclear deployment, the deployment of nuclear weapons in Okinawa. Everybody in Japan I spoke to, government officials, newspaper-men, or scholars, told me there were nuclear weapons on Okinawa, and I also told them I could neither confirm nor deny that fact. So it was certainly not a secret from them, not a secret from the Russians whose satellites took pictures of storage sites, but it is the case if the United States said publicly on the record there were nuclear weapons on Okinawa, there would have been increasingly domestic opposition in Japan and Okinawa to the stationing of those nuclear weapons.'<sup>271</sup>

By 1980, senior Australian officials with responsibilities for East Asian affairs would have been well aware of these matters. Fraser himself had visited Japan on numerous occasions, including as prime minister. In 1976 Australia and Japan signed the Basic Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation, concluding a series of negotiations initiated by Gough Whitlam, and pursued energetically by Fraser, 'who gave priority to its successful conclusion.'<sup>272</sup> In addition to dialogues with Prime Minister Miki Takeo over the treaty process, Fraser met with all three of Miki's successors until 1982: Fukuda Takeo, Ōhira Masayoshi, and Sukuki Zenko.

Fraser had met with Ōhira Masayoshi several times before Ōhira's death in June 1980 to discuss both regional strategic developments and their shared interest in developing a region-wide economic organisation. It is plausible that, during the period when the Fraser cabinet was developing the carefully specified guidelines and conditions with which they hoped to regulate a new U.S. presence in Australia, he was mindful of Japan's long-running humiliation – publicly committed to a non-nuclear policy but undermined by U.S. actions. Was this a cautionary example of a fate Fraser hoped Australia could avoid?

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<sup>271</sup> Morton H. Halperin, Testimony, United States Congress, 93(2), Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Hearings on Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 7 March 1974, p. 41; and Morton H. Halperin, 'Why Not Tell Where The Weapons Are?', *Washington Post*, 15 July 1971.

<sup>272</sup> Moreen Dee, *Friendship and co-operation: the 1976 Basic Treaty between Australia and Japan*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia in the world the foreign affairs and trade files No. 3, 2006, pp. 44, 37-40.

## 4.8 The fate of Fraser's nuclear heterodoxy

Alliance heterodoxy on nuclear weapons does not commonly survive the gorgon gaze of empire, and all three key elements of Fraser's nuclear heterodoxy were either defeated, abandoned, or passed over in silence within a few years.

Legally, the treaty-level 1981 agreement appears to remain in place in 2025: no announcement of the required one year's notice of termination has been made public.<sup>273</sup> However, once the low-level navigation training and maritime surveillance missions specified in the agreement were concluded by 1991, the agreement functionally lapsed.

After a break of a decade and a half, during which U.S. strategic bombers, principally B-52s, visited Australia for periodic short-term exercises, subsequent B-52 operations in Australia, in three main phases, were governed by new, more opaque, arrangements from 2005 to the present. The second phase in U.S. strategic bomber operations in Australia was announced at the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) on 16 November 2005. The United States Strategic Bomber Training Program authorised by the Howard coalition government, beginning early in 2006, provided training access to Australian air weapons ranges (principally Delamere Air Weapons Range) by all three active U.S. strategic bombers: B-52, B-2 and B-1 aircraft types.<sup>274</sup> The bomber training missions included the use of conventional munitions, and involved U.S. bombers both overflying northern Australia and/or landing in Darwin.<sup>275</sup>

The governing arrangements for the Strategic Bomber Training Program are contained in a still classified 2005 *Statement of Principles* which, unlike the 1981 Staging Agreement, does not, as far as is publicly known, include assurances that deployed U.S. strategic bombers will not carry nuclear weapons.<sup>276</sup> At the 2005 AUSMIN meeting, the Australian Defence Minister, Robert Hill, laconically concluded his brief announcement by remarking that

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<sup>273</sup> The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade treaties website entry on the agreement (Australian Treaty Series Number 1981 [ATS] 9), last updated on 5 May 2004, [accessed 10 June 2025], gives no indication the treaty has been terminated or otherwise amended: <https://www.info.dfat.gov.au/Info/Treaties/treaties.nsf/3328431b218f8d59ca256ae1000029b8/3d95034ab45f2f61ca256e8b000ba062>.

<sup>274</sup> 'Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations Joint Communiqué 2005', *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, last updated 24 January 2013, at <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/united-states-of-america/ausmin/Pages/australia-united-states-ministerial-consultations-joint-communique-2005>.

<sup>275</sup> Robert B. Zoellick, Deputy Secretary of State, Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense; Alexander Downer, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs; and Senator Robert M. Hill, Australian Minister for Defense, '2005 Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations Joint Press Conference', *US Department of State (Archive)*, 18 November 2005, at <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/57372.htm>.

<sup>276</sup> *Statement of Principles Between the US Pacific Air Forces and the Australian Defence Organisation Regarding the Conduct of United States Pacific Air Forces Bomber Training in Australia*. Defence Minister Brendan Nelson confirmed the classification of the text of the Statement of Principles in August 2006, going on to say that 'The Statement of Principles is not intended to be an agreement binding under international law. It is a written record of mutually determined policy and operational guidelines for the management and implementation of the training program.' CPD, House of Representatives, Questions in writing, No. 3553, US Strategic Bomber Training Program, 10 August 2006, 188.

‘obviously, if they’re coming down to use our bombing ranges, they won’t be using nuclear weapons.’<sup>277</sup>

The only stated limitation on the Strategic Bomber Training Program in terms of armament is the prohibition on U.S. bombers releasing munitions that are not certified for use on northern Australian training ranges; a prohibition that includes nuclear weapons.<sup>278</sup>

However, without declassification of the secret 2005 *Statement of Principles* it is not possible to be sure that the ‘focus’ on use of live conventional bombs and the absence of nuclear armed bombers precluded the simulated delivery of nuclear weapons, as had been the practice during BUSY BOOMERANG and BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA missions.<sup>279</sup>

Fraser’s explicit public insistence in 1981 that ‘aircraft carrying nuclear weapons will not be allowed to fly over or stage through Australia without its prior knowledge and agreement’ as a firm expression of Australian national sovereignty was jettisoned by the Howard government in 2005. Moreover, by agreeing to classify the entire text of the still secret *Statement of Principles*, the Howard government rejected the Fraser government’s model for democratic transparency and accountability.

The third phase in U.S. strategic bomber operations in Australia was established in earnest in 2018 as part of a wider 2017 Enhanced Air Cooperation (EAC) initiative to increase the type and frequency of U.S. air elements rotating through Australia. The EAC is governed by the 2014 Force Posture Agreement (FPA), a comprehensive legal, policy and financial framework that underpins all six U.S. Force Posture Initiatives in Australia covering land, air, sea, space and logistics domains. The EAC marks a significant step-change in U.S. strategic bomber operations in Australia because the FPA by which it is governed expands access by U.S. forces to a substantial but classified number of Australian facilities and areas and leaves open the types of potential missions ‘as the Parties may mutually determine’.<sup>280</sup>

The FPA also marks a low point in democratic transparency of U.S. strategic bomber operations in Australia. In both the 1981 Staging Agreement and the 2005 *Statement of Principles*, access by U.S. forces to Australian bases and areas was made public with staging undertaken by U.S. air elements through RAAF Base Darwin and, in the case of the Strategic Bomber Training Program, the use of specific northern Australian training ranges for bombing runs. Under the

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<sup>277</sup> Robert B. Zoellick, et al, ‘2005 Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations Joint Press Conference’, (n. 276).

<sup>278</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Questions in writing, No. 2819, US Strategic Bomber Training Program, 9 February 2006, 194; CPD, House of Representatives, Questions in writing, No. 3553, US Strategic Bomber Training Program, 10 August 2006, 188.

<sup>279</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Questions in writing, No 2819, US Strategic Bomber Training Program, 9 February 2006, 194; and CPD, House of Representatives, Questions in writing, No. 3553, US Strategic Bomber Training Program, 10 August 2006, 188.

<sup>280</sup> ‘The Force Posture Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the United States of America’, *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, 12 August 2014, p. 5, at the Australasian Legal Information Institute (AustLII), <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/ATS/2015/1.pdf>.

terms of the FPA, however, the list of agreed facilities and areas U.S. forces are granted access to is not publicly known but rather contained in a classified Memorandum of Understanding.<sup>281</sup>

As with the case of the 2005 Statement of Principles, and in contrast to the 1981 Staging Agreement, the 2014 FPA requires no assurances of prior knowledge and agreement before deployed U.S. strategic bombers to Australia can carry nuclear weapons. The FPA does attach conditions and requirements to consultation mechanisms established as part of the agreement to

‘ensure that relevant mutually determined activities are conducted in accordance with Australia’s policy of Full Knowledge and Concurrence, *where applicable*.’<sup>282</sup>

The inclusion of the qualification ‘where applicable’ is telling. The policy of Full Knowledge and Concurrence states that Australia has a ‘right to know, understand and agree to foreign government military and intelligence activities conducted in, from, or through Australia and through the use of our assets’.<sup>283</sup> However, this assertion of national sovereignty is difficult to reconcile with the willed ignorance that flows from Australia’s ‘understanding of and respect for’ the U.S. doctrine of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on board U.S. aircraft.<sup>284</sup>

These issues of national sovereignty and democratic transparency and accountability extend to the fourth and final phase of U.S. strategic bomber operations in Australia, but with potentially significant and unprecedented political and strategic consequences. The phase commenced with the announcement in 2022 that up to six USAF B-52H bombers – and conceivably other types of bombers – are to be forward-based at RAAF Tindal near Katherine, accompanied by an infrastructure expansion project that includes a squadron operations facility for mission planning, intelligence, crew briefings and crew readiness, along with a fuel farm, maintenance facility and logistics and sustainment capacity. Unlike other rotations of U.S. strategic bombers in the past, this new forward-basing arrangement will enable sustained strategic combat operations from Australian territory, including potential nuclear missions for the first time in history.<sup>285</sup>

The near-continuous presence of U.S. strategic bomber operations in Australia over the past four decades not only highlights the dramatic expansion of those activities, but also underscores the extraordinary significance of Fraser’s original framework – a high-water mark of sovereignty, transparency, and accountability that has since been steadily dismantled.

Fraser’s assertion of an apparently settled policy (‘a firm policy’) of Australian requirement of ‘prior knowledge and agreement’ – and hence notification by the United States government – of

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<sup>281</sup> Richard Tanter, ‘Cover up: The Australian Governments secret list of US bases’, *Pearls and Irritations*, 24 July 2023, at <https://johnmenadue.com/post/2023/07/cover-up-the-australian-governments-secret-list-of-us-bases/>.

<sup>282</sup> The Force Posture Agreement, (n. 281), p. 5. Emphasis added.

<sup>283</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, National Security: Ministerial Statement, 9 February 2023, 501-507, (Richard Marles, Minister for Defence).

<sup>284</sup> See the discussion of this issue in Vince Scappatura and Richard Tanter, *Nuclear-capable B-52H Stratofortress strategic bombers*, (n. 7), pp. 53-56.

<sup>285</sup> Vince Scappatura and Richard Tanter, *Nuclear-capable B-52H Stratofortress strategic bombers*, (n. 7), pp. 42-45.

nuclear-armed aircraft entering Australian airspace and territory is a remarkable episode in Australia's nuclear weapons history – and indeed globally in the U.S. alliance structure.

An Australian leader formally asserting that the United States had obliged Australia – apparently alone amongst all major U.S. allies as a matter of fixed policy – by obviating its otherwise rigidly and universally consistent policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons was and remains unprecedented – and necessary.

To our knowledge Fraser never resiled from this proclamation of sovereignty while in office.



## Appendices

## Appendix 1. Cabinet documents cited from National Archives of Australia

Cabinet documents from the period 1979 to 1982 used in this study are available in files of the National Archives of Australia (NAA). Citations follow the recommended NAA guidance.<sup>286</sup> Any file or item in the NAA collection is identified by three numerical data: Series number; Control symbol; and Item ID (sometimes referred to as 'Barcode'). Each NAA file will have a title and a date or range of dates indicating a period over which the principal matters were considered.

NAA files titled as submissions to cabinet or minutes of decisions of cabinet may include more than one document or decision, some of which may originate from a date earlier or later than the date of the document most discussed in this study. Documents included in a file may have individual pagination. Citations in this study use the page numbers of the file pdf, including the total number of pages in the file: for example, p. 23/57 or pp. 23-30/57.

One NAA file that is used extensively in this study may be illustrative:

National Archives of Australia: Cabinet Office, Series number: A12909, Control symbol: 4245, Item ID 30484653, Submission No 4245: US military use of Australian territory and/or facilities - Related to Decision No 12508 (FAD), 29 July 1980 - 15 August 1980.

This is cited in this study in shortened form either as:

NAA: A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, US military use of Australian territory and/or facilities, 29 July 1980 - 15 August 1980,

or in more abbreviated form still as: NAA: A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245.<sup>287</sup>

This NAA file is 43 pages long, made up of four separate items, each with its own pagination. Using the pagination of the NAA pdf file, rather than that of its individual items, this file consists of:

pp. 5-8: Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Decision No. 12508, Canberra, 15 August 1980;

pp. 9-10: Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Decision No. 12400, Canberra, 5 August 1980;

pp. 11-18: D.J.Killen, Minister for Defence, Submission 4245 - US military use of Australian territory and/or facilities, 29 July 1980; and

pp. 19-43: Four attachments to the Killen submission prepared by the Defence Committee:

pp. 19-22: Attachment A. Homeporting of US Navy ships at Cockburn Sound.

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<sup>286</sup> National Archives of Australia, 'Citing archival records', at <https://www.naa.gov.au/help-your-research/using-collection/citing-archival-records>.

<sup>287</sup> The NAA 'Record Search, Advanced search – Items' page for this item recommends a shortened citation as NAA: A12909, 4245, indicating that knowledge of a file's Series Number and Control Number are sufficient to retrieve the file in the NAA system.

pp. 23-27: Attachment B. Staging of US aircraft through Australia.

pp. 24-39: Attachment C. Policy implications of United States B52 aircraft use of Australian territory and facilities.

pp. 40-43: Attachment D. Conclusions of the Defence Committee regarding US Military Use of Australian Territory and Facilities.

Six files of cabinet documents are cited in this study. Table 6. presents the full and abbreviated file citations, together with common names used in the text, and a note on important documents contained.

Table 6. Cabinet documents cited

Common name in text	Full citation	Abbreviated citation	Important document included
Decision No 12371(C)	National Archives of Australia: Cabinet Office, Series number A13075, Control symbol 12371/C, Item ID 30835067, Decision No 12371(C) - Landing rights for B52 bombers - Without Submission, Cabinet Minute, Co-ordination Committee, Canberra, 22 July 1980.	NAA, A13075, 12371/C, 22 July 1980	
Submission No 4245	National Archives of Australia: Cabinet Office, Series number: A12909, Control symbol: 4245, Item ID 30484653, Submission No 4245: US military use of Australian territory and/or facilities - Related to Decision No 12508 (FAD), 29 July 1980 - 15 August 1980.	NAA, A12909, 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980	Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Decision No. 12508  Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Decision No. 12400, Canberra, 5 August 1980  Submission 4245: US military use of Australian territory and/or facilities, 29 July 1980, with four attachments
Submission No 4292	National Archives of Australia: Cabinet Office; Series number A12909, Control symbol 4292, Item ID 30484699, Submission No 4292: Possible provision of staging facilities in Australia for United States B52 aircraft - Related to Decision No 12508	NAA, A12909, 4292, 14 August 1980 – 15 August 1980	Decision No. 12508. Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Canberra, 15 August 1980  Submission No 4292. Possible provision of

Common name in text	Full citation	Abbreviated citation	Important document included
	(FAD), 14 August 1980 - 15 August 1980.		staging facilities in Australia for United States B52 aircraft, including one attachment
Decision No 12737(FAD)	National Archives of Australia: Cabinet Decision No 12737(FAD), Provision of staging facilities in Australia for US B52 aircraft - Without Submission, Series number A13075, Control symbol 12737/FAD, Item Number 30835276, 11 September 1980 - 11 September 1980	NAA, A13075, 12737/FAD, Decision No 12737(FAD), 11 September 1980	Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee Cabinet Decision No 12737(FAD), 11 September 1980, with one attachment (Guidelines and Principles)
Submission No 4989	National Archives of Australia, Series no. A12909, Control symbol 4989, Item ID 30837866, Submission No 4989, Second Airfield B52 aircraft operations, 22 July 1981, 16 July 1981 - 9 March 1982	NAA, A12909, 4989, 16 July 1981 – 9 March 1982	Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee Cabinet Decision No 17659, 9 March 1982  Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee Cabinet Decision No 17386, 19 January 1982  Cabinet Minute, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee Cabinet Decision No 16587, 18 August 1981  Submission No 4989, Second Airfield B52 aircraft operations, 22 July 1981
‘A preliminary appraisal of the effects on Australia of nuclear war’	National Archive of Australia, Series number A10756, Control symbol LC5130, Item ID 7584267, Policy Paper on Effects of a Nuclear War on Australia, 08 Dec 1980 - 10 Mar 1983	NAA, A10756, LC5130, 8 December 1980 – 10 March 1983	Cabinet procedural documents  ‘A preliminary appraisal of the effects on Australia of nuclear war’, Office of National Assessments, 8 December 1980, pp. 24-52/57.

## Appendix 2. Australian B-52 Stratofortress deployment decisions and events, 1979-1991

Year	Date	Description
<b>1979</b>		
	May	Formal US proposal for combined USAF – RAAF exercises to include ‘low-level training flights by USAF B52 aircraft in Australia’. At some point the proposal was ‘subsequently modified to provide for unarmed B52 aircraft based at Guam to conduct low-level navigation flights at fortnightly intervals over Cape York’. <sup>288</sup>
	October	Approval for low-level navigation flights at fortnightly intervals over Cape York granted by Minister for Defence. <sup>289</sup>
	November – December	AF Chief of Staff/ CINCSAC/CINCPACAF discussions on B-52 maritime surveillance operations in Australia; led to negotiations re low-level training missions <sup>290</sup> SAC initiated survey of Australian air bases for possible transit operations. <sup>291</sup>
<b>1980</b>		
	31 January, 7 February	Australian PM Fraser meetings in Washington with President Carter and senior officials to discuss allied response to Afghanistan invasion, Iranian Revolution, and Southeast Asia. <sup>292</sup>
	January 1980-March 1981	Protracted ‘intensive negotiations’ over both terrain-avoidance training flights and sea surveillance flights through Darwin; U.S. told approval by Australia is conditional on aircraft being on ‘the politically sensitive issue of B-52s carrying nuclear weapons’. <sup>293</sup>
	February	ANZUS Council meeting brought forward – Afghan implications; staging discussed as one possibility. <sup>294</sup> CINCPAC oral request for ‘transit of Australia by B52 aircraft travelling to the Indian Ocean area for the purpose of applying US air power there’. <sup>295</sup>
	3 February	Defence Minister D.J. Killen announces overflights by pairs of Guam-based B-52s. <sup>296</sup>
	27 February	BUSY BOOMERANG terrain-avoidance flights begin weekly on two routes in north Queensland and Cape York. <sup>297</sup>
	July	SAC team commenced Australian airfield survey; Darwin recommended on completion. <sup>298</sup> CINCPAC and CINCSAC inform Australia US is considering ‘possible advantages in using

<sup>288</sup> NAA, A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980; and Department of Defence, *Defence Report 1980*, (n. 2), p. 6.

<sup>289</sup> NAA, A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980.

<sup>290</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History 1981*, pp. 253-254.

<sup>291</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 254.

<sup>292</sup> State Department, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1977–1980, Volume XXII, Southeast Asia and the Pacific*, ‘268. Memorandum of Conversation’, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v22/d268>; State Department, Office of the Historian, ‘Visits by Foreign Leaders in 1980’, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/visits/1980>; and Department of Defence, *Defence Report 1980*, (n. 2), 1980, p. 5.

<sup>293</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 254. Confirmation of the Australian negotiating position is clear in NAA, A12909, 4292, Submission No 4292, 14 August 1980 – 15 August 1980; and NAA, A13075, 12737/FAD, Cabinet Decision No 12737(FAD), 11 September 1980.

<sup>294</sup> Department of Defence, *Defence Report 1980*, (n. 2), p. 5.

<sup>295</sup> NAA, A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980, Attachment B, para. 3.

<sup>296</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 664-666.

<sup>297</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 254; Department of Defence, ‘US Air Force B-52 Flights’, (n. 2).

<sup>298</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 253.

Year	Date	Description
		Australia's staging facilities as "emergency bases" for use by US B-52s', to involve 'pre-positioning of fuel, spares and weapons'. <sup>299</sup>
	29 July	Defence Submission No 4245 provides Cabinet with detailed consideration of benefits and risks of a staging agreement, with emphasis on 'reduction of national control over Australia's international involvements'; recommends 'no commitment to the development in Australia of facilities that could be identified as unreservedly available to US use'; subject to 'full and timely information about strategic and operational developments relevant to the facility and their significance for Australian national interests'; and no introduction of nuclear weapons or maintenance or repair of US nuclear powered vessels, unless there is specific agreement to the contrary'. <sup>300</sup>
	5 August	Cabinet Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee Decision 12400 considers detailed Defence Submission 4245 (29 July) and adopts 'favourable attitude' subject to conditions to be specified. <sup>301</sup>
	15 August	Cabinet Decision 12508, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, 15 August 1980. <sup>302</sup> Sets conditions for 'any agreement' on staging, including: prior agreement for any operations other than 'navigation training, sea surveillance or strategic display'; or anything beyond 'the common objective of deterrence of the Soviet Union'. 'aircraft would introduce nuclear weapons into Australia only if separate and specific agreement had first been given by the Australian government'. any alteration in terms to be consistent with Australia's international commitments and policies, including the NPT. Defence Minister's Attachment A: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognizes possible salience of nuclear weapons 'in time of hostilities' to U.S. strategic nuclear display in the face of 'a Soviet move against the Gulf oil fields'.</li> <li>• notes "it will be important to sustain the position proposed by the defence Committee, that unless there is specific agreement to the contrary, U.S. use of facilities in Australia should not include the introduction of nuclear weapons. An agreement with the U.S. should accord with this principle – without preempting the question of future policy in altered circumstances."</li> </ul>
	10 September	Defence Minister D.J. Killen announces discussions of U.S. request to stage B-52s through Darwin for 'extended' Indian Ocean flights. <sup>303</sup>
	11 September	Cabinet Minute, Decision 12537, Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, 11 September 1980. <sup>304</sup>

<sup>299</sup> NAA, A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980, Attachment B, para. 10.

<sup>300</sup> NAA, A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980.

<sup>301</sup> NAA, A12909, 4245, Submission No 4245, 29 July 1980 – 15 August 1980.

<sup>302</sup> NAA, A12909, 4292, Submission No 4292, 14 August 1980 – 15 August 1980.

<sup>303</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Defence: Government Decisions: Ministerial Statement (D.J. Killen, Minister for Defence), 9 September 1980, 997; 'Australians Will Allow Landings by U.S. B-52's', *New York Times*, 10 September 1980.

<sup>304</sup> NAA, A13075, 12737/FAD, Cabinet Decision No 12737(FAD), 11 September 1980, with one attachment (Guidelines and Principles).



Year	Date	Description
		<p>Cabinet agreed to draft note and policy guidelines prepared by Defence Minister Killen and passed to PM Fraser, 8 September, subject to amendments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• frequency of deployments was to be limited to three per month;</li> <li>• agreement for operations beyond 'navigation training, sea surveillance and strategic display' 'be "required" rather than "assumed";</li> <li>• airfields to remain under Australian control; and</li> <li>• 'the item on the carrying of nuclear weapons to be clarified'.</li> </ul> <p>The Australian ambassador in Washington was to be asked to press the United States at a high level for an early response to the Australian note, and in any case for a clearance by Tuesday [three working days later] on the basic principles of the Note and guidelines so that questions could be answered in the Parliament.'</p> <p>Accompanying Attachment A. sets out the revised Australian Note and guidelines, including</p> <p>Article 9. 'Aircraft flying over or landing in Australia would not carry nuclear weapons unless separate and specific agreement had first been given by the Australian government.'</p> <p>Article 11. 'The Australian government would consider it desirable that the terms of any arrangement be made public.'</p>
	November	<p>Negotiations deferred by U.S. until incoming Reagan administration could be briefed 'on the politically sensitive issue of B-52s carrying nuclear weapons'; U.S. fear of 'adverse reaction' by Japanese government.<sup>305</sup></p> <p>USAF technical team to Canberra for discussions on construction at Darwin and costings.<sup>306</sup></p>
<b>1981</b>		
		BUSY BOOMERANG flights weekly all year; two Queensland/Cape York routes <sup>307</sup>
	11 March	Fraser Ministerial Statement on sea surveillance and navigation training flights through Darwin. <sup>308</sup>
	12 March	PM Fraser commits to informing Parliament of any change of purposes or conditions of B-52 operations. <sup>309</sup>
	28 March	US embassy Canberra press conference confirming aircraft will be 'unarmed and carrying no bombs'.
	2 April	Fraser incorporates State Department-approved U.S. embassy statement into Hansard.
	June	<p>First GLAD CUSTOMER operation.</p> <p>GLAD CUSTOMER operations: once a quarter three CONUS-based B-52 staging through Guam and Darwin, with six KC-135 refuelling tankers.<sup>310</sup></p>

<sup>305</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 254.

<sup>306</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 254.

<sup>307</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 254-256.

<sup>308</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, 11 March 1981, 665-686.

<sup>309</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Questions without Notice: B52 Bombers, 12 March 1981, p. 703.

<sup>310</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, pp. 254-256.

Year	Date	Description
	11 August	B-52 night missions approved by Australia. <sup>311</sup>
	October –November	Planned elimination of Guam B-52 Task Group results in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USAF proposal to ‘maintain U.S. level of presence in Australia’ by landing BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA B-52D flights in Darwin up to twice per quarter.</li> <li>• planned reduction of GLAD CUSTOMER from twice monthly to once a quarter, with three B-52 and four KC-135s.<sup>312</sup></li> </ul>
1982		
	14 April	CINCPACREP Australia obtains interim Australian approval to land BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA flights in Darwin. <sup>313</sup>
	29 April – 3 May	First BUSY BOOMERANG staging through Darwin. <sup>314</sup>
	22 July	Australian Defence Department informs U.S. of new conditions on BUSY BOOMERANG landings at Darwin: <p>on months without quarterly GLAD CUSTOMER operations, two BUSY BOOMERANG aircraft could land at Darwin together with three KC-135s, returning to Guam via Arnhem Land for terrain-avoidance flight training.<sup>315</sup></p> <p>CINCPAC stated that the Defence Dept. advised U.S.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘that it regarded these new arrangements to be an extension of those originally made for navigation training over Queensland under BUSY BOOMERANG and had agreed to them on the understanding that the B-52 aircraft taking part would be “unarmed and not carry bombs”’.</li> <li>• ‘This last statement was contrary to the standard worldwide U.S. practice of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons.</li> <li>• ‘However, as pointed out by the U.S. Ambassador in Canberra, as a result of the intensive negotiations the two governments had agreed in 1980 that the Australians could use the “unarmed and carry no bombs” phrase, and Australian approval was conditional on reaching agreement on this issue.</li> <li>• ‘Any change would be immediately noticed in Australia and would imply a change in armament. The Secretary of State therefore agreed with the Ambassador that it was inadvisable to seek a change in the language for the time being. Similar statements had been made in the past (in the United Kingdom for example).</li> <li>• ‘CINCPAC concurred.’<sup>316</sup></li> </ul>
	22 September	USAF 3rd Air Division requests change from ‘fly two, land one’, to fly three, land two’ to ‘enhance aircrew training’ from ‘sites away from home’. <sup>317</sup>
	15 October	Defence Dept announces combined upper limits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 pairs (16 aircraft) of terrain avoidance and sea surveillance flights each month</li> </ul>

<sup>311</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 256.

<sup>312</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, p. 256; and CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1982*, p. 321.

<sup>313</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1982*, p. 321.

<sup>314</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1982*, pp. 321-322.

<sup>315</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1982*, pp. 321-322.

<sup>316</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1982*, pp. 321-322.

<sup>317</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1982*, p. 322.

Year	Date	Description
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>of which three aircraft could land at Darwin.<sup>318</sup></li> </ul>
	16-17 October	Minister of Defence Ian Sinclair announces six new terrain avoidance routes over Arnhem Land and northern Western Australia. <sup>319</sup>
1983		<p>Quarterly GLAD CUSTOMER flights of three B-52H aircraft and up to six KC-135s; B-52s from CONUS staging in Guam and Darwin.<sup>320</sup></p> <p>BUSY BOOMERANG DELTA evolution of BUSY BOOMERANG:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sixteen sorties per month.</li> <li>Three B-52s and up to six KC-135s to Darwin each quarter, flying from CONUS-Guam-Darwin-Guam-CONUS.</li> <li>Remaining 13 B-52s returned to Guam without landing.<sup>321</sup></li> </ul>
	26 May	Incoming Labor Foreign Minister Gareth Evans confirms no modification of Fraser government conditions regarding B-52 low level training and surveillance flights; including 'unarmed and carry no bombs', with 'no present intention to review the detailed arrangements'. <sup>322</sup>
1984		
	3 October	<p>Defence Minister Gordon Scholes reports B-52 low-level navigation flights over Australia and 'landings in Darwin' (for low-level missions or sea surveillance missions) as follows: <sup>323</sup></p> <p>1982: 40 + 16</p> <p>1983: 63 + 28</p> <p>1984 (to Sept.): 94 + 23</p>
1985		
	27 March	Foreign Minister Gareth Evans confirms continuation of 1979, 1981 and 1982 agreements, and that all B-52 flights over Australia are 'unarmed and carry no bombs... We believe the United States is not in the habit of breaching agreements of this kind.' <sup>324</sup>
	11 September	Foreign Minister Gareth Evans states 'There are no grounds whatsoever for any conceivable suspicion that B52 bombers are armed and carrying nuclear weapons over Australian soil. We have accepted absolutely the assurances of the United States government in this respect and continue to propose to rely on those assurances.' <sup>325</sup>
1986		
	17 January	Minister for Defence Kim Beazley stated the 1981 agreement contained 'cast iron assurances' that B-52 aircraft participating in exercises 'would be unarmed and carry no bombs'. 'Any deception would be detected and the result would seriously damage U.S. - Australian relations.' <sup>326</sup>

<sup>318</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1982, p. 322.

<sup>319</sup> Department of Defence, 'B52 operations in Australia', *Defence News Release*, (n. 137); and CPD, Senate, B52 Flights Across Australia, 21 October 1982, 1701.

<sup>320</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1983, p. 343.

<sup>321</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1983, p. 343.

<sup>322</sup> CPD, Senate, Questions without Notice: United States B52 Flights Over Australia, 26 May 1983, 892.

<sup>323</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Answers to Questions No. 1622. American B-52 Aircraft, 3 October 1984, 1574.

<sup>324</sup> CPD, Senate, Questions without Notice: United States B52 Bomber Flights, 27 March 1985, 878.

<sup>325</sup> CPD, Senate, Questions without Notice: B52 Bomber Agreement, 11 September 1985, 446.

<sup>326</sup> 'No warheads on B-52s: Beazley', *Canberra Times*, 17 January 1986.

Year	Date	Description
	20 February	Foreign Minister Gareth Evans: 'Australian government confidence regarding B-52s flying over Australia being "unarmed and carry no bombs" is derived from 'particular operational characteristics of the agreed B52 activities. For safety reasons, it is not operational practice to carry weapons of any sort in aircraft undertaking low level navigation flights. Moreover, the stringent security measures that the U.S. Air Force always takes to protect its nuclear weapons while. On the ground are not applied when B52s stage through Darwin. In light of this the Australian government sees no requirement for verification arrangements.' <sup>327</sup>
	11 March 1986	Foreign Minister Gareth Evans: 'B52 aircraft regularly fly along pre-arranged and publicised low jet routes in northern Australia. They normally fly at an altitude of 800 ft above ground level, although this may vary according to terrain.' <sup>328</sup>
1987	17 February	Defence Minister Kim Beazley stated that there were '141 B52 aircraft landings' in Darwin between 1981 and 30 November 1986: <sup>329</sup> 1981: 19 1982: 22 1983: 29 1984: 28 1985: 21 1986: 22
	11 September	Kim Beazley, Minister for Defence: 'The U.S. acknowledges that it does not conduct routine training exercises with nuclear weapons.' <sup>330</sup>
1989		
		Australian government agrees to U.S. request to 50% increase low-level training overflights from 16 to 24 aircraft, with B-52 monthly landings at Darwin increasing from 4 to six. <sup>331</sup>
1990		
	10 October	Defence Minister Robert Ray reported 32 'B-52 visits to Darwin' in 1989, and 13 in 1990 to 10 October. <sup>332</sup>
1991		
	6 November	Defence Minister Robert Ray reported 19 B-52 'visits' to Darwin 1 January 1990 – 24 October 1991, including on five occasions for 'crew training' and two for exercises. <sup>333</sup>

<sup>327</sup> CPD, Senate, Answer to questions, No. 322: Operations of B52 Bombers, 20 February 1986, 741.

<sup>328</sup> CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 641: Flights by United States' Aircraft over Australia, 11 March 1986, 829.

<sup>329</sup> CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 1451 - B52 Bombers, 17 February 1987, 22.

<sup>330</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Question on Notice, No. 101: United States Aircraft: Carrying of Nuclear Weapons, 10 December 1987, 3289.

<sup>331</sup> Guy McKanna, 'The Nation', *Australian Financial Review*, 26 January 1989.

<sup>332</sup> CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 178: B52 Bombers: Visits to Darwin, 10 October 1990, 2859.

<sup>333</sup> CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 1294: Visits by B52 Bombers, 6 November 1991, 2602.

### Appendix 3. B-52 overflights and landings, 1980-1991 - Australian official data

Year	Killen, 7 May 1981 <sup>334</sup>		Scholes: 3 October 1984 <sup>335</sup>		Evans: 17 February 1987 <sup>336</sup>	Ray: 10 October 1990 and 6 November 1991 <sup>337</sup> .
	“Low level navigation training” #	“Staging operations” +	“Low level navigation training”	“Staged through Darwin” / “Landings at Darwin” on either low- level navigation or maritime surveillance +	“Landings at Darwin” +	“Visits to Darwin” +
1980 (Feb – Dec)	23					
1981 (Jan – Dec)	42	7			19	
1982			40	(16)	22	
1983			63	(28)	29	
1984			94	(23)	28	
1985					21	
1986 (to 10 Oct)					22	
1987						
1988						
1989						32
1990						11* [15]
1991						1* [4]

Notes:

# indicates number of dates of operations, and not necessarily the number of B-52 aircraft

+ indicates no distinction made between landings at Darwin for maritime surveillance operations and terrain avoidance training.

() Includes

\* indicates landing at Darwin for ‘crew training’ only.

[] include B-52 ‘visits’ for exercises and permanent museum installation.

<sup>334</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Question on Notice, No. 2155: United States Aircraft: Operations Over Australia, 7 May 1981.

<sup>335</sup> CPD, House of Representatives, Question on Notice, No. 1622: American B-52 Aircraft, 3 October 1984, 3 October 1984, p. 1574.

<sup>336</sup> CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 1451 - B52 Bombers, 17 February 1987, 22.

<sup>337</sup> CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 178: B52 Bombers: Visits to Darwin, 10 October 1990, 2859; and CPD, Senate, Answers to Questions, No. 1294: Visits by B52 Bombers, 6 November 1991, 2602.

Appendix 4. Guidelines and Principles, Cabinet Minute: Decision No 12737 (Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee): Provision of staging facilities in Australia for U.S. B52 aircraft – Without Submission, 11 September 1980.<sup>338</sup>

**SECRET**

ATTACHMENT A TO  
DECISION NO. 12737 (FAD)

The Australian Government approves in principle the request of the United States Government contained in its Embassy's Note No. 110 of 28 August 1980 for the use of RAAF Base Darwin by United States B52 aircraft and associated KC135 tanker aircraft, for staging purposes. It notes that the frequency of deployments will depend in large part on experience gained from initial missions, but could easily amount to two or three deployments per month.

The Australian Government understands that the sea surveillance missions proposed for the B52's will embrace sea surveillance and navigation training and strategic display. The Australian Government would require that its agreement be sought for operations by B52s staging through Australia going beyond these purposes, and in any case for operations addressed to concerns outside our common interests in deterrence of the Soviet Union.

The Australian Government would request that the existing consultative arrangements be extended to ensure that it would have full and timely information about US strategic policies and operational plans relevant to B52 staging operations through Australia.

The Australian Government has determined guidelines and principles that it would wish to apply to the staging of the B52 and associated aircraft through Australia. Those principles and guidelines are listed in the attached paper.

The Australian Government agrees to discussions between US authorities and the Australian Department of Defence on the US proposal with a view to drawing up formal arrangements and arrangements for public handling.

**SECRET**

National Archives of Australia

NAA: A13075, 12737/FAD

<sup>338</sup> National Archives of Australia: Cabinet Decision No 12737(FAD), Provision of staging facilities in Australia for US B52 aircraft - Without Submission, Series number A13075, Control symbol 12737/FAD, Item Number 30835276, 11 September 1980 - 11 September 1980. Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia.



**SECRET**

ATTACHMENT A TO  
DECISION NO. 12737(FAD)

GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES

1. Staging operations by US military aircraft would be through agreed Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) airfields.
2. The agreement of the Australian Government would be obtained before any type of operations occurred, other than those categories of operations in the Indian Ocean area specifically agreed between the respective governments - which are directed towards the common objective of deterrence of Soviet military expansion.
3. Staging could include the stationing at the relevant RAAF facility or facilities of some support personnel and equipment, if requested. Support personnel would have "lodger-unit" status. Status of forces agreements would apply.
4. Staging operations should not regularly nor significantly exceed an agreed frequency unless by specific prior agreement.
5. Within this context, the number of landings should be agreed between Defence Departments, having regard to relevant technical considerations.
6. Irrespective of financial arrangements agreed between the respective Governments, the airfield(s) would remain an Australian facility and under Australian control.
7. No circumstances arising from an agreement would affect the title of the Australian Government in the relevant land, or the pre-existing authority of the Australian Government in the use of the facility or facilities.

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ATTACHMENT A TO  
DECISION NO. 12737 (FAD)

8. Arrangements would include consultations to ensure that the Australian Government has full and timely information about strategic and operational developments relevant to staging operations through Australia.

9. Aircraft flying over or landing in Australia would not carry nuclear weapons unless separate and specific agreement had first been given by the Australian Government.

10. In considering whether to agree to any request for alteration of the terms of an existing arrangement the Australian Government would give weight to its international commitments and policies relating inter alia to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to Australia's commitments under ANZUS and to its understanding of US strategic and operational policies and activities as derived from consultations under 8. above.

11. The Australian Government would consider it desirable that the terms of any arrangement be made public.

12. The status of any such arrangement would be the subject of discussions between the respective authorities; if a formal inter-governmental agreement, it should be of indefinite duration, but include provision for notice of termination.

**SECRET**

## Appendix 5. CINCPAC Command Histories in the Nautilus Institute archives

*Commander in Chief Pacific Command (CINCPAC) Command Histories for Command Year [CY] 1978-1985* are collated on the Nautilus Institute website *Archives – FOIA Document – Command Histories*.<sup>339</sup>

Maritime surveillance by air and naval vessels was a continuing preoccupation for CINCPAC from CINCPAC Command History CY 1974 onwards, initially in terms of P-3 aircraft operations, ranges, and basing options, and subsequently on B-52s. There are many redactions. Over ten pages of the CY 1976 Command History on ‘Indian Ocean Operations’, including from Cockburn Sound, and P-3 operations from Kenya, Oman, Singapore and Thailand are redacted entirely, together with another ten pages on ‘Nuclear Powered and Other Ship Visits to Foreign Ports.’<sup>340</sup> The following year, ten pages on ‘P-3 maritime Air Patrol Operations’ were again redacted.<sup>341</sup> The CINCPAC *Command History, CY 1979* contained an extensive discussion of the vicissitudes of P-3 basing activities and plans in Bandar Abbas, Dhahran (Saudi Arabia), Djibouti, Oman (Masirah and Seeb), Pakistan, and Thailand (most of the last of which was redacted).<sup>342</sup>

‘B-52 surveillance operations’ are first mentioned as a topic in the CINCPAC *Command Histories* in CY 1978, but the paragraph of text is redacted.<sup>343</sup> The first substantial account of ‘B-52 Operations’ appears in the 1980 Command Year history, including a discussion of negotiations with the Philippines, and a four page account of ‘B-52 Operations in Australia’, redacted entirely.<sup>344</sup>

However, for the next three years the Command Histories paid considerable attention to the Australian operations, including covering the periods redacted in earlier editions. *The CY 1981 Command History* contained four detailed pages to ‘SAC B-52 Programs in PACOM’; the *CY 1982 Command History* six pages to PACOM programs, including more than two pages on Australian operations; and the *CY 1983 Command History* six pages on PACOM B-52 operations and two pages on Australian operations, one of which was heavily redacted.<sup>345</sup>

From *CINCPAC Command History, CY 1984* onward reporting of B-52 operations disappears: a four page account in *CINCPAC Command History, CY 1984* on ‘SAC B-52 Programs in PACOM’ covering Australia, Philippines, and Japan is redacted entirely.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> See Nautilus Institute, *FOIA Category: Command History*, at <https://nautilus.org/foia-category/command-history-2/>. References to annual Commander in Chief Pacific Command, *Command Histories* for a particular Command Year are abbreviated in the text to CINCPAC, *Command History, CY...*

<sup>340</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1976*, pp. 182-188, and 188-196.

<sup>341</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1977*, pp. 183-193.

<sup>342</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1979*, pp. 207-212.

<sup>343</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1978*, p. 197.

<sup>344</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1980*, pp.191-194

<sup>345</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1981*, pp. 253-257; CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1982*, pp. 319- 326; and CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1983*, pp. 342-348.

<sup>346</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History, CY 1984*, pp. 414-418

The *CY 1985 Command History*, itself shrunken from the many hundreds of pages of the previous editions down to just fifty, has just a single paragraph devoted to ‘Air Operations’, and is entirely redacted.<sup>347</sup> *CINCPAC Command Histories* after Command Year 1985 are not currently available from the Nautilus archives.

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See index at Nautilus Institute, *FOIA Category: Command History*, at <https://nautilus.org/foia-category/command-history-2/>.

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<sup>347</sup> CINCPAC, *Command History*, CY 1985, p. 21.

## Appendix 6. Countries with bans and visits by nuclear-armed or nuclear-powered ships\*

### Abbreviations:

CV, CVN	Multi-purpose aircraft carrier	FFG	Guided missile frigate
BB	Battleship	FF	Frigate
CG, CGN	Guided missile cruiser	SS, SSN	Attack submarine
DDG	Guided missile cruiser	SSBN	Ballistic missile submarine
DD	Destroyer		

Country	Prohibition	Visits	Stated policy basis for acceptance of nuclear-capable ship visits	U.S. visits (ship days)
Austria	Y	NA <sup>a</sup>	NA	NA
China	Y	Y	REW <sup>b</sup> : Possible secret non-nuclear-armed guarantee provided by US.	1986: 15 (first visit: (including nuclear-capable CG, DD, FFG))
Denmark	Y	Y	'Policy: "Foreign powers are conversant with this policy, and Denmark expects it to be respected by ships entering Danish territorial waters. The Danish government as such does not question compliance, as it does not want to express distrust in its allies."'	1984: 38 1985: 62 (including nuclear-capable BB, CG, DDG, FF.)
Egypt	Y	Y	'Policy: "Egypt does not allow the passage of nuclear-powered or armed vessels or aircraft into its harbours."'	1984: 26 1985: 7 (including CVN, CVG, DDG, DD.)
Faroe Islands	Y	Y	[See Denmark]	
Finland	Y	Y	'Policy: "The Finnish government expects this provision...even temporarily ... to be strictly observed."'	1984: 10 1985: 0 visits (including nuclear-capable DD [1]))
Iceland	Y	—	REW: 'In practice, Iceland operates its policy on the basis of trusting other countries to respect it, and does not check this.'	1984: 0 1985: 0
India	Y	Y	REW: Carriers apart, 'it is assumed that this policy is complied with and no further checks are made.'	1984: 6 1985: 3 (including nuclear-capable FFG)
Iran	Y	—		
Ireland	Y	Y	REW: Despite the nominal ban there are large numbers of overflights and visits: 'It seems that the Irish government merely expects other countries to respect its policy.'	1984: 12 1985: 13 (including



				nuclear-capable FF)
Japan	Y	Y	REW: 'The absence of consultations [under a 1960 MOU] is taken by the Japanese government to show that nuclear weapons do not enter their ports on United States ships.'	1984: 2895 1985: 2662 (including CVN, CGN, SSN, CV, CG, DDG, DD, FF)
Laos	Y	NA <sup>c</sup>	NA	NA
Malta	Y	Y	REW: Superpower warships not permitted to visit, but 'courtesy visits and ship repair is permitted. "Policy: but I am not aware of any measures to ensure that visiting vessels are free of nuclear weapons".'	1984: 0 1985: 0
New Zealand	Y	–	'Policy: "The PM may only grant approval for the entry into the internal waters of New Zealand if the PM is satisfied the warships will not be carrying any nuclear-explosive device into the internal waters of New Zealand."' REW: New Zealand intentionally does not ask for written guarantees.	1984: 23 (including SSN, FFG, FF) None after mid- to 1984.
Nigeria	Y	Y	REW: No requests for compliance or checks reported	1983: 3 1985: 2 (including nuclear-capable FFG in both cases)
Norway	Y	Y	Policy: "It has been and is our presumption that foreign warships do not carry nuclear weapons on board. The Norwegian authorities expect allied and other nuclear powers to respect this assumption."	1984: 63 1985: 44 (including nuclear-capable CGN, SSN, BB, CB, DDG, FFG, DD, FF.)
Seychelles	Y	Y	Policy: "Whilst all shipping and aircraft is allowed after request from the Seychelles government, no nuclear-armed or powered ships are welcome."	1984: 4 195: 21 (including nuclear-capable CG, DD.)
Solomon Islands	Y	–	Policy [February 1984]: "Solomon Islands does not accept or allow visits by nuclear-powered or armed vessels carrying nuclear weapons into her ports, or carrying nuclear weapons in her airspace or in transit at her airports."	1984: 2 1985: 0 (including nuclear-capable FF.)
Spain	Y	Y	Policy: "Spain joined NATO through a National Referendum held on 12 March 1986 under the basis of no storage or introduction of nuclear weapons in Spanish territory and progressive reduction of US military presence in Spain." REW: 'the Government has been reported as saying that visits constitute "transit" not introduction.' White, p. 37	1984: 761 1985: 826 (including nuclear-capable CVN, CVG, SSN, CV, CG, DDG, FFG, DD, FF.)
Sri Lanka	Y	Y	Policy: "Visits would be permitted from ships or aircraft of any country provided the vessel is not carrying	1984: 5 1985: 16



			nuclear weapons and the country to which the vessel belongs is not at war in the region. All such countries have been informed of this policy and the Government of Sri Lanka does not expect a friendly country to make an application for a naval visit should such vessels be carrying nuclear arms. No declaration to this effect by the requesting party nor any inspection of the vessel is insisted upon.” pp. 37-38.	(including CV, CG, DDG, FFG, FF)
Sweden	Y	Y	Policy: “There is a general prohibition against foreign vessels carrying nuclear weapons when visiting Sweden. The Swedish government takes it for granted that this prohibition will be strictly observed.”	1984: 15 1985: 12 (including nuclear-capable CG, DDF, FF.)
Switzerland	Y	NA <sup>d</sup>	NA	NA
Vanuatu	Y	—	—	—

\* Source: Robert E. White, *Nuclear Ship Visits: Policies and Data for 55 Countries*, (Dunedin: Tarkwode Press, 1989).

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> ‘Austria: “The non-admission of nuclear-armed aircraft flows from Austria’s status of permanent neutrality.” No information on aircraft visits.’ White, *Nuclear Ship Visits*, 1989, p. 27.

<sup>b</sup> REW: Robert E. White.

<sup>c</sup> Laos: “We will never allow ships or aircraft carrying nuclear weapons into our territory.” No information available concerning aircraft visits.’ White, *Nuclear Ship Visits*, 1989, p. 33.

<sup>d</sup> ‘Policy: “Due to Switzerland’s neutrality, foreign military powers do not use our airstrips or our airspace.” No information on aircraft visits.’ White, *Nuclear Ship Visits*, 1989, p. 39.