



US to bomb Northern Territory

In another move into closer co-operation with US war fighting strategies, American B-52s and Stealth bombers will soon be dropping live bombs on the Northern Territory.

At the recent AUSMIN talks between the US and Australia it was agreed that the US Air Force will begin regular strategic bomber aircraft training in the Northern Territory early next year. The program will involve B-52 and B-1 bombers and the B-2 stealth aircraft.

The B52 and B-2 are potentially nuclear armed bombers. Labor supports the program. "It is quite reasonable we provide a significant resource we have in Australia, which is open space, to develop the technologies and the skills," Opposition defence spokesman Robert McClelland says. Under the program aircraft will fly from Guam for bombing operations at the Delamere Air Weapons Range situated about 130km south-west of Katherine in the Northern Territory.

Delamere is one of the possible sites of the Commonwealth radioactive waste dump. It is surrounded by pastoral properties and Aboriginal lands.

The Darwin RAAF base would also be available for the bombers to land and refuel if necessary. B2 bombers cannot be stored in the open and require specially constructed hangars, so infrastructure development may also be involved.

Spokesperson for the Brisbane Peace Convergence Kim Stewart says, "This is a clear show of force to our neighbours in the Pacific with whom the Howard Government has been reluctant to sign a non-aggression treaty. We think this is particularly directed at China, the biggest threat to the US dominance in our region. "This development poses an increased threat to the RAMSAR listed wetlands of Kakadu and Katherine Gorge. "US forces have a track record of inaccuracy in their bombing, including a near miss of a control tower at Delamere by a 500 pound laser guided bomb in August this year, and a fighter crashed on a nearby cattle station in September 2004."

Greens Senator Bob Brown said: "This reinforces the perception developed by Prime Minister Howard that we are the Bush administration's deputy sheriff in the Asia-Pacific region.

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Editor's Note

This is the final of our three-in-one issues of the Bulletin. We carry a number of reports showing that the Howard Government's militarisation is accelerating again and costing our community extra billions of dollars. These include the decision to allow US planes to bomb at Delamere, shoot to kill legislation, expansion of phased radar research, and sending troops to the Philippines.

The agreement which allows the US base at Pine Gap to continue operating runs for ten years from 16 November 1998. It allows that after seven years, "either government may at any time notify the other in writing that it desires to terminate the Agreement in which event the Agreement shall terminate three years after such notice has been given".

The AABCC initiated campaign between November 1 to 21 of letter to the Defence and Foreign Ministers and the Prime Minister, demanding that the Government give notice to terminate the agreement and close down Pine Gap.

Then In December a small group of courageous Christians travelled to Pine Gap to conduct a citizens inspection of the base. We have a report on their magnificent exploits in this issue.

Looking at other areas in the Asia-Pacific region, we have reports on a peace conference in Japan, recent developments in Guam and Diego Garcia, and a January 2006 demonstration against the military base at Waihopi in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

We send our greetings to all our readers. We hope that you enjoy whatever celebrations or festivals that you may celebrate at this time of year and we send our very best wishes for a New Year full of hope and struggle, justice and peace.

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Hardened and Networked Army

The same tired arguments about future “uncertainty” and unpredictability” in the regional and global environment have been used to justify spending an additional \$1.5 billion over the next ten years on expanding the army by 1,500 combat troops and restructuring it into new flexible “battle groups”.

The Australian Government already spends \$60 million a day on the military. More is spent on war than on education without any evidence that Australia will be attacked or has credible enemies. Prime Minister John Howard joined Defence Minister Robert Hill and Chief of the Defence Force Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston to launch the report, *Australia's National Security: Defence Update 2005*, at Victoria Barracks in Sydney on December 15.

The planned changes would see the new 750-strong “battle groups” provided with equipment including with artillery, tanks and helicopters, and networked with soldiers given access to sophisticated communications and intelligence links.

"With the Hardened and Networked Army plan, the Government will provide the Army with greater mobility, combat weight and network capabilities to be able to conduct a wide range of tasks," Senator Hill said.

The radical overhaul is intended to provide better protected soldiers with increased mobility, capable of being rapidly deployed to wars and organised in battle groups of infantry, armour, artillery, aviation and logistic units, according to need.

More units are to go to higher readiness levels to allow faster deployment.

This is a signal that the Australian military will be on a more aggressive footing and will be sent to take part in more Coalition aggression like Iraq and Afghanistan.

The report says Australia's counter-terrorism efforts will be reinforced with changes to the Defence Act which strengthen the ADF's powers to help civil authorities during periods of national emergency. (see story below).

Another key point is the possible purchase of heavy airlift capabilities. These may well be to allow the movement of the recently purchased Abrams tanks which are too heavy to be moved by existing ADF equipment. Government spin calls this an upgrade instead of what it really is a mistake!

The upgrade ensures the growth of an Australian military-industrial complex.

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Shoot-to-Kill Bill

Prior to the 2000 Olympics the military were given extraordinary new powers to suppress civil disturbances, including protests and industrial disputes. Once deployed, the military forces were given wide-ranging powers to seize premises, places, and means of transport, detain people, search premises and seize things, and the use of "reasonable and necessary force", including shoot-to-kill powers.

Now the Howard government is expanding those powers and removing safeguards against the abuse of the powers. The Defence Legislation Amendment (Aid to Civilian Authorities) Bill 2005 may be pushed through the parliament in February. It is important that people express their opposition to this new attack on civil rights now.

TAKE ACTION

Write to John Howard and Kim Beazley saying you oppose the bill
Call radio talkback and write letters to newspapers
Make a submission to the Senate Inquiry at www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/legcon_ctte/inquiries.htm

Specific changes in the legislation include:

- ▶ *Expanding the grounds for a call out of troops, to include threats to designated infrastructure (basically any form of property or infrastructure listed by the government) and off-shore areas, including aircraft and vessels*
- ▶ *Shoot-to-kill and use of force powers expanded to include protection of property from "damage or disruption"*
- ▶ *Immunity for soldiers from state criminal law and a defence to criminal prosecution of following orders*
- ▶ *Giving the Prime Minister the sole power to call out the troops when a "sudden and extraordinary emergency exists"*
- ▶ *Powers for ADF members to require people to answer questions or produce documents*
- ▶ *removal of the requirement that a notification of a call-out of troops be broadcast and published*
- ▶ *Removal of mandatory requirement for troops to wear name identification*
- ▶

Source: Damien Lawson, Office of Greens Senator Kerry Nettle

Peace activists penetrate Pine Gap

On the night of 8 December, four members of Christians against all Terrorism entered the prohibited area of the United States spy and warfighting base at Pine Gap in the Northern Territory in order to conduct a citizens' inspection of the establishment. This is a wonderful achievement!

Jim Dowling and Adele Goldie and a second team of Donna Mulhearn and Bryan Law walked for several hours from two different directions to enter the base.

Jim and Adele report that they were surprised that the

heavily guarded establishment did not detect their presence. They placed a large banner on the inner perimeter fence and then cut two fences. They were then able to enter the base proper and started to walk around before climbing on the roof of one of the buildings.

When Jim and Adele were eventually spotted, they were photographed and were then arrested very roughly.

The other team of Donna and Bryn were apprehended near the perimeter fence and again they were roughly treated.

All four were taken to the lockup in Alice Springs. Meanwhile the support group at the gates of Pine Gap were hassled by police and had their belongings confiscated. Sean O'Reilly was arrested at the gate doing what he thought was a 'non arrestable' action. In town later on in the day Jessica Morrison was arrested as an 'accessory'.

The four who walked into Pine Gap were charged with destroying or damaging Commonwealth property; trespassing on Commonwealth land; unlawfully entering a prohibited area; and unlawfully damaging property. Sean was charged with obstructing Commonwealth police. A trial date is expected in February.

Everyone in the Anti-Bases movement in Australia warmly supports the actions of the six and congratulates them on their great work.

We will keep you informed about their cases (some charges attract a seven year sentence) and what support they will need.

Christians Against All Terrorism (CAAT) is small group of people committed to moral and intellectual honesty on the issue of terrorism. Those who made the trip to Pine Gap were: Jim Dowling (50, from Dayboro), Bryan Law (51, from Cairns); Adele Goldie (29, from Brisbane); Donna Mulhearn (37, from Sydney); Sean O'Reilly (47, from Brisbane); and Jessica Morrison (29, from Melbourne).



Adele on the roof of one of the buildings inside the United States Pine Gap military facility.

Bush spies on American people

Pine Gap, the US military base near Alice Springs, may well be involved in spying on United States citizens.

It has been revealed that President Bush has been secretly authorising the National Security Agency (NSA) to spy on hundreds and possibly thousands of American citizens without court warrants, citing the "war on terror" as justification for these illegal phone taps.

The NSA is the US's largest intelligence agency with listening posts around the world including Pine Gap.

Patrick Leahy, a Democrat on the Senate's Judiciary Committee, commented: "The Bush administration seems to believe it is above the law. Our government must follow the laws and respect the constitution."

The spying revelations reveal again that the Bush administration is prepared to do anything to ensure United States domination of the world's resources weapons in the heavens, pre-emptive nuclear strikes, torture and more.

US to bomb Northern Territory

from front page

"The Greens see Australia as proudly independent, not as a venue for increasing US military practice and forward positioning as hostility to US bases grows elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region. There is plenty of open space in Texas if more bombing ranges are needed by President Bush."

The mayor of Katherine, Anne Shepherd, has serious concerns about the plan. "I know of the other accidents that have happened there when the Americans were training," she said.

"I know that they use the depleted uranium on the warheads for added penetration ... and I'd be quite concerned if they use those kind of weapons," Ms Shepherd also said.

Hardened and Networked Army

from page 2

The Government says it is "committed to policies that will build an internationally competitive defence industry to support, sustain and upgrade defence assets, signalling that a major beneficiary of this upgrade will be the armaments corporations. It will be Christmas for those people and greater hardship for ordinary Australians.

Yet again, Government decisions on military matters do nothing for defence and security. Instead they contribute to United States aggression and simultaneously make Australia poorer and less secure.

*Sources: Minister for Defence Media Release 201/2005
AABCC media release 15/12/05*

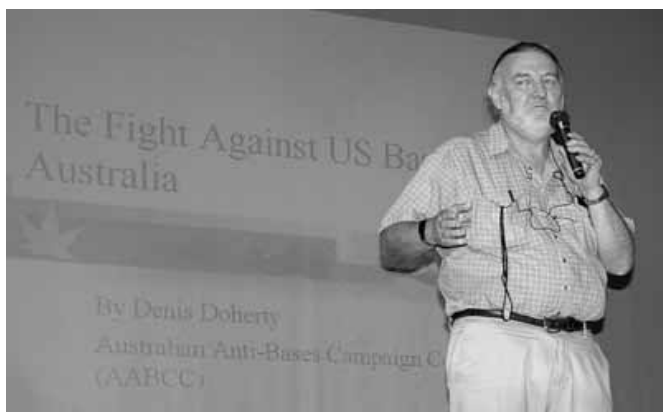
Visit to Japan by the Coordinator

From October 20 to 28, I was a guest of the Peace Forum, a section of a larger group called Gensuiken. During this time I was able to participate in and speak at a number of peace and anti-bases actions in Tokyo and Okinawa. The principal event was the International Anti-War and Anti-Base Meeting which had delegates South Korea, Guam, Philippines, Japan and Australia.



A view of the symposium held in Tokyo. Delegates from Japan, Guam, and South Korea visible

The meeting adopted a Declaration which included: We note with alarm that the US is advancing its 'realignment of forces' in the Asia-Pacific area by 'transforming and adjusting' its bases and military forces in preparation for aggression in our region. We cannot permit the US military to freely organise for the next wars by using bases in our countries. We cannot permit the Governments of our countries to participate in present and future murders of innocents as allies of the US.



Denis Doherty addressing the conference on "The Fight Against US Bases in Australia." The Audience was about 300.

The US calls the area between the Middle East and East Asia an 'arc of instability' and intends to use this subterfuge as an excuse for military intervention in that region.

We note with sorrow that the people of Afghanistan were made a target for US aggression by being blamed for 9/11. As a result many Afghanis became victims of US military slaughter.

We further note that the invasion of and occupation of Iraq disregarded international law and has resulted in the many deaths of civilians and soldiers over the last 2 years. There is no excuse for this outrage and there is no alternative but for the US to leave Iraq at once.

We participants of the Anti-War and Anti-Bases Symposium promise to:

- *Work for the denuclearisation of the Asia-Pacific Region.*
- *No US military operations in the Philippines. We will work for the abolition of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA).*
- *We will work for the removal of US bases from Australia and the abrogation of the ANZUS treaty.*
- *Remove the US bases from Guam. We oppose the home porting of the nuclear powered and armed aircraft carrier as well as the stationing of nuclear submarines and strategic bombers.*
- *No expansion of the Pyeong-Taek base in South Korea. Let's achieve the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula.*
- *No strengthening and realignment of US bases in Japan and an end to the Japan-US military alliance.*
- *We oppose the Iraq occupation and call on the United States and its allies to withdraw from Iraq immediately.*
- *We will continue to work for peace with the cooperation of our friends in the Asia-Pacific area and the rest of the world.*

Japan

Our hosts detailed their concerns about the 'realignment of US forces in the Pacific'. There is also a move by the US and right wing Japanese elements for Japan to abandon its pacifist constitution. The US plans incorporate the Japanese military into its fighting force.



Denis Doherty teaches the Japanese to yell "CLOSE PINE GAP US BASES OUT!" at an open air rally in Tokyo.

This is a major concern for the peace movement in the Japan. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi scored a landslide win in the last election and has the numbers in both houses of Parliament to get constitutional changes adopted.

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Of equal concern to the Japanese peace movement is the 'realignment of US forces' in Japan. In Okinawa there will be a small transfer of some marines to Guam and one contentious runway will be closed. Its replacement will be built some miles away in a sensitive coastal area essential for dugong. With over 40 per cent of Okinawa stolen for US bases, resistance by the people is angry and strong.

In Tokyo Bay the US will station a new nuclear powered aircraft carrier to replace the Kitty Hawk. The changes are very worrying the US with the compliance of the Japanese Government is building a formidable force to oppose China in our region.

Whales and dolphins threatened by naval sonar

High-intensity naval sonar poses a serious threat to whales, dolphins and porpoises that depend on sound to survive, says a report by the United Nations Environment Program.

The study lends the first official support to claims by environmental groups that military manoeuvres are responsible for the increasing incidence of mass whale beachings.

"A new and emerging threat to cetaceans is that of increased underwater sonars," said Mark Simmonds, of the Whale and Dolphin Society. "These low-frequency sounds travel vast distances, hundreds if not thousands of kilometres from the source."

Mr Simmonds added: "This is a hugely serious concern because these animals need sound to navigate, to find their food, to communicate and to mate."

A coalition of environmental groups sued the US Navy in October over its use of sonar, saying the ear-splitting sounds violated environmental protection laws. The lawsuit is aimed at vessels that use mid-frequency sonar to locate submarines and underwater objects.

Tests on the bodies of seven whales that died near Gran Canaria in 2002 found haemorrhages and inner-ear damage, which experts said was caused by high-intensity, low-frequency sonar used in the area.

The Australian Department of Defence has admitted two minehunters used short-range, high-frequency sonar to search for a 360-year-old Dutch wreck off Marion Bay, where 110 pilot whales died in two beachings in October. But the defence officials denied any responsibility for the strandings

A report by the International Whaling Commission's scientific committee said the link between sonar and whale deaths was "very convincing and appears overwhelming".

Source:

*Extracts from article by Daniel Howden 25/11/05
<http://news.independent.co.uk/environment/article329181.e>*



The lead banner in a rally to end the Iraq in Tokyo 21st Oct with delegates from all the region holding the banner. This rally was held at peak hour around 6 pm in the centre of Tokyo.

Proposal

2007 is the 20th anniversary of the Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition. This would be an excellent occasion on which to hold a similar conference in Australia. We would welcome the responses from other peace groups to this suggestion.

For a more detailed report on the meeting and Denis Doherty's visit, please email aabcc@zipworld.com.au

US to ship marines to Guam

Japan and the United States plan to begin moving U.S. Marines from Okinawa to Guam in 2008 and finish by 2012, Madeleine Bordallo, the Guam delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives, said in early November.

The two states intend to start building facilities in Guam for the marines next year.

The cost, which Japan is committed to sharing, is estimated at more than \$4 billion.

Bordallo said the construction will include housing, medical facilities, schools, utility infrastructure and bases in Guam as well as "world-class" training areas not only in Guam but also in the neighboring Northern Mariana Islands.

The deal includes moving 7,000 marines out of Okinawa -- 6,000 to Guam and 1,000 to elsewhere in Japan -- out of the 18,000 now stationed there.

The U.S. military has already begun looking at three different sites in Guam to set up headquarters and bases for the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force now based in Okinawa, Bordallo said.

Japan's Defense Agency is interested in building and using training facilities in Guam because the October 29 accord calls for enhancing joint operations with the U.S. military.

Source: The Japan Times, November 13, 2005

Australia to exercise with Kopassus again

Many peace activists are appalled that Australian forces are about to resume military exercises with Kopassus, the Indonesian Special Forces responsible for so much of the torture, rapes and murders throughout the decades-long Indonesian occupation of East Timor.

Claiming that the move will "further strengthen the region's ability to tackle terrorism", Defence Minister Robert Hill announced that Exercise Dawn Kookaburra will be conducted in Perth early next year and will be a combined counter-hijack and hostage recovery exercise.

The two-week exercise will involve Australia's Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) and Indonesia's Armed Forces (TNI) specialist counter-terrorism unit, Kopassus Unit 81.

The last similar training exercise took place between the two countries in 1997.

Source: Minister for Defence Media Release, 198/2005, 11 December 2005

Australian troops for Philippines

Defense Minister Robert Hill said on 6 November that he expected a counter-terrorism training agreement to be finalised with the Philippines by the end of 2005.

"Then it will need approval of the Philippine Senate, which might be quite challenging," Senator Hill told Channel Nine TV.

Australia will deploy troops, patrol boats and surveillance aircraft to the southern island of Mindanao. Australian special forces will provide their Filipino counterparts with long-range reconnaissance training. Military explosives experts are already providing assistance.

The two countries are negotiating a "status-of-forces" agreement that would allow for joint training exercises on Philippines soil and could, in the future, mean joint operations.

The Philippines constitution prohibits foreign troops in the country unless their presence is covered by a treaty. The US has the only other defence treaty with Manila and has used it to deploy up to 1,000 troops.

Filipino legislator Teodoro Casino said he was concerned that the accord could "open doors for direct military intervention" by Australia.

Mr Casino said his concerns stemmed from John Howard's comments earlier this year that he reserved the right to conduct pre-emptive strikes on terror strongholds in the region.

Minister Hill travelled to the Philippines to discuss the agreement in October, shortly after Australia's special forces commander Mike Hindmarsh made a low-key visit.

http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5744,16975898%255E2702,00.html

Radar research for Star Wars

Australia's involvement in the United States Star Wars project to control the earth from space took another step forward on December 16 when the Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) and the University of Adelaide signed an agreement to establish a Centre of Expertise in the university's School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering.

The centre will develop research in phased array and microwave radar systems.

The centre's research is expected to have significant long term benefits for "emerging Ballistic Missile Defence surveillance and tracking requirements," according to a Defence Minister's press release.



Contracts and corruption

The Howard Government gives jobs and contracts to its friends, even when it is clear they are corrupt and dishonest. This is happening in both the industrial relations and the military areas.

A \$145 million contract to build the army's new airborne spy technology was awarded on 12 December to Boeing and Israel Aircraft Industries. The unmanned aircraft will be the army's "eyes in the sky" and will play a "crucial intelligence and surveillance role", according to Defence Minister Robert Hill.

The chief executive of the state-owned Israel Aircraft Industries, Moshe Keret, has been detained by Israel's national fraud investigation unit over bribery allegations.

Source: "Defence contract sets guns blazing" by Cynthia Banham, Sydney Morning Herald, 13/12/05

NASA's plutonium could kill

On January 11, the window opens for a launch from Cape Canaveral of a rocket lofting a space probe a New Horizons mission to the planet Pluto with 24 pounds of plutonium fuel on board. Plutonium is considered the most deadly radioactive substance.

Because a fatal dose of plutonium is just a millionth of a gram, anyone breathing just the tiniest particle of plutonium dispersed in an accident could die.

The plutonium will be used in a Radioisotope Thermoelectric Generator (RTG) to convert the heat from the radioactive decay of the plutonium into on board electricity.

Please contact NASA to state your opposition to this launch. Points to raise include (please use your own words):

- 1) NASA acknowledges in their Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the New Horizons mission that there is a 1 in 300 chance of an accident resulting in release of the plutonium. In the event of such an accident the EIS states that the deadly plutonium could be carried by winds for a 60-mile radius throughout Central Florida.
- 2) NASA is moving toward a dramatic escalation in the numbers of nuclear launches in the coming years. Everything from nuclear powered bases on the moon to nuclear reactors on rockets to Mars.
- 3) The Pentagon has long stated that they will require nuclear reactors to provide power for space-based weapons. NASA says that each of its space missions will be dual use -- military and civilian.
- 4) At a time of major fiscal crisis in the U.S. why is NASA using public tax dollars to put the lives of the people on Earth at risk?

Why does NASA not invest in development of alternative space power technologies and move away from the use of deadly plutonium?

Write to:

Michael Griffin, NASA Administrator,
300 E. Street SW, Washington DC 20546
mgriffin@mail.hq.nasa.gov

Source: *Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space*,
<http://www.space4peace.org>

Waihopai spybase protest

JANUARY 20-22, 2006

The Waihopai electronic intelligence gathering base is located in the Waihopai Valley, near Blenheim. First announced in 1987, it is operated by New Zealand's Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) in the interests of the foreign powers grouped together in the super-secret UKUSA Agreement (which shares global electronic and signals intelligence among the intelligence agencies of the US, UK, Canada, Australia and NZ).

Its two satellite interception dishes (shielded from public view by giant domes) intercept a huge volume of telephone calls, telexes, faxes, e-mail and computer data communications. It spies on our Asia/Pacific neighbours, and forwards the material on to the major partners in the UKUSA Agreement, specifically the US National Security Agency (NSA).

Its targets are international communications involving New Zealanders, including the interception of international phone calls. The codename for this Echelon has become notorious worldwide as the vast scope of its spying has become public. New Zealand is an integral, albeit junior, part of a global spying network, a network that is ultimately accountable only to its own constituent agencies, not governments, and certainly not to citizens.

Waihopai does not operate in the national interests of New Zealand or our neighbours. Basically it is a foreign spybase on NZ soil and directly involves us in America's wars. Waihopai must be closed.

We invite people to join us for the weekend of anti-war protest at this spybase.

For more information and to register, please contact:

Murray Horton

Anti-Bases Campaign, Box 2258,
Christchurch, New Zealand
cafca@chch.planet.org.nz

U.S. drops nuclear 'bunker-buster' plans

In a significant victory for peace and security, the Bush administration in late October abandoned for the upcoming year its bid to research "bunker buster" nuclear weapons.

The Pentagon will instead focus on developing a conventional deep-earth penetrating bomb.

In a number of votes, Congress had rebuffed the administration on its plans to research a nuclear weapon that the Pentagon argues would be effective against targets buried deep in the earth in fortified bunkers.

Critics said researching such a weapon would undermine efforts to stem the spread of nuclear arms among other countries. They also said it would produce hugely destructive fallout.

Source: Reuters
<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N26353734.htm>

Indian Ocean Islanders take on the US

The island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean is located perfectly from a strategic point of view. But when the US military adopted it as a military base, it was inconveniently populated. The people were driven out -- but now they want their home back.

When Great Britain granted its colony Mauritius, which also included Chagos, independence in 1968, the islands remained under London's guardianship. The depopulation program began in 1971 and ended in 1973, when the last Chagossians were forcibly deported and Diego Garcia was turned over to the United States.

For the Americans, Diego Garcia is an indispensable launching pad for sorties over Afghanistan, Iraq and other destinations throughout half of Asia.

The 2,000 Chagossians were starved out, pets were gassed before the eyes of the islands' children, and finally, the islanders were loaded onto freighters and shipped off to the Seychelles and Mauritius.

The 60-square-kilometer Chagos Archipelago islands didn't remain empty for long. For \$14 million -- paid indirectly in the form of a discount on Polaris rockets purchased by Great Britain from the United States -- America leased the largest island in the archipelago in 1966. Diego Garcia soon became one of the US's most important military bases in the world.

The 2,000 Chagossians were starved out, pets were gassed before the eyes of the islands' children, and finally, the islanders were loaded onto freighters and shipped off to the Seychelles and Mauritius.

For the US, a base in the Indian Ocean helps keep Russia and China at bay. Films at Britain's Public Records Office in London offer extensive documentation of the exploratory trips taken by US military personnel. For the Americans, the Chagos Islands were the perfect location.

The Chagossians originally came from Mozambique, Madagascar, Senegal and southern India. The descendants of slaves, they worked on the coconut plantations and made a living trading in copra.

The plantation owners on the three largest islands, Diego Garcia, Peros Banhos and Salomon, had created a well-functioning infrastructure. The islands boasted churches, schools and even a small railway. Food, lodging and medical care were free for the plantation workers. The islanders raised ponies and donkeys, pigs and chickens, and they fished the lagoons surrounding the atolls.

In 1966 a senior diplomat, Sir Paul Gore-Booth, issued the following instructions: "We must surely be very tough about this. The object of the exercise is to get some rocks which will remain ours.... There will be no indigenous population except seagulls."

"We are a small people without blonde hair and without education. But we ask the world to respect us and let us return home."

Nowadays about 5,500 Chagossians and their offspring live in exile -- 4,500 in Port Louis, 650 in the Seychelles and 300 near London's Gatwick Airport. The Creole word the Chagossians themselves use to describe their melancholy condition is "chagrin" -- longing.

But in 1998 they decided to fight back, and filed a lawsuit against the British government. In 2000, the High Court declared the deportations illegal and ruled that the displaced Chagossians were within their rights in seeking to return to the islands.

Intelligence analysts say the island is to be used as a secret detention centres where the CIA interrogates and tortures terrorist suspects.

But the United States had absolutely no intention of giving up "7.20 S, 72.25 E," as the base is known in military circles. For the Americans, Diego Garcia is an indispensable launching pad for sorties over Afghanistan, Iraq and other destinations throughout half of Asia -- an ideal hub for a powerful fleet of B-52 and Stealth bombers.

The island has a harbor that can accommodate 30 warships. It training facilities and oil and gasoline storage tanks. From Diego Garcia, Washington monitors the region's tanker routes, as well as India and China. The island is home to about 4,000 troops, as well as civilian employees, mainly from Sri Lanka and the Philippines, but none from the Chagos Islands.

There may also be darker reasons. Intelligence analysts say Diego Garcia's geographic isolation is being exploited for the island to be used as a secret detention centres where the CIA interrogates and tortures terrorist suspects.

"We are a small people without blonde hair and without education," says Olivier Bancoult, president of the Chagos Refugees Group in Cassis. "But we ask the world to respect us and let us return home."

Source: "Der Spiegel", 8/12/05

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/08/international/europe/05spiegel.html>

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