

Territory left exposed to terrorists

Australia is leaving its front door — the Northern Territory — open to terrorists and saboteurs.

Possible targets, according to defence expert John Langtry, include the Jabiru and potential Challis oilfield installations in the Timor Sea, associated facilities on Troughton Island, Tindal RAAF base near Katherine, Melville and Bathurst Islands and the Jindalee over-the-horizon-radar sites.

Darwin, too, is vulnerable as a "hostage" city.

The claims made by Mr Langtry, executive officer of the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, highlight the deficiencies and weaknesses in northern defence.

Even the Katherine road bridge and access roads to the Kimberleys and East Arnhem region also need to be carefully considered in terms of local security.

Tindal RAAF base, for example, has been hailed by Federal Administrative Services Minister Stewart West as the "major tactical fighter base in Northern Australia".

Yet the security of the base — 15 km south-east of Katherine — is minimal.



TAMBLING
IN CANBERRA

Defence Minister Kim Beazley said in a letter recently that: "The terrorist/sabotage threat to Tindal, as assessed by ASIO and RAAF security authorities, is currently minimal."

"When FA-18 aircraft, a major defence asset, are deployed to Tindal, the size of the security force of RAAF police, police dog handlers and guards would be increased to a level sufficient for the effective protection of defence assets against assessed threats."

"Should the threat increase, the size and alert status of the security force would increase accordingly."

What the experts are concerned about, however, is the possibility of surprise attacks or "fait accompli" which attempt to cripple if not destroy strategic military and civil assets.

For this reason Australia needs to step up its peacetime security of valuable installations.

A disturbing scenario outlined by another defence expert,

Major General P.M. Jeffery, involves an aircraft-load of terrorists landing at Darwin airport during the wet season.

Quoted in a paper called *The Northern Territory in the Defence of Australia: A Potential Adversary's Reception*, General Jeffery warns:

"Darwin is potentially a high-risk hostage city and could be taken by surprise and held for protracted periods during the Wet, using terrorist techniques, with no more than 400 trained personnel."

"The political and military difficulties for an Australian Government faced with such a situation would be immense."

So how prepared are our defence forces?

The Navy, according to Mr Langtry, is manned to about 90 per cent, maintained at a high state of readiness and perhaps the best placed of all three services to deal with a security emergency.

By contrast the RAAF's lack of manpower means it cannot operate all its combat and surveillance aircraft around-the-clock without significantly expanding — and training — air crew and ground staff.

The Army, as the most manpower intensive of all services,

is also in danger of becoming over-extended and over-taxed during conflicts.

A battalion of soldiers, for example, would be needed to defend an isolated airfield such as Tindal against raiding parties.

One company would be required to deny immediate access to the airfield while the remainder would patrol up to 20 km of approaches by day and night.

The arguments are, thankfully, hypothetical.

But just last week the Chief of the Protective Services Coordination, Brigadier Mac MacKenzie-Orr, warned the people of Australia that terrorism was moving closer to home.

Terrorists, he said, were looking for "softer" targets.

"We can expect in Australia, instead of having a bomb every year or two, to have two or three bombs every year or two," he said.

"And if they follow the world pattern they will be more destructive, more dangerous."

The NT Disaster Act, unlike others in Australia, allows for the employment of the Territory's Emergency Service in counter-terrorist action and also provides a legal framework for

a suitable para-military force.

Similarly the Northern Territory Police Aides Scheme is further proof of the close working arrangement between the Australian Defence Force and Northern Territory Government agencies.

The complex problems of civil and military jurisdiction were investigated by Exercise Kangaroo '83 five years ago and found to hamper defence efforts in northern Australia.

Although the results of K83 received a great deal of publicity and study at the time we are still waiting to see the Australian Defence Force adopt a more appropriate structure.

Essentially more money and more research are needed to boost manpower in the ADF and develop special training programs suited to tropical and coastal conditions.

Next year Exercise Kangaroo '89 will again look at countering security threats in the north and safeguarding national assets over a vast area.

Hopefully the results of K89 will offer the Federal Government a range of viable short-term solutions which will work towards closing, if not locking, Australia's front door to terrorism.

Cheaper power pledge broken

Good morning.

I guess many regular readers of this column would have expected me to talk about uranium this morning.

I seem to have done little else all week ... but, in fact, I want to talk about electricity prices.

Everyone who has received a bill in the past fortnight or so will know why.

Many people have been contacting my office to express alarm at the cost of power so I decided to have a look at what the Hatton Government was doing in this area.

When questioned about the high cost of power the Hatton Government immediately shifts the blame on to Commonwealth funding cuts.

However, it may interest many of you to know that during the last Territory election campaign some promises were made which have not been kept.

The Country Liberal Party promised a re-elected Hatton Government "will implement a strategy involving the introduction of more flexible pricing arrangements so that business and domestic consumers will be able to achieve real and substantial savings on electricity".

I decided to check out the so-called flexible pricing arrangements which would give Territorians some respite from the highest domestic electricity prices in Australia.

Cheaper

According to Chief Minister Hatton's election pledge, the Government would introduce an off-peak tariff for an eight-hour period during the night to allow such appliances as air-conditioners and pool filters to operate at a "significantly cheaper rate".

Upon checking with the Power and Water Authority I was informed there was an off-peak tariff introduced but I had to use 16 000 kilowatts of power a year or 4000 kilowatts a quarter to qualify — and then I would receive a paltry one cent a kilowatt unit reduction in the cost of electricity use between 10 pm and 6 am.

I inquired how much my



COLLINS
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quarterly electricity bill would be in dollars and cents to reach the threshold at which I would become eligible for the one cent a kilowatt reduction.

I was told it would have to be more than \$462 a quarter — that's more than \$38 a week.

It came as no surprise when I was informed it was a rare middle-income domestic consumer who had sought, let alone qualified, for Mr Hatton's "real and substantial savings".

But that's not the end of it.

The other promise was a \$50 rebate on the purchase price of domestic air-conditioning units.

What Mr Hatton did not tell Territorians was that those air-conditioners had to be brand new.

If you have just spent \$200-\$300 to buy a reasonably good second-hand air-conditioner in the knowledge you might get a rebate — forget it.

The Power and Water Authority has informed me the rebate applies only to units which are new and they must be more than three quarters horsepower.

The cheapest brand new three-quarter horsepower air-conditioner I could find selling in Darwin was \$539.

The second cheapest was \$599 — and I am sure you will agree a \$50 rebate doesn't put much of a dent in that.

I think many of you would be surprised to learn charitable organisations do not attract any form of concession or subsidy.

I understand there are people in the Power and Water Authority who have asked the Government to consider a range of rating charges now in operation in southern States but these have fallen on deaf ears.

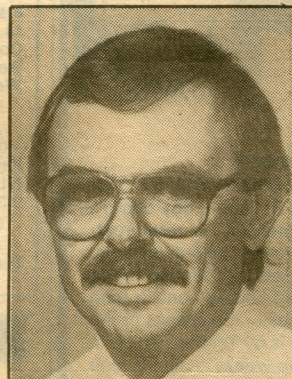
I would suggest the Government immediately review the situation and puts its election pledge into action.



•Mr Hatton



•Mr Heaslip



•Mr Hare



•Mr Kilgariff

Stand by for CLP dogfight

A lot has been said and written about how crucial and important today's CLP Central Council meeting at the South Alligator is.

But crucial and important to whom and to what?

Like so many CLP talkfests this is often the hardest thing to discover. Today's is no exception.

Sure, everyone knows that angry words will be exchanged, that a move to dislodge some of the "Young Turks", like the party secretary John Hare and a couple of his sidekicks, is likely to be made, that a battle royal will be fought for the party presidency.

But so what? If any changes that are wrought have no real long-term implications for the party's philosophy and direction, why should anyone worry?

Easier

This is the dilemma in attempting to analyse a political summit where it is mateship, not issues, that are dynamic.

It's so much easier with the Labor Party. Here the personality conflicts are structured by factions, each with a distinctive political philosophy and political agenda with clear priorities.

Not so the CLP, where everyone stands united behind the word "conservatism" as if it is some kind of all-embracing truth which sums up the meaning of life.

At this conference the issue at hand is simply what manner of man should hold aloft the party standard, not how it will be waved.

THE BIG PICTURE

Political Comment by DAVE NASON



Broadly speaking the CLP can be divided into two groups.

On the one hand there are the parochial "Old Guard" delegates like Grant Heaslip, Bernie Kilgariff, Noel Buntine and Alf Hooper, men used to having cow dung on their boots, who joined with others of the same breed 14 years ago to fashion a political party reflecting the spirit of the Outback.

On the other are the so-called "hucksters" — ambitious, modern, city slicker types like Hare, Shane Stone and Bob Brough who believe that in politics, the ends justify the means.

In the early days these two groups slept together comfortably because there was a small ruling clique which, by sheer force of personality and a good degree of political cunning, managed to set the CLP agenda and there were no questions asked.

This clique comprised former chief minister Paul Everingham, party secretary Barry Wyatt and former party president Graeme Lewis.

Everingham was the hot gospel, the voice of the party philosophy, Wyatt organised it and Lewis made sure there was money to keep it alive.

Throw in some clever symbolism like a Territory flag, railroads and statehood and the result was a happy family where everyone

was prepared to accept that father knew best.

But now Everingham is in Brisbane, the victim of a political ego that failed to touch base in Canberra.

Wyatt is in Colorado paying homage to his other passion — building gold mines.

And Lewis, while still held in respect, even awe, remains on the party's outer limits.

He will have observer status only at today's meeting.

Since their departure from the CLP's front line affairs the party has become a rabble, lurching from crisis to crisis, usually before a drooling media.

When the mudslinging is on in earnest today there probably will be many who will reflect on the days of old and wish Wyatt in particular was back to set things right.

Stooped

Things have become so bad that Kilgariff, former senator and the party's elder statesman, has even stooped to playing the numbers game in a bid to establish some sort of party stability.

In doing so he has probably killed off any chance of moving into Government House when Commodore Eric Johnston finishes his term as Administrator next year.

It seems a waste because whatever the result of today's bloodbath, the party is likely to remain in the same limbo land it is today.

Such is the price of personality politics.