

# Ascension island to be test area for Star Wars?

**THE BRITISH ISLAND of Ascension, in the South Atlantic, is one of only two target areas which can be used for long range US ballistic missile tests, according to official American military studies recently obtained by Pacific island campaigners. The island may eventually be developed for 'Star Wars' ballistic missile defence research.**

Because of local opposition to the second American missile target area, Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands — a US-administered 'trust territory' — the US bases on Ascension could become vitally important for some 'Star Wars' anti-missile tests. No-one lives on Ascension but British and American military and intelligence personnel.

The Ascension island target area has already been involved in developing MIRVed multiple nuclear warheads for Poseidon, Trident, and 'Advanced Trident' missiles, the documents indicate. Britain used Ascension as the main support base for the Falklands war, and still operates a 'sigint' electronic spy station as well as utilising the US-built airstrip for flights to and from Port Stanley.

Ballistic missiles being tested are

normally fired from the Eastern Test Range at Cape Canaveral, Florida, or the western equivalent, Vandenberg Air Force Base, in California. Missiles launched from California impact at or near Kwajalein.

## Pacific protests

But a growing campaign in the south Pacific islands demands that the US now give up the military use of Kwajalein; and the Strategic Systems Test Support Study report, prepared for the US Ballistic Missile Defence Systems Command in 1981, acknowledges that its main purpose was to consider 'a contingency island location if political stresses force evacuation of [Kwajalein Missile Range]'.

The study gives a comprehensive description of US installations on Ascension described by the US as a 'strategic system testing instrumentation asset'. The US has installed four computers, and six separate radar and optical tracking stations on Ascension, which has an area of about 7 square miles. Information from the tracking stations has been used to improve US warhead accuracy to less than one hundred feet.

**Duncan Campbell**