

Pine Gap base automatically involves Australia in US wars

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Leaked US National Security Agency (NSA) documents confirm that the US-Australian satellite surveillance base at Pine Gap in central Australia is pivotal to Washington's wars and war plans, particularly against China. The 38 radar dishes, many concealed underneath golfball-like domes, provide "real-time" targeting for the US military across Eurasia and Africa.

The facility, near Alice Springs, is integral to US-led military operations globally. Any war or military attack by Washington—whether against North Korea, China or Russia, or in the Middle East—automatically involves Australia. Behind the backs of the Australian population, successive Liberal-National and Labor governments, by defending the base, have committed the country to being on the frontline of a potential nuclear war.

Five "top secret" documents were obtained by the *Intercept* from NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden and published this week in partnership with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), although with various passages blacked out. The ABC said the documents were "submitted to the NSA for comment prior to publication."

Despite this vetting, the documents show that the role of the Pine Gap complex, code-named RAINFALL, has increasingly shifted since it was established in 1970, from spying on governments and people across the Asia-Pacific to providing critical data for military operations, including for targeting missile attacks and drone assassinations.

According to a Top Secret NSA Information Paper dated April 2013, the so-called Joint Defense Facility at Pine Gap "plays a significant role in supporting both intelligence activities and military operations." These include battlefield operations in the Middle East, where hundreds of civilians, including US citizens, have been targeted and killed by Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) drones directed by presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

Since Obama's "pivot to Asia" to combat China's rising influence, however, the focus has been, above all, on China. The NSA paper stated: "China is changing the strategic balance in the Pacific by expanding its interests in the Asia-

Pacific region and the Indian Ocean, modernizing its military, striking a more assertive strategic posture, and flaunting its power. Increased emphasis on China will not only help ensure the security of Australia, but also synergize with the US in its renewed emphasis on Asia and the Pacific."

In "specific divisions of effort," Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) officers are "solely responsible for reporting on multiple targets in the Pacific area, including Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore." These arrangements mirror the underlying "US-Australia alliance," with the Australian military and intelligence apparatus assigned parts of the Asia-Pacific where Australian imperialism has sought to hold sway, while operating under the global umbrella of US imperialism.

About 800 American and Australian operatives and other employees, including NSA, CIA and US military personnel, work at the base, located in a "prohibited zone." The presence of these US officials, and their control by the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) is "classified" information, not to be divulged to the American or Australian people.

The official NRO "cover story," as outlined in the documents, is to "support the national security of both the US and Australia. The [facility] contributes to verifying arms control and disarmament agreements and monitoring military developments."

Behind this "cover story," Pine Gap, together with the NSA's Menwith Hill base in England, has functioned as a command post for two missions that form part of Washington's ever-more aggressive military and surveillance activities directed at maintaining US hegemony worldwide.

The first, named M7600, involved at least two satellites and was said, in a 2005 document, to provide "continuous coverage of the majority of the Eurasian landmass and Africa." This initiative was later upgraded as part of Mission 8300, which involved "a four satellite constellation" and covered: "Former Soviet Union, China, South Asia, East

Asia, Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the Atlantic landmasses.”

A 2009 document listed “NATO operations” as part of Pine Gap’s mission, indicating that the base would be crucial to any US war against Russia, as well as China.

The satellites monitor communications, such as those by cellphones, radios and satellite uplinks. They gather “strategic and tactical military, scientific, political, and economic communications signals,” according to the documents. They also monitor weapons tests in targeted countries, sweep up data from foreign military systems and provide surveillance support to US forces.

One document explained: “Mission 7600 was designed originally as a FISINT [Foreign Instrumentation Signals Intelligence] but now is primarily used as a COMINT [Communications Intelligence] collection system against targets of high intelligence value. Currently, about 85 percent of Mission 7600 collection is against these COMINT targets.” Mission 8300 provided “SIGINT [Signals Intelligence] to US military combat operations,” as well as “crisis monitoring.”

One of the base’s key functions is to gather geolocational intelligence, which can be used to help pinpoint airstrikes. An August 2012 NSA “site profile” of Pine Gap said it has a special section, known as the “geopit,” equipped with “a number of tools available for performing geolocations.”

The “site profile” explained that the facility not just collects signals, but analyses them. “RAINFALL detects, collects, records, processes, analyses and reports on PROFORMA signals collected from tasked entities,” it stated. PROFORMA signals are the communications data of radar and weapons systems, such as surface-to-surface missiles, anti-aircraft artillery and fighter aircraft.

This evidence further supports the 2013 report, by Fairfax Media, that Pine Gap played a key role in US drone strikes. These attacks—often taking place outside war zones, in places such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan—have resulted in the deaths of thousands of people, including civilians, and therefore constitute war crimes.

Australians could be among these deaths. On August 17, the Murdoch media reported that Australian intelligence agencies supplied information for a US airstrike in Syria that was believed to have killed an alleged Australian Islamic State fighter, Khaled Sharrouf, and two sons, aged 12 and 11. Earlier this year, the Turnbull government stripped Sharrouf of his Australian citizenship, making him the first victim of new laws to arbitrarily revoke citizenships. Whether Sharrouf and his sons have been killed has not been confirmed, but it is quite possible that they were murdered via tracking performed at Pine Gap.

According to the 2013 document, “the mutually beneficial

partnership between the United States and Australia continues to grow.” The Australian ruling class has supported the US and its military in every major war since the early 1900s. This relationship was cemented in World War II and formalised in 1951 with the signing of the ANZUS Treaty, which Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull recently said he would invoke to commit the country to joining any US war against North Korea.

Australia is also a member of the Five Eyes surveillance network, alongside the US, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. The country’s electronic eavesdropping agency, the ASD, maintains extremely close ties with its American counterparts at the NSA. As Snowden’s previous revelations have proven, this includes conducting surveillance over the phone and on-line communications of tens of millions of people, with the collaboration of major corporations such as Microsoft, Apple, Google, YouTube and Facebook.

For nearly 50 years, one Australian government after another has shielded Pine Gap’s activities with official lies, and protected the base from protests. Labor governments, in particular, have been prominent in defending the Pine Gap. In 2009, the last Labor government made it a crime punishable by up to seven years’ imprisonment to enter the facility’s perimeters, fly over it, or acquire “a photograph, sketch, plan, model, article, note or other document of, or relating to” Pine Gap.

As part of Obama’s “pivot,” the Labor government also offered Darwin as the site for a US Marine base, northern Australian airfields for more extensive use by American long-range bombers, and ports for expanded visits by US warships and submarines. These facilities, together with Pine Gap, thoroughly integrate Australia into US war plans.



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