

Massive expansion of Pine Gap spy base integrates Australia into US nuclear war planning

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Over the past four years, the joint US-Australian Pine Gap spy base in the Northern Territory has undergone the largest expansion in its history. The development of the base appears to be aimed at integrating Australia into the American government's planning for nuclear war, confirming its status as a key target in the event of any conflict.

Those explosive revelations were contained in an article published by the *Saturday Paper* on the weekend. Its author, Peter Cronau, is a former producer of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's prestigious "Four Corners" program.

As a founder and editor of *Declassified Australia*, Cronau has previously written other significant exposures of Pine Gap and the broader military build-up. His latest article includes material from Professor Richard Tanter of the Nautilus Institute, who has sought to track the development of the base over decades.

According to Cronau, since 2020, 10 new satellite dishes or antennae have been constructed at Pine Gap. That includes three large satellite dishes in the western portion of the base, "four smaller dishes in the northern section, and three new dishes in the south."

Cronau explains, "The new satellite dishes are built inside radomes, large ball-shaped structures covered with a plastic and fibreglass composite material to protect from the desert dust and sun, and from observation. The total number of satellite radomes, smaller dishes and antennas at the base is now the highest ever, at 45, with 25 of the largest housed inside radomes and the other 20 uncovered."

The article includes satellite imagery of the base since 2020. That is a graphic and shocking display of the expansion, with the facility growing by up to a third. It enables Cronau to provide a detailed expansion timeline, a

multi-year program requiring vast resources and planning.

It has previously been documented that Pine Gap receives and processes information from two Orion geosynchronous signals intelligence satellites over the Indian Ocean. Those satellites cover a vast portion of the world, from Africa, to the Middle East and Europe. That makes Pine Gap more a central military planning headquarters than simply a spy base.

Of the latest expansion, Cronau writes: "Linked remotely from Buckley Space Force Base in Colorado, these new Pine Gap satellite antennas can collect an enormous amount of intelligence on missile and rocket launches, including location, size, type, likely warhead, range, speed, trajectory, tracking and target location. They operate as an integral part of the US nuclear war-fighting strategy, providing real battlefield intelligence."

He adds that "The expanded thermal imaging capability to detect and track ballistic missiles through all phases of flight will play a new critical role in US battlefield operations worldwide and in upgrading missile defence for the US and Japan."

As Cronau and Tanter both note, the new capabilities are clearly directed against China. Tanter states that the expansion means "a greater Australian involvement with US nuclear war fighting planning and operations," while Cronau comments: "The primary purpose of the new antennas is believed to be to hunt and target Chinese nuclear missile silos."

This is of vast significance, making Pine Gap one of the central US-led military facilities worldwide and, thus, a potential target.

Over the past 13 years, the US has conducted an expanding military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific, explicitly directed to preparing for a conflict with China, which is viewed as the chief threat to American military

dominance. Australia has been thoroughly integrated into this program under successive governments, beginning with the Labor administration of Prime Minister Julia Gillard in 2011.

In 2017, the US National Security Strategy declared that “great power competition” had supplanted “terrorism” as the primary threat to “national security.” It specifically identified Russia and China as the chief targets. Similar statements have been repeated each year since.

In Europe, the US and NATO succeeded in provoking a reckless Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. That conflict has evolved into an increasingly direct war between the US and its NATO allies on the one side and Russia on the other. The US has repeatedly crossed “red lines” that President Biden and others admitted would risk nuclear war, including with the announcement last month that American-supplied munitions could be used to strike targets inside Russian territory.

The continuous escalation of the Ukrainian war has been accompanied by an ever more open discussion of the possibility of nuclear weapons being used.

Those calculations are not unique to Europe. In the Indo-Pacific, top US commanders have repeatedly “predicted” that there will be a war with China this decade. They have established a network of aggressive alliances throughout the region targeting Beijing, while engaging in a vast militarisation. Taiwan is being primed to play an analogous role to Ukraine in provoking China into military action and providing the *casus belli* for US intervention and a broader war.

The US, while presenting its nuclear arsenal as a “deterrent,” has never ruled out the prospect of its use in a first strike. As Cronau notes, the expansion of Pine Gap and its involvement in planning for a nuclear conflict coincided with official US statements reaffirming the possibility of such a first strike.

In October 2022, the Pentagon released a National Defense Strategy, Nuclear Posture Review, and Missile Defense Review. In summarising the documents, the first point raised by the Pentagon was that they targeted the “growing multi-domain threat posed by the People’s Republic of China.” The third declared aim was “Deterring aggression, while being prepared to prevail in conflict when necessary—prioritizing the PRC challenge in the Indo-Pacific region, then the Russia challenge in Europe.”

The summary stated: “The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United

States or its Allies and partners.” That is an open-ended declaration that a nuclear first strike is on the table.

At the same time as the Pine Gap expansion was underway, it was revealed in October, 2022 that the US had been given authorisation to station its B-52 bombers in northern Australia. The B-52s are capable of carrying nuclear weapons, and the US never confirms or denies which of its assets is carrying a payload. That decision thus overturned Australia’s status as a nuclear-weapons free country. B-52s have also “visited” South Korea and other countries in the region.

As with the stationing of the B-52s in the north, there has been no discussion or announcement, let alone a popular mandate sought for the Pine Gap expansion. Every aspect of the military build-up takes the form of a conspiracy against the population, which is kept in the dark as its growing anti-war sentiment is egregiously violated.

The Pine Gap expansion began under the former Liberal-National Coalition government and has proceeded seamlessly since Labor was installed in the May 2022 federal election. It is a joint facility with the US, which means that both the major Australian parties are directly responsible.

That underscores the reality that whatever their tactical differences, Labor and the Coalition are effectively two factions of a single war policy. On the question of questions, the US drive to war, which threatens nuclear armageddon, there is not a slither of difference between them. That includes full support for the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, to which Australia has contributed more than a billion dollars, backing for the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and the transformation of Australia into a frontline state for conflict with China.

Cronau’s latest revelations have not been reported on by a single mainstream publication outside the *Saturday Paper*. An article he wrote in November, featuring the comments of a former Pine Gap employee who alleged the base was almost certainly involved in providing targeting information for Israeli strikes on Gaza, was also blacked out.



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