

Painting a Target on Australia's Backside - Pine Gap

Written by John Hallam

Wednesday, 22 July 2026 14:15 -

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PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

‘PAINTING A TARGET ON AUSTRALIA’S BACKSIDE;

PINE GAP A THREAT NOT AN ASSETT TO AUSTRALIA’S SECURITY’

– WHY THE PROTESTERS ARE RIGHT

‘NO COMMENT ON SECURITY MATTERS’ JUST DOESN’T CUT IT

After a number of years of inattention from media, the so – called ‘joint facilities’ (though there has been much discussion, and much doubt on just how ‘joint’ they really are) at Pine Gap have been propelled into the media spotlight by the largest protest at the site since 1987.

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At a time when the world is closer to nuclear war than it has ever been, ever, (including during the height of the Cold War), the timing of the protest is perfect.

For years if not decades the likelihood of nuclear war has not featured in public discourse. Hopefully this will help bring it back to public attention. Though PND had **no** role in its organising, it is the right protest at the right time and hopefully the precursor to more. The protest organisers are to be congratulated.

Pine Gap is likely the largest CIA/Intelligence facility outside the United States, and one of the most important or THE most important.

NAUTILUS notes that:

<https://nautilus.org/publications/books/australian-forces-abroad/defence-facilities/pine-gap/pine-gap-intro/>

“Pine Gap is perhaps the most important United States intelligence facility outside that country, playing a vital role in the collection of a very wide range of signals intelligence, providing early

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warning ballistic missile launches, targetting of nuclear weapons, providing battlefield intelligence data for United States armed forces operating in Afghanistan and elsewhere (including previously in Iraq), critically supporting United States and Japanese missile defence, supporting arms control verification, and contributing targetting data to United States drone attacks.”

and:

“Pine Gap today houses three distinct functions and operational systems. Its original and still principal purpose is to serve as the ground control station for geosynchronous signals intelligence (SIGINT) satellites developed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); it probably remains the CIA’s most important technical intelligence collection station in the world. There are now 38 satellite dishes/radomes at Pine Gap. Most are still concerned with the core function of controlling geosynchronous SIGINT satellites and processing and analysing the intercepted intelligence.”

Des Ball notes that Pine Gap :

‘...enhances war- fighting capabilities in several important ways, some of which are critical to the success of *any* war- fighting strategy.’

(quoted in

‘hiding-from-the-light-the-establishment-of-the-joint-australia-united-states-relay-ground-station-at-pine-gap’ (1).pdf)

Given Pine Gap’s clearly critical nuclear war-fighting role, it is to be expected that it will be/is a

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high priority nuclear target. Indeed, to anyone contemplating a nuclear first strike against the US, Pine Gap would have to be practically the number one target, as it is from there rather than directly from Cheyenne Mountain or STRATCOM, that immediate early warning from SBIRS satellites over Asia would emanate, and via which war-fighting instructions would be relayed. War-fighting orders to US nuclear-armed submarines would have to be relayed via NW Cape in W.A., another high priority nuclear target.

Pine Gap has been known and acknowledged to be a nuclear target for decades – at least since the 1980's.

The report Hiding from the Light notes that:

“In his major statement to parliament on the ‘joint facilities’ on 6 June 1984, Prime Minister Bob Hawke acknowledged that ‘the Government believes that hosting the facilities does bring with it some degree of added risk of nuclear attack’. The following month Foreign Minister Bill Hayden confirmed government awareness that ‘it is undeniable that in certain circumstances these facilities [Pine Gap, Nurrungar, and North West Cape] could be nuclear targets.’ [\[19\]](#) Two years later, on 16 March 1986, Hayden went further still, saying

‘They are ... nuclear targets in certain circumstances, I would think high priority ones in an all-out exchange.’ [\[20\]](#)

And just one month before the September 1997 cabinet decision, the former Labor Minister for Defence Kim Beazley told the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

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that in his time in government that had just ended

‘we accepted that the joint facilities were probably targets, but we accepted the risk of that for what we saw as the benefits of global stability.’ [\[21\]](#)

Clearly, such issues such as the role of Nurrungar and the Relay Ground Station in nuclear war-fighting and their status as candidate high priority nuclear targets should have been addressed in the ministerial submission’s discussion of ‘whether the functions of which the RGS will be a part can be expected to be closely coincident with Australian interests’.”

Commonsense would suggest no less!

Of COURSE the most critical nuclear alert and targeting facility outside the US would be a high priority nuclear target!

While the possibility of basing Pine Gap’s functions might now be possible with much expense and considerable lead-time to replicate elsewhere, for the immediate present and foreseeable future, Pine Gap remains in all likelihood the number one nuclear target other than Cheyenne Mountain and STRATCOM and the White House outside the US, and arguable the

first

target to be struck in a global nuclear exchange, before it actually went global. Anyone wanting to carry out a ‘splendid first strike’ on the US would first have to ‘take out’ Pine Gap, and then STRATCOM and Cheyenne Mountain.

Richard Tanter’s examination of the 1997 Howard Government Cabinet papers on the expansion of Pine Gap makes it clear from a variety of points of view that Pine Gap is a nuclear target of the very highest importance because of the role it plays in US nuclear war-fighting as well as launch detection.

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At the same time -and this holds true in spades under the current Trump administration - Pine Gap takes a critically important role in conflicts in which Australia has neither interest nor involvement and which we might even oppose – such as the current war between the US and Iran. This is something which is NOT in Australia's geopolitical interest, nor does it add to our national security.

Pine Gap, as well as Northwest Cape, are amongst the most important nuclear targets in any potential global nuclear exchange.

They literally hold Australia to ransom, and 'paint a target on our backside'.

The protesters are right.

'No comment' on matters of national security just doest cut it.

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Australia needs a wide-ranging debate on these matters of national security, maybe starting with the Senate or Joint Committee inquiry, in which information may not be withheld on national security grounds.

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