



Most of us understand that Australian forces fighting beside the United States in the Middle East and south-west Asia in four wars in 25 years is the price of our defence alliance with Washington. What they are less likely to know is that 64 years after the signing of the ANZUS Treaty, Australian defence policy is more deeply rooted in the American alliance than ever before.

While symbolically important, the visible parts of this insurance payment arrangement – Australian troops in the Middle East and American Marines in Darwin – have little to do with profound shifts in the military relation between Canberra and Washington. At the heart of these changes are the so-called joint facilities, the military and intelligence bases in Australia operated in conjunction with the US.

The critical Australian contribution to the alliance is a combination of hosting the bases and implementing joint plans for the Australian Defence Force to function as a niche auxiliary force in support of the US in the Middle East and east Asia. Under a pervasive doctrine of interoperability, substantial numbers of ADF personnel – from major-generals down – are embedded in US high-technology units from Qatar to Hawaii to Colorado, building careers based on strategic doctrines which assume Australian and US national interests always coincide.

These bases, of which Pine Gap is the most famous and controversial, have new roles as the leading edge of what is now the networked alliance between Australia and the US.

These include: a greatly increased role for the joint facilities in US global military operations, US nuclear and conventional global conventional military operations, drone

assassinations, missile defence, and planning for space warfare; technological and organisational integration of Australian military forces with those of the US, as a niche auxiliary force for global deployment; an unprecedented missile defence role for Pine Gap, the most controversial of the joint facilities, in the defence of Japan; and new capacities at a number of joint facilities transforming Australia's military relationship with China, as well as the US.

Decades of bipartisan support for the US alliance rest on a belief that, despite the known risk of nuclear attack on the major bases, hosting the facilities was the price to guarantee American support for Australian defence. The possible nuclear cost for Australia remains high: Pine Gap is still, as it was throughout the Cold War, a high-priority missile target in the event of major war between the US and China, with heightened risks for the residents in nearby Alice Springs.

Australian military planners value the edge that access to US intelligence data and analysis, and advanced military technology, gives us over any country in the region, including Indonesia and India. This is a privilege denied even close US allies such as Japan outside the charmed circle of the Five Eyes intelligence club (the US, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand), which was born out of their co-operation during World War II.

The Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap exemplifies this situation. True, the base has an Australian Assistant Secretary of Defence as deputy chief of facility, but in 2008, the last year for which data is available, Australia's contribution to Pine Gap's budget was just \$8 million – enough for the station's security guards and a bit left over.

Whatever the sign on the gate may say, if a joint facility is built by the US, paid for by the US, and can only function as part of an

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HOMIE BASE

Defence Australia Day is a good time to consider our defence relationship with the US, exemplified by joint military bases, writes Richard Tanter.



Bob Hawke told Australians US bases were essential to the process of arms control. Left, Hawke with Ronald Reagan in 1986. Above, Pine Gap in 1984.