Australia’s participation in the Pine Gap enterprise



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Desmond Ball, Bill Robinson and Richard Tanter

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Full report available here [1.7 MB].

Summary

Australian participation in the operation of Pine Gap is effectively complete, with access to all areas of the base except the US National Cryptographic Room. The senior Australian Defence officials who negotiated the original implementing agreement with the CIA sought and obtained access to all 'product' from the facility. After initial discriminatory restrictions on Australians employed in the Operations Room, by the end of the 1970s, Australians were employed in all of its sections. Compared with arrangements at Pine Gap's companion station in the United Kingdom, RAF Menwith Hill, Australian officials believe they have achieved a much more genuinely 'joint' facility, with command and employment arrangements exemplifying this. However, the fundamental realities are that not only does the vast bulk of tasking of satellites come from the United States and reflect its strategic priorities, but Australian participation in the base's greatly expanded range of operations brings with it a measure of responsibility for the consequences of those operations.

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Other papers in this series on Pine Gap are available at https://nautilus.org/briefing-books/australian-defence-facilities/pine-gap/the-pine-gap-project/.

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II. Special Report by Desmond Ball, Bill Robinson and Richard Tanter

Australia's participation in the Pine Gap enterprise

The full report is available here.

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II. Essay: Australia's participation in the Pine Gap enterprise

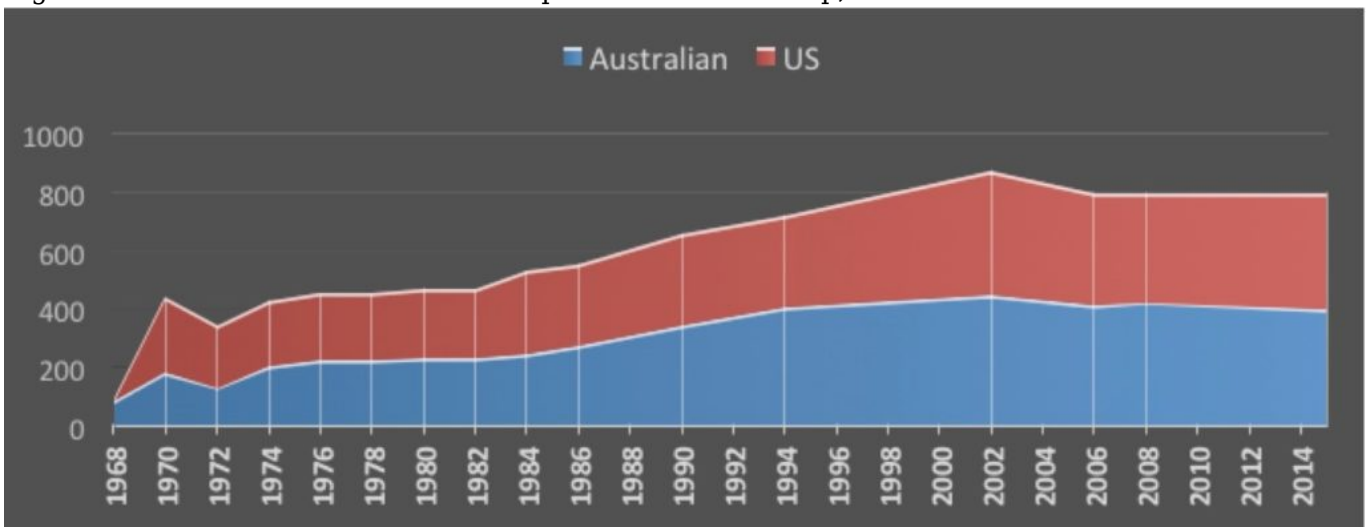
1. Introduction: the transformation of the Australian role

There can no longer be any question about the completeness of Australian access to or concurrence in the activities undertaken at Pine Gap. Australians are now completely enmeshed into the management structure at the station, including with respect to management of operations, as embodied in the positions of Deputy Chief of Facility, Deputy Chief of Operations and Chief of Intelligence Operations. Within the Operations Room itself, Australians serve as Mission Directors

and Team Leaders or Collection Operations Leads (COLs), while every team of interest has an Australian member.

This transformation reflects both the achievements of Australian governments in their efforts over decades to increase the Australian presence at the base on the one hand, and on the other the changing military and intelligence nature of the relationship between Australia and United States. Indeed, the pervasive Australian participation in the activities of Pine Gap now epitomises the networked, but fundamentally asymmetric character of the ANZUS alliance today. Australians may participate in all aspects of the base's operations, including tasking satellite operations, but the fundamental realities are that not only does the vast bulk of tasking of satellites come from the United States and reflect its strategic priorities, but Australian participation in the base's greatly expanded range of operations brings with it a measure of responsibility for the consequences of those operations.

Figure 1. Number of Australian and US personnel at Pine Gap, 1968-2015



About 420 Australians were stationed at the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap in June 2008, of whom about 100 were Australian Government personnel, comprising about 50 engaged in Operations and 50 AFP Protective Services officers, and about 320 were employees of Australian contractors.

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