

The Health Risks of Bases, and AUKUS Agreements and the Defense Industry

Richard Tanter

Senior Research Associate, Nautilus Institute

Webinar on US Bases-
protection or infection?

People's Health Movement, 20
May 2026

rtanter@nautilus.org

[Publications](#)

[Talks](#)



“First Multinational HIMARS Launch on Australian Soil Highlights Regional Unity and Modernization’, US Army, 15 July 2025

1. Acknowledgement of country – and the foreign policy outlook of a settler-colonial state in denial
2. Health consequences of imperial military violence - ‘let us count the ways’
3. Where do we start?
 1. Australia’s addiction to alliance wars (Korea, Vietnam, Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iraq/Syria (again), Yemen, and now – with minimal hesitation, Iran -
 2. Ongoing complicity in Israeli/US genocide in Gaza
 3. Longstanding and now expanding deep involvement in US nuclear planning
 - The old story – command, control, communications and intelligence (North West Cape + Pine Gap + ...)
 - The more recent story – direct involvement in US nuclear force projection – USAF nuclear-capable bombers (coming very soon to Tindal) and USN attack submarines (coming soon to Perth) (HMAS Stirling/Submarine Rotational Force-West)
 - The newest story: enabling space warfare (DARC: Deep-space Advanced Radar Capability, Exmouth)
 4. And then the story common to Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines – amongst others.

Not US penetration, but US saturation: US restructuring alliance relations around ‘interoperability’, ‘combined’ force structures [that is – combined US and ...], increased ‘defence’ spending, and deepened national dependence on and ‘lock-in’ with US defence corporations
4. The way out
 - National interests over US interests: Spain’s ‘no’ to US bases for illegal war
 - Resistance to particular US bases – in each of our countries
 - Rebuilding networks of resistance and mutual support across all of the Pacific, Southeast and East Asia
 - No involvement of nuclear weapons in any way or form – including the latest form in our region: Fly-in, Fly-out ‘Agile Combat Employment’ of weapons platforms, essential logistics, and fuel sources
 - Rethinking defence – in whose interest? What are the alternatives? Building connections, building peace.

FIGURE 1 AUSTRALIAN, US AND JOINT DEFENSE FACILITIES



Nuclear command, control and communications:

Harold E Holt Naval Communications Station,
Exmouth, North West Cape,
Western Australia

- Original and still important purpose to communicate with submerged US Polaris ballistic missile submarines
- uses very low frequency transmission from giant antenna on twelve towers 300 metres high, with more than a million watts of power
- Formal control now shared with Australian navy
- long assumed by Australian government to be a nuclear target



Nuclear command,
control, communications,
cyber and
intelligence:
Pine Gap,
Alice Springs:

one base,
three separate surveillance
facilities,
one nuclear target.



Original and most
important system: ground
station for space-based
signals intelligence
(SIGINT) collection of a
wide range of electronic
transmissions

Ground-based interception
of foreign communications
satellite transmissions

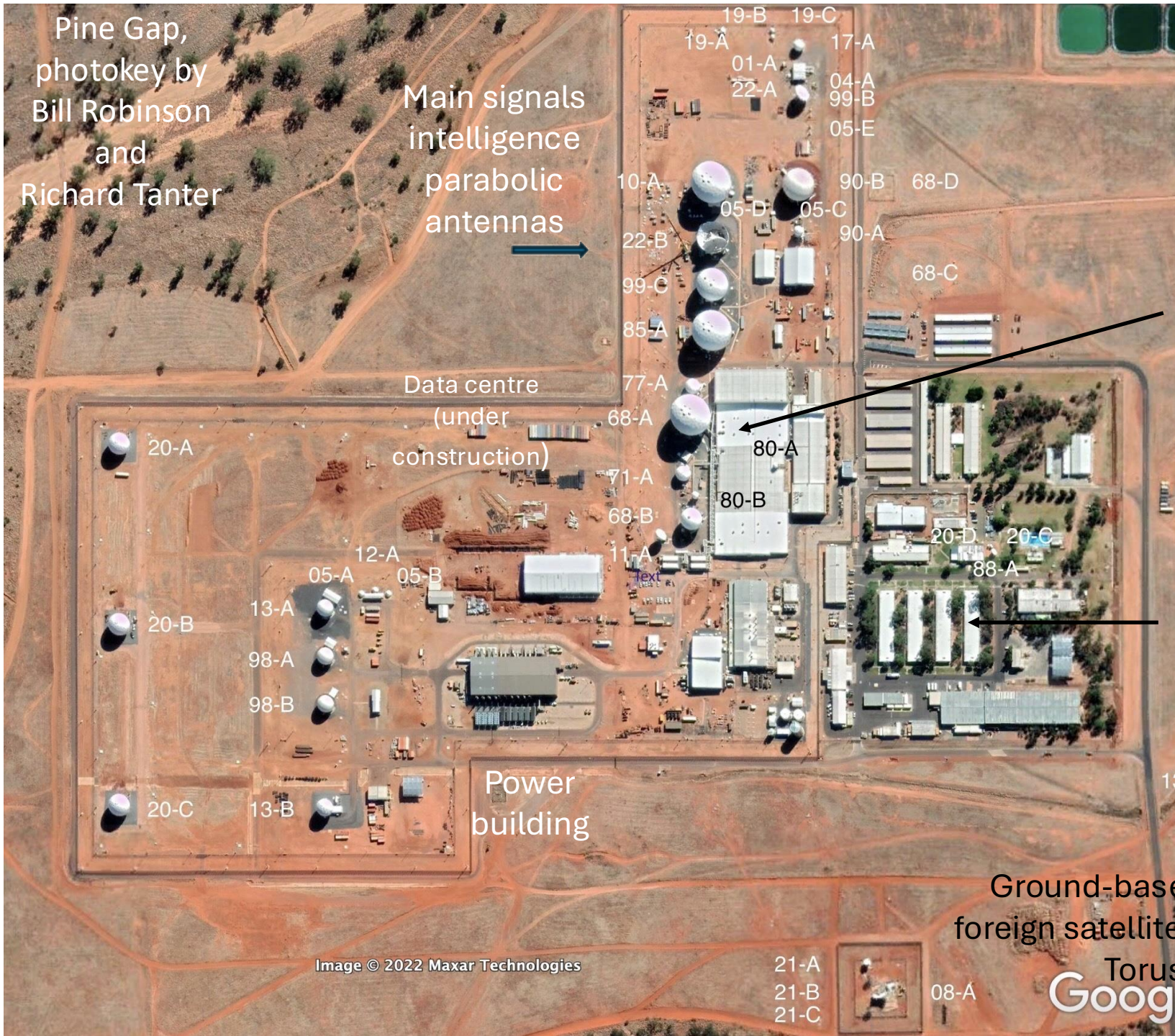
Relay Ground Station for
US early warning infrared
surveillance satellites

Photo courtesy of Felicity Ruby (2016)

Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap photokey 2022

Sources: Google Earth;
photokey by
Bill Robinson and Richard Tanter,
2025





Pine Gap,
photokey by
Bill Robinson
and
Richard Tanter

Main signals
intelligence
parabolic
antennas

Operations
buildings

Administration
precinct

Relay Ground
Station for
Overhead
Persistent
InfraRed
satellites

Data centre
(under
construction)

Power
building

Ground-based interception of
foreign satellite communications –
Torus antenna

Source:
Robinson and
Tanter, Pine
Gap table of
antennas,
updated 2025

Image © 2022 Maxar Technologies

Goog

Nuclear force projection future: nuclear-capable US Navy Virginia-class attack submarines in Perth by 2032

- now, regular month-long maintenance visits with currently conventionally-armed Virginia-class submarines
- **AUKUS Phase 1 from 2027 four US Navy Virginia-class submarines home-ported** at Stirling in Submarine Rotational Force – West
- **AUKUS Phase 2 – maybe Australia buys Virginia-class submarines of its own**, or more US Navy submarines homeport at Stirling
- **AUKUS Phase 3 – never-never land of UK -yet to be designed AUKUS-class submarines** to be delivered around 2045-2050
- Trump administration: great pressure to produce a new submarine-launched cruise missile with a new 5-150 kiloton nuclear warhead
- Although not yet in production, US SLCM-N program is reportedly on schedule to be operationally deployed on Virginia-class attack submarines
- By about 2032, the Virginia-class submarines defacto homeported at HMAS Stirling near Perth under the AUKUS arrangements are likely to be nuclear-armed.

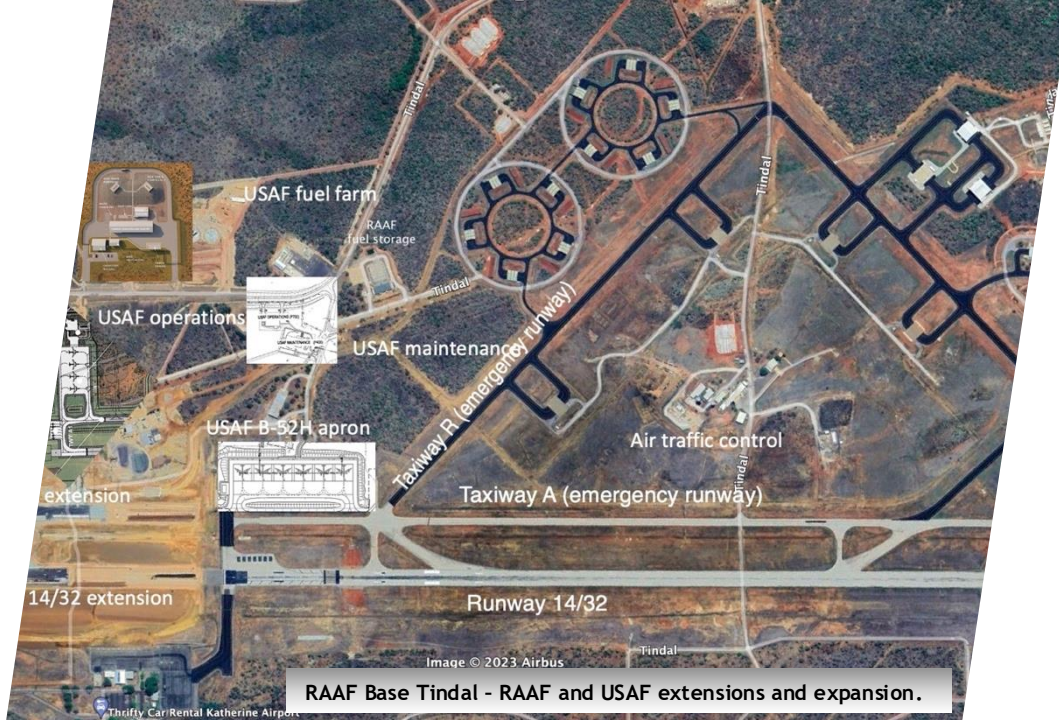


Australia's new nuclear posture: B-52s at RAAF Base Tindal

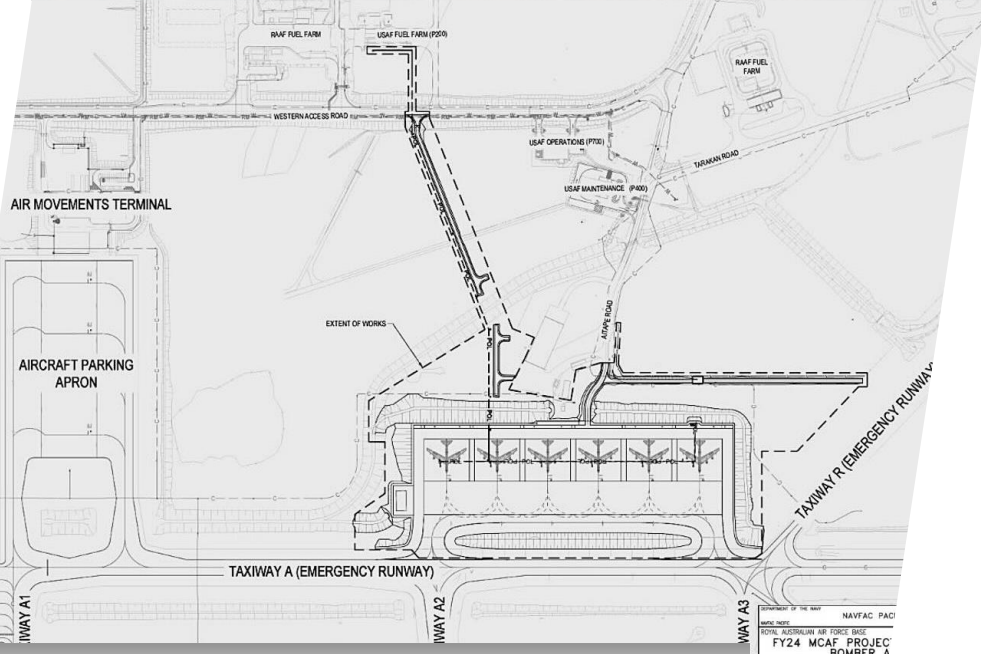
The US-funded expansion of RAAF Base Tindal in the Northern Territory includes the construction of dedicated USAF infrastructure, including:

- ▶ squadron operations facility
- ▶ strategic fuel reserve
- ▶ maintenance facility
- ▶ munitions stockpiling
- ▶ 500 metre-long apron to support up to six B-52H aircraft, and/or C-17 transport aircraft

Altogether, by hosting forward-deployed B-52 bombers and support infrastructure for carrying out real-world operations, and training in interoperability exercises to provide extensive operational mission support, the RAAF will, for the first time in history, be in a position to support potential nuclear combat missions from Australian soil.



RAAF Base Tindal - RAAF and USAF extensions and expansion.



Site plan, USAF dedicated B-52H bomber, KC-30A tanker transport, and C-17A Globemaster III transport facilities construction, RAAF Base Tindal.

Bulk Fuel Facility, East Arm, Darwin,
(top centre right)
(Google Earth, 8 August 2022)



U.S. Bulk Fuel Facility, East Arm,
Darwin,
U.S. Defense Logistics Agency /
Crowley Solutions

Storage capacity =
80 million gallons / 303 million litres



May 2023, courtesy of Justin Tuddy