

Pine Gap intelligence base makes Australia complicit in Israel's atrocities

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is once again earning his reputation as “Each-Way Albo” with his vacillating response to Israel’s atrocities against the Palestinian people in Gaza. He has bemoaned the mass death of civilians but refused, when pressed, to support Foreign Minister Penny Wong’s public demand that Israel comply with international law by ceasing its indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and deliberate targeting of hospitals. The fact though is that far from Albanese having merely made no effort to stop Israel from committing war crimes in Gaza, he and his government have actually been complicit in them from the start, by allowing the United States to use the so-called “joint” signals intelligence base at Pine Gap, in the central Australian desert near Alice Springs, to collect and analyse battlefield intelligence on behalf of the Israeli military.



The Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap, in the Northern Territory, is used by the United States to collect intelligence and guide military strikes, including the Israeli strikes that are currently killing thousands of civilians in Gaza. Photo: AFP

This is, of course, nothing new. It has long been well known, and has been proven irrefutably by the disclosures of former US intelligence contractor Edward Snowden and other whistleblowers since 2013, that both Labor and Liberal governments have for decades stood idly by as the Americans used Pine Gap’s awesome intelligence capabilities to support coups, dictators and terrorists, wage illegal regime-change wars, and commit sundry other bastardry across Southwest Asia (the “Middle East”), North Africa and elsewhere—not least the Obama Administration’s drone-bombing assassination campaign, with its 90 per cent civilian death rate.¹ Through its key role in targeting US nuclear weapons at China and Russia, Pine Gap also makes Australia a priority target in any nuclear exchange. For all of those reasons, the Australian Citizens Party has long called for Pine Gap to be shut down and for the expulsion of all US (and any other foreign) military and intelligence personnel from Australia’s sovereign territory. The good news in the meantime is that Pine Gap’s unique and, at least in the near term, irreplaceable role give Australia leverage to pressure the USA to bring Israel to heel and *impose* a ceasefire, had Albanese the courage and moral fibre to use it.

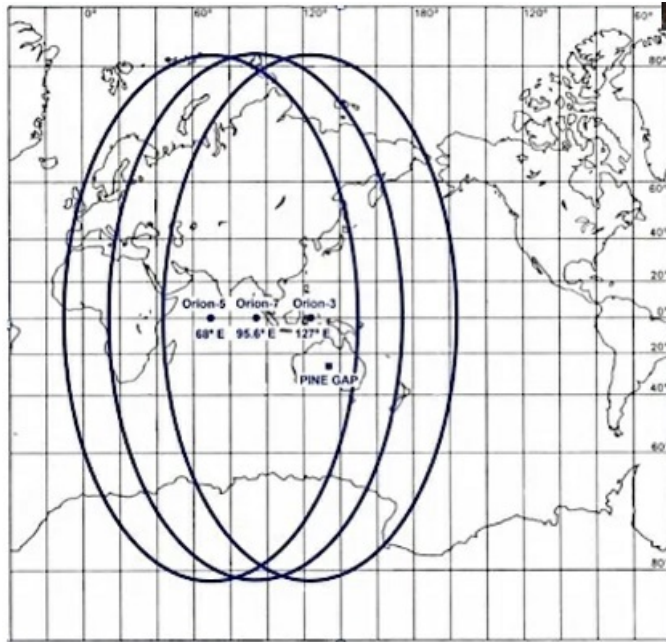
Labor’s left wing, whence Albanese hails, has historically supported (at least in word) the right of Palestinians to their own state, and to equal rights and dignity in accordance with international law and the United Nations Charter. And none more so, it seems, than Albanese’s own electors. “As the federal government stops short of calling for a ceasefire in the conflict that has reportedly claimed more than 11,000 civilian lives in Gaza”, the *Guardian* reported 14 November, “Albanese’s local branch of Marrickville has urged his administration to ‘utilise all avenues of diplomacy to stop the bombing’.” (Emphasis added.) A motion passed by the branch the previous night urged Albanese to “call for an immediate ceasefire”, the *Guardian* reported. “It also called on the government to ‘acknowledge the response from Israel has now moved from that of defending itself to acts of retribution on an innocent Palestinian population which are excessive and in breach of international law’, as well as acknowledging that ‘the United Nations has declared Israel’s siege of Gaza as collective punishment, prohibited under international law’.” A member of the branch told the *Guardian* that the motion had been passed unanimously by the quorum of 12 members present; and that whilst they had “a lot of respect” for Albanese, “the unanimous support for the motion in the PM’s most loyal branch speaks to the deeply felt anguish of rank and file members, at the enormous and unacceptable loss of Palestinian lives. We want to see Palestine free in our time.” Several other branches have reportedly passed similar motions, with the *Guardian* reporting separately on 11 November that one Labor politician from a “heartland ALP seat” described the community’s reaction to the federal government’s response (or lack thereof) to Israel’s bombardment of Gaza as one of “red-hot anger”. Some rank-and-file members are even resigning in disgust.

Pine Gap targets Palestine

True to form, Albanese has sought to excuse his inaction by telling a 14 November party room meeting that, as quoted by the *Guardian*, “the impact Australia can have is limited” because it is not a “direct participant”. Presumably he meant in whatever diplomatic efforts might be going on behind closed doors to cool things down. Imagine how “redhot” the anger among Labor’s support base might

become were they to realise that through Pine Gap, Australia is in fact already a party to the so-called “conflict”, on Israel’s side.

The Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap (as it is formally called) has for decades been indispensable to the geopolitical and neo-colonial projects of the USA and its allies and appendages, Israel most definitely among them. “[The] Pine Gap facility is monitoring the Gaza Strip and surrounding areas with all its resources, and gathering intelligence assessed to be useful to Israel”, US National Security Agency (NSA) veteran and former Pine Gap team leader David Rosenberg told journalist Peter Cronau of *Declassified Australia*, in an [exclusive interview](#) published 3 November. Established in 1966 ostensibly as a space research station, Pine Gap began operations in 1970 as a ground-control and processing station for the US SIGINT (signals intelligence) satellites that monitored missile tests, military communications, radar emissions and so on—and was thus a target for Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles then, and Russian (and Chinese) ICBMs today. In the decades since, and especially since the end of the Cold War in 1991, it has also become the keystone of the Five Eyes’ (USA, UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand) global surveillance apparatus.



Pine Gap—controlled Orion SIGINT surveillance satellites, showing collection coverage over the Middle East. (Image: Desmond Ball, Bill Robinson and Richard Tanner, “The SIGINT Satellites of Pine Gap: Conception, Development and in Orbit”, NAPSNet Special Reports.)

The orbit of the Pine Gap-controlled Orion SIGINT surveillance satellites, showing collection coverage over the Middle East. Photo: Screenshot

Relevant to the subject at hand, Cronau explains, is that “Two large Orion geosynchronous signals intelligence satellites, belonging to the US and operated from Pine Gap, are located 36,000 km above the equator over the Indian Ocean. From there, they look down on the Middle East, Europe and Africa, and gather huge amounts of intelligence data to beam back to the Pine Gap base. After collecting and analysing the communications and intelligence data for the [NSA], Pine Gap is providing it to the Israel Defence Forces [IDF], as it steps up its brutal assault on Palestinians in the Gaza enclave.” Rosenberg, Cronau reports, “says the personnel at Pine Gap are tasked to collect signals such as ‘command and control’ centres in Gaza, with [Palestinian paramilitary organisation] Hamas[’s] headquarters often located near hospitals, schools, and other civilian structures. ‘The aim would be to minimise casualties to non-combatants in achieving their objective of destroying Hamas’.” As Cronau notes, however, the IDF “has bombed hundreds of targets inside Gaza, killing far more than Hamas militants”. As of 14 November, Turkey’s Anadolu news agency reports an estimated 11,320 dead, including 4,650 children and 3,145 women, with another 29,200 people injured and 3,600 unaccounted for. It also seems somewhat disingenuous of Rosenberg to claim that Hamas has its headquarters near “civilian structures” since, as UN Special Rapporteur for Palestine Francesca Albanese (no relation to the PM) pointed out 14 November at Australian National Press Club, with 2.1 million people in an area less than half the size of Canberra, Gaza is “the most crowded place on Earth”, where everything is near everything else.

Shut it down

The Citizens Party has warned for over 14 years that while ever the USA were allowed to continue to operate Pine Gap and associated facilities as it saw fit, Australia would both remain a priority target for Russia and China in the event of a nuclear exchange (which, contrary to establishment propaganda, only our “allies” the USA and UK have shown any inclination towards initiating);² and would continue to be complicit in crimes against humanity committed by the Anglo-American empire and its various other satrapies and vassal states.

This position was echoed soon thereafter by the late former PM Malcolm Fraser. After former Pine Gap personnel admitted to Fairfax Media in July 2013 that the facility targeted drone strikes by “geolocating” supposed terrorists’ mobile phone signals, Fraser warned that the Australian intelligence officers involved could one day be charged with war crimes. In his book *Dangerous Allies*, published early the next year, he wrote that Pine Gap had strayed so far from its original purpose as to be more trouble than it was worth, and should be shut down. His warnings were bolstered by later revelations such as *The Intercept’s* “Drone Papers” series of articles in October 2015, which revealed that an estimated 90 per cent of drone victims in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen were not designated targets, but had been posthumously re-classified as terrorists to cover up the civilian death toll.

Ironically, the only Australian leader ever to threaten publicly to shut down Pine Gap was Labor PM Gough Whitlam, in whose infamous dismissal from office by Governor-General Sir John Kerr in November 1975 Fraser (to his later regret) was complicit. Besides the threat his government presented to the Anglo-American establishment with its “buy back the farm” campaign to wrest Australia’s vast mineral and energy wealth back from foreign corporate control, Whitlam shocked and outraged the Americans with his declaration in Parliament in April 1974 that “there should not be foreign military bases, stations, installations in Australia. We honour agreements covering existing stations. We do not favour extensions or prolongation of any of those existing ones.” The USA’s lease on Pine Gap had been due to expire in December 1975, and Whitlam planned not to renew it.

Albanese, by contrast, has gleefully signed over permanent control of vast swathes of the Australian landmass to the US war machine, for the purposes of making war on China, and calls it “sovereignty”. It is to be hoped that in their justified outrage over his position on Israel and Gaza, the Labor rank and file either force Albanese to emulate his supposed hero Whitlam, or shunt him and as many others as necessary aside in favour of a leader who will.

Footnotes

[1.](#) “Snowden docs confirm Pine Gap’s role in drone war crimes”, *AAS*, 30 Aug. 2017.

[2.](#) G. Peut, A. Isherwood, A. Douglas, “Australia prepares for world war: Tragedy, or just plain farce?”, *New Citizen*, June-July 2012, p.9.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 15 November 2023