

[Home](#) » [National](#) » Article

Pine Gap's wider missile role



The joint Australian-US defence facility at Pine Gap, in central Australia.

Sarah Smiles and Brendan Nicholson
September 21, 2007

THE Pine Gap spy base in central Australia could become part of the Bush Administration's controversial plan for a global anti-ballistic missile system.

In a speech to Parliament marking the 40th anniversary of the joint Australian-US facility, Defence Minister Brendan Nelson said it contributed to global security, helped inhibit the spread of ballistic missiles and provided information on ballistic missile launches of interest to Australia. And, information from Pine Gap on missile launches could be used in any US missile defence system.

"As such, this would be a continuation of a ballistic missile early warning partnership that we have shared with the United States for over 30 years," Dr Nelson said.

Australia's increasing involvement in the planned US system has raised concerns from those who fear that what is intended as a defensive arrangement could provoke other countries, notably China and Russia, into significantly increasing the number of missiles in their arsenals to ensure that if enough are fired, some will get through.

Ron Huisken, a senior fellow from the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre said Dr Nelson's statement seemed designed to reassure the Americans of continuing co-operation on missile defence and raised the possibility of collaboration with Japan, which was closely involved with the US program.

"For the Government to proactively go out and acknowledge that information that transits Australia would be directly linked to any ballistic missile defence system that the US deploys, and by implication the Japanese, is in itself significant," he said.

Dr Huisken said Australia's collaboration on missile defence with Japan and the US could agitate the Chinese and Russians. Moscow has already objected to a Europe-based US ballistic missile defence shield.

That could lead to proliferation as countries sought to develop weapons that could penetrate the shield. "Both the Russians and the Chinese have been acutely sensitive about ballistic missile defence development," he said. "The Chinese would begin to worry whether they had a strategic nuclear deterrence against the United States."

The missile defence system, designed to protect America and its allies from missiles launched by "rogue states", will integrate defensive missile systems on land and at sea with spy satellites and the navy's new-generation air warfare destroyers.

Defence scientists from Australia, the US and Japan are already including in the system Australia's Jindalee radar network, which is capable of "seeing" far over the horizon. Other systems operate on line-of-sight and have a much shorter range. The Australian-designed Jindalee operates across the Top End, and US scientists who have examined it told *The Age* they were impressed by its range and capability. They confirmed it could detect a missile launch in Asia.

Dr Nelson said Pine Gap had two main roles: collecting intelligence and providing early warning on ballistic missiles. It provided information on terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and military developments.

When you see news happening: SMS/MMS: 0406 THE AGE (0406 843 243), or [email us](#). [More](#)

[Subscribe to The Age for your chance to win a trip to Italy and southern France with Peregrine!](#)

Copyright © 2007. The Age Company Ltd.