



# US forces in Australia: 2012

In November 2011, Barak Obama and Julia Gillard announced a new level of military cooperation between the United States and Australia, including:

- The deployment of a 2500-strong US Marine Air– Ground Task Force (MAGTF) to Darwin.
- More use of Australian air bases by US aircraft: more visits, more frequently, by a wider range of aircraft.
- Both governments stress that US military will “rotate” through Australian bases, rather than set up US bases.

## The new joint facilities in context

Australia–US military and intelligence cooperation has been gradually growing over the last decade (see box).

New operational capacities at Pine Gap outside Alice Springs placed this Joint Defence Facility on the front line in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. With a new US space surveillance radar planned for North West Cape, Australia plays a key role in US missile defence and space operations.

Following the Obama visit, and Australian government confirmed plans for an increase in the number, frequency and type of US naval visits to HMAS Stirling at Perth, the only major naval facility on Australia’s west coast. The government also confirmed it was discussing possible use of the Cocos Island airfield in the Indian Ocean by the US surveillance drones such as the Global Hawk.

## US forces in Darwin

The first 150 Marines arrived in Darwin in March 2012. The full MAGTF complement of 2500 is expected to be in place by 2016. There will be 2500 Marines passing through on ‘constant rotation’, probably on six month tours. When complete the Task Force will consist of command, ground combat and air combat elements available for rapid deployment for expeditionary combat. The Robertson

Barracks in Darwin will effectively be a permanent joint base, and the organisational heart of the Task Force. The port of Darwin is deep enough even for the largest US aircraft carriers. The NT government is eager for more defence spending, which already makes up 12.6 per cent of the Territory’s gross state product

## US forces: Northern Territory training grounds

The three main training locations for the MAGTF will be the **Bradshaw Field Training Area**, the **Mount Bunday Training Area** near Humpty Doo, and the **Delamere Air Weapons Range**, 220 km south-west of Katherine. Together they make up the ADF’s North Australian Range Complex (NARC). With Shoalwater Bay in Queensland, they are key locations for the multinational Talisman Sabre exercises. Bradshaw and Delamere were named as part of a Joint Australia–US Combat Training Centre (JCTC) in 2008.

Bradshaw is a former cattle station (just smaller than Cyprus). During Talisman Sabre in 2007, US and Australian personnel constructed an airfield there, with a 1250 m runway which can take the largest US and Australian cargo aircraft. The NT government anticipates 7000 troops will visit Bradshaw every dry season.

Delamere Air Weapons Range, over 3000 square kms, is the RAAF’s principal bombing practice and testing range. US fighter and bomber aircraft based in Guam and Japan have been using Delamere in exercises for many years.

### A decade of growth in US forces

Announcements following the annual Australia–US meetings of defence and foreign ministers (AUSMIN) track how the US has been granted increased access to Australian facilities across a decade:

2004 and 2005: the Bradshaw Field Training Area, Delamere Air Weapons Range, Shoalwater Bay, the Joint Combined Training Centre, and Yampi Sound

2007: new joint facilities at the Kojarena Satellite Communications Station

2008 and 2010: new joint facilities at North West Cape

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These bases have sophisticated electronic networking which link them to other ranges and with US and Australian command and training centres. The JCTC is planned to link into the US Pacific Command's Pacific Warfighting Center and the US Joint Force Command's Joint National Training Capability.

## Northwest Cape: Subs and satellites

The **Naval Communication Station Harold E. Holt** at North West Cape is currently a VLF (very low frequency) communications base. It was originally a US-only facility for communications with submerged US nuclear missile submarines, then a joint station. After the Cold War it was returned to Australia who used it for submarine communications.

Following a new treaty in 2008 it again has a primarily US war-fighting role, with two functions.

First, Northwest Cape will support operations by US attack submarines, which could be nuclear-armed.

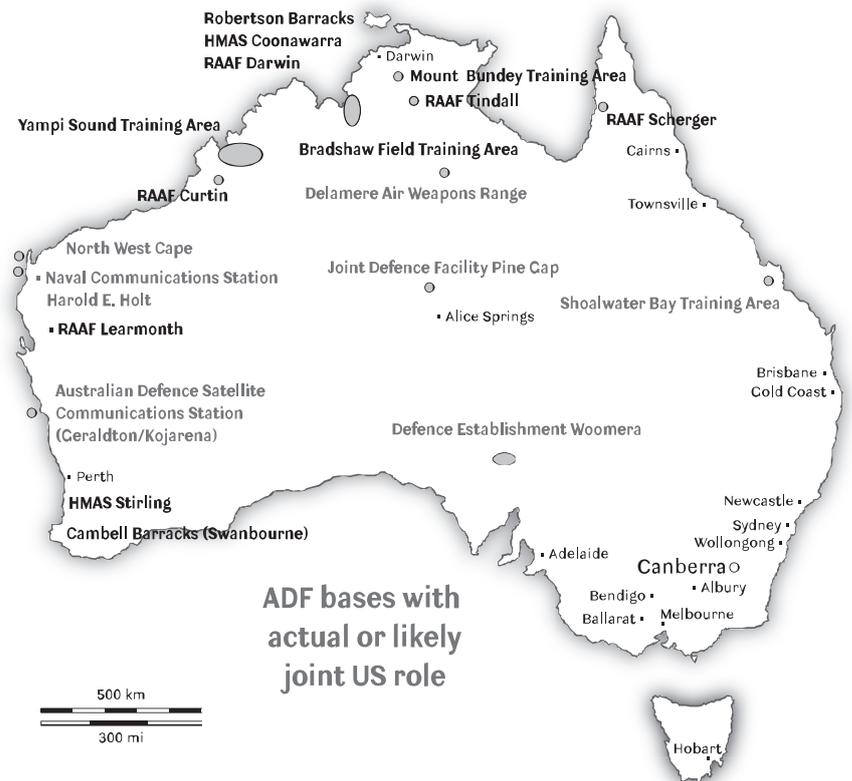
Secondly, it is now proposed to build a new facility at North West Cape under a 2010 partnership agreement — a powerful US space surveillance sensor. Its publicised function is to locate space debris orbiting the earth and threatening the satellites on which our networked society depends. Its military purpose however is to detect objects in space for offensive and defensive aspects of warfighting in space.

Data from the sensor will go to the US Joint Space Operations Center (JSpOC), which manages the US Space Surveillance Network at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. It will be part of a new Space Fence made up of US Air Force-operated radars, located at Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific or Ascension Island in the south Atlantic (or both).

## Kojarena, WA: signals and satellites

The **Australian Defence Satellite Communications Ground Station (ADSCGS)** is at Kojarena, 30 km east of Geraldton. It is operated by the ADF Defence Signals Division (DSD).

Kojarena station is a major DSD signals interception facility, and is part of a worldwide system of satellite communications keyword monitoring known as Echelon.



In addition, under a 2007 MOU with the US, the Australian government has built a separate facility in the ADSCGS grounds for Ultra-High-Frequency satellite communications, enabling secure all-weather and all terrain 3-G mobile telecommunications. Kojarena will be one of four such ground stations world-wide

## Pine Gap

The **Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap**, near Alice Springs, remains the most important US intelligence facility outside the US.

Pine Gap is the command and control link to US signals intelligence satellites over the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, listening to ballistic missile testing and launches, radars, satellite communications, and microwave transmissions.

After the closure of Nurrungar in 2000 it also became a Remote Ground Station for US thermal imaging satellites, providing early warning of missile launches, including as part of US and allied missile defence. Pine Gap has played a key role in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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