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Thank you, Linley Grant, for raising the issue of the US military alliance in your excellent Talking Point article (*Mercury*, January 26). While we are revisiting the debate on whether Australia should become a republic or not, this could be an opportune time to put the spotlight on our foreign policy and examine whether the US-Australian alliance is in our national interest. Are we willing to come of age as an independent sovereign peaceful country and a good global citizen?

September marks the 50th anniversary of the US secret telecommunication base, Pine Gap, in the Northern Territory. Despite its official name being Pine Gap Joint Defence Facility, there is nothing joint when only one in ten workers at the base is Australian and it is off limits to the rest of us including our politicians and the original owners of the land. Whistleblower, Ed Snowden, revealed that it is a key facility used in US surveillance. It has provided targeting information for US missiles as well as for drone strikes in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Iraq. At the beginning of the 2003 Iraq War 60 innocent people were massacred by a single missile guided by telecommunications from Pine Gap.

As Linley Grant rightly points out, the rising use of drones makes Australia complicit in violating UN conventions and committing war crimes. A UN report found that 30 out of 37 drone strikes it investigated demanded a public explanation to justify the the use of deadly force under international law because of suspected civilian deaths.

US bases on our soil put us at risk of attack from any aggrieved enemy of their government. It makes us less safe. This surely requires some national debate.