

## WB15-5: ANZUS, CHINA AND AUSTRALIA: WATCHING BRIEF

### Background

*Recently there has been discussion about the extent to which Australia's role in ANZUS affects our relationship with China. This WB seeks to place the issue in context and to raise questions for Friends to consider when pursuing concerns about Australian defence and foreign policies.*

### The ANZUS Treaty

In September 1951 in San Francisco, representatives from the USA, Australia and New Zealand signed a Security Treaty – ANZUS – to take effect from late April 1952. The Treaty speaks of the Parties consulting together and acting to meet the common danger. The following are the main features of the Treaty:

- The Parties will seek to settle international disputes by peaceful means, consistent with the purposes of the United Nations. (Article 1)
- The Parties will maintain their capacity to resist attack. (Article 2)
- The Parties will consult whenever territorial independence, political independence or security of any Party is threatened in the Pacific. (Art.3)
- The Parties will act to meet a common danger caused by an armed attack in the Pacific and will report any action to the UN Security Council. (Art. 4)
- An armed attack includes one on the territory or forces of any Party.(Art 5)
- The Treaty is not intended to conflict with the rights and obligations of states under the UN Charter for maintaining peace and security. (Art. 6)

The Treaty has been invoked only once – by Australian Prime Minister John Howard after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the US. He said: “The Australian Government will be in close consultation with the United States Administration in the period ahead to consider what actions Australia might take in support of the US response to these attacks”. Australia subsequently became part of the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

### What the Treaty means in Practice

According to the *ABC's Fact Check* website, a number of experts have expressed the view that the Treaty does not necessarily mean military action or that the US would come to Australia's defence. They quote Hugh White (ANU), Rory Medcalf (Lowy Institute), John Blaxland (ANU) and Adam Lockyer (UNSW) in emphasising the reality that ANZUS can be interpreted in a range of ways, and does not impose unequivocal demands on any of the Parties. Gareth Evans, former Foreign Minister, says that ANZUS could mean “almost anything the (US) administration of the day chooses to make it mean”. Julie Bishop, current Foreign Minister, has said: “at the heart of the Treaty is a commitment to come to one another's aid in the worst of times”. There remains ambiguity about the literal meaning of the Treaty, but a definite sense that it is part of a vital relationships

between US and Australia for mutual support in times of need. New Zealand has effectively lessened its involvement after the dispute about visits of US nuclear-powered ships to NZ ports.

### **Where the Political Parties and Parliament Stand**

The Australian Labor Party (in its Draft Platform to be adopted at the 2015 federal conference) says as follows:

The US remains our closest security ally and a vital global partner, formalized through the ANZUS Treaty, Labor is firmly committed to maintain and strengthening Australia's close relationships with the US, a relationship founded on our people's common democratic values and our mutual commitment to fostering international peace and security.

The Liberal Party says in its Platform that

Australia's priority in foreign and trade policy must be to strengthen our international relationship and alliances, especially with the US.

The National Party adopts the same approach.

The Australian Greens, in their Peace and Security Platform, give a detailed list of steps to build peace, including the following:

A renegotiated defence relationship with our allies that promotes Australia's independent role in our region.

In a report on the topic *Australia's Defence Relations with the US*, the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in 2013 concluded that, while there are some concerns that the interests of Australia and the US may not always coincide, the US Alliance remains a key pillar of Australia's national security policy, and a represents a framework of trust between the two countries. The committee recommended that:

The ANZUS Alliance be maintained in its current form and that the Treaty be viewed not just as a specific set of requirements, but rather as a statement of shared values capable of being acted upon in the face of evolving contemporary threats.

### **How the Treaty Could Affect Australia's Relations with China**

In an article in *The Canberra Times* (19 May 2015) Professor Hugh White (Strategic & Defence Studies, ANU) said that the Australian Government's concern about the recent US decision to send B1 bombers to Darwin represented denial by our leaders that our alliance with the US makes us strategic rivals of China. "The government wants us to believe that nothing Australia does as a US ally is directed against the strategic interests of our largest trading partner". He continued: "The US now sees itself in an increasingly serious political and strategic contest with China over who leads in Asia. Washington naturally looks to its Pacific allies for support in this contest....Our leaders are in denial about a fundamental shift in our strategic circumstances...they have no idea what to do as our major ally tries to draw us into a spiraling strategic rivalry..." He predicts that Australia will be asked to become part of a containment force against Chinese advances in the South China Sea. He advocates greater talking with Washington about a more effective and realistic response to China's challenge to US leadership in Asia.

The next Defence White Paper is due to be issued this year. In a discussion paper put out by the Department of Defence in 2014, Australia's relationships with US and China were mentioned. "Australia will continue to pursue close relationships with both, and the key

policy question for the White Paper is how exactly this is to be done”. It goes on to predict that the US Alliance will continue to be a central part of Australia’s policy, and envisages “enhanced cooperation with the US Marine Corps and US Air Force...the possibility of enhanced Navy cooperation, and options for cooperation on defence technology areas..”

On the website of the *Australian Institute of International Affairs* (AIIA) is an article called “Understanding ANZUS: Unpacking Australia’s Treaty Commitments”, by Cam Hawker, lecturer in political and international studies at the Australian Defence Force Academy. He points out the overwhelming public support for ANZUS (85% shown in a Lowy Institute poll in 2014), and contrasts it with polling by the Australia China Relations Institute which says that 71% surveyed were against Australia taking sides in a dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. He says this reflects confusion in the public mind about the possibility of Australia becoming engaged in a war between our security or trade partners. He warns that any resistance by Australia in coming to the assistance of the US in a war would end the Alliance, as it would be against Washington’s clear expectations. Australia’s links with US military systems (e.g. at Pine Gap) mean we would be expected to become involved.

Geoffrey Barker (ANU Strategic & Defence Studies Centre) wrote an article for *Inside Story* in June 2011 in which spoke of ANZUS as a relic of the twentieth century. “Australians need to start thinking about the continuing relevance of ANZUS to their vital interests. It is a challenge that cannot be evaded with fatuous political rhetoric crafted to flatter great powers. Great powers are smarter than that, and Australia needs to be smarter too”.

John Garnaut (Fairfax) wrote on 22 May 2015 that Australia’s China policy is rational. “The good news is that Australia has had a clear, consistent and sound China strategy ever since the Defence Intelligence Organisation began querying why a China that was committed to its own ‘peaceful rise’ might be developing the world’s first anti-ship missiles, anti-satellite missiles and other platforms for projecting military power far from its shores...The analysis matured into a strategy of ‘engage and hedge’ which was set out in a Rudd cabinet report of December 2010 and then endorsed and updated by the Gillard and Abbott cabinets. The strategy is a rational response to the fear, greed and sheer uncertainty engendered by China’s rise”.

Peter Hartcher (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 2015) reported on the moves by China to assert itself over 90% of the South China Sea by reclaiming land from coral reefs, building airstrips and ports, to challenge US dominance in the region. “On a strategic level, it’s about control of the world’s busiest shipping route...almost half the world’s commercial shipping passes through the area, including 60% of Australia’s exports”. Recently the US and Australia have made strong statements challenging the Chinese moves, but there is no solution in sight.

The Public Issues Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) made the following comment in a report to their recent Assembly in Jakarta:

Christian communities in Northeast and Southeast Asia in particular are deeply concerned that the United States and China have been intensifying their belligerent military activities. This growing militarism and interventionism has seen an alarming rise in the resurgence of base-building, military occupation and rotational troop deployments and joint military exercises with allied countries including Japan and Korea.

## Quaker Perspectives

At various times, Australian Quakers have commented on the ANZUS Alliance. For example, in the document *Towards a Vision of a Peaceful and Sustainable Australia: Quaker Voices* (2013) the following point was made:

*Australia has a long coastline with few people to defend it. Military planners, however, are tied to the US Alliance in a way that leads to Australia becoming involved in distant conflicts (examples: Iraq, Afghanistan), in defiance of public opinion. It also leads to decisions enhancing intelligence sharing and naval facilities, acquiring high-tech equipment beyond our defence needs, and offering access to our ports and bases, and threatening our sovereignty. Money thus spent is diverted from building non-military security. There is insufficient public debate about these issues, given the commitment of the major political parties to the US alliance.*

In response to the Government's Defence White Paper in 2013, the Presiding Clerk of Australia Yearly Meeting, Maxine Cooper, made the following point in a letter to the Government (9 May):

Australian Quakers wish to see Australia adopt defence policies that are part of a wider approach to international relations that helps take away the causes of war and advances peaceful conduct by all nations. We urge the allocation of greater resources to nonviolent initiatives, disarmament, stronger international law, and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Our Friend David Rosenberg (Visiting Fellow at ANU, and emeritus professor of political science at Middlebury College in Vermont USA) wrote in *The Canberra Times* on 4 June 2015 of the many environmental threats to the South China Sea ecosystems and the need for greater co-operation among all the nations of the area "for joint resource management for marine safety, search and rescue operations, scientific research, disaster relief, protection of the maritime environment, and other politically feasible areas, even while their sovereignty disputes remain unsettled". He continued that "more sustained, collective diplomatic and political action will be necessary to transform mutually exacerbating confrontations into mutually beneficial ones".

## Reflections

Australia, as a party to ANZUS, is caught up in a web of links with the US defence forces, and that such links make it increasingly difficult to become 'independent' in making decisions about war in our region. This raises a question for those working for global peace as to how best to focus our efforts in an environment where Australians generally favour retaining the ANZUS links and yet do not want to be drawn into a war in our region.

A way of approaching this could be to emphasise in our public statements and contact with politicians that we wish to strengthen the non-military options wherever possible. These include (a) working with other NGOs to support citizen-to-citizen links throughout Asia and the Pacific, (b) encouraging dialogue between government officials and NGOs on issues of disarmament and peacemaking, just as happens to some extent on human rights, (c) seeking more transparency about the role of foreign bases like Pine Gap in offensive military strategies, (d) supporting diplomatic, aid and trade processes that help build peace in our region.

QPLC welcomes any reports on action taken by Friends on this and related issues of concern.

Canberra  
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## Sources

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