

Ian Curr

Probably only a few people remember the basis of Australia entering its longest war. On the 14th September 2001, the Australian government invoked the ANZUS treaty for the first time, originally signed with the Americans and New Zealand in 1951 because of fear of Chinese supremacy in the Pacific. This was largely a symbolic act in response to the attack on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre on 11th September 2001. The terms of the ANZUS Treaty require that there be an attack on the metropolitan territory of one of the signatories. 9/11 was the first time this had happened since Pearl Harbour on December 7th, 1941.

So Howard gave the Americans 200 SAS troops to go into Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban. It should come as no surprise that it has taken more boots on the ground to rescue the 4,000 Australians stranded there when the Taliban took power this week.

I hope the ABC has learnt its lesson, no to treat Howard as the go to man on all things Afghanistan. His policy of invoking ANZUS is a disaster. His policy and governments that followed the Americans have created even more misery with the death of over 100 people at Kabul airport two days ago.

Ironically, by far the biggest story of the day 14 September 2001 when Howard made the ANZUS announcement was the liquidation of Ansett airlines with their employees thrown on the dust heap. Howard refused to bail out the company ... something that a Liberal government is only too happy to do for Qantas, now a private company thanks to Keating and Hawke supported by Howard.

Conclusion

ANZUS should be revoked immediately and Australian governments should be seeking bilateral relations with China, something that Gough Whitlam began nearly 50 years ago when he visited China.



Gough with Mao in 1972

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Here is the Transcript of Howard's speech invoking ANZUS after 9/11.

“As I indicated in Washington and I repeat today, and it’s the unanimous view of the Cabinet, that Australia stands ready to cooperate within the limits of its capability concerning any response that the United States may regard as necessary in consultation with her allies. I do want to stress of course that although the greater loss of life, the overwhelmingly greater loss of life as a result of these attacks, has been American, there are still some 80 or 90 Australians unaccounted for and there are confirmed deaths of at least three Australians. And at no stage should any Australian regard this as something that is just confined to the United States. It is an attack upon the way of life we hold dear in common with the Americans. It does require the invocation of ANZUS. The provisions of ANZUS do in our view apply and the Cabinet came to that view and I have released a formal statement to that effect that will be available to you at the end of this news conference.”

– John Howard, Press Conference, 14 September 2001. See <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-12308>