

The Need for Greater Independence in Australian Foreign Policy and Defence

Since coming into force in 1952, the ANZUS treaty has significantly shaped Australia's foreign policy and approach. Australia's continued relationship and alliance with the United States is not without benefit, however it needs to be re-examined and re-imagined. In light of the changed global landscape, Australia should consider a more independent approach to its foreign policy strategy that does not require securing the interests of the United States at all cost. Under the wording of the ANZUS treaty, both nations are only obliged to "consult together" and "act to meet the common danger", placing emphasis on the word "common". It would be advisable for Australia to more strictly limit its support and alliance with the United States to these terms. Failing to act autonomously not only puts Australia's economic and security interests at risk, but also jeopardises global peace, stability and security. Respect for international law needs to guide Australia's approach to Foreign Policy and Defence, instead of our alliance with the United States as is currently evident.

Concern should be given to how Australia's relationship with the United States is limiting the ability of Australia to make independent foreign policy decisions. This is evident in Australia's current stance on Nuclear Weapons and its reluctance to sign onto treaties such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Put simply by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, "ANZUS should not prevent the Australian government from exercising the clear will of its own citizens, where 71-79% of people polled are in favour of abolishing nuclear weapons." Australia's reluctance to sign this treaty is greatly attributed to its relationship with the United States and fears that it will lose the security supposedly afforded to it under its nuclear umbrella. Concerns also surround whether signing this treaty may also put Australia's operations at Pine Gap into question, which presently support the American military complex and its nuclear program. ANZUS, however, does not guarantee Australia the protection of the United States nuclear arsenal as is. While it is yet to be seen if the ANZUS treaty could withstand Australia ceasing its support for nuclear weapons, the ethical, humanitarian and environmental harms at stake warrant seriously reconsidering its current support in this area. The nuclear dimension of the United States and Australia alliance may well be unlawful and fails to be readily justifiable. This is not to say that Australia cannot continue to pursue a military relationship with the United States. Military assistance and support between both countries needs to be limited to situations where they are acting in strict accordance with international law.

Australia's alliance with the United States currently puts it in a position where it is required to adhere to policies that may be counterintuitive to its own interests and breach international law. The relationship has prompted Australian participation in wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, of which the ramifications of this involvement are presently enduring. These wars are reflective of the reality that the geopolitical objectives of the United-States are not necessarily aligned with those of Australia. Australian military support in these circumstances has been provided in spite of the fact it is not obliged to provide such

assistance under the ANZUS treaty. Australia's continued participation in the military efforts of the United States contributes to unnecessary escalation and prolongment of these conflicts. In doing so, it helps legitimate and enable flagrant breaches of international law. The Australian government must endeavour to be more critical of proposed military interventions by the United States when it has concerns about its efficacy and legality.

With the nation's growing presence in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia must also be mindful of the emphasis it places on its alliance with the United States. This relationship may come at the expense of harmonious relationships with other regional actors and prevent Australia from pursuing its own independent interests. Australia has shown itself capable of forming economic and political relationships within Asia and should no longer consider the United States alliance as instrumental to its success within the region. The U.S. Department of State cites the relationship as "an anchor for peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region". This is clearly brought into question by the growing deterioration in Sino-American relations and the diplomatic challenge Australia therefore faces in reconciling the conflicting priorities of both superpowers. Of particular concern to regional peace are the status of Taiwan and territorial claims in the South China Sea, which place United States and Chinese interests in direct conflict. In the interests of global peace and security, Australia should err on the side of caution and rely on international law as opposed to alliances to determine where its support will lie.

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