



ANZUS WILL ENDURE



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by Paul Barratt, former Secretary, Australian Department of Defence

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I. INTRODUCTION

This essay by Paul Barratt, former Secretary, Australian Department of Defence, responds to the confusion and uncertainty generated by President Trump's dismissive and angry response to the deal struck by the Obama Administration to accept 1,250 refugees from Australia. The author outlines the United States and Australia's complementary contributions to joint security under the ANZUS alliance. He points out the significance of the intelligence bases hosted by Australia for American security, noting that "It is hard to conceive of a successful war against ISIS without it."

Banner photo: John Foster Dulles, the US secretary of state, signs the ANZUS treaty in San Francisco in 1951, surrounded by US politicians and diplomats.

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II. POLICY FORUM BY AUTHOR

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By Paul Barratt, former Secretary, Australian Department of Defence

Leaked accounts of that abrasive first telephone call between President Trump and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull have many commentators wondering aloud what this sharp exchange means for ANZUS, the 1951 security treaty underpins the Australia-US security relationship.

My short answer to that question is not very much. The Turnbull-Obama agreement that President Trump finds so offensive, an agreement for the resettlement of refugees, has little if anything to do with Alliance business. The Alliance has endured since 1951 because both countries have seen at as in their national interests for it to do so.

ANZUS is not a US guarantee of Australian security, so any perception by the Trump Administration that Australia is taking a free ride on US military spending is incorrect. ANZUS simply provides that whenever either Party consider its territorial integrity, political independence or security is threatened, the Parties will consult, and that in the event of an armed attack in the Pacific Area on any of the Parties, each of them would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.

"Acting to meet the common danger" does not require either party to take military action - indeed, the central proposition of the Treaty is the undertaking in Article 1 that the Parties agree to seek to resolve all international disputes by peaceful means in accordance with the United Nations Charter. US diplomatic pressure to help avert a threat to Australia's security would be a very elegant way of giving effect to the US Treaty obligations.

ANZUS was not conceived in a vacuum. It was born out of the close collaboration in World War II, collaboration in which Australia provided the unsinkable aircraft carrier from which General Douglas MacArthur managed the Pacific War to its successful conclusion, and in which Australian soldiers, sailors and airmen fought alongside their US counterparts every inch of the way.

Under the umbrella of the Treaty, the two sides bring different capabilities and contributions to the table. What Australia gets from the Treaty is well understood: access to the US Government at the highest level, a clear expression of which is the annual AUSMIN talks in which the US Defense Secretary and Secretary of State confer with the Australian Defence and Foreign Ministers, all supported by their various military and civilian advisers; and access to intelligence, technology and advanced weapons. At the senior operational and policy level contact is a daily affair.

What the US gets from Australia is less well understood on both sides of the Pacific, but would be well understood by National Security Adviser Mike Flynn and Defense Secretary Mattis.

A critical capability is that of the Joint Defence Facility at Pine Gap in Central Australia, which is commonly understood to control US spy satellites as they pass over the one third of the globe which includes China, the Asian parts of Russia and the Middle East, and more recently to be involved in the orchestration of military operations and the precision use of smart weapons (drones). It is hard to conceive of a successful war against ISIS without it.

The Harold E. Holt Naval Communication Station in North West Australia was established to communicate with US nuclear submarines patrolling in the Indian Ocean and has since acquired other roles.

The Australian fleet of quiet, long-range diesel-electric submarines, which is optimised for operations in warm, shallow tropical waters, represents a capability which is highly valued by the US Navy because it can undertake operations to which the US's nuclear-only submarine fleet is not well suited.

Australian intelligence agencies make a valuable contribution to the "Five Eyes" intelligence sharing arrangements between the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; the Defence Science and Technology Group (one of the largest scientific organisations in the country) makes important niche contributions of technology.

Australian special forces have undertaken significant operations in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and will continue to be valued by US Special Forces.

The field training areas at Bradshaw in the Northern Territory and Shoalwater bay in Queensland provide facilities for large formation training and exercises that are increasingly difficult to find in Continental US.

Much of the collaboration between Australia and the US is underpinned by treaty-level agreements under the day-to-day operational control of people on either side of the Pacific who well understand its value. While I expect that ill-considered statements by President Trump and his inner circle will create difficulties for these people, I expect that these will manifest themselves more as disruptions and sources of media headlines than as transformations in the way Alliance business is conducted.

Of more significance to the Alliance, perhaps, will be the extent to which any continuation of the disrespectful treatment which Donald Trump accorded to the Australian Prime Minister will cause Australians across the political spectrum to question, as did the late conservative Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser in recent years, why we do as much for the Americans as we do.

With that caveat, ANZUS has proved to be remarkably resilient over the 65 years it has been in effect. Political leaders come and go, but my guess is that ANZUS has a long way to run, because it is valued by the defence and foreign policy establishments on both sides of the Pacific.

III. NAUTILUS INVITES YOUR RESPONSES

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