Standing upright there: the New Zealand path to a nuclear-free world

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Recommended Citation

Richard Tanter, "Standing upright there: the New Zealand path to a nuclear-free world", NAPSNet Policy Forum, October 03, 2012, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/standing-upright-there-the-new-zealand-path-to-a-nuclear-free-world/

by Richard Tanter

October 4, 2012

This article is an expanded version of a **blog post** by Richard Tanter on the same theme.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Richard Tanter writes that the recent rapprochement between New Zealand and the United States is born of both shared concerns about the rise of China and American recognition "that the Lange Labour Government's 1984 policy of banning the entry of nuclear-armed ships is not incompatible with an alliance with the United States." Tanter concludes that the morale of the story remains that "passage to a nuclear free world will require surely require more New Zealands.

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II. ARTICLE

"Standing upright there: the New Zealand path to a nuclear-free world"

by Richard Tanter

The New Zealand visit of US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to announce resumption of military and intelligence cooperation was a long overdue recognition that the Lange Labour Government's 1984 policy of banning the entry of nuclear-armed ships is not incompatible with an alliance with the United States. True, New Zealand had been knocking on the American door for some time, including sending troops to both Iraq and Afghanistan. Times have to some extent changed, and Washington and Wellington appear to have found common cause in the rise of China.[i]

Years of broadly-based peace movement campaigning and the atmosphere of fear generated by the

Reagan administration's talk of nuclear "war-fighting" encouraged the Lange cabinet to make New Zealand the first country to establish a national nuclear weapon free zone, culminating in the passage of the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act 1987.

In the face of enormous pressure from the United States, vigorously aided by an antagonistc Hawke Labor government in Australia and by white-anting from within his Cabinet, Lange persisted, insisting that he never wanted to break the ANZUS alliance.[ii] Rather as Lange argued brilliantly in the famous 1985 Oxford University debate [video][iii], nuclear weapons were not simply unnecessary (and unwanted) for the country's defence, but also morally indefensible.

From the American point of view, as Bill Tow put it "ANZUS was designed to serve as part of its global network of extended deterrence". The essence of the position Secretary of State George Schultz put Lange was that, again to quote Tow, New Zealand's qualification of the terms of alliance would erode

> "unity of purpose and strategy between the United States and each of its security partners …[and] … impair the finely-tuned balance upon which the ultimate credibility of western deterrence rests."[iv]

Kim Beazley, the long-serving Defence Minister in the Hawke and Keating Australian Labor governments explained the real concerns behind Schultz's claim of a global unity of American extended nuclear deterrence – fear of the influence of the New Zealand example on peace movements in Australia and Japan:

> "Basically, the Americans were not worried about the New Zealanders. They were worried about us and they were particularly worried about the Japanese, because the Americans regarded themselves as doing serious business with us and with the Japanese …The mere cut-off of military relationships with New Zealand was enough to send a signal into our two systems that this would be an unwise course to follow."[v]

In the decades since, there has been strong bipartisan support for the nuclear free legislation in the parliament. During Panetta's visit conservative PM John Key made clear that there was simply no question of revisiting the nuclear-free legislation.[vi]

Hans Kristensen has pointed out that the US policy to "neither confirm nor deny" the presence of nuclear weapons on Navy ships which triggered the new Zealand nuclear exit has long been both redundant and counter-productive.[vii]

In fact, there is a rapprochement between the US and New Zealand on all but nuclear matters. Declarations of "enhanced defence cooperation" were signed in 2010 and 2012, with New Zealand ships in RIMPAC exercises and US Marines training in New Zealand. In 2009 Secretary of State Clinton announced a resumption of sharing of defence intelligence - to the chagrin of the Key government that preferred the resumed cooperation pass unnoticed.[viii]

In fact, despite the US public ostracism of New Zealand, the most important part of their Cold War collaboration – signals intelligence monitoring and sharing - continued untouched by the change in ANZUS status. As New Zealand peace researcher and journalist Nicky Hager[ix] and intelligence researchers Jeffrey Richelson and Desmond Ball[x] have documented, the country's most important – and secret – connection to the United States was as a Commonwealth signatory to the UKUSA Agreement.[xi] Under the long super-secret agreement, which New Zealand (and Australia) entered in 1956, New Zealand operates two major signals intelligence facilities at Tangimoana and Waihopai – and has continued to do so without interruption.[xii]

This is not a return to the ANZUS of old. The US suspension of its treaty obligation to New Zealand remains in place. But as Robert Ayson cannily pointed out,

> "It actually suits John Key's government to have New Zealand's nuclear free stance stand in the way of a full resumption of ANZUS. An informal and incomplete alliance relationship with the US is much more compatible with good relations in Asia with a rising China. If this means that New Zealand doesn't face some of the same expectations from Washington that Australia shoulders, even better".[xiii]

Yet despite all, the morale of the story remains that a country which, in Malcolm Templeton's memorable and accurate phrase, is prepared to Stand Upright Here can take collective responsibility for its actions. Passage to a nuclear free world will require surely require more New Zealands.

III. FOOTNOTES

[i] New Zealand after Panetta: Australia's prodigal brother, Robert Ayson, The Strategist (ASPI) (25 September 2012), at

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[ii] Malcolm Templeton, Standing Upright Here: New Zealand in the Nuclear Age 1945-1990, Victoria U.P., 2007.
http://www.nickyhager.info/standing-upright-here-new-zealand-in-the-nuclear-age-1945-1990-by-malcolm-templeton/

[iii] David Lange Memorial Trust, Oxford Union Debate [video], 1 March 1985, at

http://www.davidlange.org.nz/oxford-debate; Transcript: Great New Zealand Argument, at
http://publicaddress.net/great-new-zealand-argument/nuclear-weapons-are-morally-indefensible

[iv] William T. Tow, "The ANZUS Dispute: Testing U.S. Extended Deterrence in Alliance Politics, Political Science Quarterly, Volume 104, Number 1 (1989), p. 117, at
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[v] Kim Beazley, "The New Zealand relationship: Australian observations", Anzus After 45 Years: Seminar Proceedings 11-12 August 1997, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Parliament of Australia, 11 August 1997.

[vi] No backdown on nuclear-free NZ: Key, AAP The Australian (24 September 2012)

http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/breaking-news/no-backdown-on-nuclear-free-nz-key/story-fn3dxix6-1226479988638.

[vii] The Neither Confirm Nor Deny Policy: Nuclear diplomacy at work, Hans M. Kristensen,

Federation of American Scientists, February 2006, at http://www.nukestrat.com/pubs/NCND.pdf; In Warming US-NZ Relations, Outdated Nuclear Policy Remains Unnecessary Irritant, Hans Kristensen, FAS Security Blog (23 September 2012), at http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2012/09/newzealand.php.

[viii] Key mum on Clinton's intelligence sharing arrangement, National Business Review (13 October 2009), at http://www.nbr.co.nz/article/key-mum-clintons-intelligence-sharing-arrangement-113056.

[ix] Nicky Hager, Secret Power - New Zealand's Role in the International Spy Network, Craig Potton Publishing, 1996; available online at http://www.nickyhager.info/ebook-of-secret-power/.

[x] Jeffrey T. Richelson and Desmond Ball, The Ties That Bind: Intelligence Cooperation Between the UKUSA Countries – the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, (George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Second Edition, 1990), at http://www.amazon.com/The-Ties-That-Bind-Intelligence/dp/0045200092

[xi] New UKUSA Agreement – 10 May 1955, National Security Agency, at

http://www.nsa.gov/public_info/_files/.../new_ukusa_agree_10may55.pdf.

[xii] Wikileaks: Leaked US cables spill the beans on NZ ties, Nicky Hager, Sunday Star Times, 12 December 2010, at http://www.nickyhager.info/wikileaks-leaked-us-cables-spill-the-beans-on-nz-ties/.

[xiii] New Zealand after Panetta: Australia's prodigal brother, Robert Ayson, The Strategist (ASPI) (25 September 2012), at

http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/new-zealand-after-panetta-australias-prodigal-brother/.

IV. Nautilus invites your responses

The Nautilus Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this report. Please leave a comment below or send your response to: napsnet@nautilus.org. Comments will only be posted if they include the author's name and affiliation.

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