

Reading The ANZUS Treaty

Senator David Johnston's dismissal as Australia's Defence Minister came soon after he said that he wouldn't trust ASC (formerly Australian Submarine Corporation) to build a canoe. The ASC sheltered workshop wanted to be paid [\\$3 billion](#) to build a submarine. The Japanese build them year in and year out for [\\$600 million](#) a copy. Surely an attempt to be an effective Defence Minister shouldn't be a sacking offence in an ideal world.

The Senator had said something far more disturbing earlier in the year, something that would qualify as a sacking offence. In June 2014, when, in response to the [question](#) "does the ANZUS alliance commit Australia or not if the United States is in a conflict in our region?" he replied "I don't believe it does."

That answer got [Quisling Central](#), the Australia-China Relations Institute (ACRI) at the University of Technology Sydney, so excited that they published a booklet based on it. The purpose of ACRI is to winkle Australia out of its defence treaties with the United States and Japan. Everything ACRI produces is agitprop to that end. Thus in this instance they produced a [booklet](#) entitled *Conflict In The East China Sea: Would ANZUS Apply?* It is written by academics Nick Bisley and Brendan Taylor.

The ACRI booklet waffles on for 80 pages but it can be summarised in its first recommendation:

"The principal challenge for Australia lies in maintaining maximum freedom of policy manoeuvre in the event conflict erupts in the East China Sea. This means ensuring that Australia does not overcommit too soon, thus taking a position in which it unnecessarily pays a price with Beijing. For Canberra the main piece of policy preparation lies in managing the expectations of the US and Japan in the event of conflict."

Note that Bisley and Taylor do not answer the question they ask in their title. So let's answer that question ourselves by reading the original [document](#). Article IV of the ANZUS Treaty includes the sentence:

"Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on any of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes."

That means that if the United States was attacked in the Pacific region then Australia and New Zealand would be obliged to render military assistance to the United States. To make sure that there is no doubt about the meaning of Article IV, Article V was included which states:

"For the purpose of Article IV, an armed attack on any of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack on the metropolitan territory of any of the Parties, or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific or on its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific."

There is no ambiguity there. If China sinks an American ship or shoots down an American aircraft, military or otherwise, and the United States declared war on China, Australia would be at war with China too.

Senator Johnston's answer in mid-2014 abrogated the one treaty that Australia's whole defence posture is based on. It may have been a moment of befuddlement or carelessness, but such carelessness can get a lot of people killed. A good example from recent history is April Glaspie. She was the United States ambassador to Iraq and told Saddam Hussein "*We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait.*" What is not specifically forbidden in such matters is allowed, so Saddam Hussein took Ambassador Glaspie's words as a green light to invade Kuwait. We are still dealing with the aftermath 25 years later.

And so it is with the East and South China Seas. Any minister of the crown attempting to be nuanced and sophisticated with respect to Australia's obligations under the ANZUS treaty is encouraging China to be more assertive. And as Confederate general Nathan Forrest said "War means fighting, and fighting means killing."

A couple of ministers of the crown, Tony Abbott's presumptive heirs, have been careless in their comments if Australia's aim is to help preserve the peace in Asia. Amongst other things, Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull has [written](#) "*We should seek to ensure that the Americans, unlike the Spartans, do not allow their anxiety about a rising power to lead them into a reflexive antagonism that could end in conflict.*" Talk about getting the situation arse-about.

Foreign Minister Ms Julie Bishop, a self-confessed very good friend of Malcolm Turnbull of 20 years standing, has said "*The United States has long been the single greatest power in the Pacific, in Asia, in fact globally. ... But we recognize that there are other countries that are emerging as stronger economies, other countries are building up their militaries. ... So we are in a very different world. It's a changing landscape and our foreign policy must be flexible enough and nimble enough to recognize that changing landscape.*"

Ms Bishop's words, uttered as Foreign Minister, and so nuanced and sophisticated, are exactly the sort that will get so many people killed. Prime Minister Tony Abbott has spoken of Japan being "Australia's best friend in Asia". That is the kind of statement that helps keep the peace in our time.

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