

# Effects of the ANZUS Treaty on Australian Foreign and Defense Policy

LIU Xixi

East China Normal University, Shanghai, 201100;

**Abstract:** The ANZUS Treaty, signed in 1951, established a military alliance between Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Compared with the contents of this treaty, the relationship of Australia-America Alliance officially confirmed by this treaty has a more profound impact on Australia, especially in the field of foreign and defense policies. It brings both pros and cons to Australia. For the Australian government, how to maintain a close relationship with the United States while keeping independent is the key problem.

**Keywords:** ANZUS Treaty; Australia-America Alliance; Defense Policy

**DOI:**10.69979/3041-0843.25.01.021

## 1. The Forming of ANZUS

As a member of the Commonwealth, for international affairs, Australia chose follow-Britain policy. After the outbreak of World War II, Australia sent all naval ships in service, making a great contribution to the defence of the Commonwealth. However, the UK rejected Australia's request of establishing the Commonwealth War Cabinet so that more attention would be paid to dominions' security requirements (Yue, 2010). Relations between Australia and Britain started to deteriorate.

The Pacific War was a watershed in Australian politics. Facing Japan's invasion, the UK's military forces in the Pacific region quickly collapsed. It was obvious that Britain was powerless to defend its dominions. As a result, the Australian government turned to the United States for help. With joint efforts, they won the victory. After WWII, both Australia and New Zealand realized that Britain could not protect their security and that standing with the U.S. should be the better choice. The United States, however, was not interested in the alliance initiative.

To better persuade the U.S., Australia took part in the Korean War and sent troops to support U.S. forces. After that, the United States agreed to form an alliance—Australia, New Zealand and the United States Pacific Security Treaty.

ANZUS Pact, a security treaty between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, was signed in San Francisco on Sept. 1, 1951 and came into force in 1952. Under the terms of the treaty, the three nations maintained a consultative relationship with each other and strove to ensure their collective security in the Pacific region.

However, in 1980s, New Zealand adopted an antinuclear policy, one of whose provisions was the banning of nuclear-armed vessels from its ports, including those of the U.S. Navy. In response, the United States formally suspended its treaty obligations to New Zealand in 1986 and reduced the two countries' military ties (Catalinac, 2010). The three nations remained formal parties to the treaty, but in practical terms ANZUS was inoperative from then on. But for Australia, its bilateral ties with the United States have been re-affirmed and even strengthened, which imposes a great influence on Australian foreign and defence policies.

## 2. The Roles of ANZUS

As the initiator, the ANZUS Treaty was significant to Australia. It was even regarded as the cornerstone of Australian foreign and defence policies. The post-war world changed rapidly. ANZUS played different roles and imposed different requirements on members in different periods, mostly based on the US's needs. What remains the same is that Australia is always a loyal ally, adapting its national policies to cooperate with the United States

## **2.1. Defensive Alliance against Japan**

At the very beginning, ANZUS was designed to be a defensive alliance. Australia's main purpose was to deter Japan (Wang, 2013). After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Australia followed the United States' step and declared war on Japan. In 1942, Japan launched large-scale air strikes on Australia, which exacerbated Australians' panic. This was also the first time in Australia's history that it came under a massive raid. Australia asked to participate in the surrender ceremony and the military occupation of Japan, punish Japan severely and hold the peace conference as soon as possible. However, the outbreak of the Korean War intensified the Cold War situation in Asia. The United States hoped to support and rearm Japan as an important ally against international communism by signing a peace treaty. Australia and New Zealand worried about the resurgence of Japanese militarism, and then made the AUZUS Treaty as a precondition for signing the peace treaty. After consultations, Australia, New Zealand and the United States signed the treaty and formed an alliance, mainly targeting at defending their national security from Japan's attack.

As the situation in the Asia-Pacific changed, the Australia-US alliance led Australia towards cooperating with Japan. In 2007, Japan and Australia signed a military agreement that allows for joint military exercises, formal military exchanges and anti-terrorism training with Japan's self-defense agency on the Australian homeland. In 2012, the two countries signed a military information agreement which provided a legal basis for the two countries to share military secrets and counter-terrorism intelligence. In 2022, they signed The Australia-Japan Reciprocal Access Agreement(RAA), which could be seen as a sign of paramilitary alliance. Therefore, influenced by the United States, Australia's position has turned from against-Japan to pro-Japan.

## **2.2 Military Tool against Communism**

In 1971, Whitlam, then Opposition leader, visited China and said "ANZUS Treaty was never the reason for intervening the Vietnam War." But the truth is that influenced by military alliance relation with the United States, Australia did join the war and fight against the Communist forces.

In fact, on the first meeting of the ANZUS Council, the United States managed to set the alliance's focus in to the orbit of anti-communism and thus made the ANZUS together with other alliances the tool of the Cold War (Wang, 2007). To be more specific, for the United States, they regarded this alliance as a tool to suppress China. Then America's Secretary of State— Dean Acheson said that the purpose of the meeting was to carefully examine the shared interests in the face of the security threat posed by China in the Pacific area. At the beginning, Australia might not totally agree with this view. However, when dealing with the Sino-Australia relations, it was inevitably influenced by the United States. For example, the defense white paper released in 2009 identified China's rise as a destabilizing factor in the Asia-Pacific region, and even regarded China as an imaginary enemy of Australia's future defense construction. In recent years, Australia also made great efforts to promote nuclear submarines cooperation with America and Britain. The problem of nuclear proliferation might be one of the most significant uncertainties in the Sino-Australia relations (Li et al., 2023).

## **3. Influence on Australia**

The ANZUS alliance has neither standing organ nor executive organization. The ANZUS Council is only an advisory body that provides analyses and judgments during decision-making process (Wang, 2008). In addition, Australia has only formally invoked the treaty once so far. On Sept. 14, 2001, Australia decided to activate the ANZUS Treaty, invoking Article IV to support the United States in its wars on terror (Yu, 2016). As a result, we can see that, the AUZUS Treaty itself might not be that important. What truly matters is the military alliance between Australia and the United States formally established by the treaty.

### **3.1. Benefits**

### 3.1.1 Safety Guarantee

One of the main reasons Australia proposed the alliance treaty was to prevent Japanese armies invading again. Facing a weakening Britain, it turned to the United States. Indeed, with the help of America, Australia has greatly enhanced its military capabilities. Its national safety has also been secured.

In this treaty, Article V(1951) clearly mentioned that “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”, which acted as a deterrent. For actual actions, after signing the treaty, Australia and America have launched a series of military projects. For example, by 2019, America set up about 15 military bases and installations in Australia. It has also provided many advanced weapons for Australia. And America even decided to help Australia develop guided weapons. In July 2023, Lloyd Austin, U.S. Secretary of Defense, made an important announcement in Australia. He declared that the United States will help Australia develop a capability for manufacturing GMLRS.

### 3.1.2 Stronger Sense of Existence

With the signing of the ANZUS Treaty, Australia formalized its alliance with the United

States and paid more attention to the Asia-Pacific region. Australia's former prime minister, John Winston Howard, once said that “The United States is the sheriff around the world, and Australia is the deputy sheriff.”

On the world stage, Australia also acts as the deputy sheriff, and helps the United States maintain Asia-Pacific regional order. Since 1950s, following the United States, it participated in a number of wars in Asia, took part in the establishment of APEC, enhanced military cooperation with India, Japan and the Philippines, and reinforced ties with the South Pacific Island countries. It also attended conferences organized by ASEAN and discussed potential cooperation opportunities. With the status as one of the United States' closest allies, the growing military strength, and its successful multilateral diplomacy, Australia has been increasing its regional influence, especially in the area of security affairs.

## 3.2.Costs

### 3.2.1 Lack of Independence

From the contents of the ANZUS Treaty, the relevant explanations and complementation, to a greater extent, reflected the will of the United States. During the first meeting, Australia came up with some proposals relevant to the actual practice of the alliance. For example, military representatives sent by Australia and New Zealand should keep in touch with the Pentagon. But because the United States did not want to take on too many obligations, most of these suggestions were rejected (Wang, 2007). As a result, this treaty is not as powerful as Australia imagined.

From the nature of the alliance, its focus has shifted largely in line with America's interests. The direction changed from fighting against Japan to cooperating with Japan, then eliminating terrorist organizations, and now keeping China down. Pressure from America, Australia's dependence on the US and its established strategy of struggling to maintain America's strategic dominance have often forced Canberra to meet the United States' demands and fulfill the expectations (Hou, 2011). For instance, on the ground of preventing Vietnam from expanding to the south and endangering its territory, Australia sent troops to support the US. After America declaring Nixon Doctrine, Australia did try to go on its own way and focus more on the homeland defence. 1976 Australian Defence White Paper delivered by the Fraser government stated that “it is not our policy, nor would it be prudent, to rely upon US combat help in all circumstances.” The changes included building Darwin military base, decommissioning HMAS Melbourne (R21) and so on. However, in 2009, the United States put forward the concept of “Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific”. Thanks to the advantageous geographical position, Australia regained America's attention. It adjusted its military deployment and increased the dependence on the United States. For instance, Australian Defence White Paper 2009 acknowledged that “America's protection provides a stable and reliable sense of assurance and has over the years removed the need for Australia to consider more significant and expensive

defence options.” In order to get more military information, Australia joined QUAD. Meanwhile, it is also a member of AUKUS, which could be an entry ticket of nuclear states. Military dependence also has an impact on economic policy. For example, when Scott Morrison was in power, knowing that launching a trade war with China would do great harm to the economic development, he still chose to follow the United States. It can be seen that from military security to economic and political affairs, Australia is difficult to maintain complete independence and is largely influenced by the United States.

### 3.2.2 Extra Military Expenditure and Casualties

In fact, the ANZUS Treaty did not specifically require members to provide military support. But Article IV “...act to meet the common danger...”, to some degree, indicated that members should offer timely military and other assistance if necessary. Compared with the United States, Australia is the weaker side. To show its loyalty, Australia interfered in wars irrelevant to the homeland security and participated in many other military actions, which led to unnecessary expenditure and injuries. For example, many political commentators suggested that Vietnam War was a means of proving Australia’s usefulness to the alliance. According to World Bank (as shown in table 3-1), from 1965 to 1968, Australia’s military spending had grown from \$0.79 billion to \$1.32 billion. During this cruel war, Australian troops suffered more than 5,100 casualties, with a battle damage rate at over 10%, of which more than 700 were killed and more than 4,400 were wounded (Jiang, 2022). In 2001, after quoting the AUZUS Treaty to support America’s counter-terrorism actions, Australia joined the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. According to a report published by Guangming Net (2021), Australia has spent more than \$10 billion in the past 20 years, and has deployed 39,000 soldiers in Afghanistan. Since joining the Iraq War in 2003, the economic cost to Australia is estimated to be more than \$5 billion (IFENG, 2022).

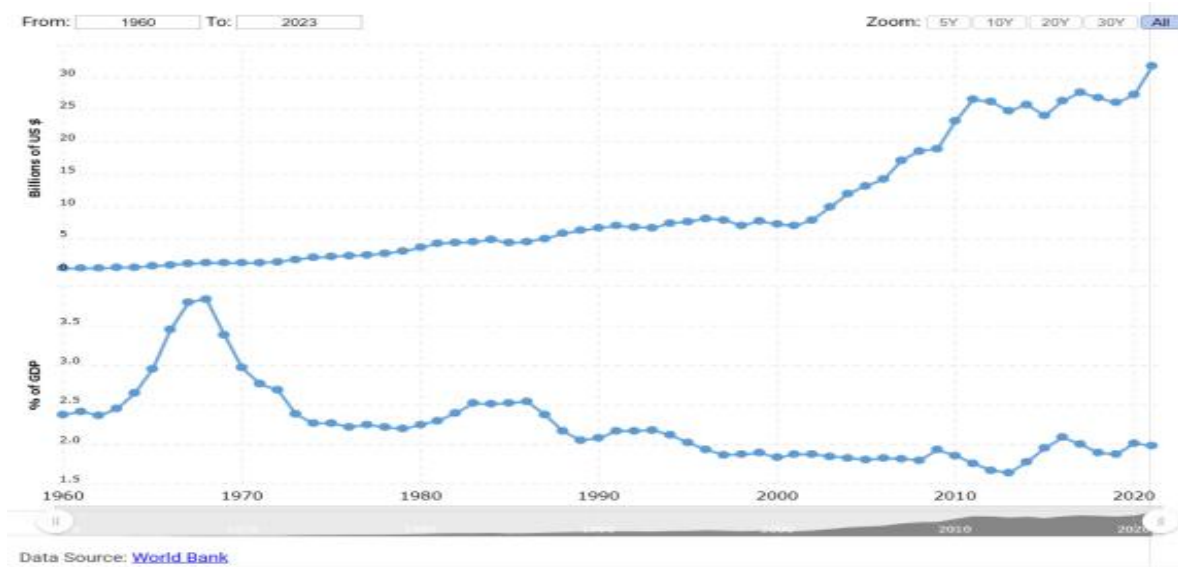


Table 3-1 Australia Military Spending/Defense Budget 1960–2023

According to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 passed by both the House of Representatives and the Senate in the United States, America would provide support for DOD activities relating to the security partnership among Australia, United Kingdom, and the United States, known as AUKUS. According to relevant statements, Australia is expected to spend \$245 billion to jointly develop and purchase nuclear submarines (People’s Daily Online, 2023). However, nuclear submarines’ capabilities have far exceeded the needs of domestic defense. Australia’s former prime minister, Paul John Keating strongly criticized that joining AUKUS is the worst decision the Australian Government ever made in 100 years. It does not serve Australia’s own interests or the regional security (xinhuanet, 2023).

### 3.2.3 Damages to Sino-Australia Relations

The AUZUS Treaty was initially seen as a defensive alliance. But the nature has been changed. As what have been mentioned, influenced by the United States, this alliance was firstly used as a tool against Communism, then against the Islamic world, and now against China again.

Since 2017, China-Australia relations went through a free fall. The Australian government has repeatedly claimed that they always acts independently on the world stage. But in fact, its foreign policies basically follow that of the United States.

When it comes to anti-China issues, it sometimes goes even further, such as tracing the origin of COVID-19. In 2022, the Labor Party won the election. And there was a hint of warming between China and Australia. For example, Australia's prime minister visited China again after 7 years. Anthony Albanese declared his visit to China before leaving for America, which to some degree indicated Canberra's independence and rationality. However, the Australia-US alliance remains a cornerstone of Australian foreign and defence policies. And Australia continues to participate in military operations against China, bringing uncertainties to future bilateral relations.

## Conclusion

The ANZUS Treaty, the compensation of signing the peace agreement towards Japanese invasion, was significant to Australia. This alliance, to some degree, did assure Australia's national safety and strengthen the regional influence in the Asia-Pacific region. But Australia also paid a heavy price. After the dispute between New Zealand and America, this treaty in fact only included two countries— Australia and the US. And as there are more new military projects and organizations proposed by these two countries, such as QUAD and AUKUS, the ANZUS Treaty is no longer that important.

In a word, compared with the contents of the ANZUS Treaty, the alliance relationship with the United States formally confirmed by this treaty is more influential for Australia, especially in the field of foreign and defense policies. The lack of independence, extra military expenditure and casualties, and damages to Sino-Australia relations are the main costs. It is worth noting that the current government showed a certain degree of independence and rationality. How to keep a balance between China and the United States is always one of the most challenging tasks for Canberra.

## References

- [1] Hou Minyue. The American Factors in Australia's Policy and Attitude towards China in the Post-Cold War Period(in Chinese)[J]. History Research and Teaching, 2011, (06): 68-73.
- [2] Li Chong, Liu Zhexi. The Low Level of Sino-Australian Relations and the "Cold Politics and Warm Economy" (in Chinese)[J]. Quarterly Journal of International Politics, 2023, 8(03): 182-192.
- [3] Wang Shiming. On the First Meeting of the ANZUS Council(in Chinese)[J]. Fudan Journal (Social Sciences Edition), 2007, (05): 107-113.
- [4] Wang Shiming. A Study of the ANZUS Treaty in 1951(in Chinese)[M]. Beijing: World Affairs Press Co. Ltd., 2008: 284.
- [5] Wang Shiming. The ANZUS Alliance as Part of US Global Strategy—Also on the Development Course of Australian Foreign and Defense Policies(in Chinese)[J]. Frontiers, 2013(16): 34-44.
- [6] Yu Changsen. Redefining the US-Australian Alliance for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: From Cooperation against Terrorism to Responding to China's Rise(in Chinese)[J]. Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies, 2016, (04): 70-86+154-155.
- [7] Yue Xiaoying. From "Guaranteeing Security" to "Elevating Status": An analysis of Australia's Post-World War II Policy of Following the United States(in Chinese)[D]. Fudan University, 2010.
- [8] IFENG. Australia's military influence of the invasion of Iraq in 2003(in Chinese)[N/OL]. 2021-07-13[2023-12-20]. <https://m.gmw.cn/baijia/2021-07/13/1302403931.html>
- Guancha Syndicate. the US is so kind to help Australia develop guided weapons?(in Chinese)[N/OL]. 2023-08-02[2023-12-20]. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1773073818363036984&wfr=spider&for=pc>
- [10] Guangming Net. This army in Afghanistan "fled" faster than the US army, but it also has a debt to pay!(in Chinese)[N/OL]. 2021-07-13[2023-12-20]. <https://m.gmw.cn/baijia/2021-07/13/1302403931.html>
- [11] Jiang Sen. Australia: a painful memory of the Vietnam War(in Chinese)[Z/OL]. Prosecutorial View, 2022-01-04[2023-12-20]. <https://www.sh.jcy.gov.cn/jcfy/lsgc/78818.jhtml>
- [12] The Paper. Build bases, send more troops, kick off large-scale military exercises... US and Australia further deepen the military collaboration(in Chinese)[N/OL]. 2019-07-22[2023-12-20]. [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_3977849](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_3977849)
- [13] People's Daily Online. Australia's huge military purchase is criticized(in Chinese)[N/OL]. 2023-03-28[2023-12-20]. [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrhwb/html/2023-03/28/content\\_25972556.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrhwb/html/2023-03/28/content_25972556.htm)
- [14] xinhuanet. Former Australian prime minister Paul Keating: the AUKUS agreement is the "the worst international decision" (in Chinese) [N/OL]. 2023-03-16[2023-12-20]. [http://www.news.cn/world/2023-03/16/c\\_1129434287.htm](http://www.news.cn/world/2023-03/16/c_1129434287.htm)
- [15] Amy L. Catalinac. Why New Zealand Took Itself out of ANZUS: Observing "Opposition for Autonomy" in Asymmetric Alliances[J]. Foreign Policy Analysis, 2010, 6(4).
- [16] Stephan Frühling. Australian defence policy and the concept of self-reliance[J]. Australian Journal of International Affairs, 2014, 68:5, 531-547.
- [17] Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America. ANZUS Treaty - Full Text[R/OL]. 1951-09-01 (2023-12-17). <https://australianpolitics.com/1951/09/01/anzus-treaty-text.html>

- [18] CoA (Commonwealth of Australia). 1976 Defending Australia in the Asia-Pacific Century[R/OL]. Canberra: Department of Defence, 1976-11[2023-12-20].  
<https://www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/defence-white-paper>
- [19]CoA (Commonwealth of Australia). 2009 Defending Australia in the Asia-Pacific Century[R/OL]. Canberra: Department of Defence, 2009-05-02[2023-12-20].  
[https://www.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-08/defence\\_white\\_paper\\_2009.pdf](https://www.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-08/defence_white_paper_2009.pdf)  
Government of Australia, Canberra. “Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030” , [R/OL]. 2009-05-04[2023-12-20].  
[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1516/DefendAust/2009](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1516/DefendAust/2009)
- [21] Macrotrends. Australia Military Spending/Defense Budget 1960-2023[Z/OL].  
<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/AUS/australia/military-spending-defense-budget>
- [22] Stephen Dziedzic. “Australia started a fight with China over an investigation into COVID-19—did it go too hard?” [N/OL]. ABC News, 2020-05-20[2023-12-20].  
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-20/wha-passes-coronavirus-investigation-australia-what-cost/12265896>
- [23] The National Museum of Australia. Defining Moments: ANZUS Treaty[Z/OL].  
<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/anzus-treaty>
- [24] U.S. Department of Defense. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024[R/OL]. 2023-06[2023-12-20].  
[https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fy2024\\_ndaa\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fy2024_ndaa_executive_summary.pdf)