

ANZUS and the Next War:  
A response to Dr Malcolm Hugh  
Patterson

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## ANZUS and the Next War – a response to Dr Malcom Hugh Patterson

Chris Gardiner

### Introduction

In a June 2024 *Security Challenges* commentary, Dr Malcolm Hugh Patterson calls for a re-evaluation of Australia's alliance with the US in the shadow of a possible US-Sino war over Taiwan and given the possibility that the region in which Australia is a part will soon fall under China's "sphere of influence".

This commentary responds to Dr Patterson's call for a re-evaluation of ANZUS in the current strategic environment<sup>1</sup>. It also considers two possible military flashpoints – the Philippines and Taiwan – and the position and preparations the Australian government should take in each case.

It argues for the continued relevance of ANZUS and for action by the Australian Government to inform and prepare Australians for the possibility of war in the region.

This paper has been revised to correct a mis-attribution to Dr Patterson of a view he ascribed to the Communist Party leadership of the People's Republic of China.

### The Call to Re-evaluate ANZUS

Dr Patterson's reasoning around a review of ANZUS is grounded in his judgment that there is likely to be a war over Taiwan in the next few years and that it is likely that Australia would be involved in that conflict because of its alliance with the US. The US will expect direct Australian involvement, he argues. Current Australian Government equivocation on the subject has been for domestic political purposes and masks an unavoidable Australian subservience to US decision making in any outbreak of war in the region.

The CCP believes, Dr Patterson also warns, that Australia, apart from any such war or possibly as a result of such a war being decided in China's favour, "will shortly be located in China's widened Indo-Pacific sphere of influence" and any Australian defiance of its hegemony will not in the future be tolerated by China.

The risk of Australian engagement with China's military, he writes, is therefore growing. In the context of a major clash, the question Dr Patterson puts, echoing Sam Roggeveen<sup>2</sup>, is whether "a qualified American interest in Australian survival [would] endure the prodigious human and capital costs of a conventional war waged against China". He even ponders the possibility of a Trump administration cutting a deal with China in Asia that abandons Australia.

Post WWII "currents of history" provided stability in the ANZUS relationship, Dr Patterson writes, and that relationship has been fortified by the strength of interpersonal relations of the leaders of both

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<sup>1</sup> By 'strategic environment' I mean the current and developing balance of military and economic power between States in the Indo-Pacific and the potential conflict scenarios in or as a result of which Australia's fundamental national interest – its ability to operate in the world as an independent, democratic state – would be threatened.

<sup>2</sup> Roggeveen, S 2023, *The Echidna Strategy: Australia's Search for Power and Peace*, La Trobe University Press, Collingwood.

countries. The international system which has served Australia and the US and its alliances, however, “falters and its successor is far from certain”. As in any relationship that is ‘interest’ based (and Dr Patterson establishes a ‘realist’ theoretical framing in a brief section of his paper on the nature of alliances), one should not assume the US would uphold the treaty where costs outweigh benefits, including in the context, he posits, of a major clash with China or of a regional order dominated by China.

ANZUS – a treaty of “ambiguous scope and language” – must accordingly be re-evaluated, he concludes.

### On the continuing relevance of ANZUS

There are four questions to be addressed in re-evaluating ANZUS in the current strategic environment: what are the key strategic challenges Australia faces in the current environment; does ANZUS still serve Australia’s interests in its strategic environment; is there any discernible weakening of US commitment to ANZUS and the Australian relationship; and could ANZUS better serve Australian interests?

In the short term<sup>3</sup> the key strategic challenge Australia faces is the relative and rapid shift in the balance of power in the region between China and the US. In the medium term, Australia will face a shift in relative power towards India in the Indian Ocean and a shift in relative power between it and its immediate neighbour Indonesia.

Let me deal with the strategic challenge in the short term, which is the focus of Dr Patterson’s commentary. The increase in China’s relative power might not warrant alarm and defensive responses if it weren’t for what its behaviour suggests about how it might use its power in a Sino sphere of influence were it to be unchecked and achieve regional hegemony: its actions in the South China and West Philippines Seas<sup>4</sup> and towards Taiwan<sup>5</sup>; its declarations about the global order<sup>6</sup>; continuous and continuing cyber-attacks from Chinese actors<sup>7</sup>; and indeed China’s use of economic sanctions to punish the mere call to allow investigation of the source of COVID-19<sup>8</sup>, The growth of its blue water naval capabilities in terms of its ability to project and enforce power across any sphere of influence it establishes is indicative of the shift in its relative power<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> By ‘short term’ I mean 5-6 years, and by ‘medium term’ I mean 10-12 years, or in terms of Australia’s national governance, two terms of office and four terms of office respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Phillips, T, et al 2016, “Beijing rejects tribunal’s ruling in South China Sea case”, *The Guardian*, 13 July, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/12/philippines-wins-south-china-sea-case-against-china>; Magramo, K, et al 2024, “Chinese water cannon damages ship in new South China Sea flare up, Philippines says”, *CNN*, April 30, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/04/30/asia/china-water-cannon-damages-philippines-ship-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> Aljazeera 2024, “China says war games around Taiwan to test ability to ‘seize power’”, 24 May, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/24/china-says-war-games-around-taiwan-to-test-ability-to-seize-power>

<sup>6</sup> Aljazeera 2023, “China’s Xi tells Putin of changes ‘not seen for 100 years’”, 22 March, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/22/xi-tells-putin-of-changes-not-seen-for-100>

<sup>7</sup> Mercer, P 2023, “Australian Intelligence Report Identifies China as Major Backer of Cyber Crime”, *VOA*, November 15, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.voanews.com/a/australian-intelligence-report-identifies-china-as-major-backer-of-cyber-crime/7355583.html>; Mason, M & Tillet, A 2024, “Leaked documents reveal Australia targeted by Chinese hackers”, *AFR*, March 26, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.afr.com/technology/leaked-documents-reveal-australia-targeted-by-chinese-hackers-20240325-p5ff4h>; Bassi, J & Forrest, A 2024, “China’s hackers targeted our MPs. We need to talk about this relationship”, *The Strategist*, ASPI, 6 May, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.aspi.org.au/chinas-hackers-targeted-our-mps-we-need-to-talk-about-this-relationship/>

<sup>8</sup> Walsh, M 2021, “Australia called for a COVID-19 probe. China responded with a trade war”, *ABC News*, 3 January, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-03/heres-what-happened-between-china-and-australia-in-2020/13019242>

<sup>9</sup> Lenden, B 2022, “Never mind China’s new aircraft carrier, these are the ships the US should worry about”, *CNN*, June 26, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/25/asia/china-navy-aircraft-carrier-analysis-intl-hnk-ml-dst/index.html>; Lagrone, S 2022, “

Does ANZUS continue to serve Australia's interests in the context of such a power shift? The ANZUS Treaty is only one but a key underpinning element in the Australia-US security relationship. That relationship delivers access to unequalled advanced technology and weapons, most clearly reflected in the recent AUKUS agreement. It provides access to unequalled intelligence, including through the 'Five Eyes' partnership. It brings Australian under US extended deterrence. The Treaty provides, within the Australia-US relationship, a formal "declaration of trust"<sup>10</sup>, a declaration of commitment to support each other in facing threats to either party's peace and safety, which, whilst not specifying supportive military action, does not preclude it, and to a very significant degree provides a deterrent to any hostile state having to factor in potential US engagement.

To the extent that US forces, assets, systems, and infrastructure located on Australian territory make Australian territory and population centres a target in any US conflict with China, Australia must assess the likely impact of any such attack(s) and the overall costs and benefits in the protection and promotion of its interests. Any such assessment first asks whether Australia supports the US in its policies in the region, specifically regarding Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and The Philippines, and whether it supports US extended nuclear deterrence both to deter use of nuclear weapons and to prevent development of independent nuclear forces in the region. If it does, because it believes its interests are served through robust collective security and deterrence under the US umbrella, it accepts the risks involved. Likewise, if the basing of US forces and infrastructure, not least that which is crucial to the US' own regional strategies, 'entangles' the US military in Australia's direct defence, Australia again has good reason to accept the risks involved in having US forces present on Australian soil.

On balance, ANZUS serves Australia's interests in its current strategic environment.

Is there any indication that the US does not see its interests being served in its Australian security relationship generally and ANZUS specifically? Is there a risk the US could abandon ANZUS and simply cut and run in the face of a threat to Australia that might entangle it in an Australian conflict with China?

AUKUS, and decisions by the US Administration and Congress to enable AUKUS, suggest that the US is strongly committed to its Australian ally and to investing in the alliance. As Townsend has noted, AUKUS marked "a tectonic shift" in the alliance, with the alliance playing for the US a critical role in "high-end US military operations to preserve a stable balance of power in an increasingly contested Indo-Pacific region".<sup>11</sup> As to a possible Trump administration, whilst Trump may be disposed to

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Pentagon: Chinese Navy to Expand to 400 Ships by 2025, Growth Focused on Surface Combatants", *USNI News*, November 29, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://news.usni.org/2022/11/29/pentagon-chinese-navy-to-expand-to-400-ships-by-2025-growth-focused-on-surface-combatants>; Lenden, B & McCarthy, S 2023, "Blue-water ambitions: Is China looking beyond its neighborhood now it has the world's largest navy?", *CNN*, September 2, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/01/asia/china-navy-overseas-military-bases-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>; Eaglen, M 2023, "The U.S. Navy is Falling Behind China, and the Pentagon Knows it", *American Enterprise Institute*, October 31, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.aei.org/op-eds/the-u-s-navy-is-falling-behind-china-and-the-pentagon-knows-it/>; Mizokami, K 2024, "China confirms it's building 4<sup>th</sup> aircraft carrier – and the tables are turning", *Popular Mechanics*, March 12m, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/navy-ships/a60116121/china-building-a-4th-aircraft-carrier/>; Indian Defence News 2024, "China built 10 missile cruisers in 48 months packing 1,120 missiles", June 4, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.indiandefensenews.in/2024/06/china-built-10-missile-cruisers-in-48.html>

<sup>10</sup> Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade 2006, *Australia's Defence relationship with the United States*, Parliament of Australia, Conclusion Section 2.61, accessed 6 June 2024 at [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Completed\\_Inquiries/jfadt/usrelations/chapter2#con](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Completed_Inquiries/jfadt/usrelations/chapter2#con)

<sup>11</sup> Townsend, A 2023, "The AUKUS Submarine Deal Highlights a Tectonic Shift in the A.S.-Australia Alliance", *Carnegie Endowment*, March 23, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2023/03/the-aukus-submarine-deal-highlights-a-tectonic-shift-in-the-us-australia-alliance?lang=en>

handing Europe to Putin<sup>12</sup>, there appears to be bipartisan Congressional support for contesting and containing China<sup>13</sup> and it appears that Trump himself is supportive of AUKUS<sup>14</sup>.

In short, there is little evidence to suggest a risk of a breach of the trust expressed by the parties in the ANZUS treaty in the current environment and evidence to suggest, again on the part of the US, a willingness to instantiate that trust in shared technologies, resources, capabilities and posture.

It is possible that in an actual war in the Philippines or Taiwan, the US would not risk Guam for the Second Thomas Shoal or Seattle for Taipei in the face of nuclear escalation, would accept its 'Suez' moment<sup>15</sup>, hand regional hegemony, and arguably global pre-eminence, to China, and leave Australia and other allies to deal with their losses and negotiate their future vassalage themselves. In the short-term, it is possible but not probable. Were Australia and others to act on that possibility by abandoning their alliances with the US, they would deliver a self-fulfilling prophecy. The argument (sometimes presented as consistent with realist theories of the world) that the US must and will ultimately realise it has no core interests at stake in Asia and will hand it over to China to avoid possible military defeat, ignores the history of the US risking its interests (indeed its cities) in defence of its allies and underestimates the extent to which it defines its interests in terms of its ideals and identity.

### 'The Next War'

Dr Patterson builds his call for a re-evaluation of ANZUS around what he sees as the likely 'next' war – a US-Sino war over Taiwan. There are two current conflicts that could provide flashpoints that escalate to kinetic warfare<sup>16</sup>: Taiwan certainly, but also conflict in the West Philippines Sea between China and the Philippines<sup>17</sup>.

In considering Australia's involvement in these wars as a result of its ANZUS treaty with the US, I want to suggest that a re-evaluation of the treaty should include whether it serves Australian interests by playing a role in balancing power in the region and not just whether it meets Australia's need for an ally in any direct attack on Australia. I also want to suggest that a re-evaluation of ANZUS should consider the extent to which its general commitments to support each party in an attack should be translated into specific commitments for potential war in the region and operationalised to provide readiness for any such war.

Let me start by considering the situation in the West Philippines Sea and around the contest for the Second Thomas Shoal. The Philippines is in dispute with China over their maritime territorial boundaries in the South China and West Philippines Seas. Consistent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, in 2013, the Philippines took its dispute with China to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, for independent judgment on the contending claims. In short, in 2016, the Court upheld

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<sup>12</sup> Sullivan, K 2024, "Trump says he would encourage Russia to 'do whatever the hell they want' to any NATO country that doesn't pay enough", CNN, February 11, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/10/politics/trump-russia-nato/index.html>

<sup>13</sup> Carothers, C & Sun, T 2023, "Why Polarization Won't Stop Washington's New Bipartisan Consensus on China", *US-China Perception Monitor*, October 5, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://uscnpm.org/2023/10/05/why-polarization-wont-stop-washingtons-new-bipartisan-consensus-on-china/>

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, L 2024, "Donald Trump is supportive of AUKUS defence pact, former Australian PM says", Reuters, May 16, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.reuters.com/world/donald-trump-is-supportive-aukus-defence-pact-former-australian-pm-says-2024-05-16/>

<sup>15</sup> Pilkington, P 2022, "America's Suez Moment", *The American Conservative*, November 17, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/americas-suez-moment/>

<sup>16</sup> By the term 'kinetic warfare' I differentiate between low level hybrid warfare that may include smaller military engagements and conventional warfare involving major naval, land, and air assets, personnel, and engagements.

<sup>17</sup> Assuming no unexpected clash and escalation between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.

the position and claims of the Philippines and dismissed China's claims<sup>18</sup>. China rejected the authority of the Court, did not participate in proceedings, and rejected its final decision(s). Naval forces of the two countries now face off in these Seas, with the flashpoint being the Second Thomas Shoal, upon which the Philippines maintains a physical presence to uphold its claims<sup>19</sup>.

The Philippines has a defence treaty with the US, not dissimilar to the ANZUS treaty and signed in the same year (1951). The US is honouring the (similarly vague) commitment in the treaty to support its ally in its dispute with China<sup>20</sup>, and indeed in 2023 agreed to guidelines that applied the treaty's general commitments to any armed attack in the South China Sea (and including on coast guard vessels)<sup>21</sup>.

Now, an attack on US forces defending the Philippines arguably would trigger Australian obligations under ANZUS. Australia should not however view any involvement in the conflict as forced by its treaty obligations. It is in Australia's interests, as a liberal democratic middle power, that the Philippines be supported, both to uphold the UN Charter and to support the exemplary action of the Philippines in seeking to resolve the conflict through peaceful means.

Because it sees its interests being at stake in a challenge to the rules-based order in the region in the actions by China against the Philippines, and notwithstanding that it has no treaty with the Philippines, Australia has committed its navy to joint patrols with the Philippines Navy in what it deems to be Philippines territorial waters<sup>22</sup>.

Michael Pezzulo<sup>23</sup> has recently suggested that ANZUS be seen as a contribution to a regional strategy of power balancing and integrated deterrence, and I think his judgment is right. Being willing to apply ANZUS obligations to any attack on the US in its defence of the Philippines as part of regional deterrence would be an appropriate element in re-evaluating how ANZUS serves Australia's interests.

And what of Taiwan – a territory which is the subject of an unresolved and continuing (if 'cold') civil war between Communist and non-Communist Chinese? Australia has no defence agreement or defence involvement with Taiwan. Indeed, the US has no formal defence treaty with Taiwan. When President Biden was asked, however, whether the US would defend Taiwan against a Chinese attack,

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<sup>18</sup> Permanent Court of Arbitration 2016, *The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of the Philippines v The People's Republic of China)*, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://pca-cpa.org/en/cases/7/>

<sup>19</sup> Seidel, J 2021, "China 'threatens war' with Philippines as US pledges support", *News.com.au*, January 30, accessed 28 April 2024 at [https://www.news.com.au/technology/innovation/military/china-threatens-war-with-philippines-as-us-pledges-support-to-manila/news-story/cbbb6437ce8d2ed171bd6a708c16842a?utm\\_source=SEM&utm\\_medium=PPC\\_SEM&utm\\_campaign=%7Bcampaign%7D&gad\\_source=1&gclid=EAlaIqobChMIrIqYpNvjhQMV1KdmAh0VvAeLEAMYASAAEgJ4jfd\\_BwE](https://www.news.com.au/technology/innovation/military/china-threatens-war-with-philippines-as-us-pledges-support-to-manila/news-story/cbbb6437ce8d2ed171bd6a708c16842a?utm_source=SEM&utm_medium=PPC_SEM&utm_campaign=%7Bcampaign%7D&gad_source=1&gclid=EAlaIqobChMIrIqYpNvjhQMV1KdmAh0VvAeLEAMYASAAEgJ4jfd_BwE); Cheng, D et al 2024, "Are China and the Philippines on a Collision Course?", *United States Institute of Peace*, March 14, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/03/are-china-and-philippines-collision-course>; Tan, R, et al 2024, "Asia's next war could be triggered by a rusting warship in a disputed reef", *The Washington Post*, April 26, accessed 28 April 2024 at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/04/26/asias-next-war-could-be-triggered-by-rusting-warship-disputed-reef/>; Venson, C H 2024, "Philippines Blasts China's Moves After Sea Clash Injured Sailor", *Bloombera*, 19 June, accessed 19 June 2024 at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-06-19/philippines-blasts-china-s-moves-after-sea-clash-injured-sailor?srnd=homepage-africa>

<sup>20</sup> Asia News Network 2024, "US, Philippines to hold drills facing Taiwan, West Philippines Sea", *American Military News*, June 5, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://americanmilitarynews.com/2024/06/us-philippine-marines-to-hold-drills-facing-taiwan-west-philippine-sea/>

<sup>21</sup> Petty, M 2023, "Why have the United States and Philippines issued defence treaty guidelines?", *Reuters*, May 5, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/why-have-united-states-philippines-issued-defence-treaty-guidelines-2023-05-04/>

<sup>22</sup> Australian Associated Press 2024, "Australia and Philippines begin joint patrols in the South China Sea as regional tensions rise", *The Guardian*, 25 Nov, Accessed 28 April 2023, accessed 28 April 2024 at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/25/australia-and-philippines-begin-joint-patrols-in-south-china-sea-as-regional-tensions-rise>

<sup>23</sup> Pezzulo, M 2024, "ANZUS and the fabric of peace in the Pacific", *The Strategist*, ASPI, 4 June, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.aspi.org.au/anzus-and-the-fabric-of-peace-in-the-pacific/>

he responded that it would<sup>24</sup>. He reportedly told President Xi recently that he would defend Taiwan if China acted unilaterally to change the status quo<sup>25</sup>. Were US forces to be attacked in a conflict with China over Taiwan, again ANZUS obligations would need to be considered. The Australian Defence Minister in 2021 stated that it was “inconceivable” that Australia would not join the US in defending Taiwan<sup>26</sup>.

Were China to re-start the civil war by attacking Taiwan and were it to take control of Taiwan, a (de-facto) state that provides democratic governance for some 23 million people will have been crushed; the credibility of US deterrence will have been destroyed; Japan, South Korea and the Philippines will be strategically vulnerable as a result of Chinese force projection out of Taiwan, and at least in the case of Japan and South Korea, there will be immense pressure to develop independent nuclear capabilities<sup>27</sup>. The shift in the regional strategic environment would certainly not be in Australia’s interests.

Seeing ANZUS as committing Australia to support for the US in any defence of Taiwan again involves a re-evaluation of how the treaty best serves to secure Australian interests, defined to include a balancing and deterrence of the power of a state seeking to overturn a regional and global order that currently benefits Australia and other middle powers.

And it’s not as if Australia hasn’t previously engaged Chinese forces in a fight to protect a population in North Asia from Communist conquest in a civil war: Australia committed its military forces to the defence of South Korea against Communist forces in the Korean War (1950-1953) and one of the Australian Army’s proudest moments in war was against the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army’s 60<sup>th</sup> and 118<sup>th</sup> Divisions at the Battle of Kapyong in 1951.

In the shadow of war in the Philippines and Taiwan, then, I take Dr Patterson’s invitation to re-evaluate ANZUS to require the very practical task of clarifying Australia’s application of the Treaty in terms of the forward defence of Australia’s security.

If re-evaluating ANZUS this way suggests involvement in two potentially near-term wars, it would be responsible to also re-evaluate the treaty in terms of the extent of its operationalisation to address such threats.

Pezzulo<sup>28</sup> argues that Australia should, under ANZUS Treaty articles III, IV and V, formally consult the US on how to address the challenge from China, and, in a similar way to the actions by the Philippines and the US to clarify their treaty commitments, specify that the ANZUS applies to armed attacks on the parties’ forces defending Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines. He goes further by recommending policy, planning, command, and operational arrangements, with

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<sup>24</sup> Brunnstrom, D & Hunnicutt, T 2022, “Biden says U.S. forces would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion”, Reuters, September 20, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-says-us-forces-would-defend-taiwan-event-chinese-invasion-2022-09-18/>

<sup>25</sup> Johnson, J 2024, “Biden says he won’t rule out use of U.S. military to defend Taiwan”, *The Japan Times*, June 5, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/06/05/asia-pacific/politics/biden-defend-taiwan-china/>

<sup>26</sup> Reuters 2021, “‘Inconceivable’ Australia would not join U.S. to defend Taiwan – Australian Defence Minister”, November 13, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/inconceivable-australia-would-not-join-us-defend-taiwan-australian-defence-2021-11-12/>. As Dr Patterson notes, the current Defence Minister is not so sure.

<sup>27</sup> For discussion of the significance of Taiwan, see Rahman, C 2001, *Defending Taiwan: Why it Matters*, Naval War College, Newport; Rehman, I 2014, “Why Taiwan Matters”, *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*, February 28, accessed 7 June 2024 at <https://csbaonline.org/about/news/why-taiwan-matters>; Sweeney, M 2022, “How Militarily Useful Would Taiwan be to China”, *Defence Priorities*, April 12, accessed 7 June 2024 at <https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/how-militarily-useful-would-taiwan-be-to-china>

<sup>28</sup> Op Cit.

articulated aims, objectives, roles and missions, be put in place. Again, such instantiation of broad ANZUS commitments to provide readiness for foreseeable threats seems eminently appropriate, indeed prudent, in any re-evaluation of the treaty.

I would add another element in the practical re-evaluation of ANZUS however: if we conclude that ANZUS should play a role in securing order and peace in the region and should be operationalised in readiness to deal with threats to that order, we should also consider the need to inform the Australian public about the implications of ANZUS as we see them and prepare now for the political warfare that will be waged for public understanding of the legitimacy of regional engagement policies and public allegiance should we commit to war in the Philippines and/or Taiwan.

Consider two scenarios. China's Coast Guard detains Filipino fishers in disputed waters under Chinese law covering illegal crossing of Chinese borders and trespass in Chinese territory<sup>29</sup>. Australia joins the Philippines in protesting the arrests and demands such arrests cease. It is told not to interfere with the application of Chinese border laws and in a dispute between China and the Philippines, and that any such interference, including naval support for the Philippines and US Navies in preventing Coast Guard ships from enforcing the law, will be treated as an act of war.

The second scenario<sup>30</sup>: China announces that it will be enforcing national maritime safety and coast guard laws along with enhanced customs inspection rules on all shipping entering 'its' waters around Taiwan. It begins to deploy Coast Guard, Maritime Safety Administration and PLA Navy ships around Taiwan. Taiwan announces that it does not accept the application of these laws in 'its' waters, and the US advises not only that its ships will not comply but that it will escort vessels to and from Taiwanese waters. Australia declares support for the US position, and China warns that any such support will be treated as an act of hostility.

In both scenarios, the Australian public would be subjected to significant information warfare and disinformation to delegitimise any action under ANZUS<sup>31</sup>. Elements would include: why China's action were consistent with its historical rights; why China was simply acting in accordance with its laws; why Australia should abide by its own 'One China' policy regarding Taiwan; that Australia has no treaty with the Philippines and no role to play in that matter; that ANZUS does not apply and that the US was dragging Australians into unnecessary wars; that the US carries the blame for the conflicts, exploiting and exacerbating the disputes to preserve its own hegemony; that Australia would suffer significant loss of life and face significant economic sanctions for matters outside its concerns; and that China, with its now well-known military power, would prevail in any conflict and the losses would be for nought.

These are the wars that ANZUS may require of Australia. These wars will test the Australian public's commitment to ANZUS. A re-evaluation of ANZUS must involve the very real consideration of Australian engagement in its region through the treaty, consider the likelihood of these wars, and

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<sup>29</sup> This scenario is based on China's announcement that it will enforce such laws in the South China Sea from 15 June 2024. See Cai, V 2024, "Coastguards can detain trespassers without trial, says Beijing as activists converge on Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea", South China Morning Post, 16 May, accessed 6 June 2024 at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3262911/beijing-clarifies-coastguards-detention-powers-activists-converge-scarborough-shoal-south-china-sea>. China it seems is already beginning to rely on this use of its new laws in its tactics: Chen, A 2024, "South China Sea: photos show Chinese coastguard encircled, boarded Philippine boat", South China Morning Post, 19 June, accessed 20 June 2024 at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3267279/south-china-sea-photos-show-chinese-coastguard-encircled-boarded-philippine-boat>

<sup>30</sup> This scenario is taken from Lin, B et al 2024, "How China could quarantine Taiwan", Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 5, accessed 6 June at <https://features.csis.org/chinapower/china-quarantine-taiwan/>

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of 'information warfare' by China in the South China Sea, see Clarke, M 2019, "China's Application of 'Three Warfares' in the South China Sea and Xinjiang", Orbis, Spring, pp. 187-208.



consider how to build public understanding and support for ANZUS in the context of these regional engagements.

## Conclusion

It may be that Australians would be happy to opt for the quiet life involved in acceptance of Chinese 'humane authority' under an 'all under heaven' beneficent Chinese regional hegemony<sup>32</sup>, in the place of ANZUS and US primacy. I very much doubt that any Government that proposed such an acquiescent defence and foreign policy turn would survive. It may be that Australia could stand alone in resisting coercion and aggression in a Sino sphere of influence, without the US, although it is hard not to believe that it – with other states such as Japan and South Korea – would in the end have to adopt nuclear weapons to do so. Roggeveen has made an argument for why he thinks Australia could stand alone, burrowed into its continental redoubt, echidna-like, bristling with missiles, in the hope that the loss of several naval assets in any military conflict would deter China from using its massive – and in the context of a war with an echidna-sized opponent like Australia, inexhaustible – military power to force its will on the country<sup>33</sup>.

Or it could be that ANZUS, strengthened by AUKUS, and extended to ensure Australia plays its part in regional balancing of power and deterrence, could contribute not just to Australia's security but to that of other like-minded states in the region and indeed provide an environment that, in deterring and preventing conflict, would help China gradually move beyond its current nationalist and revisionist dispositions and become a peaceable great power that learns to share the South China Sea and its resources with its neighbours and, over the course of time, persuades rather than compels Taiwan to come under its governance. It is possible, I think, in re-evaluating of ANZUS in the shadow of 'the next war', to find not only that it continues to serve Australia's interests, but that it could make exactly that contribution to securing regional stability and peace.

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<sup>32</sup> For an account of Chinese 'humane authority' as a force in future international relations, see Zhao, T 2016, *All Under Heaven: The Tianxia System for a Possible World Order*, University of California Press, Oakland, and for the place of *Tianxia* – 'all under heaven' – in Xi Jinping's thinking see Tsang, S & Cheung, O 2024, *The Political Thought of Xi Jinping*, Oxford University Press, New York.

<sup>33</sup> Op Cit.