

## **The Yanks Are Welcome in Oz**

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This week, senior Australian and American national security officials meet to mark the 60th anniversary of their security alliance, in San Francisco -- the very city where the Anzus treaty was signed.

The alliance has played an important part in anchoring the U.S. presence in Asia since the Second World War. Australia has benefited from the resulting security umbrella, intelligence and advanced military technology from America. The United States has gained from joint intelligence facilities and a reliable ally willing and able to maintain stability in its immediate neighborhood and to contribute further afield. Australia has sent men and materiel to conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. It was quick to invoke the Anzus Treaty after 9/11.

There is no cause for complacency, however. Canberra, Washington and their friends and allies face new risks and dangers. Many of these follow from uncertainty about China's rapid rise and longer-term intentions.

It's encouraging that a number of these challenges are on the agenda for this week's talks. Take cyber security. Hardly a week goes by without new reports of an attack on a Western government or company, many of them emanating from China. Australia and America have common interests here: Both are victims of previous cyber attacks and both are highly globalized countries with a huge stake in keeping cyberspace free, open and secure.

Officials will also discuss steps the alliance can take to protect other domains in the global commons on which they depend. As trading nations, America and Australia have long taken unhindered access to the high seas as a given. Yet this assumption is under threat. China is deploying military capabilities that jeopardize the U.S. Navy's ability to operate in the Western Pacific, while at the same time claiming ever larger swathes of the South China Sea. It's also developing aircraft carriers and the other power-projection forces it feels it needs to protect its crucial energy shipments.

U.S. allies such as Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, and other nations such as Vietnam, are anxious as they find themselves in the front-line of this assertiveness. And others such as Australia, while farther away, are heavily dependent for jobs and economic growth on trade passing through an increasingly volatile South China Sea.

So Australia and the United States must seize the opportunity to bolster their current position in the Pacific and Indian Oceans while they still can. The window may not stay open, considering America is planning defense cuts, while China is increasing spending in this area. Canberra will have to step up to shoulder more of Washington's load. Its current defense budget of \$26 billion will not be enough to fund a planned naval build-up.

Australia can help U.S. military strategy in other ways in the future. American forces operating out of Darwin and airbases in Australia's north would have ready access to the crucial waters linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans and the South China Sea; they also happen to be less exposed to a potential Chinese attack than locations farther north. A Marine task force stationed in Darwin, with several thousand Marines and supporting ships and aircraft, is a distinct possibility. U.S. ships and submarines operating from Australia's vast west coast could roam the Indian Ocean at will, whether to keep sea lanes safe from pirates or respond to crises in the Middle East.

Australian facilities would also help spread some of the burden on other U.S. bases in the region. Washington has been cut off from using the Philippines as a base since the early 1990s and its Futenma base in Okinawa, Japan, is now the site of a bitter political debate.

President Obama's upcoming visit to Australia in November presents an ideal opportunity to announce a permanent U.S. military presence Down Under then, along with increased American use of Australian bases and facilities. Australia has some of the world's largest military training ranges, which U.S. forces could use to hone their combat skills. Australia would benefit from the enhanced deterrent effect of the U.S. military presence and from Australian forces' ability to train more closely with the world's most sophisticated military.

Also important, greater military relations indicate how close the two countries and their peoples are. Polling conducted by the Lowy Institute shows a majority of Australians would support basing American forces. Prime Minister Julia Gillard's left-wing Green party allies would probably object, but her disastrous approval ratings suggest that she would do better to stand up to them.

The greatest impact of a stronger Australia-U.S. alliance would be for the Indo-Pacific region. This part of the world sees some of the world's most fraught conflicts, but is yet becoming more and more key for the economic wellbeing of the planet. The two democracies should work together to minimize the risks to peace and stability, while enhancing prosperity.

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