

Storm Signals Fly for U.S. in South Pacific

New Zealand's ban on entry of nuclear-capable naval ships raises fresh set of problems for the Reagan administration.

WELLINGTON

The sharp dispute over nuclear arms between the United States and New Zealand, staunch allies for more than three decades, is threatening American military strategy in the South Pacific with a serious setback.

At stake: The viability of the ANZUS Treaty, the 33-year-old defense pact among Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. that anchors the southern edge of the West's security network in Asia.

Triggered by the antinuclear stance of Prime Minister David Lange, a policy that effectively bans American warships from calling at New Zealand ports, the crisis already has led Washington to cancel at least six defense exercises involving New Zealand.

Secretary of State George Shultz told a U.S. Senate committee on February 21 that New Zealand basically had "taken a walk" from ANZUS.

As the estrangement widened, Lange planned during a late-February visit to the U.S. to personally reaffirm his com-

mitment to the alliance. But at the same time, he has made clear that he will not back down from his decision to bar nuclear-armed or nuclear-powered ships from New Zealand waters.

In the words of one of his supporters here: "Nuclear weapons are a danger to the entire world, and we shouldn't have anything to do with them."

To avoid tipping off the Soviet Union, the U.S. refuses to disclose which ships in its fleet are in the nuclear category. Washington contends that Lange's order, therefore, amounts to a ban against all American vessels and thus undermines the alliance.

Heightening U.S. concern is the realization that not only U.S.-New Zealand relations are being cast into doubt. Lange's antinuclear position also is increasing pressure inside Australia, an even more important member of the alliance, for a similar reduction of support for U.S. defense policies.

Likewise, several island nations in the South Pacific may weigh nuclear prohibitions of their own. Vanuatu, for one, already has withdrawn the gangplank for American ships.

Notes one American analyst in Washington: "Leaders of such islands as Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa look to New



Lange says he is pro-U.S. but antinuclear.

Zealand as a big brother, as a window on the world. It might not take much to encourage these small states to emulate Wellington. The resulting patchwork of nuclear-free zones might make it all but impossible for U.S. ships to move through the area."

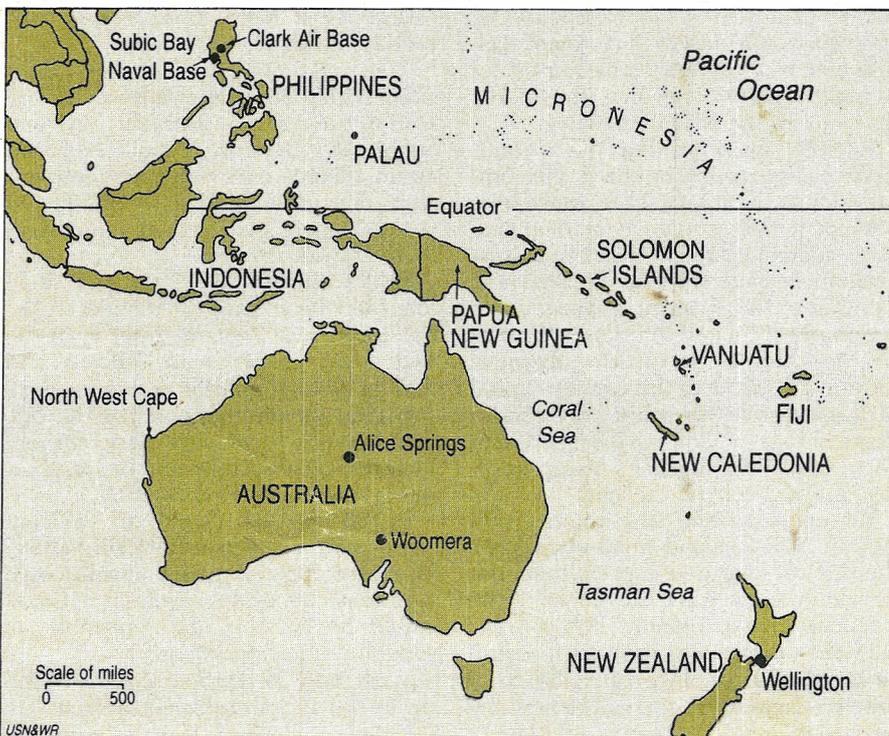
Beyond that, American policymakers fear that the ANZUS crisis could provoke a backlash as far away as Japan and in Western Europe, where some allies are seen wavering in their commitment to the U.S. nuclear deterrent against the U.S.S.R..

Soviet buildup. What makes discord in ANZUS even more disconcerting to the U.S. is the fact that it comes at a time of growing Soviet military expansion in the Pacific. The Kremlin has turned Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam into a major air-and-naval facility. The American-built installation now is a home base for Badger bombers, MiG-23 jet fighters and surveillance craft that give the Soviets an unprecedented presence in a region long dominated by the U.S.

Making matters worse: Spreading anti-American sentiment in the Philippines at the western fringe of the South Pacific is raising concern over the long-term security of the two key U.S. facilities in Asia, Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base. Some opponents of President Ferdinand Marcos pledge to shut down the bases if they gain power.

New Zealand seems an improbable nation to rock the West's security boat. A peaceful farming land of 3.2 million people and more than 60 million sheep, it is far removed from the world's major hot spots. It long has been a close U.S. friend, sending troops to fight in the Korean and Vietnam wars.

In 1951, New Zealand signed the



Even in peace time, it can't stay out of trouble!!!



U.S.S. *Buchanan*. New Zealand's denial of port call for the American destroyer leads to South Pacific controversy.

ANZUS Treaty, a loosely worded pact binding each member to "consult" and "act to meet the common danger according to its constitutional processes." Originally formed to protect against a potentially rearmed Japan, ANZUS has become an umbrella for military and intelligence cooperation agreements.

But ANZUS was not created as a nuclear alliance, and New Zealand has displayed over the years its apprehension about the possible introduction of atomic weapons close to home. It also opposes French nuclear tests in the Pacific and in 1972 sent a Navy ship with a cabinet minister aboard into the French test area to demonstrate its disapproval.

While not a hot issue in last July's elections that put Lange in power, the call for a ban on nuclear-armed or powered ships was a significant element of the Labor Party platform. So when Labor won, the 42-year-old Lange, a Methodist lay preacher, wasted no time issuing his controversial directive.

Despite strong bonds of friendship with the U.S., Lange's antinuclear tilt has won widespread support in New Zealand. Says one doctor in Wellington: "A lot of people here believe nuclear arms should have no role in our defense—or in solving world problems. They should not be a part of New Zealand's input into international matters."

A new generation. The point also is made that many members of the Lange government are too young to have memories of World War II, when Western nations had to fight together against a common enemy.

Even against that background, the U.S. believed at first that differences could be resolved by quiet diplomacy. Instead, the level of rhetoric soared. Finally, the U.S. decided to call Lange's bluff, ordering the destroyer *Buchanan* to make a port call after an

ANZUS exercise scheduled for March, but declining to state whether the ship would be carrying nuclear arms.

After days of wrangling, New Zealand refused entry, making it the first treaty member to bar an American warship.

The U.S. promptly pulled out of the planned Sea Eagle maneuvers and later canceled or withdrew from other joint operations, asserting that participation with New Zealand would be "inappropriate." In Washington, American officials said New Zealand no longer will be treated as an ally.

Reconciliation will not come easily. Lange says he is pro-American but insists he is committed to oppose nuclear arms and that ANZUS never was meant to be a nuclear-protection pact. As he puts it: "The real question at issue, the question which must in the interest of all of us now be resolved, is whether nuclear weapons have become the whole character of the ANZUS alliance."

To ease suspicion that he is anti-West, Lange called in the Soviet ambassador on February 22 to warn Moscow not to take propaganda advantage of his quarrel with the Americans. New Zealand, he said, still is an "unshakable member of the Western alliance."

Complicating any solution is the David-Goliath nature of the dispute. American visitors to this breezy capital of English-style churches and gingerbread houses quickly are barraged with jibes about "big brother" trying to order smaller countries around.

Yet many civilian and military officials in New Zealand privately oppose the nuclear ban and express their understanding of American anger. "The U.S. has to make a point," says one.

Public-opinion surveys reflect a similar ambivalence. Since cancellation of the Sea Eagle exercise, mail to newspapers that once ran 5 to 1 in Lange's

favor has dropped to half for and half against. A recent poll indicated that 78 percent of New Zealanders surveyed supported ANZUS.

Domestic politics cannot be ignored. Lange's conservative foes argue that the Prime Minister's stand will hinder, not help, arms-control efforts. They challenge Labor's denial of a potential military threat to New Zealand, citing the Soviet Union's blue-water fleet that operates out of Vietnam.

Yet the left wing of the ruling Labor Party appears bent on taking an even more independent tack in the months ahead.

Treaty stands. Lange has dropped hints that he is willing to negotiate. But he also refutes the idea that the end of ANZUS is at hand. Even critics concede he is right.

"The chances of Congress going along with a new defense treaty of any kind in this age are not high," says one opponent. "Besides, if the U.S. broke up an alliance over one disagreement, what does that do to its credibility in other alliances such as those with Japan or Western Europe?"

Shultz himself told American senators that the treaty will remain on paper until New Zealand returns to the fold. State Department officials said that could take months or even years.

Diplomats here believe that the U.S. eventually will pressure New Zealand by reducing arms sales and by less sharing of intelligence information.

But even that would be difficult. More than a dozen American, Australian and New Zealand intelligence agencies cooperate so closely that it would be hard, if not impossible, to separate their operations.

With New Zealand's role in ANZUS up in the air, American strategists are wondering about Australia's intentions.