

Reviews

In Defence of New Zealand: Foreign Policy Choices in the Nuclear Age. By Ramesh Thakur. New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, Wellington, 1985. N.Z. price: \$9.95.

RAMESH THAKUR'S work is a timely publication. Debate over foreign policy has been more intensive in the last eighteen months than at any other time in the country's history. Moreover, this debate has reached closer to the core of the country's foreign policy than have other issues, even Vietnam and South Africa, for it comes closer to challenging deepseated notions as to who are our friends and who are not.

Dr Thakur's study deprives any participant in the debate of an excuse for being ill-informed. He examines many of the arguments for and against participation in the ANZUS alliance and the wider-ranging political alignment with the United States of which it is the most overt manifestation. He also weighs the principal foreign policy stances often advanced as alternatives to ANZUS, namely non-alignment and neutrality, as well as scrutinizing the proposals for a South Pacific nuclear weapons-free zone.

The core of Thakur's study is his analysis of the ANZUS debate. Firstly, Thakur takes up the argument that New Zealand is a nuclear target. He considers that such reports are 'greatly exaggerated' (p.51) and invokes Soviet evidence in support of this claim. On the question of whether or not there is any obligation under ANZUS for the United States to come to New Zealand's assistance, Thakur downplays the differences in wording between the texts of the North Atlantic and the ANZUS treaties. His defence of the credibility of the commitment rests on the argument of a 'coincidence of concrete interests': 'No U.S. government could, or would want to, lightly discard its duty to aid a New Zealand under serious military threat from an external foe' (p.55).

Thakur accepts that the Soviet Union, 'even if it had the intention' (p.57) still lacks the capability to threaten New Zealand. But he relates this position to the deterrent impact of the treaty: 'the claim that New Zealand should withdraw from ANZUS because the Soviet Union is no threat to us is tantamount to damning the alliance for being too successful' (p.58). Some critics of the treaty say that New Zealand no longer has enemies. Thakur is not so sure. There are, he argues, four countries which can threaten New Zealand: the United States — but 'an actual American military attack on New Zealand is too wildly fanciful to contemplate' (p.60), the Soviet Union, China and Japan. Thakur concludes that 'regardless of original motivation, ANZUS is an insurance against a possible, if remote, Soviet or Chinese threat to New Zealand. And of course it would be directly applicable should the even more remote threat of a resurgent Japan materialise again.' (p.61)

Thakur also considers the links between alliance membership and New Zealand's

economic interests. He concludes that ANZUS provides New Zealand with an important and direct channel to key decision-makers in Washington: and this does ensure 'that the New Zealand case receives attentive hearing and considerate treatment on all occasions' (p.64). Thakur also analyzes the charge of political dependence. He instances New Zealand's stance on issues such as the Falklands War, on Grenada, and on Iran as evidence of its capacity to take an independent course of action. Thus in respect of Iran the fact that New Zealand's economy could not bear the cost of joining in sanctions in fact was understood and accepted by the Americans (p.66). Moreover where New Zealand does agree with the United States, Thakur sees this as stemming from free consent and suggests Kampuchea as an instance where Australia has taken a different stance from the United States. It is clear that New Zealand would have done so too if it had wished (p.67).

Overall, Thakur's analysis suggests that the alliance is more satisfactory to New Zealand than many of its critics contend: maybe our foreign policy choices are more straightforward than we thought. There are two problems with this conclusion, though. Not many of the claims as to the merits of the alliance can be made — as Thakur himself recognizes — without qualification. 'Probably' (p.130) the targets to be hit first in a nuclear exchange would be in Europe, the Atlantic or the United States: for many this is insufficient comfort. There is no ironclad guarantee of American assistance: if it is the case that the United States would not 'lightly' discard its obligation to aid New Zealand, does this simply mean it would, but only after due consideration? The alliance may ensure that the United States will listen to New Zealand's economic concerns but it 'does not guarantee deference to its economic priorities' (p.64). It is not clear just how independent New Zealand could be on a foreign policy issue: maybe on Iran or Kampuchea, but what about relations with the Soviet Union?

This last point dramatizes the fact that Thakur's arguments about the compatibility of New Zealand and American interests rest on a set of assumptions about the nature of those interests. And whilst under one formulation of New Zealand interests the limitations and/or costs of the alliance might seem insignificant, under another formulation they might loom larger.

Thakur comments that 'at the general level, New Zealand security has been sought within the context of the wider grouping to which it belongs by virtue of historical origins, kinship ties, and political ideology' (p.49) and that 'New Zealand . . . continues to have much in common with the Western ideological premises that underlay the Cold War . . . alliances merely gave expression to an existing consensus . . . New Zealand has been an affluent country and an aid donor' (p.89). In the final analysis 'the ties that bind New Zealand to America, Australia, Britain and Canada are the ties of kinship; they are allied more by history, language, culture and race, than by treaty commitment' (p.109).

It is precisely these ties that critics of the alliance challenge and this is the point at which Thakur's study could usefully have been more expansive. The historian can identify a number of factors, some of which Thakur touches on in passing, which may explain why New Zealand's alignment with the west no longer seems so axiomatic as it once did.

First, thirty-five years ago, when the alliance with the United States was made, it was seen as an enlargement of New Zealand's primary association, that with Great Britain. The 'ties that bind' have tied New Zealand in the first instance and most powerfully, to Britain, and perhaps Australia, and only secondarily to the United States (and the United States itself has of course always been sceptical of 'special'

relationships). The Holland government which signed the treaty was committed to the Cold War, but the treaty preamble made reference to New Zealand and Australian Commonwealth obligations outside the Pacific area. The equation in the minds of the New Zealanders seems to have been that which obtained in World War II: New Zealand would fight in support of British interests, secure in the knowledge that its home territory would be protected by a friendly power. The transition from an alliance system linking New Zealand to Britain in the first instance, and then to the United States, for one linking New Zealand more directly to the United States took place in the late 1950s and the 1960s and was dramatized by New Zealand's involvement in Vietnam alongside the United States and Australia but without Britain. The alliance was drained of some of its emotional kith and kin content: American crusades were not as appealing as British ones. Moreover, the economic association with Britain could not be transposed: the New Zealand-American economic relationship has been a much less intimate affair.

There have also been shifts in perceptions of regional security. New Zealand has always wished to keep the South Pacific for 'us' and not 'them'. Through the nineteenth century all powers other than Britain were suspect intruders. Well into the post-World War II era there was persistent anxiety about the country's relationship with impoverished and populous Asia. Today the Europeans have (mostly) gone home and the Asians are seen as trade partners rather than adversaries. But a new intruder has been identified: nuclear weapons. The campaign for a nuclear weapons-free Pacific draws on longstanding and deep-seated notions about who or what should be allowed in the South Pacific. This is particularly evident in the campaign against the French, but diffidence about American activities in the South Pacific has historical antecedents too (see M. P. Lissington, *New Zealand and the United States 1840-1944*, for some of them).

Contemporaneously with these quasi-nationalist currents has come increasingly vocal criticism of the underlying assumptions of the Cold War from a wide variety of groups in New Zealand. The criticism is partly leftwing and anti-American in character: Thakur takes note of this latter aspect (p.47) although he does not really explore it. (It would be interesting for instance to identify the connections between the Democratic Party's present defence and foreign policies and the traditional suspicion found in the Social Credit movement towards international finance). There is also a peace movement which overlaps with but is not quite to be identified with the left. It stems in part from social changes which have their roots in the postwar era. Tertiary student numbers have increased steadily since the 1950s and students or ex-students have played a prominent role in various kinds of political action of which the 'anti-nuke' movement is one. Contemporary feminism has also been a major current in the peace movement. Thakur himself comments (p.144) that 'younger people and women are less supportive of nuclear ship visits to New Zealand. Males over 55 are the most supportive'.

Yet maybe there is something to Thakur's 'ties that bind'. Despite the evidence of lack of enthusiasm for, or even opposition to, American foreign policy, there are no predictable conclusions. Polls show that while 60 per cent of New Zealanders support an anti-nuclear policy, around 70 per cent support ANZUS (*Evening Post* October 1, 1985). Some of the 70 per cent presumably do not support the anti-nuclear policy and represent the pre-1984 orthodoxy of belief in the shared interests of New Zealand and the United States. And some of the 60 per cent presumably do not support ANZUS and see the two countries as having few shared interests. But it would seem that around a third of the population espouses a radicalism that is

tempered either by apprehension as to what might happen if the Americans really did leave the South Pacific, or perhaps by a judgement that they won't. For these people and, therefore, for the country as a whole, there is profound ambivalence about the foreign policy choices which should be made.

Thakur's study would have gained from a more extended exploration of these dimensions of the subject. Alongside his analysis of the arguments he would then have been able to place an evaluation of their political significance. The analysis nonetheless does stand as an excellent and lucid introduction to a debate in which clarity of thought and expression are all too often at a discount.

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Horowhenua County and its People: A Centennial History. By A. J. Dreaver. The Dunmore Press, for the Horowhenua County Council, 1984. 316 pp. NZ price: \$28.00.

THIS BOOK represents a most refreshing change from the normal format and style of local body centennial histories. The fact that it was commissioned to commemorate the centennial of a local authority — Horowhenua County Council — has not been allowed to cramp the author's approach to the subject, and all credit must be given to the Council for adopting so enlightened an attitude to the writing of its history. Fortunately, there does seem to be a growing recognition on the part of local authorities of the desirability of celebrating more than just the activities of councillors and officials. Hastings and Hamilton come to mind as other recent examples of this willingness to allow celebration of the centennial of a local authority to be used as an opportunity to write in-depth analyses of all facets of the evolution of a town or region. In this work, for instance, there is no assumption that everything began in 1885. There is abundant treatment of the district's pre-1885 history, Maori as well as European. The history of the County Council itself is well integrated into the narrative and flows smoothly out of the discussion of the phases of development in the district.

One drawback to local body histories is that they sometimes impose, on the area to be examined, boundaries which do not make a great deal of sense in any terms except those of local government administration. The Horowhenua region has never been particularly self-contained and sharply marked off from other regions, such as the neighbouring Manawatu. It featured in early New Zealand history as a region through which people wished to travel — on the coastal route between Wellington and Wanganui — and much of its own history was tied up with efforts to overcome the obstacles to such travel constituted by its swamps, rivers, and forests. The author handles this aspect of its character sensitively and skilfully, not trying to force onto the district more of a coherence and unity as a region than is justified by the evidence. Rather than adopting a narrative structure he devotes each chapter to a detailed examination of an aspect of the district's history — flax-milling, timber, the development of dairy farming, the construction of a hydroelectric dam at Mangahao, the