

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS. ARTHUR GAVSHON, DIPLOMATIC EDITOR,
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1. In the aftermath of the American withdrawal from Indochina there have been expressions of doubt about the credibility of US security commitments. How do you foresee Australia's defence requirements and the continued validity of the ANZUS and SEATO treaty arrangements?

ANSWER: There has never been any question in Australia of the validity of ANZUS. It is more than 20 years since it was signed and the friendship and co-operation which underlie it had their origins in World War Two. SEATO is a different matter, it has very little political relevance or military relevance. Australia's long term defence requirements are based on an expert strategic assessment which is constantly under review. There is no likelihood of any external threat to Australia's own security in the foreseeable future. The stability of the region is more difficult to predict but on the whole I am optimistic.

2. There has been some emphasis within the United States on the need for American military aid to go primarily to those allied nations which help themselves. In your view does Australia now qualify completely with that requirement? And do you see any merit in the suggestions of some authorities that Australia should perhaps enter the nuclear weapons league by building tactical weapons for the defence of your continent?

ANSWER: Australia has never received American military aid, though, of course, we have been war time allies. The Australian Government is resolutely opposed to the production of her nuclear weapons and indeed, to the production or testing in any environment of nuclear weapons by any other country. We have ratified the NPT and have constantly urged others to do likewise. As I have pointed out this week it is regrettable that only 17 of the 34 Commonwealth countries have ratified the NPT.

3. Your government has been portrayed as favouring a "zone of peace" in the Indian Ocean but opposing a "nuclear-free zone" in the Pacific. If this is a fair portrayal how do you reconcile the seeming contradiction?

ANSWER: Certainly we have supported the Sri Lanka proposal for a free zone in the Indian Ocean. The idea of a nuclear free zone in the Pacific, while unexceptionable in principle would be exceedingly difficult to implement.

The Pacific covers a vast area and the number of states, within it, or on its borders is very large. At least one nation is still using it for nuclear experiments. I might say, however that Australia has vigorously opposed French nuclear testing in the Pacific. I am happy that France has now apparently decided to cease atmospheric tests.

4. Soon you will be visiting President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger in Washington. How in this period of reappraisal in the United States do you envisage the development of Canberra-Washington relations?

ANSWER: I look forward to a period of much closer co-operation and understanding. The American nation has just come through one of its darkest and traumatic experiences since the Civil War. The lifting of that shadow will surely bring America closer in spirit to her allies in the region.

5. Do you agree the balance of power in Asia now appears tilted toward the Communist countries? As you see it are the Soviets or the Chinese People's Republic the main beneficiaries?

ANSWER: After three decades of war I think the main beneficiaries will be the Vietnamese people. I don't think it is realistic to talk in simple terms about the balance of power in Asia. This is not a confrontation between China and the Soviet Union, anymore than it was a confrontation between world communism and western democracy. It is largely because we saw the conflict in those terms that the war raged so long at such terrible cost.

6. Is Australia ready for trade and friendship with the four regimes of Indochina as it has shown itself to be with the CPR? And is your government ready to co-operate with those regimes in the reconstruction of their war-damaged lands?

ANSWER: Certainly. We have made that clear since the signing of the Paris agreement. As a belligerent nation in South Vietnam, though admittedly under a previous administration, Australia has a special obligation to contribute to the task of reconstruction.

7. Some of the nations of South East Asia and the Pacific are moving toward the extension of their zone of "peace, freedom and neutrality" by hopefully bringing the Indochinese peoples and Burma into it. Would Australia offer its political support for such a project.

ANSWER: I think so. The details of this proposal are still uncertain. But in general we are in favour of such movements.

8. Do you anticipate the early reunion of North and South Vietnam? And do you share the view of many authorities who expect the Indochinese states, under Vietnamese leadership, to concentrate on reconstruction rather than to expand their influence and power?

ANSWER: Reunion would, we hope be a logical process. How long it takes would depend on the governments concerned. I would certainly expect the Indochinese states to concentrate on reconstruction. For the moment they have very little choice.
