

U.S. - New Zealand Disagreement on Port Access for U.S. Ships

[The following is a reprint of a Department of State policy statement announced by then Department Deputy Spokesman Charles Redman on 2 July 1986.]

In Manila, Prime Minister Lange and Secretary of State Shultz discussed the ship visit problem between our two countries. The meeting concluded with a recognition that the Government of New Zealand does not feel that it can live with U.S. policy on this issue, but that we would part company as friends. We regret that the position of the United States, both with reference to that meeting and with respect to our efforts to find a satisfactory solution, has been misconstrued.

The United States maintains a worldwide policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence or absence of nuclear weapons. Implicit in this policy is a requirement for ambiguity about the nature of the armaments of our ships. Our other allies recognize the need for this ambiguity, and none feel constrained to make judgements about individual ships. It is on this point that the policy of the Government of New Zealand differs significantly from that of all our other allies.

If New Zealand maintains its intentions to say no to ships operating under the ambiguity of neither confirming or denying, or to nuclear-powered ships, then it is not possible for us to send Navy vessels into New Zealand's ports. This vitiates the principal contribution that New Zealand makes to the alliance.

Suggestions that the United States has refused to engage in negotiations or consultation on this issue are at variance with the facts. The United States has made a considerable effort to work with New Zealand over the past two years to resolve the port ban and to restore normal port access. We have maintained intensive contacts and understand fully the New Zealand Government's position. Unfortunately, the New Zealand Government has as yet not put forward any proposal to restore normal port access compatible with our global responsibilities and our policy of neither confirming or denying our requirements.

It has been alleged that the ANZUS [Australia, New Zealand, United States security pact] treaty contains only an obligation to consult. Article IV of the treaty clearly states that an armed attack on any of the parties in the Pacific area would be a danger to the other parties and that all would act to meet the common danger. The U.S. government has consistently confirmed that it would fully and promptly fulfill its security commitments under ANZUS, by both military and non-military means, as best would meet the threat.

New Zealand's withdrawal of an essential element of its ANZUS participation inevitably must alter the obligations of the United States with respect to its security responsibilities to New Zealand. We continue to hope that New Zealand will eventually restore normal port access on a basis comparable to other alliance partners.