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Political Report for the Month of April 1975, L. N. Ray, High Commissioner, 'ANZUS Meeting in 1975 after the victory by the Communist forces in Indo-China'

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Summary:

Australia and New Zealand stress the importance of closer consultation with them on matters concerning their security and the US strategy in the entire region.

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ANZUS Meeting

In view of the victory gained by the Communist forces in Indo-China which signified the humiliating defeat of the United States and liquidation of its military strength in South-East Asia, the annual meeting of the ANZUS Council in Washington (April 24 and 25) assumed special significance. The USA was naturally anxious to retain at least two trusted friends, Western-oriented New Zealand and Australia, in this region to reassure them as strongly as possible of its help and support as envisaged under the ANZUS Pact. Australia and New Zealand, on the other hand, were equally keen to stress on the importance of closer consultation with them on matters concerning their security and the US strategy in the entire region. They pressed for having a greater say in decisions concerning the Pacific basin's future, as they were not prepared to accept dictates of the Great Powers on matters of such vital concern to them. Mr. A.J. Faulkner, Minister of Labour, who led the NZ Delegation, was reported to have hammered the theme that it would not be politically or economically productive for the United States to continue pursuing policies based solely on its relationship with the Soviet Union and China. He was supported by the Australian foreign minister, Senator Willisee, who led his country delegation, and the final communiqué emphasized the importance of close co-operation among the ANZUS members and other nations "on the problems of international finance and trade, especially trade in raw materials and primary products where both the interests of both producers and consumers should be taken into account. Even in regard to this "agreement" on economic cooperation, not to speak of military or political decision, the NZ Press Association correspondent from Washington doubted whether Dr. Kissinger who led the US delegation "will act on it in formulating policies>' He went even further to observe, "Dr. Kissinger is not noted for his willingness to take into account the views of nations other than the super-powers."

10. It was reported that during the Council meeting, Dr. Kissinger emphasized that the USA intended to remain a military power in Asia and the Pacific. Both New Zealand and Australia consider ANZUS as providing best guarantee for their security and hence they would not be, in principle, opposed to American military presence in this area, but they would like the United States of America to play a much greater economic role and take serious account of the views of the area's political leaders. According to Dr. Kissinger, a major strategic review of the U.S. policy in this regard was to be undertaken shortly. This was also hinted in President Ford's Congressional speech on April 10. The imminent discussions of President Ford with the Prime Ministers of New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, and UK, and President Suharto of Indonesia, in early May in Washington are intended to help formulation of the new American strategy in Asia and the Pacific. After the military debacle in Indo-China, Micronesian Islands of the Western Pacific, Islands of the Indian Ocean, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand have obviously gained far more significant strategic importance in the assessment of the Pentagon. The Russian naval manoeuvres, in different parts of the world, proclaiming the capability of the Russian navy specially at a time when America's credibility of its defense commitments to its allies is in doubt, have also been creating a stir within the Defense Department. It could, therefore, be expected that America would assume a rather hard attitude towards Russia in its new policy-formulation in Asia and might like to build a fresh defence line comprising of Japan, Western Pacific Islands, Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Indian Ocean Islands, and possibly also Pakistan. In its new formulation, the USA would like to make full use of the available facilities at Singapore, bases in the Philippines, the strategic importance of Micronesian and Indian Ocean Islands, and possibly the use of New Zealand and Australian ports by its nuclear fleet. Recently America dropped some "feelers" to New Zealand to ascertain possible reactions to the visit of its nuclear fleet

to NZ ports. Although a final decision could only be taken after a formal approach has been made, the NZ government have already expressed their willingness to consider such a request on its merit. And it appears that in view of the American Congressional decision to accept liability in the event of accident on nuclear-powered ships in a foreign port, the basic opposition in New Zealand to such visits has been perceptibly weakening. A large number of New Zealanders feel that it would be incongruous and unrealistic to desire protection including nuclear-umbrella from the US under the ANZUS provisions, and at the same time not to allow the US nuclear fleet to make use of the NZ ports and territorial waters. It is understood that Australia is more amenable to offer port facilities to the US nuclear vessels.

11. It was reported that despite known opposition of the USA and waning interest from Australia, Mr. Faulkner raised the question of nuclear free zone in the South Pacific. He, however, linked the nuclear free zone proposal with a wider investigation of all aspects of nuclear energy, peaceful and military, and stated that New Zealand would oppose testing of nuclear weapons in the South Pacific. Prime Minister Rowling also announced in the Parliament that this country would continue protesting against French nuclear tests in the South Pacific even if conducted underground.

L.N. Ray, High Commissioner