



Proof positive we prefer to pick our own battles

January 6 2015

Bob Carr

More proof of the common sense of the Australian people: they tend to get these things right.

The last Lowy Poll put backing for ANZUS at 85 per cent. But, according to ACRI's poll out today, 71 per cent don't think it should drag us into conflict on the side of Japan should there be a flare up over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

And that's even if the US gets involved — still 51 per cent against and only 24 per cent in favour. Or even if President Obama rings Tony Abbott and asks for a frigate or a plane — still 68 per cent against and only 14 per cent in favour.

The ACRI poll will encourage those in Canberra who share the view of Dennis Richardson, head of the Department of Defence, that "our interests aren't always the same as those of a great power", a shrewd summation I quoted in *Diary of a Foreign Minister*.

America has a treaty relationship with Japan. It has consistently said while it takes no position on the sovereignty of these five rocky outcrops it would come to Japan's support should conflict flare. Australia's interests are different. Our living standards depend on trade and investment with China. We share values with Japan, but are wary of nationalist currents in its politics.

We can have more influence in urging caution on China and Japan if they understand, through quiet diplomacy, we would stay out of a conflict — in the same way Americans let us know in the 1960s that ANZUS would not have applied if we had come to blows with Indonesia.

Australians would no more want to see us at war over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands than over the Falklands or the Faroe Islands or the Machias Seal island in the Gulf of Maine disputed between the US and Canada.

Our interests are not always the same as our great and powerful friend's. That clearly is the posture Australians want their government to adopt.

Note: This article appeared in *The Australian*, January 6 2015