



Why New Zealand Took Itself out of ANZUS: Observing “Opposition for Autonomy” in Asymmetric Alliances¹

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In 1985, a dispute over nuclear ship visits led the United States to formally suspend its security guarantee to New Zealand under the trilateral ANZUS Treaty. In this article, I conceptualize this dispute as a case of intra-alliance opposition by a small state toward its stronger ally. I generate four hypotheses from the literature on alliances in international relations to explain why New Zealand chose to oppose its ally on the nuclear ships issue. Using new evidence, including interviews with 22 individuals involved in the dispute and content analysis of debates in the New Zealand parliament from 1976 to 1984, I conclude that a desire for greater autonomy in foreign policy was the driving factor behind New Zealand’s opposition.

The Spat that Ended ANZUS

In July 1984, the New Zealand Labour Party fought and won a general election on a commitment to make New Zealand “nuclear-free.” If elected, Labour promised that it would ban the entry of nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered ships from New Zealand ports (Lamare 1991:473). At the time New Zealand, along with Australia and the United States, was a member of the tripartite security alliance, ANZUS. The ANZUS Treaty had been signed in September 1951 as a form of insurance against the possibility of a resurgent Japan, an aggressive China, or any other form of regional instability that might threaten the interests of the allies (McKinnon 1986; Hayden 1996:434–454). It committed the allies to “consult together” (Article III); “develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack” (Article II); and “act to meet the common danger” in the event of an armed attack on them or their armed forces (Levine and Harris 1994:389). For New Zealand and Australia, ANZUS brought the protection Great Britain was no longer able to provide (McIntyre 1995). When East–West tensions deepened and the British withdrew from East of Suez, the New Zealand and Australian publics warmed to ANZUS. By 1972, New Zealand politicians were referring to ANZUS as “the principal long-term guarantor of our security” and in 1975 as “the keystone of our collective defense policy” (Jackson and Lamare 1988:167). New Zealand, priding itself on its willingness to shoulder the

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responsibilities of collective defense, demonstrated its dutifulness as an ally by sending troops to support US efforts in Korea and Vietnam (McKinnon 1993; McGibbon 1999).

Nevertheless, if implemented, Labour's "nuclear-free policy" meant that the US Navy would only be able to visit New Zealand if it provided the New Zealand government with an unambiguous assurance that its ships were nuclear free. This challenged the US Navy's policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons aboard visiting vessels. Two days after the election, in which Labour won a majority and turnout was, at 94%, the highest ever recorded in a general election US Secretary of State George Shultz flew to New Zealand from the annual meeting of the ANZUS Council in Australia (Alves 1991:1064). Upon his arrival, Shultz held a meeting with incoming Labour Prime Minister David Lange. While the details of what was said are disputed, it is clear that both Lange and Shultz came away from the meeting believing that a favorable outcome could be negotiated. Lange later wrote that he believed there was room for the United States to accommodate New Zealand's desire to be separate from "all nuclear aspects of the alliance" (Lange 1987:60). Others suggested that Shultz came away with the impression that all Lange needed was some time to "get on top of the issue" within the Party.² In any case, the two agreed to discuss the issue while Lange visited New York in September for the UN General Assembly meeting. At this meeting, Lange wrote that Shultz made the US position very clear, saying that the United States "would make no exception for New Zealand," and "it was incumbent on an ally to accept the visits of American vessels" (Lange 1987:61). Upon hearing this, Lange wrote that he decided the issue should "be put to the test" (Lange 1987:62), and asked Shultz to make a request for a ship visit that December.

The outcome seemed to take both parties by surprise. In January 1985, the US government formally requested permission for a visit by the conventionally powered USS Buchanan, selected on the grounds that it was "unlikely" to be carrying nuclear weapons (Jamieson 1990). Deputy Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer, in charge of affairs while Lange was out of the country, decided that while the ship was neither nuclear-powered nor fitted with a weapons system designed to deliver nuclear weapons, it was still "nuclear-capable" (Wilson 1989). Without further information that the ship was unambiguously nuclear-free, information that would have forced the United States to break its "neither confirm nor deny" policy, Palmer concluded that he had no choice but to deny the visit. On January 28, the Cabinet voted unanimously to reject the request and on February 5, Wellington informed Washington that the request was rejected and asked if Washington would consider sending a ship of the Oliver Perry class instead, which the New Zealand government had decided was unambiguously non-nuclear. The United States declared that it would not (Pugh 1989).

Almost immediately, there were implications. Washington announced that New Zealand's policy represented a challenge to the entire Western alliance (Pugh 1989:135). The Chairman of the US House of Representatives Committee on Asia-Pacific Affairs announced that legislation would be introduced suspending the US defense obligation to New Zealand. Resolutions were introduced into the US Senate calling for the removal of New Zealand products from US markets (Hansard 1985). Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher expressed their disapproval (Pugh 1989:130; Hensley 2006). Two weeks later, David Lange stopped off in Los Angeles en route to Europe and was briefed by Deputy Assistant Secretary for State William Brown, who outlined the US response: all intelligence flows to New Zealand would be stopped; military exercises and other forms of defense cooperation cancelled; New Zealand's access to the State Department restricted; and the July 1985 ANZUS Council meeting

² Interview, McLean.

postponed (Alley 1987:206; Clements 1988:395; McKinnon 1993:283). Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger characterized the policy as “an attack on the alliance” and poignantly claimed that he had “lost New Zealand’s address” (Hensley 2003:36).

Despite the severity of this reprisal, the New Zealand government did not budge. Instead, it began to prepare legislation that would cement New Zealand’s nuclear-free status into law and require the Prime Minister to publicly guarantee the nuclear-free status of every ship or airplane visiting the country. By September 1985, the Cabinet of Prime Minister Lange was contemplating life without ANZUS (Jackson and Lamare 1988:176). A year later, on June 27, 1986, the United States formally suspended its security obligation to New Zealand. Secretary of State Shultz memorably stated “we part company. We part as friends, but we part company” (Hoadley 2000). One month later, Australia and the United States re-affirmed their bilateral ties and expressed disappointment that New Zealand’s policy had “caused the disruption of the alliance relationship between the United States and New Zealand” (Templeton 2006:621). Undeterred, the New Zealand government pushed ahead, enshrining New Zealand’s nuclear-free status into law with the Nuclear-Free Zone, Disarmament and Arms Control Act of 1987 (McGibbon 1999:125).

Why the New Zealand government came to care more about prohibiting the visit of one or two US ships a year which may or may not have been nuclear-armed than it did about maintaining New Zealand’s membership in the three-decade-old ANZUS alliance is a fascinating puzzle for scholars of international relations (IR). Contrary to current conviction, this case is not one in which an emotional public or a committed political minority pushed the government into a position where it had no choice. As this article makes clear, a higher proportion of New Zealanders wanted to remain a member of the ANZUS alliance (66–71% across the dispute) than prohibit nuclear ships (56%). Neither was there any sign of a relaxation of Cold War tensions, nor any indication New Zealand was prepared to engage in costly rearmament to make up for the deficit in security. In this article, I conceptualize this case as an example of intra-alliance opposition between a small state and its more-powerful ally that went much further than most cases of intra-alliance opposition. Understanding the motivation behind New Zealand’s opposition, and why it eventually chose “no alliance” instead of accepting its obligation of hosting one or two ships a year are the central research questions with which this article is concerned.

The outline of the article is as follows. In the next section, I point out the inadequacy of extant explanations of alliance break-ups to explain the ANZUS spat, and probe one of the most persuasive arguments offered to date. Next, I argue that the dispute is best conceptualized as a case of intra-alliance opposition between a small state and its more powerful ally. I identify four categories of oppositional behavior often conflated in the alliance literature: free-riding, hedging against entrapment, soft balancing, and asserting autonomy. The fourth section describes the qualitative data collected to weigh up the evidence for each. I conclude that New Zealand’s opposition to US policy was motivated primarily by a desire to assert autonomy. Employing a comparison with Australia in 1984, I conclude that declining levels of threat perception in the years prior fostered the perception in New Zealand that there was room to assert its autonomy.

While it may tempting to conclude that few lessons can be learned from a case in which a smaller ally was content to let itself be cut from the apron strings of its great-power protector, I argue that this incident offers important lessons for US policymakers. The major takeaway is that states do chafe at the constraints on autonomy imposed by their membership in asymmetric alliances. What ordinarily prevents this chafing from influencing policy is the existence of an outside threat. Should this decline, levels of public support for the alliance are an

unreliable indicator of what could happen in the event an enterprising politician or political party chooses to politicize the state's alliance policy.

The Limits of Existing Explanations

Most IR scholars view alliances through the lenses provided by three paradigms. The first is neorealism. Neorealists hold that alliances are formed in response to shifts in the material balance of power in the international system (Waltz 1979; Walt 1989; Powell 1999). Faced with the rise of new threats, states will either build up their own military capabilities (internal balancing) or combine their capabilities with another state to form a security alliance (external balancing). Neorealists would attribute any decision to endanger or leave the ANZUS alliance to a significant reduction in Soviet threat and/or a gain in New Zealand's indigenous military capabilities. Neither of these occurred. In fact, the opposite occurred. The dramatic build-up of Soviet naval (ballistic missile submarines and surface ships) and air power (aviation cruisers, attack aircraft, and Backfire bombers) in the Pacific from the late 1970s meant that Soviet military capabilities came close to rivaling those of the United States (Winkler 2000). They were also brought much closer to New Zealand via the use of bases in Vietnam. The Soviets were much more capable of posing a threat to New Zealand in 1984 than they had been previously. Second, while the withdrawal of the US security guarantee did end up requiring New Zealand to spend more on defense (under the banner of what Lange would later call "self-reliance in foreign policy"), there is no evidence that this desire existed before the US reaction was made clear. Instead, it seemed like a hasty afterthought. Several months after the dispute Lange admitted that the "capacity to operate on our own bat in the South Pacific would require more surveillance, more exercise, and more training assistance" and approved an 18% increase in defense spending to cover this (quoted in Alves 1989:368).

A second lens is provided by neoliberal institutionalism. At root is the assumption that the negative effects of international anarchy can be positively influenced by the provision of information and rules via institutions established to address common problems (Keohane 1984; Axelrod and Keohane 1993). In particular, security institutions such as alliances can develop rationales for their existence which are unrelated to security concerns. They can become devices by which cooperation is achieved in a wide variety of issue areas, including trade and cultural exchange (Deutsch et al. 1957; Adler and Barnett 1998). Empirical evidence for this has been provided by Gowa and Mansfield (1993), for example, who find that free trade agreements are more likely to develop between states in political-military alliances formed under bipolarity than those formed under multipolarity. The explanatory capacity of this paradigm is also limited. ANZUS provided many tangible benefits for New Zealand. These included security (New Zealand was never threatened in the period); military training (a great number of New Zealand Armed Forces participated regularly in US-sponsored military exercises); the supply and joint development of sophisticated weapons system technology (which New Zealand would not have funded on its own); and the sharing of intelligence about the situation in the region (which would have been difficult to acquire elsewhere; Jennings 1988; Thakur 1989; Jamieson 1990; Rolfe 1997). In return for these material benefits, New Zealand was obliged to attend annual meetings of the ANZUS Council and host visits from US warships several times a year. Most outsiders would probably conclude that New Zealand was getting the better deal. It is clear that this paradigm also has difficulty explaining why New Zealand left an alliance it was benefiting from in material terms and would likely benefit from in the future.³

³ The United States and Australia signed a free-trade deal in 2004.

Another rationalist explanation for alliance formation and disintegration is provided by Reiter (1994), who finds that minor powers make choices about allies that accord with previously successful experiences during wartime. Given that New Zealand was on the winning side of almost every war it fought merely adds to the puzzle of its sudden decision to de-align. Indeed, the decision is extremely difficult to understand from the perspective of New Zealand's history. Until 1984, New Zealand had placed its alliances (with Great Britain as a former colony and then with the United States) at the very center of its national security policy (Rolfe 1997). Clements (1988:397) writes that New Zealand had "compensated for geopolitical marginality by enthusiastic support for the strategic doctrines of the United States, the United Kingdom, and other Western allies." This support had entailed the sustaining of heavy casualties in the First and Second World Wars, as well as in Korea (1950–1953) and Vietnam (1964–1972). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that supporting New Zealand's allies in far-away places was something New Zealanders were extremely proud of. The New Zealand historian Michael King writes that Labour Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage "articulated the sentiments of most citizens" when he declared, 2 days after Germany declared war on Poland in 1939, "Where she goes, we go. Where she stands, we stand. We are only a small and young nation, but we are one and all a band of brothers, and we March forward with a union of hearts and wills to a common destiny" (King 2003:392).⁴ Similar statements were made upon the signing of the ANZUS Treaty in 1951 (F. H. Corner, unpub. data). Indeed, New Zealand's reputation for "loyalty second to none" (Jackson and Lamare 1988:161) likely contributed to the failure of US officials to see the policy coming (Lange 1990). Clearly, Reiter's findings about the importance of formative historical experiences cannot explain New Zealand's de-alignment.

A third lens is provided by looking inside the state. The liberal approach turns the spotlight onto domestic political actors, and suggests that variables such as an emotional public, a determined political minority, or the leader's own views could be influential enough to sway a state's foreign policy in a new direction (Hermann and Hermann 1989; Moravcsik 1997). An explanation that fits squarely within this tradition has been offered by the former Minister of Health in Lange's Cabinet (1983–1987), Michael Bassett. Bassett (2002, 2003) argues that Prime Minister Lange was himself uncommitted to the policy but was captured by the leftwing of his Party and forced to reject the ship otherwise lose their support for his government and its agenda of economic liberalization. The evidence cited by Bassett includes the meeting between Lange and Shultz in August 1984 (in which he claims Lange expressed his desire to "negotiate a way for a ship to visit"); the meeting in September; statements made by Lange to the press (which Bassett claims is evidence Lange was wavering); and the fact that Lange sent his Chief of Defense Staff to Hawaii in November 1984 to negotiate a ship (Bassett 2002:3). In the remainder of this section, I point out the flaws in Bassett's argument and conclude that domestic politics variables do not, by themselves, provide a sufficient explanation for New Zealand's decision to prioritize its ship ban over ANZUS.

First, Bassett's argument is that Lange changed his mind between July 1984 and January 1985. There is very little evidence of this. A reading of what Lange said during the 6 months between the election and the rejection of the ship visit reveal shades of difference in tone but confirm that Lange was very consistent about one thing: getting the United States to *publicly assure* the New Zealand government that its ship was not nuclear-armed. Lange never wavered on this point,

⁴ King (2003:391) writes that when the Dardanelles were threatened in 1922, the New Zealand Cabinet took 3 minutes to decide that New Zealand would join the war, and 13,000 men enlisted "virtually overnight" to serve in the expeditionary force.

and it was this point that the United States would not compromise on. It is no secret that Lange was willing (and tried) to reconsider the ban on nuclear power (Lange 1990:62–63), but there was no indication he was willing to waver on the question of nuclear arms. While Bassett argues that a new category of “nuclear-capable” ships was added to the agenda in January 1985, which he takes as evidence of both Lange changing his mind and being captured, I argue that there was no such addition. What had been important to Lange from the beginning was the US *assurance* that whatever ship it wanted to send was not nuclear-armed. As we have seen, the US did not want to give this assurance.

Second, Bassett’s explanation depends on Lange being backed into a corner by the leftwing to the extent that he was forced to go along their demands. Was he? I argue that Lange actually held several potent weapons with which he could have countered the power of the leftwing, had he wanted to. His first weapon was public opinion. Going into the dispute, it is difficult to argue that Lange had the public behind him. While 57% of New Zealanders would have liked to keep nuclear ships out of New Zealand, 66% favored New Zealand’s continued membership in the ANZUS alliance (Campbell 1989:88, 95). Public support for ANZUS actually increased over the course of the dispute: from 1984 to 1985, the proportion of New Zealanders answering that they wanted New Zealand to “remain a member of the ANZUS military alliance” rose from 66% to 71%, and stayed that way for several years. In 1986, a government commission found that if given a choice between the nuclear-free policy and ANZUS, more New Zealanders would have chosen ANZUS (Defence Committee of Enquiry 1986:64). Not only do these figures mean that I can reject the hypothesis that an emotional public reaction pushed the government into a position it did not want to take, but I can also reject Bassett’s account. Not having a public mandate to take New Zealand out of ANZUS gave Lange a very powerful weapon with which he could have countered the leftwing, had he wanted to.⁵

The second weapon derived from Lange’s popularity. The 1984 election was the first election Labour had won in 9 years. Labour gained 13 seats from the 1981 election to win 56 seats to National’s 37 (Jackson and Lamare 1988:173). Many believed that this was partly due to the popularity of David Lange, who had replaced the individual who had led Labour for the previous 8 years, Bill Rowling. In the words of one of Lange’s Ministers (and initiator of three of the “nuclear free” bills discussed in more detail below): “the 1984 Labour Cabinet was very fond of David Lange. He’d done brilliantly in the ‘84 campaign ... we tended to be very protective of him. If this is what he wanted to do, we tended to go along with it.”⁶ While prime ministers in parliamentary systems do need to retain support from their backbenchers to remain at the helm (and Labour Prime Ministers in New Zealand must retain the support of their Party), it is doubtful that the four individuals Bassett identifies as “the leftwing” had the political capital to credibly threaten Lange’s position.⁷ Indeed, the interviews I conducted with the then-Australian Prime Minister and then-Australian Foreign Minister gave me examples of things Lange could have done had he wanted to “manage” the influence of the leftwing: “There were a number of things we did. One was appoint an Ambassador for Disarmament ... We gave quite a bit of

⁵ This also allows me to rule out the argument that Lange was simply unaware that rejecting the visit could lead to the disintegration of the alliance. Whether Lange understood this or not is immaterial as public opinion was structured in a way that enabled him to back down without suffering audience costs.

⁶ Interview, Prebble.

⁷ The “leftwing” is identified as the President of the Party Margaret Wilson, and three Members of Parliament (Anderton, Wilde, and Clark). Clark and Anderton were elected for the first time in 1984, and Wilde for the second time. None were in Cabinet. In 2005, I interviewed Wilde, Wilson, and Anderton, and none said anything that corroborated this story.

funding to the peace movement. We helped finance the U.N. International Year of Peace celebrations. That is how we handled it.”⁸

It is also difficult to see how this faction used their support for Lange’s economic policy as leverage on the ships issue when the economic policy had not yet been formulated by Cabinet. In the words of the Lange’s Deputy Prime Minister:

That’s a myth that was propagated afterwards. It certainly did keep the Party happy, when they weren’t happy with the economic policy. But the economic policy wasn’t unveiled when the nuclear policy was set. The nuclear policy became a kind of touchstone.⁹

While Bassett views Lange’s efforts to negotiate a suitable ship in the months prior to the dispute as further evidence Lange was uncommitted to the policy, I suggest that these efforts actually gave Lange a third weapon with which to counter the leftwing. Had Lange wanted to accept the USS Buchanan, he could have portrayed his negotiations with the United States as efforts to convince the United States to make an exception for New Zealand, and framed the choice of the Buchanan as the product of a successful negotiation. Very little is impossible in politics. If Japanese and Danish leaders found ways to manage their alliance with the United States and their “nuclear-free” policies, why should David Lange be any different?

Bassett (2003) concludes with an admission that “none of us [in Cabinet] had time to monitor what Lange was doing.” Whether this is true or not, it merely supports my point that by February 1985 ANZUS had become unimportant to Lange and his Cabinet. If maintaining ANZUS in its present form had been important to Bassett, he would have been paying attention. In our interview, the then-Deputy Prime Minister put it like this: “I didn’t think ANZUS was something that you needed to die in a ditch in preservation of. It was a desirable policy for New Zealand, but not one that you should support at all costs.”¹⁰ The next section explores reasons why this view became so prevalent.

Why Smaller States Seek to Oppose their More-Powerful Allies

The previous section demonstrated that extant explanations of alliance formation and disintegration are not helpful in explaining the break-up in United States–New Zealand ties. Theories of IR become useful if one conceptualizes the dispute as a case of intra-alliance opposition between a smaller state and its stronger ally (Reiter and Gartner 2001).¹¹ In this section, I pull apart motivations for intra-alliance opposition that are often conflated in the literature. While one might imagine that the larger security benefits, the relatively low cost at which these are acquired, and the unavailability of such benefits elsewhere (especially in a bipolar system) produces strong incentives for the smaller ally to behave as it was told, I show that states will oppose their ally under certain conditions. What are these conditions, and which one can best explain New Zealand’s opposition?

First, smaller states have incentives to hedge against entrapment. If State A displays too much commitment to State B, this could embolden State B to be more intransigent in dealing with a threat than it otherwise would be. The result is that State A might be dragged into a war it could have otherwise avoided

⁸ Interview, Hayden.

⁹ Interview, Palmer. Similar views were expressed to me by another member of Lange’s Cabinet, Margaret Shields.

¹⁰ Interview, Palmer.

¹¹ I argue it can be taken as such because the nuclear-free policy meant *by definition* opposition to the US policy of “neither confirm nor deny.”

(Snyder 1984, 1997:180–186). The literature suggests that states guard against the possibility of entrapment by finding ways to hedge their commitment to their ally. The intensity with which states fear entrapment is thought to be affected by the degree to which they can exit from existing arrangements. Under bipolarity, the lack of alternative alliance partners makes the costs of exiting from a security alliance higher than under multipolarity (Christenson and Snyder 1990). States should feel the fear of entrapment more acutely under bipolarity. This leads to my first hypothesis: New Zealand's opposition can be explained by a *desire to hedge against entrapment*. The motivation is reducing risk.

Second, smaller states have incentives to free-ride. Given that deterrence of a revisionist state is a public good (because it benefits all states in the system whether they contributed or not), neorealists recognize that states have strong incentives to “pass the buck” of deterrence onto someone else to avoid the costs of warfare. The same dynamic operates within alliances. The literature on burden-sharing shows that free-riding (as measured in the percentage of a country's GDP spent on the military) is endemic in alliances in which deterrence of a threat is the primary goal. Olson and Zeckhauser (1966) show that free-riding exists at extremely high levels in asymmetric alliances, defined as those in which the military capability of one state vastly exceeds the others'. Because the contribution of the smaller states to the aggregate power of the alliance is so small, they have powerful incentives to let their larger ally assume most of the burden (see also Sandler 1993). This leads to my second hypothesis: New Zealand's opposition can be explained by a *desire to free ride*. The motivation is reducing the costs shouldered by the state.

Third, scholarship on the behavior of US allies since the end of the Cold War identifies a third category of oppositional behavior: soft balancing (Pape 2005; Walt 2009). Unlike hard balancing, which seeks to challenge the balance of power, soft balancing is a category of intra-alliance opposition that “accepts the existing balance of power but seeks to obtain better outcomes within it” (Walt 2009). Allies practicing soft balancing coordinate their diplomacy with other allies and assemble “counter-veiling coalitions” designed to thwart US policy. As it currently stands, the motivations of soft balancers are fuzzy. Walt (2009:104) defines their goal as “the conscious coordination of diplomatic action in order to obtain outcomes contrary to US preferences.” Why a state may want these outcomes is left unspecified, except that the opposition is directed at US policy rather than the alliance itself. I interpret the motivation to be improving the quality of policies adopted by Washington. This leads to my third hypothesis: New Zealand's opposition can be explained by a *desire to soft balance*. The motivation is reducing both risk and cost.

Fourth, a different perspective on alliances is provided by Morrow (1991). Morrow suggests that states gain different things from an alliance: larger states gain autonomy and smaller states gain security in exchange for autonomy. He redefines “asymmetric alliances” as those with asymmetry of ends rather than means, and writes: “nations, particularly great powers, can use alliances to further their pursuit of changes in the foreign policy status quo. Weaker parties can offer concessions such as military bases or the coordination of foreign and domestic policies that can increase a stronger ally's freedom of action while increasing their protection from external threats” (Morrow 1991:905). This creates the possibility of a fourth category of oppositional behavior: what I call “opposition for autonomy.” Under certain circumstances, it is conceivable that the smaller state may become unhappy with the autonomy it is ceding to its more-powerful ally and may attempt to gain some of this back. What are these circumstances? For Morrow, what drives a state's re-evaluation of its interests is change in material capabilities. The growth of a state's material capabilities will lead it to demand more autonomy from its ally (either by obtaining new

concessions or removing old obligations), and a decline in its material capabilities will make its ally demand more autonomy in exchange for protection. In other words, states may come to value the autonomy of their foreign policy over the security they are receiving from their ally, but this will only happen when the balance of capabilities changes. This leads to my fourth hypothesis: New Zealand's opposition can be explained by a *desire to assert autonomy*.

The first three hypotheses are rooted in a material desire to achieve security at low cost. The weaker state is trying to get the stronger state to pick up the tab, restrain its adventurism, or choose a better policy. However, the motivation behind a state's pursuit of autonomy is less clear. Why do states value autonomy? Morrow assumes that states want autonomy to pursue interests their ally does not share. In this article, I assume that these interests could either be material or nonmaterial. The key is that they are observable. In other words, I assume that if New Zealand's opposition was underpinned by a desire for autonomy, the interest for which this autonomy is sought should be observable.

Particulars of this case lead me to expect that New Zealand's opposition to US policy will be motivated by either one of the first three categories of oppositional behavior identified above. Being the weaker state in an asymmetric alliance formed under bipolarity, New Zealand's fears of entrapment should have been intense, which suggests that its opposition should have been motivated by a *desire to reduce the risk facing New Zealand*. Being a small ally in an alliance with a superpower, New Zealand's incentives to pass the buck should also have been intense, which suggests that its opposition may have been motivated by a desire to *free-ride*. Finally, New Zealand's opposition was directed at the US policy of "neither confirm nor deny" rather than the alliance itself, which suggests that New Zealand's opposition may have been motivated by a desire to *soft balance*. Finally, the absence of a shift in either New Zealand or American military capabilities that was large enough to alter the balance of security/autonomy between the two allies casts doubt on the applicability of the fourth category. As even a cursory glance at New Zealand's history confirms, a desire for independence in foreign policy had never mattered in New Zealand before, so why should it now? In the next section, I describe the qualitative data I collected to adjudicate between these four hypotheses, which are summarized in Table 1.

Data

I collected two forms of qualitative data to weigh up the explanatory power of my four hypotheses. First, I conducted interviews in July and August 2005 with 16 individuals closely involved in decision making at the time, and six individuals who watched from the sidelines. I interviewed the Deputy Prime Minister; five other Cabinet Ministers; seven other Labour Members of Parliament (MPs); the President of the Labour Party; the Secretary for Defense; and the Head of the Prime Minister's Advisory Council. In addition, I interviewed the Leader of the Opposition; the individual who became the next Leader of the Opposition (and was later Prime Minister from 1990 to 1998); the National MP who threatened to cross the floor (vote with Labour) on a nuclear-free bill in 1984; a

TABLE 1. Categories of Oppositional Behavior Within Asymmetric Alliances

<i>Category of behavior</i>	<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Interest</i>
Hedging against entrapment	Reducing risk	Material
Buck-passing/free-riding	Reducing cost	Material
Soft balancing	Reducing risk/cost	Material
Asserting autonomy	Pursuing a unit-level interest	Material/nonmaterial

former Secretary of Foreign Affairs who had taken part in the original 1951 ANZUS negotiations; the Australian Prime Minister; and the Australian Foreign Minister, both of whom watched the dispute unfold across the Tasman.¹² Interviews enabled me to ask those who made the policy what their motivations were and those who watched from the sidelines why they opposed the policy. I found my interviewees eager to share their recollections of the events and the role they played with me. All my interviewees allowed me to record the interview, and most spoke with me for more than an hour.¹³

The second method I employed to understand the motivations and goals of policymakers at the time was content analysis of the parliamentary debates surrounding four private-member bills that were submitted to the New Zealand parliament between 1976 and 1984. The purpose of these bills was to prohibit the entry of nuclear weapons (Hansard (1976, 1982, 1983, 1984) and variously, nuclear-powered ships (Hansard 1976, 1983, 1984). A third purpose of the 1976, 1982, and 1984 bills was to put into force a UN resolution declaring the South Pacific a nuclear-free zone. While opposition to US policy was not the sole motivation underpinning these three bills (stopping French nuclear testing was another motivation), all three purposes directly challenged US policy. I contend that analysis of how politicians framed their support and opposition to each of the bills offers an excellent means of uncovering the motivation for opposition to US policy, and a good check on the results of my interviews. Table 2 presents a list of the kinds of rationales I expected to observe if those supporting the policy were motivated by free riding, hedging, soft balancing, or autonomy concerns. I analyzed the results of the interviews and the parliamentary debates with this list in hand.

Third, to shed light on the question of why New Zealand took its opposition so far, I asked each of interviewees the following question: "Why did it not happen in Australia?" Australia in 1984 is an excellent comparison case. Not only did Australia have similar historical foundations, a similar geographic location, and was the third partner in the ANZUS alliance, it had two other similarities: a vibrant anti-nuclear movement and a Labour Party elected after a long period of conservative governance (Pugh 1989:118–125). In Australia, the peace movement also targeted ship visits and had been successful at blocking permission for the HMS *Invincible* to stop for dry dock repairs in Sydney Harbor in 1983 because the British would neither confirm nor deny the existence of nuclear weapons aboard (Albinski 1987:36). Going into the 1983 general election, pressure from the leftwing of the Labour Party to ban all nuclear-powered and armed ships led to Leader Bob Hawke incorporating a promise to conduct a "review" of the ANZUS alliance into Labour's platform (Hawke 1994:214). The review was

TABLE 2. Expected Rationales Per Category of Oppositional Behavior
(Interviews/Parliamentary Debates)

<i>Category of behavior</i>	<i>Expected rationales</i>
Hedging against entrapment	Nuclear weapons/nuclear propulsion/being allied with the United States is dangerous and should be avoided, etc.
Buck-passing/free-riding	New Zealand does not have the obligation under the ANZUS Treaty to accept nuclear ships, etc.
Soft balancing	Security underpinned by nuclear weapons is not the best way to ensure security; New Zealand should take a stand in a different way, etc.
Asserting autonomy	This policy allows New Zealand independence to pursue X interest, etc.

¹² A list of my interviewees is in the Appendix.

¹³ When transcribed, these yielded 63,000 words (120 pages in size 12 font).

conducted at the ANZUS Council Meeting that year but changed little. Hawke and his Foreign Minister Bill Hayden told me in interviews that by doing this they had “silenced” the anti-nuclear cause.¹⁴ Given the communication flows between the New Zealand and Australian Labour Parties, I hypothesized that asking my interviewees to compare New Zealand with Australia might yield insight as to why New Zealand chose to take its opposition this far and Australia did not.

The Motivation for New Zealand’s Opposition: Autonomy

In this section, I concentrate on the first part of the puzzle: uncovering the source of opposition to US policy. Why did a majority of Members of Parliament and the New Zealand public come to care more about keeping ships that may or may not have been carrying nuclear weapons out of New Zealand than they did about maintaining New Zealand’s membership in ANZUS? I use the results from my interviews, content analysis, and how my interviewees remembered the events that happened afterward to answer this question.

Interview Findings

When asked why they supported the nuclear-free policy all 15 proponents I interviewed offered rationales that echoed the same point: it enabled New Zealand to demonstrate it was in charge of its own affairs, and carve out an independent foreign policy. Proponents made statements such as “The nuclear-free policy was part of New Zealand setting its own course in world affairs, and also about not having our foreign policy dictated by others”¹⁵ and “It was instrumental in defining a separate identity for New Zealand, while at the same time being part of the world and maintaining our traditional links. It enabled us to demonstrate that we weren’t a client state.”¹⁶ The policy was described as “a symbol of us asserting ourselves in the world”¹⁷ and “a symbol of New Zealand self-expression ... we were casting off the shackles and liberating our foreign policy”¹⁸ and “We showed that we’re not an echo of somebody else’s voice. We speak with our own voice and do what we believe is appropriate to our own interests and values.”¹⁹ Another interviewee recalled: “it was a hunger for an independent foreign policy. We wanted a foreign policy based on our position in the world and our own integrity.”²⁰ For all 15 proponents whom I interviewed, opposing US policy was a means by which New Zealand could assert and gain autonomy in foreign policy.

The second most-common rationale offered was that saying no to US ships would protect New Zealand from becoming a nuclear target or suffering from a nuclear accident. Table 2 suggested that these statements can be classified as hedging statements, reflecting a desire to guard against entrapment. For 10 of the 15 proponents I interviewed, opposition to US policy was motivated by a fear of entrapment. For example: “every time a ship came to New Zealand, we were at risk. The ships carried nuclear material and it was reasonable to believe that the Russians probably tracked them. Just because we were friends with the US didn’t seem to me that we should volunteer to be on the line.”²¹ Another put it

¹⁴ Interviews, Hawke; Hayden.

¹⁵ Interview, Caygill.

¹⁶ Interview, Wilson.

¹⁷ Interview, Moore.

¹⁸ Interview, Dunne.

¹⁹ Interview, Goff.

²⁰ Interview, Shields.

²¹ Interview, Prebble.

plainly: “at the height of the Cold War we felt that having nuclear ships made us a nuclear target.”²²

None of my interviews offered rationales in the category of “free riding” or “soft balancing.” This was not unexpected. If New Zealand policymakers had been motivated by free-riding, they would have backed down as soon as the consequences for ANZUS were apparent. The discussion in the New Zealand parliament on February 12, 1985 provides stark evidence that politicians understood the ramifications of their rejection of the *USS Buchanan* the week before. The fact that the government still went ahead—despite public opinion being structured in a way that would have allowed Lange and his Cabinet to back down—provides powerful evidence that it was not about free riding. In our interview, the Director of the Prime Minister’s Advisory Group recalled that the Deputy Prime Minister met with Secretary of State Shultz in September 1985 and presented a strong argument for New Zealand’s continued membership in ANZUS on the grounds that New Zealand “was a great ally” and “looked after things in the Pacific.” The rationales offered by the Deputy Prime Minister extended to presenting Labour’s economic reforms as “a role model for other Western countries.”²³ This leads me to reject the hypothesis that New Zealand policymakers were motivated by “free-riding.”

I venture that the absence of “soft-balancing” rationales can be explained by the way Labour leaders handled the public relations of the nuclear-free policy. While the parliamentary debates showed a sizeable proportion of the rationales falling into the category of “soft balancing” (nuclear deterrence is misguided; New Zealand should spearhead a campaign for nuclear-weapons-free-zones around the world), this rhetoric was shown to be empty soon after the policy was adopted as Prime Minister Lange and his Cabinet made public statements suggesting that the policy was New Zealand’s own, and no one else should “imitate it” (Alves 1989:371). This casts doubt on the proposition that a serious commitment to improving US strategy was behind New Zealand’s opposition. A former Minister in Lange’s Cabinet (and Prime Minister in 1990) relayed to me that he travelled to Australia soon after the rejection of the *Buchanan* at the invitation of the then-Prime Minister to speak to the Australian Labour Party caucus. He recounted: “The goal of the visit was to say to the Australian Labour Party: this is our policy. We don’t expect you to have it too.”²⁴ These statements provide compelling evidence that a desire to contribute to international security or improve the quality of decisions made by the United States was not the major driver of New Zealand’s opposition.

Content Analysis Findings

Critics may contend that rationales mentioned 20 years after the nuclear-free policy was implemented are not a good indicator of how policy was viewed back then. New Zealand is now rather well-known for its nuclear-free policy. Standing New Zealand’s ground to the very end is considered a source of pride for many New Zealanders.²⁵ But it seems unlikely that policymakers couched their opposition to US policy in the same terms back then when more effective rhetorical tools (issuing doomsday predictions about the dangers of nuclear weapons, for example) were available. To guard against bias that occurred with the passage of time, I collected statements of support and opposition expressed in the

²² Interview, Moore.

²³ Interview, Henderson.

²⁴ Interview, Moore.

²⁵ Interview, Moore.

parliamentary debates surrounding the four private members' bills introduced in 1976, 1982, 1983, and 1984. I searched for statements that called on New Zealand to oppose the hosting of US ships for X reason. I coded 174 statements of support and 99 statements of opposition. Are these congruent with the findings from my interviews?

Table 3 shows that the most common rationale articulated by proponents of the ban in the New Zealand parliament was that it would enable New Zealand to have an independent foreign policy. I was startled to find very similar arguments being made for the policy at the time. The opening of the 1976 debate is illustrative: "This bill gives the House a clear choice between a policy of peace or war and between a policy of proud independence or being a crawling puppet" (Hansard 1976). Proponents described New Zealand as "a lackey of the major powers" and "a client state" (Hansard 1982), and argued that opposing US ship visits would liberate New Zealand: "The general view of Foreign Affairs is that New Zealand is impotent and has to cling to someone else, and we cannot declare where we stand. That is not so" (Hansard 1982). Proponents argued "A nuclear free pacific is a turning point for our nation. New Zealand must choose whether it is a European colony that happens to be located in the South Pacific or whether it is one of a group of independent states that are developing a Pacific way" (Hansard 1982). The policy also allowed New Zealand to "tell the world the way we want to live" (Hansard 1982). "It's time the government stood up and talked as New Zealanders. They should not wield an axe in London or Washington, but should say what they want as New Zealanders" (Hansard 1982). Proponents also emphasized that the bill was New Zealand's right: "The bill deals with New Zealand's territory, its sovereignty, and its right to determine on behalf of its people what will happen within its own territory" (Hansard 1982).

Contrary to expectations, rationales emphasizing the danger of hosting nuclear ships made up only 15–24% of the total number of rationales per year. This was a surprising finding given that drumming up fears of a nuclear holocaust would seem to be an effective way leaders could have garnered support for the policy. While these rationales were often posed rather dramatically (the nuclear-free policy could mean the difference between national survival and destruction in a nuclear war; Hansard 1976) the fact that a larger proportion of rationales focused on the autonomy the policy would bring New Zealand leads me to conclude they were of lesser importance to the outcome. Rationales informed by both free-riding and soft balancing also played a role in the debates. Statements such as "no clause in the Treaty obligates us to accept their ships" and "the visits are for rest and recreation, they are not strategically important to the United States" (Hansard 1976, 1982) were coded as "free riding" because they showed that the Member wanted the alliance but not the burden. As

TABLE 3. Rationales Provided by Proponents of the Nuclear-free Policy in the New Zealand Parliament, 1976–1984

	1976 (n = 37)	1982 (n = 41)	1983 (n = 46)	1984 (n = 50)
Hedging against entrapment	24% (9)	19% (8)	15% (7)	24% (12)
Buck-passing/free-riding	13% (5)	12% (5)	15% (7)	10% (5)
Soft balancing	2% (1)	17% (7)	26% (12)	28% (14)
Asserting autonomy	54% (20)	46% (19)	40% (18)	30% (15)
Other*	2% (1)	5% (2)	4% (2)	8% (4)

(Notes. *I coded all statements in which legislators did not mention a specific reason [such as "the people support it"] in the "Other" category.)

expected, at no time did these rationales account for more than 15% of all rationales. In 1982, David Lange (then Deputy Leader of the Opposition) stated “the bill does not preclude the honoring of the ANZUS agreement ... it would mean that we would need to try harder to provide positive and collective security”. This statement confirms my conjecture that “free-riding” was not a motivation behind opposition to US policy.

Interestingly, “soft-balancing” rationales increased from 2% of the total number of rationales in 1976 to 28% in 1984. Soft-balancing rationales were those arguing in favor of opposition based on its potential to contribute to larger goals such as nuclear disarmament. For example, “A country like New Zealand must take some initiative that has some hope of reversing the escalation of nuclear arms and bring us back from the brink” (Hansard 1983), and “Although we would not save ourselves physically by means of the legislation, we would be signaling to other countries the seriousness of our concern about the nuclear arms race. We want to establish our credentials as second to none when we speak out for nuclear disarmament” (Hansard 1984). I argued above that it is difficult to attribute explanatory power to soft balancing given that prominent New Zealand leaders cautioned other states from adopting (“imitating”) New Zealand’s policy soon afterward. Given this, I venture that the increase of soft-balancing rationales and decline of autonomy rationales may reflect a desire to provide better reasons for why New Zealand needed the autonomy it would gain from opposing US policy.

Finally, how did the opposition tackle this drive for autonomy? What rationales did they marshal to say “no, New Zealand should not oppose US policy”? I found that approximately three-quarters of the 99 rationales reflected concern that passing the policy would lead to abandonment. However, a careful reading of the remaining one-quarter indicated that over time opponents modified their arguments in a way that reveals that they too understood that a very real drive for independence lay behind the policy. Whereas in 1976, Members had no problems making statements such as “New Zealand needs to stand with its allies”, there were no statements like this after 1982. After 1982, opposition was framed in a way that recognized New Zealand’s desire for independence but emphasized that opposing US ship visits was not the right means to achieve this. They stated that while New Zealand had an important role to play in minimizing the threat of nuclear war, “any policy designed to achieve that end must operate in a real world, and take account of the realities of politics and diplomacy” (Hansard 1984). This provides additional evidence that the drive for autonomy was the most important factor underpinning New Zealand’s opposition to US ship visits.

New Zealanders’ React to American Pressure

The way New Zealanders reacted to American pressure also supports my finding that autonomy was the driving factor behind New Zealand’s opposition. In February and March 1985, the US government sent very clear signals that New Zealand was about to suffer serious consequences, which included the withdrawal of the US security guarantee. The Prime Ministers of Australia and the United Kingdom, the two “most-liked countries” by New Zealanders (Campbell 1989:82), issued public statements disapproving of New Zealand’s actions (Pugh 1989:130). Despite almost three-quarters of the New Zealand public preferring New Zealand remain in ANZUS there was no public uproar once the ramifications of the policy became apparent. Public opinion polls conducted immediately after the ship was rejected showed that a good many New Zealanders supported the policy even when told it would result in New Zealand’s exclusion from ANZUS or the harming of New Zealand’s trade

(Campbell 1989:103).²⁶ It was later demonstrated that the nuclear-free policy contributed significantly to Labour's 1987 electoral victory (Vowles 1990).

When asked about the reaction of the New Zealand public, my interviewees argued that US pressure produced the opposite effect: "the reaction of the United States gilded, hardened New Zealanders' attitudes. You're not going to tell us what to do."²⁷ "I think the harder the U.S. pushed, the more rebellious New Zealanders became, including those of us in Cabinet. We felt offended that we were being instructed what to do in our own country. This was our country and our policy to determine according to our values"²⁸ Another said "there is no doubt that the American reaction encouraged New Zealanders. We thought, bugger you!"²⁹

Why did this pressure provoke such hard-headed resistance from citizens who were overwhelmingly in favor of ANZUS? While my research design precludes a definitive answer to this question, one possible response is because what was driving New Zealand's opposition was not a means-end, cost-benefit calculation of the risk facing New Zealand, but a desire for greater autonomy in foreign policy. By February and March 1985 opposition to nuclear ship visits in New Zealand had become firmly linked to the exercise of independence in New Zealand's foreign policy. New Zealanders felt it was their *right* to say no to American ships. The important question to ask is: how did the two become linked? How did opposing nuclear ship visits come to be viewed as a means by which New Zealand should exercise autonomy in foreign policy?

My interviews provided important clues to answer this question. Several of my interviewees had organized and participated in protests against US nuclear ships in the 1970s. They spoke very candidly about how the New Zealand peace movement had framed its opposition to US ship visits over time as "a matter of national pride." One interviewee recalled that while activists in other countries were pro-communist and exploited their ties with China and the Soviet Union, New Zealand activists coined the slogan "nuclear-free New Zealand and proud of it" and conducted their campaigns around this.³⁰ The campaigns involved large-scale protests every time a US ship visited, with New Zealanders aboard yachts, dinghys, and surf skis "in just their swimming clothes" ramming the ship and even climbing aboard the ships. The publicity these protests generated undoubtedly made them an attractive venue through which politicians could increase their name recognition and portray themselves as patriots at the same time. By 1984, the linking of New Zealand's independence to rejection of US ships gave politicians little room to maneuver. It would have been difficult to continue to accept US ships because of the signal of dependence this would have sent. It was much easier for Lange and his Cabinet to go on television and portray the matter "as a contest between the United States and New Zealand," which is exactly what Lange did.³¹

Why did New Zealand Take its Opposition this Far?

The above analysis revealed that a desire for greater autonomy in foreign policy was the driving force behind New Zealand's opposition to US policy. I have

²⁶ Immediately after the ship was denied, a poll showed that 48% agreed with it and 42% disagreed. Of the 48%, more than 60% said that they would *remain supportive* if the penalty was exclusion from ANZUS or the harming of New Zealand's trading relations.

²⁷ Interview, Shirley.

²⁸ Interview, Palmer.

²⁹ Interview, Wilde.

³⁰ Interview, Northey.

³¹ Interview, Prebble.

provided solid evidence that states in asymmetric alliances have what I call “autonomy needs” and will sometimes choose to act on these needs. In this section, I try to shed light on the second part of my question: what enabled New Zealand to act on this desire for autonomy? While the question of whether all allies have autonomy needs all the time is a difficult question to answer based on a single case, what can a comparison with Australia tell us about the conditions under which allies may be inclined to take their opposition far, to the point at which their actions endanger the alliance itself?

My respondents mentioned several differences between New Zealand and Australia, including Bob Hawke’s personal affinity for the United States; his position within the Labour Party; and differences in the structure and access of the peace movement in both countries.³² However, one difference mentioned by almost every respondent was the difference in threat perception between the two countries. I was startled at the frankness with which my respondents alluded to this despite not mentioning it when asked why they supported the policy. For example, “In a way, there is no cost to New Zealand in its foreign policy. What if you’re wrong? Who’s going to get hurt? If you’re wrong in Thailand, or Australia, someone will get hurt. There’s no boat people arriving on our shores. We have the luxury of distance.”³³ Another Minister in Lange’s Cabinet put it “[in Australia] you can’t afford to be a smart ass. You have to be right. Because if you’re wrong, there’s a huge penalty.” Other interviewees speculated as to the reasons behind this, suggesting that Australia’s experience of being bombed in the Second World War created a “hyper-concern” with security: “they have been targets, they have been bombed. We have not.” The then-Australian Foreign Minister said frankly that Australia “has always tied itself to a great-power sponsor” and simply had no desire to break these ties.³⁴

What is important to note is that New Zealanders have not always enjoyed a low threat perception. The New Zealand public underwent what one observer called a “metamorphosis” in threat perception in the decades prior to 1984 (cited in Huntley 1996:14). Whereas in 1957 the government’s Defense Review stated “the threat arises today from the world-wide activities of the Communist bloc” and prescribed the need for New Zealand to guarantee its security through “collective defense arrangements” (quoted in Rolfe 1993:5–6), the government’s 1978 Review identified an *absence* of threats to New Zealand’s security. Instead, it called for a focus on “the part of the world in which we belong, the South Pacific,” and for armed forces to be able to independently “secure a range of national interests close to home” (Huntley 1996:3). The geographic isolation lauded for adding to New Zealand’s safety in 1984 had been viewed, for the entire period since English settlers first arrived in New Zealand, as exacerbating New Zealand’s vulnerability. Given that the international balance of power changed little across the period in which the shift occurred one must look elsewhere for an explanation. What is important for my purposes is that a large scale shift in threat perception happened and was viewed by my interviewees as a factor that allowed the New Zealand Labour Party to ban US ships whereas the Australian Labour Party could not.

³² I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that the New Zealand anti-nuclear movement may have had more traction with ordinary New Zealanders because it was part of an already-strong environment movement. See Buhns and Bartlett (1993).

³³ Interview, Moore.

³⁴ Interview, Hayden.

To What End was Autonomy Sought?

Finally, this section attempts to answer the important question of why New Zealanders wanted autonomy. Because Morrow (1991) assumes that states want autonomy to pursue interests, I reasoned that these interests would be clearly specified. I expected to find politicians defining the end to which the pursuit of greater independence in foreign policy was directed. To answer this question, I reread the 72 “autonomy rationales” I coded in my content analysis of the parliamentary debates. To what end was New Zealand’s quest for autonomy sought?

Interestingly, I found it extraordinarily difficult to pinpoint a clearly defined interest for which autonomy was sought. While making New Zealand “nuclear free” was the goal of each of the four pieces of legislation, the rationales I collected suggested that politicians treated the nuclear-free policy as a stepping stone in their pursuit of greater independence in foreign policy, rather than the other way around. The rationales offered in the parliamentary debates suggest that New Zealand policymakers derived utility from the very act of asserting autonomy. The act seemed to matter more than the outcome. In our interview, the then-President of the Labour Party said candidly: “we weren’t out to change the world, that wasn’t our purpose. We were out to say that this is the stance that were taking, if you would like to take it please do, but that’s your decision.”³⁵

The act of asserting autonomy was portrayed as valuable for three reasons. The first was because it provided a means by which New Zealand could express itself to the world and be known for something. Opposing visits by nuclear ships was described as “a bold and imaginative initiative that would capture the imagination of the world” (Hansard 1976). Legislators declared that it “establishes New Zealand’s position in the eyes of the world” (Hansard 1983), and it was “a simple instrument of principle: it gives members the opportunity to show New Zealanders and the world where they stand on the issue” (Hansard 1984). The second reason was because it made New Zealand “unique”: “it makes New Zealand the first sovereign nation to be completely free of nuclear weapons by law” (Hansard 1983). Lange’s cautioning of other states not to “imitate” New Zealand’s policy soon after it was adopted provides further evidence of this desire to be first. The third reason was because politicians felt it enabled New Zealand to exercise a kind of moral leadership. A key proponent of the nuclear-free policy (and later Prime Minister from 1999 to 2008), lauded the policy for this reason: “I speak for the establishment of a nuclear-free zone primarily because of the leadership New Zealand can give by establishing one, not because I think that New Zealand, by legislating a nuclear-free zone, or helping to establish one in the South Pacific, can save us from the horrors of a nuclear war” (Hansard 1984).

While references were made to New Zealand’s past anti-nuclear achievements (such as winning an injunction in the International Court of Justice against French nuclear testing in 1972 and sponsoring a Resolution [passed 94 votes to nil] at the United Nations in 1973 that called for a South Pacific nuclear-free zone), politicians treated these actions not as a pre-existing interest that New Zealand ought to act upon evidence that New Zealand could chart its own course in the world and other countries would pay attention. For example, “I was on the frigate as part of our government’s protests. That was one of the most dramatic moves any country has taken on a question of this nature. It alerted the nations of the world to how a small country felt about this issue” (Hansard 1976). New Zealand’s actions in this area were heralded as evidence of past

³⁵ Interview, Wilson.

success at carving out an autonomous foreign policy, rather than for the contribution they made to world peace, reducing the risk facing New Zealand, lessening the burden shouldered by New Zealand, or improving the quality of decisions made by the United States.

In sum, my findings suggest that both leaders and citizens may value the exercise of autonomy in foreign policy not merely as a means to achieve a pre-existing, unit-level interest but as an end in and of itself. I identified three reasons why states might value the *act* of asserting autonomy more than the end for which autonomy is sought: it puts the state on the map and makes it “known” for something; it gives the state a “unique” identity; and it gives the state the chance to claim “moral leadership.”

Conclusion

This article has attempted to explain the puzzle of the sudden and unexpected break-up of security ties between the United States and New Zealand in 1985. It asks why the New Zealand government let a dispute over nuclear ship visits lead to the withdrawal of the US security guarantee at a time when East–West tensions were acute and New Zealand had neither the resources nor will to make up for the security deficit. I demonstrated that this case is not well explained by existing theories of alliance formation and disintegration. Moreover, it is not one in which an emotional public or a committed political minority pushed the Prime Minister and his Cabinet into a position where they had no choice. As this article makes clear, a higher proportion of New Zealanders were in favor of New Zealand remaining in ANZUS than prohibiting nuclear ships. I argue that a better way of approaching this puzzle is to conceptualize it as a case of intra-alliance opposition between a small state and its more-powerful ally. While there are numerous examples of such kinds of opposition between the United States and its allies today, very rarely do smaller states allow their opposition to endanger the alliance itself. Understanding the motivations behind New Zealand’s opposition and the factors that enabled New Zealand to take it this far are important questions that have not been adequately answered in the literature.

Using the IR literature on alliances, I generated four hypotheses for why smaller states might oppose their stronger allies. I devised a means by which scholars can use qualitative data to distinguish between opposition motivated by “free-riding,” “hedging against entrapment,” “soft balancing,” and “autonomy concerns.” Using data from interviews conducted in 2005 with 22 prominent individuals involved in the squabble and a content analysis of debates in the New Zealand parliament on four private member’s bills between 1976 and 1984, I demonstrated that New Zealand’s opposition to US policy was motivated by a desire to gain greater autonomy in foreign policy; a category I call “opposition for autonomy.” I found that rationales offered by proponents at the time of the dispute closely matched those offered 21 years later. I discussed how the rejection of nuclear ships became connected to the exercise of independence in foreign policy via the protest movement.

While it is accepted wisdom in IR that states incur autonomy costs when forming an alliance, there has been little research to date that has addressed the questions of when states will become unhappy with their surrender of autonomy, and what they might do about it. The latter half of the article provides tentative answers to these questions. Employing a comparison with New Zealand’s next-door neighbor and partner in the ANZUS alliance, Australia, I found preliminary evidence that a decline in threat perception may be the catalyst for states to rediscover their desire for autonomy. While critics might challenge the applicability of this case to other US allies on the grounds that it would be difficult to

find a country as removed from the centers of power as New Zealand, I wish to counter this by saying that threat perception rises and falls in most countries, sometimes in accordance with the material balance or power and sometimes not. The most important lesson for US policymakers is that indicators of public support for an alliance are an unreliable indicator of how the public would respond should an enterprising leader or challenger seek to politicize the state's relationship with its more-powerful ally.

What other conclusions can we draw from this case for US policymakers? One is that short of exaggerating the threat faced by the allies, it will behoove US policymakers to work harder to incorporate their allies' desires for autonomy within the alliance. Rather than getting upset when confronted with small-scale assertions of autonomy by its smaller allies, such as the recent Japanese government's desire to renegotiate the base realignment package signed by its predecessor, it may be prudent to approach these issues with less of an iron fist and more compromise. While US policymakers have a history of becoming extremely upset when their allies will not behave, publicly giving in on small issues is likely to facilitate smoother intra-alliance management without necessarily rendering the alliance less credible. More importantly, it will demobilize leaders seeking to raise their ratings by portraying US pressure as bullying. What my analysis of the New Zealand case revealed is that citizens are extremely susceptible to perceptions of bullying by their more-powerful ally. Even though a bare majority of New Zealand citizens agreed with the government's policy at the time of the dispute, they immediately rallied (Lamare 1987). The Deputy Prime Minister at the time recalled "The American reaction to our policy cemented it further into the psyche of the New Zealand body politic. We thought: you're not going to tell us what to do."³⁶

My inability to trace the rejection of US ships to any tangible interest on the part of New Zealand suggests a third lesson for US policymakers: not all cases of intra-alliance opposition are motivated by a desire to reduce the risks or costs associated with being allied. I urge US alliance managers to listen to the signals its smaller allies send it. My interviews provided much anecdotal evidence that the US officials in charge of New Zealand at the time made no effort to understand what was driving New Zealand's opposition. Had they recognized the connection between hosting nuclear ships and dependence, they may have refrained from making statements that seemed to deliberately scuttle the possibility of an independent identity for New Zealand.³⁷ While critics could dismiss this on the grounds that the US spends its intelligence money on countries that are more strategically important than New Zealand, I venture that the cultural and linguistic commonalities between the two countries suggest that New Zealand should have been the easiest country for US policymakers to understand.

Appendix: Interviews³⁸

Geoffrey Palmer (Deputy Prime Minister, Lange Cabinet). July 6, 2005.

Roger Douglas (Minister, Lange Cabinet). August 11, 2005.

Mike Moore (Minister, Lange Cabinet). August 11, 2005.

Richard Prebble (Minister, Lange Cabinet). July 5, 2005.

David Caygill (Minister, Lange Cabinet). July 26, 2005.

³⁶ Interview, Palmer.

³⁷ Right after Labour's electoral victory New Zealand was treated to Secretary of State Shultz saying that he hoped Labour's recent electoral victory would "pose no greater threat to the ANZUS alliance than the Australian Labour Party's victory had done the year before" (Alley 1987:202). It is difficult to imagine a statement more inappropriate for the mood in New Zealand at the time.

³⁸ The position of the interviewee at the time of the dispute is given.

Margaret Shields (Minister, Lange Cabinet). August 16, 2005.
 Trevor Mallard (Member of Parliament, Labour). August 9, 2005.
 Richard Northey (Member of Parliament, Labour). August 11, 2005.
 Peter Dunne (Member of Parliament, Labour). July 15, 2005.
 Phil Goff (Member of Parliament, Labour). July 19, 2005.
 Fran Wilde (Member of Parliament, Labour). July 26, 2005.
 Jim Anderton (Member of Parliament, Labour). July 1, 2005.
 Ken Shirley (Member of Parliament, Labour). July 15, 2005.
 Margaret Wilson (President of the Labour Party). August 1, 2005.
 Jim Bolger (Member of Parliament, Deputy Leader of National). July 27, 2005.
 Jim McLay (Member of Parliament, Leader of National). August 8, 2005.
 Marilyn Waring (Member of Parliament, National). August 11, 2005.
 John Henderson (Director of the Prime Minister's Advisory Group). July 13, 2005.
 Denis McLean (Secretary of Defense). July 8, 2005.
 George Laking (former Secretary of Foreign Affairs). July 15, 2005.
 Bob Hawke (Prime Minister, Australia). August 12, 2005.
 Bill Hayden (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Australia). August 9, 2005.

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