

68pc say don't back Japan over China

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Australians have rejected overwhelmingly the possibility of siding with Japan in a military conflict with China over disputed islands in the East China Sea, according to a public opinion survey.

The survey found that 71 per cent of those contacted by UMR Research for the Australia-China Relations Institute at the University of Technology, Sydney believed Australia should remain neutral in any conflict between China and Japan over the Diaoyu-Senkaku islands. Some 68 percent of respondents said Australia should say no to a specific United States request to become involved on the side of Japan in any such dispute.

Beijing and Tokyo have been at loggerheads for more than 50 years over the disputed islands – now under Japanese control – with tensions rising and falling over the years.

These survey results indicate significant scepticism in the Australian community about military adventures that might cut across Australia's economic interests. China is by far - Australia's largest trading partner and increasingly an important source of foreign investment. Japan is Australia's second-largest trading partner.

Former foreign minister Bob Carr, director of the Australia-China Relations Institute, described the East China Sea dispute as the "most volatile" of potential disputes in the region, and one that could see Australia drawn into armed combat.

"The poll confirms that Australians want their country to stay neutral," Mr Carr said. Conflict with China would cause Australian trade to fall

"We know that Australians overwhelmingly support the **ANZUS** Treaty, but this poll confirms that they do not want it invoked in conflict over the East China Sea."

The UMR survey also found that 51 per cent of those surveyed did not believe that the **ANZUS** Treaty obliged Australia to support Japan in a conflict with China over the disputed islands.

Seventy-six per cent of respondents believed that conflict with China would cause Australian trade to fall. One thousand people over the age of 18 were polled.

Mr Carr said an agreement between Australia, Japan and the US to consult on security matters in the region was a "long way" short of a security treaty.

"What the Australian people are saying is unmistakeable," he said.

"We like Japan, but would apply a rigorous neutrality to these five islands whether it's Japanese or Chinese sovereignty involved.

"Australians do not regard these islands as any more fundamental to our security interests than who controls the Falklands in the Atlantic."

Key points Australia should say no to a specific US request to side with Japan, say 68 per cent. Half of respondents think the **ANZUS** Treaty does not oblige Australia to support Japan against China.

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