USE OF THESES

This copy is supplied for purposes of private study and research only. Passages from the thesis may not be copied or closely paraphrased without the written consent of the author.
THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FRENCH PRESENCE IN THE
SOUTH PACIFIC FOR INTERSTATE RELATIONS IN THE REGION

Steve Bates

Sub-thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (International Relations)
in the Department of International Relations,
Research School of Pacific Studies,
The Australian National University.

August 1989
DECLARATION

This sub-thesis is my own original work.
All sources used have been acknowledged.

(Steve Bates)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Mr Greg Fry for his supervision, encouragement and very useful comments. I would also like to thank Helen Fraser, David Hegarty and Dr Stephen Henningham for their advice and their willingness to clarify certain important points. I am also indebted to Mrs L. Payne and Mrs C. Lynam for their advice on the use of the word processor.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE FRENCH PRESENCE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French national defence strategy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France's desire to be a medium-sized world power</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France as guarantor of stability in the South Pacific</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EARLY HOSTILITY TOWARD FRANCE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French nuclear testing in the South Pacific</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France's opposition to Islander control of the South Pacific Commission</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISLAND HOSTILITY TO FRANCE 1979-86: NEW CALEDONIA AND REGIONAL POLITICS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its emergence as an issue in regional politics</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The attitudes of individual Island countries to decolonisation</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Forum gives France the benefit of the doubt</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France and the formation of the Melanesian Spearhead</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France and the &quot;Libyan threat&quot;</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Forum endorses re-inscription</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCE'S NEW SOUTH PACIFIC POLICY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The origins of France's new South Pacific policy</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chirac's double-edged sword: Pons and Flosse</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Flosse initiatives: the method</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Flosse initiatives: an evaluation</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

This sub-thesis examines the implications of the French presence in the South Pacific for interstate relations in the region. As such it is concerned with the condition and evolution of France’s relations with the South Pacific countries from the 1960s, when most were still not independent, until the present day and with the effects that the French presence in the South Pacific has had both on relations between Forum members and on regional stability and unity in general.¹

The South Pacific regional system is a relative newcomer to the world political scene. The South Pacific Forum, the organisation which groups together the independent states of the region, was not established until 1971 and even then it was rather limited in scope with only four of the twenty-three colonial territories in the South Pacific having achieved independence. Indeed, it was not until the end of the 1970s, by which time membership of the Forum included three of the four Melanesian entities and two other Micronesian states, that the Forum could be said to have achieved the dimensions of a regional system. Only on becoming independent were the South Pacific Island states free to determine their own foreign policy and the nature of their relations with other states from both within the region and outside it.² Yet at the same time these states, in order to guarantee their economic survival, were seeking additional sources and, in certain cases where traditional donors had been estranged, even alternative sources of economic aid.

This study then undertakes to examine the effect of the French presence not only on interstate relations in the region but on the stability of the regional system at a time when traditional economic and political ties were being questioned and new ones being forged.

¹ The members of the South Pacific Forum are Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, Western Samoa.
² For the purposes of this study the South Pacific Island states are all the Forum states listed in footnote 1 except for Australia and New Zealand.
Ideally such a study should also consider the relations of France with the two giants of the region, Australia and New Zealand. It should also examine the effects of the French presence on relations between the Island states and these two countries and on relations between the Forum states and outside powers such as the United States and Japan. These effects have been far from insubstantial. The anti-nuclear sentiments that led to the banning of all US nuclear-armed and/or powered ships from entering New Zealand ports grew out of the campaign against French testing in the Pacific. The feeling of alienation that has developed among some South Pacific Islanders in relation to the Western powers is arguably a result of the priority that both the US and the UK give to their relations with their Western ally and European partner, France, over their less important and less official allies in the South Pacific. The hostile reaction of the Islanders to the French presence also poses a dilemma for Australia who must choose between its allegiance to the Western Alliance and the necessity to preserve stability in the region.

Because of the constraints of length that a sub-thesis by necessity imposes, relations between France and the non-Island states have had to be excluded from the purview of this study. Nevertheless, it is my firm conviction that this necessary omission does not invalidate the findings of the present study. Indeed, it can be argued that in some respects this omission actually enables the study to focus more on the concerns of the independent Island countries which in other studies have too often been overshadowed by those of Australia, New Zealand and the so-called great powers. It makes it possible to view the French presence from a Pacific Island perspective rather than from the more usual East-West perspective. Nonetheless, the study makes reference to the opinions and actions of countries other than the South Pacific Island states when these are deemed necessary to a full understanding of the actions and opinions of the South Pacific Island states.

It has been alleged by different political commentators and Island politicians that France has had a destabilising and divisive effect on the South Pacific. This study investigates the validity of such allegations through an examination of the nature of the French presence and its impact on the region. In this respect it is unlike many previous
writings on the subject which have taken an East-West perspective and focussed on the role played by the Soviet Union and its surrogates in destabilising the region.

The present study is the first one of comparable length to focus on the implications-past and present- of the French presence in the South Pacific for international relations. There have been some papers of article length on the subject presented at conferences and seminars but these have only considered certain aspects of the problem. There have, of course, been longer studies of political developments within the French South Pacific territories themselves but these have devoted only a few pages to external relations with the Island countries and usually with the purpose of showing how these impacted on internal politics. Theses, books and articles have also been written on nuclear testing, nuclear free zones, regionalism and great power involvement in the South Pacific but none has the French presence as its main focus nor do these studies cover it in all its aspects.

Chapter One analyses the nature of the presence and the strength of France's commitment to remaining in the region. A second chapter examines the early incidences of Island hostility towards France in relation to the desire of the Islanders for greater control over the South Pacific Commission and their opposition to French nuclear testing. Chapter Three looks at the effects that French decolonisation policy in New Caledonia has had on bilateral and multilateral relations within the Forum. The fourth and final chapter considers the recent changes in the French attitude to the region and the reaction of the Island states to the dramatic reversals that took place in French policy on New Caledonia in 1986 and again in 1988.

3 Jean Chesnaux, "France in the South Pacific: Global Approach or Respect for Regional Agendas"; John Dalton, "France and Conflict in the South Pacific"; Stephen Henningham: "France and the South Pacific".

4 John Connell, New Caledonia or Kanaky; Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, Poisoned Reign; Myriam Dormoy, Politics in New Caledonia; Helen Fraser, "New Caledonia: Anti-Colonialism in a Pacific Territory"; Claude Gabriel and Vincent Kermel, Nouvelle-Calédonie: la révolte Kanak.

5 Ron Crocombe and A Ali (eds), Foreign Forces in Pacific Politics; Stewart Firth, Nuclear Playground; Greg Fry, South Pacific Regionalism; Richard Herr, Regionalism in the South Seas; John Ravenhill, No Longer an American Lake.
CHAPTER ONE

THE FRENCH PRESENCE

Despite the granting of independence to French possessions in Africa and Asia in the late 1950s and 1960s and the achievement of independence by the former British and Australian colonies in the South Pacific in the 1970s, France has maintained, and at certain times even reinforced, its control over its island territories in the South Pacific. In this chapter I will briefly examine the nature of the French presence in the South Pacific. I will then analyze why France is committed to remaining in the South Pacific in defiance of the global trend towards decolonisation. Because the implications of the French presence are largely the result of the reactions of the independent Island states to the unwillingness of France to change the fundamental nature of its presence, an analysis of the reasons for unwillingness must be an essential component of any study of the implications of the French presence for interstate relations in the South Pacific.

The French presence in the South Pacific takes many forms. Firstly France has sovereignty over a number of islands and archipelagos. The annexation by France of what is now French Polynesia was a gradual process. In 1842 France took control of the Marquesas. In 1847 it established a protectorate over Tahiti, Moorea, the Tuamotus and two of the Austral Islands. In 1877 the protectorate status was changed to that of a colony. The Gambiers were annexed in 1881, followed by the Leeward Islands in 1888. With the addition of the remaining Austral Islands in 1900 and Rapa the following year, France’s Polynesian colony was complete. The present territory of New Caledonia was constituted in two stages. France annexed the main island, Grande Terre, and the Isle of Pine in 1853.

---


2 Thompson and Adloff, p. 239.
The Loyalty Islands were taken over in 1864. In 1886 Wallis and Futuna was officially declared a French protectorate. Its status changed to that of an overseas territory in 1959. In 1906 Britain and France established a condominium over the New Hebrides. In 1980 the New Hebrides gained its independence under the new name of Vanuatu. To oversee the administration of French Polynesia and New Caledonia France has two High Commissioners, one in Noumea and one in Papeete, both of whom are appointed by the French president.

Complementing this administrative presence is a considerable military presence. France has two overseas inter-service military commands in the Pacific - one centred in New Caledonia under an Army general and the other in French Polynesia under a rear-admiral. From a point of view of military forces France has the third largest contingent in the South Pacific after Australia and New Zealand. There are some 5,000 personnel stationed in French Polynesia including one marine regiment, one Foreign Legion regiment and one air transport unit equipped with Caravelle and Guardian aircraft and AS 332 and Alouette III helicopters. Thirteen hundred personnel are attached to the Pacific Naval Squadron in Noumea. The squadron has two frigates, 4 patrol and coastal boats, three amphibians, some six support craft and four Guardian maritime reconnaissance aircraft. There are also another 9,500 personnel in New Caledonia including one maritime infantry regiment, two infantry groups, three infantry companies and one air transport unit equipped with C-160 aircraft and Alouette III helicopters. A large percentage of these forces (3,200 in New Caledonia) are gendarmes which although nominally under the command of the army are actually responsible for maintaining internal law and order.

Closely linked to this military presence is its nuclear presence. France is the only remaining nuclear power to use the region as the site for its nuclear tests. It has nuclear

---

3 Thompson and Adloff, p. 231.
6 The number of French forces stationned in New Caledonia has varied considerably over the last few years and as such the figures given here should be viewed with caution. Following the return of the socialists to government in France and the signing of the Matignon Accords the French military presence in New Caledonia has been considerably reduced.
testing sites at Moruroa and Fangataufa. Prior to the troubles in New Caledonia, the bulk of French forces in the region were tasked with the defence of the French testing facilities. Altogether there are some 2,300 civilian and military personnel in the South Pacific involved in the testing programme.\(^7\)

France also maintains a large scientific and technical research presence. Many of France's leading research institutes have bases in the French territories. These include those involved in general research such as ORSTOM, those involved in medical research such as *Institut Pasteur* and those involved in research into specialised areas such as sea and land based equipment for ocean exploration (IFREMER) and agriculture (CIRAD). In Papeete the *Institut Malaride* is a world leader in research on ciguatera (fish poisoning), leprosy and filariosis.\(^8\) The Institute of Renewable Energy (IERPS) has made French Polynesia the highest per capita user of solar cells in the world. The Institute for Research into Oils and Oleaginous Products (IRHO) leads the world in research into coconut tree cultivation. Since 1986 these various research institutes have been encouraged to undertake projects which could benefit the independent states as well as the French territories.

France is also an important aid donor in a region that receives more aid per capita than any other in the world.\(^9\) Although the lion's share of French aid goes to its own territories - in 1986 $US452.33 out of a total of $US460.23 million - France does give bilateral aid to some of the independent South Pacific countries.\(^10\) In 1987 France gave Vanuatu 28.3 million FF and 17.4 million to the other South Pacific Island states. An extra 30 million FF went to Fiji.\(^11\) France makes substantial contributions to multilateral aid in the region. A member of the South Pacific Commission, France contributes to that organisation's technical and economic assistance programmes which benefit both independent countries and dependent territories in the region. In 1988 the French

---

\(^7\) Young, p. 45.
\(^8\) *Islands Business* November 1986, p. 18.
\(^9\) ADAB Submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on Australia's Relations with the South Pacific, March 1987, p. 54.
\(^10\) ADAB Submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on Australia's Relations with the South Pacific, p. S2719.
\(^11\) Figures obtained from the French Embassy in Canberra.
contribution was 7.6 million FF, making it the largest donor. A member of the EEC, France contributes to the Development Fund of the Lomé Accords. In 1986 its contribution was 33 million FF or 23.5% of total contributions.

France also has a considerable diplomatic and cultural presence with embassies in Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Vanuatu. There are also Alliances Françaises in Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Tonga. The recent establishment of a French University of The South Pacific with campuses in Noumea and Papeete is intended to give technical and administrative training to both English and French speaking students from the region. France is not a major trading partner of any of the independent Island states, except for Vanuatu which still has strong commercial ties with its former colonial administrator.

France, therefore, has quite a considerable presence in the region and one that exceeds by far that of her traditional rival in the region, Great Britain. Indeed, whereas the British presence has diminished rather markedly in the 1970s and 1980s, that of France has increased. The remainder of Chapter One will examine why France has maintained and even reinforced its presence in the South Pacific.

Any discussion of the reasons for the continued French presence is faced with the problem of distinguishing between those factors which really motivate the French to remain in the South Pacific and those arguments which are used by France to justify its presence but which in fact are not the real reasons for its presence. Nevertheless, in making this distinction we should be careful not to mistake our own perception of the

---

12 Figures obtained from the French Embassy in Canberra.
13 The Lomé Accords are a series of agreements between what are in the main the former colonies of the European powers in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (the ACP group) and the European Community. The Pacific members of the group are Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Western Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Vanuatu. Under the Accords members are guaranteed duty-free access to the Community for 99.5% of their exports. A separate sugar protocol allows each sugar producing member a quota of EEC sugar imports at prices above those on the world market. Members also benefit from a special scheme known as Stabex which assists members who experience shortfalls in earnings from agricultural exports. There is also a European Development Fund and a European Investment Bank to provide members with foreign assistance and concessionary finance. Joanna Moss, *The Lomé Conventions and their implications for the US*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1982, pp. xv-xvi. For further information concerning the Lomé Conventions see also John Ravenhill, *Collective Clientelism*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1985.
validity of a particular reason for that of the French state. Clearly, in any assessment of the strength of the French commitment to remaining in the South Pacific, what is important is the perception of the French state, not our own. We may be able to demonstrate that the behaviour and/or actions of a person or a government may be based on incorrect premisses, but as long as long as they hold firmly to their mistaken beliefs their commitment to continuing with such behaviour will be no less strong. Consequently the purpose of this chapter is not so much to evaluate the validity of the different reasons advanced by France and others for its continued presence as to distinguish between those reasons that motivate it to maintain its presence and those which are simply post facto justifications.

**French national defence strategy**

The first reason that will be examined here concerns the military security of France itself and its status as a nuclear weapons power. It would seem to be one of the major reasons - if not the most important one - for French reluctance to decolonise in the South Pacific.

The history of French decolonisation and of French nuclear testing are closely interwoven. It was the decolonisation of Algeria that led to the decision by the French to shift their testing to French Polynesia. That decision and the French determination not to repeat the Algerian experience led to French efforts to avoid decolonisation in French Polynesia and, as we will see, by extension in New Caledonia. In the second half of the 1950s it had appeared that after its traumatic experiences in Indo-China and Algeria,

---

14 I have used "state" here rather than people or electors because given the isolation of the territories from metropolitan France and the fact that these territories account for less than 1% of the total French electorate, the question of their remaining part of France is not an important electoral issue. Public opinion polls may show percentages for and against but it is doubtful whether these indicate any real commitment on the part of the electors to cast their votes in accordance with their views on this particular issue. As such governments and even bureaucracies enjoy considerable autonomy in this particular area of French policy-making.

France had resigned itself to the gradual but inevitable loss of its colonial empire. The 1957 decree which granted increased local autonomy to French colonies was quickly followed by the granting by France of independence to all but one of its African possessions. Yet although this new statute also applied to the French possessions in the South Pacific, the years that followed were to see a complete reversal in the movement towards greater self-government in these territories. Indeed, the first in a series of laws to this effect, the loi Jaquinot, brought a return to the pre-1957 situation. Subsequent laws, Billote in 1969, Stirn in 1976 and Dijoud in 1979 saw a further tightening of the control of the central government and of its appointed representative in the territories over local affairs. In fact, it was not until 1984 that French Polynesia returned to the same degree of self-government that it had enjoyed in those few years between 1957 and 1963, despite continued support for greater autonomy throughout that period by the majority parties in the Territorial Assembly.

There would seem to be a connection between the tightening of central government control over France's South Pacific Territories and the unrest in Algeria in the 1950s, that culminated in the granting by General De Gaulle - albeit reluctantly - of independence to the former French colony in 1962. Algeria had been chosen as the test site for France's ambitious nuclear defence programme. However, it did not require much foresight to understand that Algerian independence would be the inevitable outcome of the unrest and that an independent Algeria would be highly unlikely to agree to the continued use of its soil for French nuclear tests.

One obvious solution would have been for France to give up its nuclear programme and renounce its ambition to accede to the rank of the nuclear powers. Two factors, however, ruled out the adoption of such a solution. The first was the commitment of the government, and in particular the military, to the decision to make France a nuclear

power. The bitter memories of the humiliating defeat of France at the hands of Nazi Germany and the subsequent division and occupation of France during WWII, coupled with the Soviet nuclear threat to Paris and the US betrayal of French interests during the Suez crisis of 1956, convinced the French establishment that it was essential that their country have its own independent nuclear deterrent.\(^{19}\) By acquiring their own nuclear deterrent, the French hoped to overcome any doubts in their own minds and more importantly any in the minds of the Soviets as to whether the US would risk the destruction of its own homeland by responding to a conventional attack by the Soviets on Western Europe with a nuclear strike on the USSR.\(^{20}\)

The second factor, which made the renunciation of the nuclear programme even more improbable, was the nature of the French regime at the time. As a result of the Algerian crisis, General De Gaulle had taken over as President in 1957 and gave himself far-reaching powers. It was obvious that a person such as De Gaulle with his connections with the military and his experience as leader of the French Government in exile during WWII would not preside over the renunciation of France’s nuclear ambitions.

The original search for a site for French atmospheric nuclear tests had been narrowed down to the Sahara Desert of Algeria and the Tuamotu Group of French Polynesia.\(^{21}\) Both met the basic requirements of a site for atmospheric nuclear tests in that they were sufficiently remote from populated areas to minimise any possible damage or harmful effects from either the resulting shock waves or fall-out. Algeria had been chosen because of its proximity to France and the existence in the vicinity of the site of an airport capable of handling large transport planes. With Algeria now ruled out, the Tuamotu Group was the obvious replacement. Fearful of a repeat of the Algerian episode, De Gaulle was determined to nip any independence movement in the bud.\(^{22}\)


\(^{22}\) Danielsson and Danielsson, p. 48.
The 1958 referendum had been held throughout the French Empire to allow each colony to decide whether it would remain a part of the French community while still being allowed to determine the form and degree of independence that it would enjoy within that community or whether it would prefer complete independence from France, without any further French moral or material support. In that referendum Pouvanaa, the leader of the Rassemblement Démocratique des Populations Tahitiennes (RDPT), the majority party of the local Territorial Assembly, had campaigned in favour of complete independence and despite official obstruction of his campaign had succeeded in attracting 36 per cent of the votes. In retaliation De Gaulle dismissed Pouvanaa and the other RDPT ministers in the Government Council. Not long after Pouvanaa was arrested and charged with instigating arson.

It is not hard to see a link between Pouvanaa’s call for a No vote in the 1958 referendum and his subsequent arrest and imprisonment. Pouvanaa himself denounced the shameful frame-up and the political character and purpose of his imprisonment and trial. Despite the complete absence of any evidence that Pouvanaa had been the instigator of the arson, he was found guilty and sentenced to 8 years of solitary confinement and 15 years of banishment from French Polynesia. He was sent to France where he remained until 1968. De Gaulle had effectively neutralised Pouvanaa.

The inhabitants of French Polynesia were not consulted on whether they wanted their islands to be used as nuclear test sites and the French government chose to ignore the successive electoral victories by the autonomistes and the bipartisan opposition to nuclear testing. It also dissolved the RDPT when that party was about to commit itself to the goal of independence and call for a stop to the influx of French troops into the territory. Each time the Territorial Assembly found a way of using what little power it still had to protest against the tests the French government retaliated by curtailing its power even further.
The efforts of the French to suppress any movement that they believed might curtail their freedom to test nuclear weapons at Moruroa demonstrate the importance of nuclear testing in any evaluation of the strength of France’s commitment to maintaining its presence in the region. The French commitment to continue with its nuclear testing programme and hence to remain in the South Pacific has not declined over the past decades. If anything, support by the main political parties in France has increased, with both the Communist and Socialist parties forgoing their initial opposition in the early 1970s for whole-hearted endorsement of both civil and military nuclear programmes while in government in the 1980s.28 The programme, however, is still not without its critics, even within France itself. At a purely technical level many have questioned the decision by France to continue to use Moruroa as a test site when the programme switched from atmospheric to underground testing in 1975.30 Indeed some have maintained that it is the worst possible place for making underground tests given the recurrence of cyclones in the area and the high probability of contaminated water seeping through cracks in the porous and brittle subsoil, at least in the long term.31 There have even been suggestions that the tests could be held in France - the Australian Government has identified several possible sites in France itself - or that France, like Great Britain, could use US test facilities in Nevada.32

France has rejected the possibility of conducting its tests in France on the grounds that no site is sufficiently remote to eliminate the risk of seismic damage to buildings and important infrastructure. Yet remarks by Pierre Lellouche, a French international relations specialist, would seem to indicate that there are other more important motives for France not wanting to conduct its testing in metropolitan France. Lellouche has pointed out that to transfer the tests to France would also risk opposition from neighbouring countries, with powerful anti-nuclear movements.33 Pressure from such countries on France to abandon its tests are likely to be far more effective than those of small and remote Pacific states. Such a move would also increase domestic awareness of the issue and risk destroying the

30 Danielsson and Danielsson, p. 211.
31 Danielsson and Danielsson, p. 276.
32 Chesnaux, "France in the Pacific", p.75.
33 Pierre Lellouche at a seminar given at ANU in 1988.
consensus that exists in favour of the nuclear defence programme and thus jeopardise the programme itself. As for transferring the tests to Nevada, the use of US testing facilities to conduct its tests would defeat the very purpose that France had in becoming a nuclear power - that of not having to rely on the US for its defence.

There are of course other reasons for France’s unwillingness to conduct its tests elsewhere. Undoubtedly some weight would have been given to economic considerations such as the financial cost of transferring the scientific and military personnel and equipment that had already been installed at great expense in the remote South Pacific, and the even more costly duplication of infrastructure that could not be transferred from the French Polynesia to a new location. There is also substantial pressure from the bureaucrats, both military and civilian, who in terms of career paths and privileges have a vested interest in the continued use of French Polynesia as a testing site.3 4

Criticism of French policy has not just been restricted to the appropriateness of French Polynesia as a testing site. Some critics, the most notable being a high ranking member of the French military establishment itself, Admiral Sanguenetti, have questioned the need for the testing programme to continue, claiming that the existing French nuclear stockpile is sufficient to meet the avowed objective of the programme, namely nuclear deterrence.3 5

It is not the purpose of this sub-thesis to examine the validity of the French argument in support of its force de frappe. What is important, however, is to show the strength of the French commitment to its programme and how this determines the nature of its presence in the South Pacific and its relations with the other states of the region. Despite the criticisms outlined above, the French military and political establishment remain convinced of the necessity to continue with their nuclear tests in the Pacific.3 6

France’s nuclear weapons still form the basis of French strategic military doctrine. Those

34 Chesnaux, *Transpacifique*, p. 132.
36 French Prime Minister Rocard has recently declared that the reduction in the number of tests to be conducted each year at Moruroa does not represent a change in principle. France, he said, firmly believed that nuclear weapons were the best deterrent to war. *Canberra Times*, 19-06-89, p. 1; see also *French Nuclear Tests*, p. 7.
in charge of French defence strategy are still convinced that this capacity must be modernised and upgraded if it is to continue to function as an effective deterrent. As long as they are convinced of the necessity to test this capacity the atolls of French Polynesia - because of their remoteness from the domestic politics of metropolitan France and from any nation of economic and military importance susceptible of taking umbrage at the tests and able to force France to abandon them - will continue to be of vital importance to French security interests. That France cannot even contemplate the loss of its sovereignty over them has been demonstrated by its persistent repression of movements in the territory that favoured greater autonomy. French commitment to remaining in the South Pacific - or at least in French Polynesia - has been very strong. 37

France’s commitment to continue testing at Moruroa may explain its unwillingness to decolonise in French Polynesia but how can a similar unwillingness to decolonise in New Caledonia be accounted for? The fact that similar measures to restrict the autonomy of the local territorial assembly were also applied in New Caledonia against the wishes of the majority of the local population and similar tactics were employed in that territory to silence local leaders who wanted greater autonomy from France, raises the question of whether the French determination to remain in New Caledonia was connected in any way to their commitment to continue testing in French Polynesia. 38 Yet surely France could have held onto French Polynesia while allowing New Caledonia greater autonomy and even independence. Given that New Caledonia was to become the focus of the decolonisation struggle in the South Pacific in the 1980s, an examination of the arguments for retaining New Caledonia as opposed to just French Polynesia would seem pertinent.

37 A further indication of the strength of France’s commitment to continue testing in the Pacific was its purchase of the atolls Moruroa and Fangataufa from the Territory so that, should French Polynesia ever obtain a sufficient degree of independence from France to be able to prevent France from using its territory as a site for its nuclear tests, its jurisdiction would no longer extend to the sites themselves and therefore France could continue with its testing irrespective of the wishes of French Polynesia. See Stephen Henningham, "France and the South Pacific", Discussion Paper No 2 1988-89, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 1988, p. 32. See also Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, "France dans le Pacifique: Aspects Stratégiques", Defense Nationale, March 1988, p. 29.

38 For an account of how Union Calédonienne leader Lenormand was deprived of his civic rights for five years and removed from his post as a member of the French parliament see Thompson and Adloff, pp. 303-18.
France's reluctance to decolonise in New Caledonia has been attributed to the fact that it, along with several other remnants of the French Empire, such as Mayotte and Guadeloupe, is of strategic importance to the French nuclear programme in that it serves as a port of transit for material and personnel en route to Moruroa. Without such staging posts France would be at the mercy of foreign governments who could deny her the use of their facilities.

Another argument that is frequently advanced by French officials is a version of the so-called domino theory. It is asserted that were France to grant independence to New Caledonia, this would encourage independence movements in other French overseas possessions, and in particular those which are essential to the success of vital defence projects such as the Space Programme and the Nuclear Programme. One French Minister of the Interior even went as far as to suggest that failure to maintain control of New Caledonia would lead to the eventual loss of Corsica. A meeting of the representatives of the Independence movements from most of the French overseas territories and departments held in Guadeloupe in 1985 is also cited as evidence in support of the domino theory. Indeed the strength of the French belief in the validity of such a theory was demonstrated by their extreme reluctance to grant independence to the New Hebrides in 1980.

Other arguments have been put forward that account for the French reluctance of France to decolonise in New Caledonia in terms of the territory's own importance for vital French economic, strategic and political interests, rather than an indirect consequence of the need to safeguard French national defence interests in French Polynesia. New Caledonia is particularly fortunate in that it has rich deposits of so-called strategic minerals. The island's mineral wealth includes deposits of iron ore, chrome and cobalt but it is nickel which is by far the most important. The largest known deposit of nickel in the

---

39 Warner, p.18.
42 Dalton, p.3.
world is to be found in New Caledonia making France the third largest producer of nickel in the world.\(^{43}\) Because cobalt and nickel are essential for the production of super alloys, magnets and steel alloys elements in high technological industries, and in particular those related to defence, they are considered strategic metals.\(^{44}\) Moreover, the development of special purpose nickel alloys capable of substituting cobalt has increased the importance of nickel.

Such valuable mineral assets could make an important contribution to the economic viability of an independent New Caledonia.\(^{45}\) However, it has an equally important contribution to make to the French objective of greater independence in terms of energy and industrial raw materials. Conscious of their vulnerability to outside pressure as a result of their heavy dependence on imported petroleum and other essential raw materials, successive French governments have stressed in their development plans the need to reduce French dependence in this area. The massive French investments in the civil nuclear energy programme designed to make France less dependent on imported sources of energy is perhaps the most striking example. It is also significant that the measures introduced to limit autonomy in New Caledonia in the 1960s and 1970s coincided with the nickel boom, a period of high demand and hence high prices for nickel. The \textit{loi Billotte} in 1969 increased government control over mining permits and regulations.\(^{46}\) In the early 1970s the French government agreed to pay a subsidy to the territorial government if the latter cut the taxes of Société Le Nickel, the giant of the Nickel mining industry in New Caledonia. It also arranged for the state owned petroleum company, Société Nationale de Pétrole d’Aquitaine, to obtain a half interest in Le Nickel, so as to give it access to government finance. Such moves, taken to prevent Le Nickel from falling into foreign hands are indicative of the determination of the French government to keep control of its nickel supplies.\(^{47}\)

\(^{43}\) Gabriel and Karmel, p.69.  
\(^{45}\) Dalton, p. 5.  
\(^{46}\) Claude Gabriel and Vincent Kermel, \textit{Nouvelle Calédonie: la revolte Kanak}, p.74.  
\(^{47}\) Tanzer, pp. 162-63; Uregei, p. 121.
Moreover, with the signing of the United Nations Convention of the Sea in 1982, the economic importance of New Caledonia, French Polynesia and even Wallis and Futuna has taken on a new dimension. The extension of internationally recognized territorial limits to 200 nautical miles has endowed France with a combined total of 11 million square kilometres in Exclusive Economic Zones world wide, of which two-thirds or 7 million square kilometres are in the South Pacific. In addition to their economic potential in terms of fishing and aquaculture, the French EEZs in the Pacific are said to have large reserves of important strategic minerals such as manganese, copper, nickel and cobalt in the form of polymetallic nodules on the seabed. The value of such deposits will no doubt increase as those on land are depleted and their exploitation costs are reduced due to technological advances.

Nevertheless, one must be careful not to carry this argument too far. France has given independence to nearly all of its former colonies in Africa and these still allow French companies to exploit their raw materials and the French military to use their facilities. There is no reason why this should not also be the case with nickel or the polymetallic nodules in an independent New Caledonia. It would appear that the wish to guarantee access to strategic metals is more a secondary motive that lends additional strength to more fundamental reasons for maintaining its Pacific presence but that it is not sufficient reason on its own to require such a strong commitment.

49 Gabriel and Kernel, p. 75; Tanzer, pp. 197-8.

Because of the depths at which these nodules are found -between 5000 and 7000 metres below sea-level - systematic exploitation is not yet possible, although three countries, France, the USA and the USSR already have miniature submarines capable of descending to depths of 6000 metres and Japan is constructing one for use off Vanuatu and Fiji."Journey to bottom of the Pacific", Islands Business, Nov. 1988. pp. 42-43.
France’s desire to be a medium-sized world power

There is another argument that is advanced by certain French political and strategic analysts in support of their assertion that France must remain in the South Pacific. This time, however, the argument is not based on any specific attribute of the different French possessions other than that they happen to be situated in what has been called "the new centre of the world", the Pacific Ocean. A series of articles and books published in France and the United States have stressed the economic dynamism of the Pacific region contrasting it with the stagnating economy of Europe. Transpacific trade is said to have surpassed transatlantic trade in terms of volume, thereby shifting the centre of gravity of the world from the Atlantic to the Pacific.\(^5\) Some French strategic analysts have argued that if France is not present in the Pacific it will be progressively marginalised as the relative weight of Europe in the world economy, and hence in international politics, diminishes. "If through pusillanimity, through stinginess or by forgetting its own traditions and its ambitions of yesteryear, France were to withdraw to its metropolitan territory and to its immediate surroundings, it would become inexorably just an outlying district in tomorrow's world."\(^5\) "(France's) eviction from the Pacific would amount to a marginalisation foreboding an irremediable decline."\(^5\) Referring to De Gaulle's claim that "France cannot be herself without grandeur", these strategic analysts maintain that the failure of France to take up its vocation of co-responsibility in the Pacific would be to the detriment of humanity and would signal the moral decline of France.\(^5\)

As long as the French government continues to believe that the Pacific is the new centre of the world economy and that the maintenance of French sovereignty over its South Pacific territories is essential to its economic survival, then such argumentation must be considered as an explanation of substance and not a hollow justification. As such it must be added to the list of factors that determine the strength of the French

\(^{50}\) René Servoise, "Le Pacifique: nouveau <Nouveau Monde>", Politique Etrangère, no. 1 Printemps, 1985, p. 111; Jean-Pierre Gomane et al., p.42.

\(^{51}\) Gomane et al., p.42.

\(^{52}\) Gomane et al., p.43.

\(^{53}\) Gomane et al., p. 256.
commitment to remain in the South Pacific since any government is likely to be reluctant to give up what it considers to be vital to the future prosperity of its citizens.

This desire to be present in what France believes to be the new centre of the world is not solely attributable to commercial motives. It is also closely related to France’s perception of itself as a medium-sized world power.\textsuperscript{54} It is France’s overseas territories and departments which according to former French Prime Minister Raymond Barre provide it with an important world dimension.\textsuperscript{55} France believes that its presence in different regions will enable it to play a balancing role in these regions and in the world.\textsuperscript{56} Just as the possession of nuclear weapons has enabled France to preserve its status of a world power "on the cheap" - a status the maintenance of which would otherwise have necessitated an expenditure on conventional forces far beyond France’s economic capabilities - the fact that France has possessions in all the world’s oceans gives it a world presence that otherwise would have required the maintenance of a large naval fleet the like of which France could not afford. Hubert Vedries, an adviser to the French President, went so far as to claim that if France was not more assertive in the region it could lose its seat in any future Yalta of the Pacific and perhaps even its permanent seat in the Security Council.\textsuperscript{57} France’s determination to remain in the South Pacific is to some extent due to its insecurity concerning its status as a medium-sized power and its concern to maintain its prestige. According to Jean-christophe Victor, adviser on Pacific affairs and policy to the Policy and Planning Office of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the belief that without these overseas possessions France’s international role would shrink to a North Atlantic, European one is common among the French political and administrative elite.\textsuperscript{58}

A further justification of a continued French presence in the region, and one that is also related to the French desire to be a medium-sized world power, is the necessity for a world power to have a global communications network for military and space activities.

\textsuperscript{53} Chesnaux, Transpacifique, p.133.
\textsuperscript{55} Chesnaux, France in the Pacific, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{56} Connell, pp. 390-91.
\textsuperscript{57} cited in Chesnaux, Transpacifique, p. 137. See also Georges Ordonnau, "La France et le Pacifique Sud. Enjeux stratégiques, diplomatiques et économiques", p. 43; François Godement, "L'environnement stratégiques et politique du Pacifique -Sud", Politique Etrangère, No. 1, Printemps 1987, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{58} Victor, p. 233.
By maintaining control of islands strategically placed throughout the world, France would be able to meet this necessity. Moreover, the French possessions provide the French navy with permanent shelter for its vessels throughout the world, thus enabling it reach most points without needing to ask permission of any other sovereign nation.

There is an important link between the necessity of France to partake in the economic growth of the Pacific economy and its ability to fulfil the requirements of its military strategy. Unable to keep up with the dynamic growth of the Pacific Basin countries and with its own national economy stagnating, France would find it hard to maintain its defence expenditure at a level that would be sufficient to maintain its status as a middle-sized world power. All its efforts to become a nuclear weapons power would have been to no avail. The importance of its presence in the South Pacific in terms of its image of itself as a medium-sized power and its belief that this presence will enable it to benefit from the dynamic growth of the Pacific economies explain why France's commitment to retaining its sovereignty over both New Caledonia and French Polynesia has been so strong.

France as guarantor of stability in the South Pacific

Having addressed those arguments that account for the French presence in terms of French national interest, I shall now concern myself with those that seek to justify the continued French presence by the contribution it makes to the security and economic well-being of the region. They are, however, closely linked to the aspirations of France to be a medium-sized power. Gomane and his co-authors refer to the international responsibilities of France. Fearful that the French government, beset by economic difficulties and forgetful of the lessons of Munich, may decide to abandon its costly overseas territories and withdraw into itself, they call on France to pursue a policy of "co-responsibility" in

60 Victor, p. 237.
the world and in particular in the Pacific. Such a policy, they argue, while ensuring the prosperity, stability and security of the country, would also allow France to remain true to its vocation as a nation of liberty, of the defence of human rights and of the right of people to self-determination.61

These same strategic analysts also maintain that a French withdrawal from the South Pacific would leave a power vacuum, a black hole, that would soon draw in other less benign powers.62 The region would become the object of rivalry between larger powers who, by exploiting tensions both between and within the island states would only destabilise the region even further.63

Yet contradictory claims have been made by strategic analysts concerning the important contribution of France to the stability of the South Pacific, sometimes within the same article or monograph. Obviously the argument that is advanced at any one time depends on the audience that is being addressed. For example, Gomane and his co-authors argue that the French presence in the region is in the interests of the Western Alliance since it occupies a space which otherwise could be filled by the Soviet Union. Taking up a common theme of French strategic analysts and politicians, Gaston Flosse, French Secretary of State for the South Pacific in the Chirac Government, stressed the dangers posed by the Soviet Union to the region. "Australia, the United States and France should do everything together not to allow the expansion of this foreign presence in the Pacific."64 Gomane and his co-authors claim that the continued French supervision of the political, social and economic evolution of French Polynesia and, more importantly, of New Caledonia is in the interests of both Australia and New Zealand in that a rapid French withdrawal could result in the establishment of a radical, even revolutionary regime, a mini Cuba, with serious implications for the stability of the whole region.65

61 Gomane et al., pp. 217-218.
62 Gomane et al., pp. 64, 135.
63 Chesnaux, Transpacifique, pp. 210-211.
65 Gomane et al., p. 64.
Other French strategic analysts argue that with the aid capacity of Australia and New Zealand has already been stretched beyond its limits, these two countries will be unable to meet the aid requirements of New Caledonia and French Polynesia.66

Somewhat analogous to the previous argument is the argument, again presented by Gomane and his co-authors, that a French withdrawal would place impossible demands on a United States that is already over-extended militarily.67 According to these French strategic analysts, the US, fearful that the Soviet Union might take advantage of the vacuum that would be left by a French withdrawal and unable for economic reasons to put more men under arms, would be forced to redeploy some of its forces from other parts of the globe. One possibility open to it would be to reduce the size of its commitment to Europe. Such a move by the United States would be of great concern to France since it would reduce even further the credibility of the US doctrine of extended deterrence that is the cornerstone of European security. What would appear, then, to be concern on the part of France for the security of the South Pacific, is in fact a further example of the priority given by France to European security.

Yet at the same time Gomane and other French strategic analysts maintain that France’s presence in the South Pacific is in the interest of the smaller states of the region since it provides a counterbalance to the hegemonic aspirations of the other major players. A French withdrawal, they claim, would allow Australia, New Zealand and the United States to extend their economic and military hegemony in the region, restricting the already limited independence of the island states even further.68 In the words of Claude Cheysson, a former French Foreign Minister, "for countries like Fiji, France represents a complementary element, which sustains them in their independence, and allows them to talk more easily with the big countries in the region."69

The strategic importance of New Caledonia is another common theme of French security analysts, many of whom have strong connections with the French military

67 Gomane et al., p. 231; Ordonnau, p. 38.
68 Gomane et al., p.219; Connell, pp. 389, 396.
69 PIM September 1984, p. 66.
establishment. The closure of the Sunda and Malacca Straits during a conflict, they maintain, would force the bulk of Japanese and Australian trade to be diverted through Torres Strait or to the South of the Australian continent and through the Tasman Sea. In such a conflict, the control of New Caledonia becomes of vital importance. Because New Caledonia is situated close to the alternative shipping lanes it could be a useful base for naval and air forces whose task it was to protect allied shipping.\(^7\) Indeed, New Caledonia is often referred to by French security analysts as being a giant natural aircraft-carrier.\(^7\)

It would appear that the arguments of French defence analysts concerning the strategic importance of the region in fact serve a twofold purpose. As well as being designed to win both Australian and US support for a continuation of the French presence in the South Pacific, they are often used by French security analysts such as Gomane and Coutau-Bégarie in an attempt to convince the French government that it should increase the defence budget so as to give France a greater military presence in the Pacific.\(^7\) So far they have met with little success. Despite their repeated claims that New Caledonia is of considerable strategic importance, the size and nature of the French military forces stationed there in no way reflect the alleged strategic importance of the island.\(^7\) They would prove inadequate to the tasks of surveillance and protection that would be theirs in time of war. Moreover, France is unable to expand its military presence in the South Pacific at a time when economic difficulties have made it imperative to cut defence expenditure.\(^7\)

It is true that Mitterand did announce an expansion of existing facilities in New Caledonia in 1985 with the aim of providing France with military self-sufficiency in the South Pacific.\(^7\) But as nothing has ever come of it, it would appear that this was simply a

---

\(^7\) Godement, p. 24.
\(^7\) Canberra Times, 21-06-89, p. 14.
ploy to win the support of some of the loyalists for the beleaguered Pisani plan.76 The increase in the number of forces in the region that occurred in the mid 1980s were of necessity, not design. It was a response to the increase in civil unrest within the territories rather than part of a plan to give France a greater role in ensuring the security of the region.

It would seem then that in spite of all the talk of the Soviet threat to the region, France is still content to leave the task of defending the region to the United States and to a lesser extent to Australia. It is highly probable that in any global conflict, France would, like Great Britain in WWII, reserve its forces for the defence of metropolitan France, leaving the United states the task of defending the French territories in the Pacific.77 New Caledonia may be a natural aircraft-carrier but its facilities would not be used by France but lent, as was the case in WWII, to those of its allies having the forces to use them.78

Another by no means insubstantial argument used by France to justify its presence in the Pacific is that this presence has in fact benefited the majority of the inhabitants of the French territories. Further evidence in support of this argument is provided by statistics which show that the French territories of French Polynesia and New Caledonia have gross domestic products that are as much as ten times that of the richest of the independent states, Papua New Guinea.79

The fact, however, that France spends more on its Pacific territories than what Australia and New Zealand combined give in aid to the rest of the South Pacific, one that is often cited as evidence of France’s generosity towards its territories, alerts us to the highly artificial nature of these statistics.80 The truth of the matter is that it is the French tax-payer that provides most of “domestic product” of the territories.81 But once again the

---

77 Coutau-Bégarie in Seurin, p. 190.
81 In terms of GDP French Polynesia is one of the 15 richest countries in the world but it is also one of the most dependent. It imports 92% of its energy needs, 88% of its food and has an excessively large balance of payments deficit. see Chesnaux, Transpacifique, p. 160; Public fund transfers to New Caledonia amount to 2.5 billion FF per year and those to French Polynesia approximately 5 billion. Yet these total less than 1% of the French national budget. see Victor, p. 325.
French manage to use this fact to justify their continued presence. They argue that because of their high level of dependence on the French public purse, the islands, should they become independent, would have to undergo a horrendous adjustment process. This process would have a profound destabilising effect on the islands, making them easy targets for ill-intentioned foreign powers who are only waiting for an opportunity to penetrate the region. It is therefore in everyone's interest that France remain.82

Yet unfortunately for France this massive influx of government funds, by setting in motion a fundamental transformation of the territories economic, social and political structures, has already destabilised them, casting doubts on whether France will be able to control their destinies for much longer. For the high GDP figures serve to mask increasingly large inequalities. Rather than benefiting all the population this massive influx of aid has largely benefited the elites, thereby widening the gap between rich and poor.83 As a result, social unrest has grown and with it the risk of internal destabilisation, as the recent unrest in New Caledonia and the riots in Tahiti have shown.84 It is ironic that a policy designed to ensconce French rule has in fact made the continuation of that rule even less probable Furthermore, in adopting migration policies that were designed to weaken the voice of those who favour greater autonomy and independence by reducing their electoral weight and thereby consolidate French control over New Caledonia, France has only made the situation far worse.85 The Kanaks, the indigenous Melanesian people of New Caledonia, increasingly aware that they have been made a minority in their own land, have become even more radical, demanding independence rather than autonomy. Yet the fact that they are now a minority makes the achievement of independence even more problematic.

It would seem then that the French claim to be a stabilising influence in the Pacific is difficult to substantiate. It could even be argued that the French presence has done more to destabilise the region than to stabilise it. These arguments will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters. However, for the purposes of this chapter, it is necessary to

82 Coutau-Bégarie in Seurin, p. 187; Lacoste, Hérodote, p. 22.
83 Gabriel and Kermel, p. 77.
85 Fraser, p. 6; Uregei, p. 123.
make some judgement about whether this desire to be a stabilising force in the South Pacific is a major contributing factor to the strong commitment that France has to remaining in the region.

The French claim to be upholding the interests of the Western Alliance by remaining in the South Pacific has a rather hollow, opportunistic ring about it, when measured against French actions in the past. The decision by France to withdraw from NATO was taken specifically with French national interests in mind and in complete disregard to the interests of France’s Western allies who were totally opposed to it. The doubts it raised as to whether France would join its allies in the defence of Europe may have enhanced its position as an independent actor but it certainly weakened the Alliance. This belated rediscovery of the importance of the Western Alliance would appear to be more a consequence of the need to justify the French presence in the Pacific than of actual concern for the Alliance itself. This fact is even more evident when we consider the nature and extent of the actual French presence in the region and the fact that France does not co-ordinate systematically with the individual states of the South Pacific on regional security matters.86 The argument that the French presence plays an important part in safeguarding the interests of the Western Alliance or in preventing US and Australian hegemony in the region is more a justification rather than an actual reason for the French presence. As such it does not appear to be a satisfactory motive for France’s strong commitment to remaining in the region.

There remains one other important argument advanced to support the maintenance of the French presence in the South Pacific: that this continued presence is in fact the wish of the majority of those who inhabit France’s Pacific territories. Moreover, it is claimed that France has a tradition of co-responsibility, of acting to defend human rights and the ideals of democracy and self-determination which must be upheld.87

87 Gomane et al., p. 217.
Of course, it is easy to point to French behaviour in Indo-china and Algeria as evidence of the hypocrisy of such claims. In New Caledonia, however, France can rightfully claim that it has acted in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the population. Besides, there is in France considerable support from all sides of the political spectrum for the idea that French civilisation embodies the superior values of humanity and the democratic ideal, that the rights of all French citizens whether they live in Noumea or in Paris are protected under the constitution. Yet we saw earlier in this chapter how French governments chose in French Polynesia and New Caledonia to disregard the ideals of democracy when they believed it was in the national interest to do so. Moreover, even the French have admitted that the problem of New Caledonia cannot be reduced to the simple question of one person, one vote. It is a conflict between two different interpretations of democratic ideals, a conflict between two legitimacies, a conflict between the rights of a colonised people to self-determination and independence and the democratic ideal of majority rule.

In this chapter I have assessed the various and often contradictory arguments employed by apologists and critics to explain France’s continued presence in the South Pacific in an attempt to discover why France is so strongly committed to maintaining its presence in the region. The principal motive for that presence have been shown to be France’s firm conviction that it is essential both to its status as a medium-size world power and to the credibility of its nuclear deterrent. Rightly or wrongly they believe that to abandon their test sites in French Polynesia would be to repudiate what has been the basis for all French defence planning since the 1950s, namely the development of a credible national nuclear deterrent. Not only would it put French national security at risk, but it would also seriously undermine France’s claim to the status of a medium-sized world power. What is at stake then is not just the possession of some scattered islands in the South Pacific but the image France has of itself, its very identity. This psychological
aspect is crucial to any understanding of why the French commitment to remain in the region has been so strong.
CHAPTER TWO

EARLY HOSTILITY TOWARD FRANCE

In Chapter One we examined the arguments that have been advanced by France to justify its presence in the Pacific in an attempt to assess the strength of its commitment to remaining in the region. However, while the strength of the French commitment to a continued presence may be useful in illuminating the reluctance of the French to follow the example of Great Britain and abandon its role as a colonial power in the Pacific, it does not explain why that presence should have met with a hostile reaction from the Islanders. The purpose of Chapters Two and Three, however, is more than just to elucidate the basis of that hostile reaction. It will also analyse the forms which that hostile reaction has taken over the past 40 years and, more importantly, the effects that it has had on interstate relations in the South Pacific region.

The hostility of the South Pacific states towards France has largely arisen in relation to two particular aspects of French policy in the South Pacific: its nuclear testing programme and its attitude to decolonisation. This latter aspect can also be divided into two. The first concerns France’s unwillingness to yield to the demands of the Islanders that they and not the metropolitan powers should control the affairs of the South Pacific region and the second its extreme reluctance to grant independence to its South Pacific Territories. Chapter Two considers the early sources of Island hostility towards France, namely the French nuclear testing programme and the French opposition to Islander control of the South Pacific Commission and spans the period from 1960 to 1979. Chapter Three covers the period from 1979 to 1986 and examines a more recent focus of hostility towards France, namely the refusal of France to accede to the demand of the Kanak people for independence.

1 The only remaining British Territory in the South Pacific is Pitcairn Island
Although this division can be justified on purely chronological grounds, the separation of the subject matter in this way also reflects the contrasting effects of the issues involved on relations between the South Pacific states. Whereas in the first period the island states were largely united in their opposition to French actions, in the later period French action in New Caledonia often created an opportunity for disagreement and disunity.

Before we examine these three sources of hostility toward France in the South Pacific, and their effects on interstate relations in the region, we must, if we are to properly assess the nature and strength of this reaction, have some understanding of the actual capacity of the South Pacific states to react. The capacity of any state to influence the behaviour of other states is determined by a myriad of factors, the four most important being the size of its diplomatic representation, its weight in the international community in terms of its military and economic bargaining power, the strength of government and/or popular feeling on the matter in question and the extent to which it is preoccupied by more pressing internal problems.

If we take the first two factors then the capacity of island states to intervene in international affairs is extremely limited. Because of their limited economic resources these states cannot afford a high level of diplomatic representation abroad. Some have no permanent overseas missions while others have one or two roving ambassadors. Even the largest states, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, have representatives in only a few key countries. This limited diplomatic representation restricts their ability to make their views known and influence the foreign policy decisions of other states.

The minute size of the Pacific Island economies and their dependence on foreign aid donors not only severely limit their economic bargaining power but make them extremely vulnerable to economic pressures from other states. In addition, their limited military capabilities - only Fiji and Papua New Guinea have a regular army and even they lack the necessary logistical support to be able to intervene militarily outside their territory - and enormous Exclusive Economic Zones make them vulnerable to low-level military pressure and make it difficult, if not impossible for them to protect their own maritime
resources, let alone back up their diplomatic initiatives with military action. Their efforts to influence world opinion, therefore must be based on moral grounds, on an appeal for the respect of fundamental tenets of the international code of morality: the respect of national sovereignty and the right of nations to determine their own national and regional affairs free of outside interference.

The position of the South Pacific states is in complete contrast to that of France. Its economic and military strength and its extensive diplomatic representation throughout the globe give it an immense capacity to intervene in international affairs and to influence the foreign policy of other states. Moreover, the insistence by France on its right to exercise the prerogatives of a great power is irreconcilable with the belief shared by South Pacific states that their sovereign right to determine what happens in their region must be respected.

French nuclear testing in the South Pacific

Hostility toward France in the earlier period arose over the persistent use by France of two atolls in the Tuamotu Archipelago as sites for its nuclear tests. As we saw in Chapter One, France considers these atolls, and indeed all of French Polynesia, to be an integral part of France and maintains that it is therefore within its rights to use its territory as it sees fit, whether that territory be in Europe, the Indian Ocean or in the Pacific. It regards any objections to French tests in the area on the part of the independent states in the region, as a violation of one of the fundamental principles governing international relations: that of non-interference in the internal affairs of another state.

For the independent states of the region, however, French Polynesia is a colony of France. By conducting its tests on Moruroa France, they maintain, is violating an important international principle and one that is enshrined in the UN Charter: the right of colonised peoples to self-determination. The French repeatedly refused to accede to the requests by the local Territorial Assembly that the tests not be carried out, choosing to
exercise the prerogatives of a colonial power to ensure that what it perceived to be French national interests took precedence over those of its colonial subjects. Delegates from the other island territories were able to witness for themselves at South Pacific Conferences clashes between France and delegates from French Polynesia over the nefarious effects of the French testing programme.2

Thus it would seem that French nuclear testing in the Pacific is really just a particular manifestation of France’s attitude to decolonisation. This link between France’s determination to continue testing its nuclear weapons in the Pacific and its unwillingness to grant independence to its Pacific territories has also not escaped the various leaders of the independent South Pacific States. According to Father John Momis "if it were not for the infamous nuclear testing taking place at Moruroa, it might be easier to for the rest of the world to accept that French Polynesia, almost alone amongst the peoples of the South Pacific, has yet to feel the desire for freedom."3 Barak Sope, the then Secretary General of the ruling Vanuaku Party, in the keynote speech to the nuclear free and independent Pacific conference in Port Vila in 1983, declared that the Pacific Islands will not be nuclear free until they are independent.4

Another objection to the tests that is frequently raised is that they pose a threat to the health and livelihood of the people not only of French Polynesia but of the whole South Pacific region. The then Prime Minister of Western Samoa, Fiame Mataafa, voiced this concern in 1963 in his comment on his government’s protest against the French decision to continue testing at Moruroa: "The government was impressed by the strong body of expert opinion which holds that there are no known precautions which can be quite certain of eliminating the danger to human life and health which results from the contamination of the atmosphere, the earth and the sea by those nuclear experiments."5 A

3 Father John Momis, The Pacific Week Lecture: Pacific Week: The University of the South Pacific: Suva Fiji: An address by Father John Momis on the subject of Self-determination: October, 1985, pp. 4-5; see also the statement by Prime Minister Somare of Papua New Guinea in which he refers to the close connection between French testing and French colonialism: Papua New Guinea Post Courier October 9 1984, p. 3.
5 PIM, July 1963, p. 7.
similar protest motion was passed by the Cook Islands Assembly that same year.\textsuperscript{6} At the first meeting of the South Pacific Forum in 1971 members expressed their concern at the potential hazards that atmospheric tests pose to health and safety and to marine life which is a vital element in the Islanders' subsistence and economy.\textsuperscript{7}

The fact that this danger was far more apparent when the testing was carried out in the atmosphere largely explains why the protests were far more vigorous in that earlier period. Island awareness of the dangers of nuclear testing, however, preceded the French tests and island protests had been directed at the earlier British and American tests in the region. Of course, it should be remembered that their ability to protest at these earlier tests would have been severely limited given that nearly all were either colonies of the nuclear powers or their close allies. Yet despite this obstacle, Western Samoa had registered its protest as early as 1956 when a joint session of the Legislative Assembly and the Fono had passed a protest resolution which had been presented to the visiting UN Trusteeship Council Mission.\textsuperscript{8} The Cook Islands Legislative Assembly had expressed its concern at testing on nearby Christmas Island later in that same year.\textsuperscript{9} It should also be remembered that these protests occurred at a time when the Australian Government was still in favour of atmospheric testing.

The fact that the increases in the levels of radiation that resulted from the French tests could be measured, coupled with the growing public awareness of the dangers of exposure to increased levels of radiation, mobilised governments and public opinion not only in the South Pacific but also in the countries of the Pacific rim in South America and Asia. Pressure was brought to bear on France in the United Nations General Assembly and in November 1972 the First Committee of the General Assembly adopted a resolution which called for a halt to all atmospheric nuclear testing.\textsuperscript{10} The resolution, which was co-sponsored by Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, had the support of 15 states in the Pacific region.

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{PIM}, November 1965, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Joint Final Communique} South Pacific Forum Wellington 5-7 August 1971.
\textsuperscript{8} \textit{PIM} June 1956, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{9} \textit{PIM} Dec. 1956, p. 55.
The campaign against atmospheric tests was to culminate in the decision of Australia and New Zealand, with the backing of the members of the South Pacific Forum, to take the matter before the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The Court ruled against France and called for a moratorium on atmospheric tests in the Pacific. But France declared that it would not conform with the decision of the Court, only to announce a few months later in August of 1973 that it would cease its atmospheric tests and begin testing underground. This initial refusal to comply with the Court decision is puzzling, especially given that, as it was later revealed, President Pompidou had ordered the army to find a suitable site for underground testing as early as 1972. Perhaps France did not want to be seen to be surrendering its sovereign rights as the final arbiter in such an important area of national policy to an international body. Nevertheless, pressure from the international community and the fear that a boycott of French goods could harm its growing trade with Asia no doubt played an important part in the decision to halt atmospheric tests.

With the change to underground testing in 1975 the risks posed to the health and livelihood of the people of the region became less quantifiable and more hypothetical in nature. The obvious danger of radio-active fall-out had been replaced by the far less visible and seemingly more remote risk of radio-active leakage through cracks in the underwater base of the atoll into the surrounding ocean. Such leaks, were they to occur, would contaminate the fish which would be dispersed by ocean currents to islands thousands of kilometres away. Since fish form the basis of the islander diet and are an important source of export earnings such contamination could have devastating effects on the health and livelihood of the islanders. Yet the only way of determining whether such cracks existed would be to send deep-sea divers and scientists to the island, something

11 Danielsson and Danielsson, p. 198.
12 Firth, p.98.
13 Danielsson and Danielsson, p.195.
14 Danielsson and Danielsson, p.194.
16 Danielsson and Danielsson, pp. 185, 213-16.
which until recently the French had to refuse to do, and allow them to inspect the whole underwater island contour at considerable depths, something which the French still refuse to allow independent scientific teams to do.\textsuperscript{17} And of course the danger is far less immediate in that according to the Atkinson Report such a crack might not appear for over 500 years. Despite repeated French denials that any such risk exists, the recent announcement that testing would be moved from Moruroa to Fangataufa would seem to support the accusation of the South Pacific States that underground nuclear testing on an atoll is dangerous.\textsuperscript{18}

The change to underground testing saw the international campaign to halt the tests lose its momentum. After all, the Soviet Union and the United States also conduct tests underground, so why should France be singled out. The difference, of course, is that, whereas the US and the USSR are testing on their own metropolitan territory, France conducts its tests as far as possible from France in what could be considered a colony. Yet even in the South Pacific the test issue, although a source of constant irritation, has been overshadowed by other more pressing issues such as the tuna fishing agreement negotiations and the issue of decolonisation in New Caledonia.

Opposition to French nuclear testing has not been confined solely to governments. The mid 1970s witnessed the growth of a grass roots anti-nuclear movement, particularly among university students and union and church leaders. The movement has played an

\textsuperscript{17} There have been several visits to Moruroa by scientific teams. The first was led by Haroun Tazieff, a French vulcanologist. One of the team's members, Professor Lambert, later criticised the investigation for failing to test for salt water infiltration of the test site (Danielsson and Danielsson, pp. 296). A second group of scientists, this time from Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, were invited by the French Government to visit the atoll for 4 days in October 1983. Their findings known as the Atkinson Report were not released until July 1984. Danielsson and Danielsson question the validity of the findings on several grounds. Firstly, the team was not allowed to take samples of the sediments from the lagoon itself. Secondly no diving was done. Thirdly only surface samples of ocean water were taken. Yet despite this the French government did not hesitate to use these findings as proof that the French tests were totally harmless (For further details about the report see Danielsson and Danielsson, pp. 315-18). The third team led by Cousteau in June 1987 was also severely criticised by Bengt Danielsson for not investigating at the depths where the tests occur (see Revkin, p. 82.).

\textsuperscript{18} See Danielsson and Danielsson, p. 244 regarding the unsuitability of using an atoll as a site for underground nuclear testing.

In March 1989 in a rare admission that French nuclear tests had caused sections of the barrier reef at Moruroa to collapse Vice Admiral Thireaut, commander of military forces in French Polynesia, declared that the large scale nuclear tests were being moved to Fangataufa to prevent cracks from growing in the substructure of Moruroa Atoll. Revkin, p. 82.
important role in shaping the anti-French attitudes of governments in the South Pacific, not only through the direct political pressure it has exerted on them but also due to the fact that many of those early protesters were later to take up important positions within them.\footnote{19} The movement, through its conferences and newsletters, has informed people of the dangers of nuclear testing and provided an important vehicle for the spread of opposition to French colonialism.\footnote{20}

The campaign by the South Pacific states against French nuclear testing has also in part been subsumed into a broader initiative, the South Pacific Nuclear Free-Zone Treaty, specifically designed to isolate France from the other nuclear powers.\footnote{21} The Treaty, adopted the South Pacific Forum in August 1985 at the Rarotonga, names no particular nuclear power but the boundaries of the Zone were deliberately drawn up so as to include the French Territories. Moreover, since by its use of the region as the site for its nuclear tests, France is the only nation that is infringing the terms of the Treaty, there can be no doubt that the initiative is intended as a means of putting further pressure on France to halt its tests in the region. South Pacific states have continued to protest each time France completes another test but diplomatic efforts to get the nuclear powers to sign the Nuclear Free Zone Treaty have met with limited success. If all the nuclear powers apart from France were to sign the Treaty protocol, this would put considerable pressure on France and perhaps force it to end its testing in the South Pacific. To date, however, only the

\footnote{19} Francis Saemala who was President of the Students' Association of the University of the South Pacific in 1970 and spoke at a public meeting of protest against the French tests was later to become the Minister for Foreign Affairs and roving Ambassador of the Solomon Islands. Barak Sope who was also involved in the anti-nuclear movement as a student at the University of the South Pacific later became the Minister for Foreign Affairs and a roving Ambassador of Vanuatu. Other present-day politicians with close affiliations with the anti-nuclear movement are Father Walter Lini of Vanuatu and Father John Momis of Papua New Guinea.


USSR and China have agreed to sign. The US and Great Britain have so far refused to split ranks with their North Atlantic Alliance partner, France.22

In addition to the French failure to respect the right of the inhabitants of French Polynesia to decide whether the tests should be carried out on their soil and the danger that the tests pose to the health and livelihood of all peoples in the South Pacific there is a third objection of a more fundamental nature and one that is frequently mentioned by some Pacific leaders: the failure of France to heed the wishes and opinions of the South Pacific Island states. France has been accused of insensitivity to the feelings of the Pacific peoples, of having persistently ignored their wishes. In 1974 Fiji Prime Minister, Ratu Mara, commenting on the decision by France to renew its tests in the Pacific, declared that it showed "complete disregard for the well-being and wishes of the peace-loving peoples of the South Pacific."23 Ebia Olewale, the then Papua New Guinea Minister for Foreign Affairs, in address to the United Nations in 1978 was equally outspoken about the attitude of the French. "We in the South Pacific have repeatedly expressed our opposition to nuclear tests in the region. However, our protests fall on deaf ears, and testing still continues."24 In 1983 the Fiji Foreign Minister said that the French tests were a clear sign of France's insensitivity to the feelings of Pacific Island people.25 In the same year Namaliu who was then Papua New Guinea Foreign Minister declared that "the French government's arrogant insensitivity threatens the health and the environment of the people of the Pacific."26

Father John Momis, the then Deputy Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, in his address at the University of the South Pacific in October 1985 declared: "(French nuclear testing) is a direct denial of our right to determine what we do in our part of the world. It

22 The refusal of both Great Britain and the US to sign the Treaty in a way parallels the French refusal to decolonise. All three external powers allowed their policy in the South Pacific to be determined by what they perceive to be their global security interests rather than by the interests of the South Pacific Region. Their actions are perceived by the South Pacific Island states to be an infringement of their sovereignty and in particular their right to determine what happens in their region. The whole issue raises two questions: that of the relationship between regional and global security and that of the conflict between the rights of sovereign states and the prerogatives of a great power.

23 PIM July 1974, p. 13
24 PIM February 1979, p.9.
25 PIM June, p. 5.
26 PIM September 1983, p. 5.
assumes that others, with little moral right, may make use at will of our unique facilities and environment for purposes which most of us openly condemn. It is a relic of the exercise of that centralised power which most of us have fought or are fighting to eradicate from our region. French behaviour is simply a continuation of that of the metropolitan powers in the colonial period, a period in which political directions that had been devised in centres thousands of kilometres from the South Pacific and that "were so frequently ill-timed, obscure or plainly alien to (their) way of life" were imposed on the peoples of the region.

Pacific Island hostility towards the French over French nuclear testing is in part a result of what they perceive to be French indifference to their health and livelihood. It is also a consequence of the frustration they feel at seeing a metropolitan power usurp their right to determine what happens in their region, of the affront that French testing constitutes to their dignity as sovereign states. It is a constant reminder of their own colonial past, of the days prior to independence when they were forced to follow the dictates of their colonial masters.

27 Father John Momis, p. 6.
28 Momis, p. 6.
France’s opposition to Islander control of the South Pacific Commission

The origins of Island hostility to the French are not solely to be found in their attitude to French nuclear testing. Their attitudes to the French were also shaped by their pre-independence experiences in the South Pacific Conferences where their desire for self-determination and independence found expression in the struggle to wrest control of the only regional body from the metropolitan powers.

The South Pacific Conference had been established under the Canberra Agreement of 1947 among the six governments responsible for the administration of colonies in the South Pacific region: Australia, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. The Agreement brought into existence the South Pacific Commission, a body which was designed to co-ordinate the efforts of the six signatories in promoting the economic and social well-being of the peoples of the South Pacific colonies.

Although a signatory to the Canberra Agreement, France was fearful that the Commission might over time weaken French control over its Pacific territories and interfere in what it considered to be its internal affairs. France was particularly wary of the South Pacific Conference, an auxiliary body of the South Pacific Commission that had been set up to associate the inhabitants of the territories with the work of the Commission. Indeed, New Zealand and the USA had originally envisaged the Conference as a way of acquainting Islanders with development issues and programmes so that one day they might play a larger role in their administration. France, however, was convinced that the Conference, in providing a platform where indigenous leaders of the French territories could challenge its policies in front of an international audience, would constitute a threat to its authority over its Pacific territories. Not surprisingly, the French and, to a lesser extent, the British and the Dutch wanted the delegates to the conference to

---

be chosen by the territorial administrations. Australia, New Zealand and the United States wanted them to be elected by the Island territories that they were to represent.\textsuperscript{32}

The terms of the Canberra Agreement were specifically designed to allay such fears as those held by France. It gave the Conference a consultative role only and placed all decision-making power in the hands of the twelve Commissioners who were chosen by the colonial powers. As a further guarantee that it would not develop into a Pacific Parliament the Conference was not permitted to discuss political matters but had to limit itself to the consideration of economic, technical and social issues.\textsuperscript{33}

In their struggle for the right to self-determination the Islanders were to challenge both the control of the Commission by the colonial powers and the prohibition on political discussion. The colonial powers were not unaware of Islander dissatisfaction with the structures and procedures of the Commission and attempted to placate the Islanders with promises of structural reform. In response to the rumblings of discontent expressed at the 1962 Conference, they called special review conferences to discuss possible changes to the Canberra Agreement.\textsuperscript{34} However, the reforms proposed were not far-reaching enough to meet Islander demands. At the 1965 Conference in Lae island frustration could no longer be contained. Ratu Mara, a delegate from Fiji, in a stormy outburst described the Commission as "an exclusive club for the metropolitan governments, which was out of date."\textsuperscript{35} With the intention of giving the Islanders some control over the activities of the Commission he moved resolutions requesting that Territorial administrations increase their financial contributions to the Commission and that each colonial power appoint an islander as one of its two representatives on the Commission.\textsuperscript{36} Such demands were anathema to the French, who were wary of any proposal that might give increased responsibility to the Islanders.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{32} Thompson and Adloff, p. 349.
\textsuperscript{33} The French Governor of New Caledonia in his opening address as Chairman of the Second South Pacific Conference in Noumea cautioned delegates against political discussion and reminded them that the Conference had only a minor role in the work of the Commission. see Herr, pp. 138-39. Also W.D.Forsyth, p. 39; G.E.Fry, \textit{South Pacific Regionalism}, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{34} Herr, pp.178-79; \textit{PIM} September 1963, pp. 57-59.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{PIM} August 1965, pp. 24-25.
\textsuperscript{36} Fry, \textit{South Pacific Regionalism}, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{37} Herr, p. 198.
Although the French were not the only colonial power to resist the demands of the Island delegates, they were by far the most persistent and outspoken with the result that France became clearly identified as the main obstacle to Island control of the Commission. It even refused to agree to an increase in the size of the Commission’s budget in what could be seen as an attempt to stop the regional body from increasing its role in development decisions at the expense of the individual colonial powers.

Most of the clashes between the representatives of France and the Island delegates at the various Conferences arose over the French refusal to allow the Conference to engage in political discussion. There would appear to be two main reasons for the French refusal. Firstly, given its efforts within its own territories to suppress movements that were demanding greater autonomy, France may have feared that such movements would use the Conference to draw attention to their demands and the methods employed by the French to silence them. Secondly, the Conference could also be used by Island delegates from the non-French territories to voice their opposition to French testing in the South Pacific.

The French fears were not unfounded and even with the prohibition on political discussion, Island delegates managed to voice their opposition to French nuclear tests. As early as the 1962 Conference some Island delegates had tried to pass a resolution condemning the French plans to use the South Pacific as the site for its tests. On several occasions delegates from the French territories spoke out against French nuclear tests or criticised France for restricting their already limited autonomy. Islanders frequently used discussions of technical programmes such as those relating to health, fisheries or the environment to point out the absurdity of such programmes in light of the effects of nuclear testing on the region. Each time they met with fierce opposition from France.

---

38 *PIM* February 1967, p. 55; Thompson and Adloff, p. 354.
39 Forsyth, p. 39; *PIM* November 1967, p. 25.
40 Forsyth, p. 42.
41 At the 1970 Conference in Suva French Polynesia delegate, Romauld Allain, blamed the French nuclear tests for the social and economic problems of the territory (*PIM* October 1970, p. 18). At the 1971 Conference in Noumea another delegate from French Polynesia, Henri Bouvier, criticised France for the way that delegates from its territories to the Conference had been selected. He also described French Polynesia as the centre of world pollution (*PIM* November 1971, p. 55). On both occasions the French delegate Nettre walked out.
42 During a debate on fisheries at the 1972 Conference in Apia delegates from the British Solomon Islands and Fiji criticised France for polluting the ocean and destroying fish (*PIM* November 1972, p. 108). At the 1973 Conference in Guam a delegate from the Cook Islands asked how ocean
who demanded that the debates be ruled out of order on the grounds that they were political. But the chair did not always uphold the French objection and the French delegate Nettre often walked out in protest. Finally, at the 1973 South Pacific Conference delegates passed a resolution condemning the French tests and asked Fiji to pass it on to the UN Assembly General.43

For many it seemed inevitable that France would walk out for good. In a message to the 1973 Conference in Guam Premier Henry of the Cook Islands declared: "If France walks out of the Conference, it is our duty to help France walk out, not only of the Conference, but also of the Pacific."44 Yet France did not leave the Commission and, rather than risk exclusion, conceded control of the Commission to the Islanders in 1974.45 But the decision to grant the Islanders control had come too late. The islanders had already established an alternative regional body, the South Pacific Forum, which enshrined the principle of Islander control and allowed its members to engage in debate on political issues.

During one heated debate during the 1970 Conference French delegate Nettre had even suggested that, if the Islanders wanted to talk politics, they should do so in a separate forum outside the Commission and France would not object.46 One year later, in August 1971, the South Pacific Forum, a regional organisation comprising the independent and self-governing countries of the South Pacific, held its first meeting in Wellington, New Zealand.47

---

43 Fry, South Pacific Regionalism, p. 173.
45 Fry, "Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics", in R. May and H. Nelson (eds), Melanesia: Beyond Diversity, RSPacS Canberra, ANU, 1982, p.654
47 The Forum was not the first regional body set up by Islanders to be based on the principle of indigenous control. In 1965 the leaders of Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa had formed what was later to become known as the Pacific Islanders Producers' Association or PIPA to co-ordinate exports of bananas to New Zealand. As has been pointed out by Fry, most of the activities of PIPA could have been accommodated within the existing Commission framework. It would seem then that the decision to establish an independent body was more a consequence of the Islanders' desire for greater control of regional affairs than of pure economic necessity.(see Fry "Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics", p. 654) It is also perhaps no coincidence that 1965 was also the year of the Lae "rebellion". Again, as in the case of the Forum, the negative attitudes of France to self-determination within the Commission can be said to have contributed substantially to the decision to set up an alternative body outside the Commission.
Although Nettre's suggestion could in no way be considered as having been directly instrumental in the establishment of the Forum, the decision to found such a body, arising as it did from Islander frustration at the slow pace of reform in the South Pacific Commission, and in particular the ban on all political discussion, was undoubtedly a reaction to France's negative attitude to the demands of the Islanders that the principle of self determination be applied in the Commission. Significantly, the Forum included only those colonial powers that could be considered to be of the South Pacific, Australia and New Zealand, both of whom had shown themselves to be favourable to Islander demands for greater self-government at a local and a regional level.48

The decision to establish the Forum was based on the recognition on the part of the newly independent island states that there was a need for a body where important political issues could be discussed and a joint position could be arrived at. By sending joint Forum delegations to express their concerns to individual countries and in international organisations they believed that their opinions would carry much more weight.49 One important political issue, of course, was French nuclear testing and it is significant that the Forum was founded at a time when there was substantial conflict at South Pacific Conferences and when Australia and New Zealand together with certain South Pacific countries were attempting to increase international pressure on France. There was an awareness among South Pacific Island leaders that one lone voice would not stop the French tests "but a thousand small voices raised in unison will make a large outcry".50 This awareness gave further impetus to the push to set up a regional body such as the Forum and remained an important factor behind regional co-operation in the 1970s and 1980s.51 The poor response to their demands for support on the issue of the French tests at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference in Singapore in January 1971 had further

---

48 For a more detailed discussion of the origins of the South Pacific Forum see Fry, South Pacific Regionalism, pp. 104-110.
49 Fry "Regionalism and International Politics of the South Pacific" Pacific Affairs, Fall 1981, p. 465
50 These words were used by the Prime Minister of Western Samoa Fiame Mataafa in a protest against French nuclear testing PIM August 1968, p. 23
51 "The sanctity of our individual national freedom and self-determination is best safeguarded by a united voice and regional co-operation on matters such as (nuclear testing), which so vitally affects the development and independence of the South Pacific." Momis, p.6.
convinced Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa of the need to for an alternative to both the Commonwealth and the SPC.\textsuperscript{52}

Not surprisingly, then, the issue of French testing in the South Pacific figured prominently on the agenda of the first Forum meeting. The communiques issued at the end of that Forum and of the next four voiced the dissatisfaction that the members felt at the insensitivity of France to their wishes and called on France to halt its tests.\textsuperscript{53}

The decision of the independent South Pacific countries to extend membership of the Forum to two of the colonial powers, Australia and New Zealand, was not based solely on the fact that both were geographically part of the region. Obviously the ability of a regional body composed only of small South Pacific Island states to impact on world opinion would still be extremely limited since such states with their limited financial resources already under strain from the demands of economic and social development programmes could not afford the diplomatic infrastructure required to mount an effective international diplomatic offensive. By including Australia and New Zealand, the new regional body would have at its disposal the already extensive diplomatic infrastructure of these two countries and would benefit from the close relationship that both of them enjoyed with two of the nuclear powers, the USA and Great Britain. They could also exert greater influence over the policies adopted by Australia and New Zealand on issues affecting the region. Furthermore by dividing the colonial powers in this way, the independent South Pacific states could alter the balance of power in the South Pacific in their favour and isolate those states whose policies were contrary to the wishes of the island countries.\textsuperscript{54}

By the end of the 1970s anti-French feeling was already well entrenched in the South Pacific. Through its antagonism to greater South Pacific Islander control of the South Commission and its refusal to accede to demands by the South Pacific Island states that it call a halt to its nuclear testing programme, France became identified as the major opponent of the right of South Pacific countries to regional self-determination. The

\textsuperscript{52} PIM February 1971, p. 28; Herr, p. 106
\textsuperscript{53} see the Final Communiques of the South Pacific Forum 1971-76.
\textsuperscript{54} Fry, "Regionalism and International Politics of the South Pacific", p. 477.
formation of the Forum must therefore be seen as the direct result of the frustration of South Pacific countries with the attitude of France and as an expression of their efforts to gain control over regional affairs. In the 1960s and 1970s the French presence in the South Pacific had succeeded in uniting what was a disparate collection of small island states and in assuring their support for a type of regional organisation that had originally been conceived to serve the needs of the colonial powers rather than those of their subjects.
CHAPTER THREE

ISLAND HOSTILITY TO FRANCE 1979-86:
NEW CALEDONIA AND REGIONAL POLITICS

Its emergence as an issue in regional politics

Until 1978 Pacific Island hostility to France had been largely a result of the French refusal to accede to demands by the South Pacific Islands for an end to French nuclear testing in the Pacific and for Island control of the South Pacific Commission. French opposition to what could be broadly termed regional self-determination - the right of the countries of a region to determine the affairs of that region - was regarded by the independent South Pacific nations as an attempt to perpetuate outdated colonial practices.

Although there had been some criticism by Fiji and Papua New Guinea of France’s refusal to recognise the right of its Pacific territories to self-determination, it was only from 1978 onwards that the issue of decolonisation became a major concern.¹ At the Thirty-Third session of the United Nations General Assembly the representatives of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Western Samoa and the Solomon Islands condemned France for denying its colonial subjects in the South Pacific the inalienable right of self-determination and independence in accordance with the United Nations’ resolutions on decolonisation.² In December 1978, during a stop-over in Papeete, Fiji’s Prime Minister Ratu Maru reiterated his country’s support for the independence of all the peoples of the

¹ There had been protests by Fiji and Papua New Guinea at the UN.: Fiji had criticised France at UN Trusteeship Council in 1975 for colonial exploitation and its failure to take steps towards implementing the United Nations Declaration on Decolonisation.(PIM March 1975, p. 4); Papua New Guinea Deputy PM Sir Maoi Kiki in his address to the UN General Assembly called for progressive movement towards the decolonisation of the various Pacific territories in accordance with the wishes of the people.(Papua New Guinea Post-Courier September 27 1976, p. 4); Dep PM and For Affairs Min Olewale calls for acceleration of the decolonisation process in the Pacific.(Papua New Guinea Post-Courier. December 14 1978, p. 3); see also PIM March 1978, p.4: Fiji criticises France at the UN Trusteeship Council for its failure to take any steps towards implementing the 1960 UN Declaration on Independence in the South Pacific. PIM February 1979, pp.9-10.; Fry, South Pacific Regionalism, thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Department of Political Science, ANU, 1979, pp.215-16.

²
Pacific including those of French Polynesia while Papua New Guinea Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ebia Olewale, expressed the hope that all Pacific territories would soon be liberated.3

In October of 1978 Papua New Guinea had already announced that it would seek the endorsement of the Honiara Forum for a resolution calling on the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation to take up the issue of independence for all South Pacific countries.4 This announcement had brought a warning from France that it would consider any such discussion at the Forum as an unfriendly act.5

The host of the 1979 Forum, the Solomon Islands, had invited a delegation from the Independence Front, the recently formed coalition of five New Caledonian political parties that wanted independence from France. These representatives met with representatives of the Vanuaku Party of the New Hebrides and the delegates of the two Melanesian members of the Forum, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, for informal discussions on the decolonisation issue6. At the Forum itself discussion of the Papua New Guinea resolution that the Forum make a joint approach to the UN to have New Caledonia re-inscribed on the list of dependent territories took up half the meeting.7 The resolution was opposed by Australia, New Zealand and Nauru who concurred with the French argument that such action by the Forum would constitute interference in the

---

3 PIM March 1979, p. 28; Papua New Guinea Post-Courier May 3 1979.
4 The Special Committee on the situation with regard to the implementation of the Declaration on the granting of independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1961. Its mandate was (a) to seek the speedy and total application of the 1960 UN Declaration on the granting of independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples in all territories not yet independent; (b) to propose specific measures to enable the populations of these territories to exercise fully their rights of self-determination and independence; (c) to recommend a deadline for independence whenever it considered it appropriate; and (d) to apprise the Security Council of any developments in these territories that might threaten international peace and to suggest appropriate remedies to the Council. In 1962 membership of the Committee was increased to 24, hence its more common appellation: the Committee of 24.
5 Post-Courier 9 July 1979, p. 1.
6 PIM September 1979, p. 10.
7 In 1946 France had enumerated New Caledonia as one of the 74 territories on which the colonial powers undertook to submit information to the General Assembly concerning their progress toward independence. In 1947 France made a unilateral decision to cease the transmission of information with respect to all its remaining territories including French Polynesia and New Caledonia. The Committee of 24 re-inscribed two French territories, the Comoro Archipelago and French Somaliland, in 1965 and 1972 respectively. see Decolonisation Vol.II No.6 December 1975, UN Department of Political Affairs, Trusteeship and Decolonisation, pp.4-6.
internal affairs of France. Although the resolution had the support of the majority of Forum members, the consensus mode of decision-making of the Forum saw the adoption of a compromise resolution aimed at accommodating the minority positions. The final resolution noted the desire of Pacific Island peoples including those in the French territories to determine their own future, reaffirmed the belief of the Forum in the principle of self-determination and independence and called on metropolitan powers in the Pacific to work towards this end. It stopped far short of the Papua New Guinea proposal but left it open to individual states to do so. The campaign against French decolonisation policies had begun. But unlike the campaigns against French nuclear testing and the French opposition to changes to the South Pacific Commission it was to divide rather than unite the Forum member states.

Why was so much interest suddenly shown in the issue of decolonisation in the French territories? If any particular event can be said to have aroused this interest, it was the October 1978 South Pacific Conference in Noumea. The French High Commissioner angered the representatives of the independent South Pacific countries, and in particular those of the newly independent Melanesian states, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, when he welcomed them to French soil. Moreover, the South Pacific Conference in Noumea provided the delegates from the other Island countries with an opportunity to meet with the leaders of the different Melanesian political parties in New Caledonia and acquaint themselves personally with their grievances and demands.

There had, of course, been previous Conference meetings held in Noumea and they had not resulted in any similar burst of interest in the state of decolonisation in New Caledonia. This time however the attitudes and perspectives of some of the delegates and the New Caledonian political parties had undergone a radical transformation, as a result of political changes both in New Caledonia and the South Pacific region.

Developments within New Caledonia had seen a fundamental shift take place in the nature of Melanesian demands from autonomy to independence resulting in a

---

8 *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier* July 12 1979, p.4.
9 *PIM* August 1979, p.7.
polarisation of the political scene into pro- and anti-independence parties. Meanwhile at a regional level the first independent Melanesian states had emerged. Having just achieved independence themselves, both Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands were obviously very receptive to any calls from their Melanesian brothers in New Caledonia and the Anglo-French condominium of the New Hebrides for assistance in their struggle for independence.

A common ethnic identity, an ability to empathise with the colonial situation of the Melanesians of New Caledonia and a desire to exercise their newly acquired independence are all important factors in explaining the readiness of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu - after it became independent in 1980 - to take issue with France over New Caledonia.

There were, however, other factors that were equally as important, especially in explaining the support that the Kanak cause obtained from non-Melanesian states such as Fiji and Western Samoa. It is quite likely that some of the hostility that South Pacific countries felt towards France because of its nuclear testing and its opposition to their demands for South Pacific Island control of the South Pacific Commission was carried over to the issue of decolonisation. Frustrated by France’s repeated refusal to heed the wishes of the South Pacific community and world opinion Fiji Prime Minister Ratu Mara had declared as early as 1973 that "the most effective action that we can take is to persuade the Committee of 24 on Colonialism to hasten the liberation of the islands in the Pacific which are at the present moment regarded as French territories so that France will no longer have the right to test in their area."11

The protests against French nuclear tests did not only come from governments. A network of anti-nuclear groups extending across the South Pacific had developed.12 Its members included students, trade unionists and church-goers who organised public

---

meetings and demonstrations to put pressure on their governments, encouraging them to adopt an anti-nuclear stance. Significant sections of the movement also took up the cause of decolonisation. Many members of the movement were later to enjoy high positions in their countries' governments and administrations and their anti-France attitude as a result of nuclear testing made them more receptive to the Kanak demands for independence.

The visits of Uregei Céléné were also important in sensitising New Caledonia's neighbours to the demands of the Kanaks. This leading member of the Union Multiraciale de la Nouvelle-Caledonie (UMNC), the first political party to advocate independence for New Caledonia, had toured the various independent South Pacific countries, including Fiji and Papua New Guinea, acquainting politicians and students with the Kanak view of the situation in New Caledonia and with the inequalities of New Caledonia. In terms of education, employment and living conditions there was a clear division along racial lines, with the indigenous Melanesians as an underclass working in the most menial positions. In 1978, as a result of his visit to the University of Papua New Guinea, students from that university presented a petition to the French chargé d'Affaires in Port Moresby condemning France for its refusal to decolonise. In the early 1980s Uregei would regularly visit each of the Forum member countries before the annual Forum meeting in order to win their support for various resolutions of support for the Kanak cause. The most important of these was, of course, the demand that New Caledonia be re-inscribed by the UN Committee on Decolonisation on its list of dependent territories.

---

13 The Executive Committee of the Pacific Council of Churches, the regional body of the protestant churches of the South Pacific, passed a resolution in 1974 urging all governments to renew their efforts to persuade France to halt its tests. p. 171. see the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting 18-19 February 1974.
14 In 1981 the theme of the South Pacific International Conference of Students was "For a nuclear free and independent Pacific". The fact that the anti-nuclear movement called its conference in Port Vila in 1983 "The nuclear free and independent Pacific Conference" shows how far the idea of decolonisation had permeated the movement. see Naidu, pp. 13-14.
15 see Footnote 20 Chapter Two.
16 The UMNC became the Front Uni de Liberation Kanak (FULK) in 1977.
Other social movements and organisations also played their part in encouraging the Forum countries to take a stand on decolonisation in New Caledonia. In September 1979 the decision of the French Synod of the Evangelical Church of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands to support, for the first time, independence for New Caledonia was endorsed by the Pacific Council of Churches, an organisation that included church representatives from the different South Pacific countries and territories.19

The attitudes of individual Island countries to decolonisation

From the start of the campaign for the decolonisation of New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea assumed a high profile. It was to continue to argue the case for re-inscription at the annual meetings of the Forum, in the United Nations General Assembly, at the ASEAN meetings that it attended as an observer and at Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings.20 It even carried its support to the heart of the French territories, Papeete, where on the occasion of the South Pacific Conference in October 1979 the Papua New Guinea Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ebia Olewale addressed a Polynesian independence rally.21 A further indication of the determination of Papua New Guinea to play a leadership role on this matter was its desire to replace Fiji on the United Nations Committee on Decolonisation in 1980.22

19 PIM November 1979, p. 11; Papua New Guinea Post-Courier September 27, p. 1.
20 At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in New Delhi in 1983 Prime Minister Somare succeeded in having a tougher resolution adopted on decolonisation. In his address to the 38th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in October 1983 he called for an act of self-determination for New Caledonia that would include an option of independence and that would provide special safeguards for the Kanaks.(see PNGFAR December 1983, pp.6-7, 20). At the July 1985 meeting of ASEAN Papua New Guinea sought the endorsement of that body for re-inscription (Papua New Guinea Post-Courier July 24 1985, p. 3).In 1984 Papua New Guinea’s Foreign Minister Namaliu in his address to the 38th Session of the UN Assembly General noted the close relation between French nuclear and colonial policies in the South Pacific (PNGFAR December 1984, p. 40). In October 1985 Foreign Minister Giheno attacked French nuclear and colonial policies and reiterated his country’s support for the right of Kanaks to self-determination (PNGFAR December 1985, p.27)
21 PIM December 1979, p. 15.
22 PIM April 1980, p.9
Support for the right of the indigenous Kanak people to self-determination has remained an important feature of Papua New Guinea’s foreign policy throughout the 1980s. The 1981 White Paper justified the attention given by Papua New Guinea to the French territories on the grounds of principle and of the need to safeguard the long-term stability of its immediate neighbourhood.23

Yet these were not necessarily the only reasons. The vigour with which Papua New Guinea pursued the decolonisation issue was perhaps an expression of the desire of this independent nation to make its mark on both international and regional politics, a reflection of the particular style and ambitions of this new nation and of certain politicians such as Olewale and Momis.24 It could also be seen to some extent as a reaction to the conservative style of the Polynesian Forum leaders. And it may have been, at least in part, an attempt to make amends for its inability to act on another issue of decolonisation closer to home: that of the Melanesian people of former Dutch New Guinea, now under Indonesian rule.25

Nevertheless, although decolonisation in New Caledonia remained a constant preoccupation of Papua New Guinea’s foreign policy throughout the period of 1979-1986, there was some difference in approach between the various governments that held office over that period. The governments of Michael Somare were more circumspect than those of Wingti and Chan. He was more concerned about possible negative reactions from the non-Melanesian states, particularly Fiji, to any unilateral action by Papua New Guinea and consequently was more committed to multilateral initiatives.26 This approach was reflected in his opposition to Chan’s unilateral decision to send troops to Vanuatu in 1980 and in his efforts to play down the importance of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, to which the previous Wingti Government had given a high profile.

24 It could be argued that the higher profile of Papua New Guinea in regional politics was a result of the transfer of power from Somare to Chan in 1980 and the Foreign Policy Review and that it reflected the goals and strategies outlined in the subsequent White Paper on Foreign Relations in 1981.
26 For an account of Somare’s earlier efforts to reassure both Fiji and the other Forum members that it had no intention of realising its potential to dominate the Forum see Fry, South Pacific Regionalism, pp. 245-249.
Obviously France had also noticed the sudden interest in New Caledonia from the independent South Pacific countries and had dispatched its Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Olivier Stim, in June and December of 1979 to inform the Forum countries of the French point of view on New Caledonia and of France’s firm intention to remain in the Pacific. He also warned them that France would consider any attempt to have New Caledonia re-inscribed as an unfriendly act.27

In an attempt to counter the pro-Kanak lobby within the Forum countries Stim announced that France would establish embassies in Papua New Guinea, Fiji and what was soon to become Vanuatu and would extend a $4.8 million development loan and $20 million in investment to Papua New Guinea. Yet the Papua New Guinea government, conscious of France’s ulterior motives, declared that it would persist in its initiatives to have New Caledonia re-inscribed.28

Unfortunately for France, developments in the New Hebrides prior to its independence in 1980 were to reinforce the negative image of France, particularly in the eyes of the Melanesian states. The at times not too covert support of the French for the secessionists in Santo and the subsequent refusal by France to use force to put down the rebellion were severely criticised by Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Fiji.29 Responding to a request by the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Walter Lini, the newly elected government of Papua New Guinea led by Julius Chan dispatched troops to quell the rebellion.30

As well as confirming the suspicions of the independent Melanesian states about France’s intentions in the region, the French actions and inaction in Vanuatu had ensured that the government of the newly independent state of Vanuatu would be hostile to France and a fervent supporter of decolonisation in New Caledonia. Because of their own experience of French colonial rule, the ni-Vanuatu were able to identify even more closely

29 For an analysis of the factors leading to the attempt at secession see Backgrounder No 239 June 18 1980, p.7; Backgrounder No 252 September 17 1980, p. 9; PIM July 1980, p. 11.
30 Backgrounder No 247 August 13 1980, pp.6-7; Backgrounder No 250 September 3 1980, p. 17.
with the Kanak struggle for independence. Indeed, of the Melanesian states, Vanuatu was the most vocal supporter of the indépendantistes in New Caledonia.

Moreover, the geographical proximity of the two and the fact that they both shared a common language and had been for some time subject to the same administration meant that there were strong economic and family ties between the Europeans and the Melanesians of the two entities. These ties also extended to politics and strong links existed between the ruling Vanuaku Party of Vanuatu and the independence movement in New Caledonia. Representatives of the Independence Front often visited Port Vila for consultations while members of the Vanuaku Party attended important meetings of the Independence Front.31

The strong support by Vanuatu for Kanak independence was very much the result of its own internal politics and of its tumultuous relationship with France. Unlike Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu had close economic ties with France, who had jointly ruled the territory with Great Britain. France had promised to continue to provide financial, technical and development assistance to its former colony and, together with Great Britain, to compensate Vanuatu for the damage that occurred as a result of the Santo secession attempt. The French contribution to the education system of Vanuatu was also far from negligible and, unlike the development assistance, far less easy to forgo. The unusual colonial past of Vanuatu had left it with two separate school systems - one English and the other French. With a considerable proportion of the school population in the French system, the country relied heavily on France not only to finance the schools but also supply them with French teachers and teaching materials.

Relations with France were further complicated by the substantial economic interests that France had in the country. Under the Anglo-French condominium French nationals had accumulated considerable business interests, particularly in the form of land holdings. With the election of a government in favour of restoring alienated land to its

31 The strength of these ties can be seen in the way the strategy employed by the Independence Front often imitated that which had been used by the Vanuaku Party to obtain independence for Vanuatu. An example of this was the decision by the Independence Front to set up a provisional government in Port Vila in 1984. They were eventually dissuaded from doing so by Vanuatu and decided to base the provisional government in New Caledonia itself.
custom owners, France was concerned that the holdings of French nationals would be confiscated and put pressure on Vanuatu to prevent this from occurring.

Finally the political situation in Vanuatu had a considerable impact on relations with France. Since the principal opposition to Lini’s Vanuaku Party was provided by the largely French-speaking Union of Moderate Parties (UMP), the depiction of France as the enemy could be useful in any electoral strategy aimed at minimising support for the UMP. Conversely it could also be advantageous for France to use the UMP to undermine the pro-Kanak and anti-nuclear stand of the Vanuaku Party.

Given all these factors it is hardly surprising that relations between France and Vanuatu have been highly volatile and that of all the South Pacific countries Vanuatu has taken the most radical stand on the question of independence for New Caledonia.

The French have tried to use ni-Vanuatu dependence on French aid to force Vanuatu to adopt policies more sympathetic to its own interests in the South Pacific. Only a few months after the independence of Vanuatu, France threatened to stop all aid to the infant nation if it were to help liberation movements in New Caledonia. The reluctance of other countries to take over French aid commitments has often left Vanuatu no alternative but to compromise. In 1981, faced with a French threat to withdraw 200 French teachers and all aid personnel, Vanuatu finally was forced to accept the conditions that France had attached to a $6.9 million aid and co-operation agreement. Under the agreement both countries pledged not to interfere in the affairs of the other and more importantly Vanuatu promised to protect the property and well-being of French citizens.

Moreover, Vanuatu’s pre- and post- independence experiences with France have not only coloured its relations with France and its attitude to events in New Caledonia, they have also had a determining influence on the conduct of its broader foreign policy and in particular its membership of the Non-Aligned Movement. The other independent South Pacific countries had achieved independence with little or no opposition from their former colonial masters and so had no need to seek outside help from countries outside of

33 PIM May 1981, p. 5.
34 see Lini’s speech on Vanuatu foreign policy In Australian Outlook, August 1982 Vol. 36, pp. 29-31.
the pro-Western international community. Vanuatu, however, was faced with an initial
reluctance on the part of France to grant it independence. In an effort to overcome this
reluctance, Lini's Vanuaku Party had sought international support. Many of the countries
which gave support were not members of the Western bloc and had socialist economic
systems. Some were former French colonies, such as Algeria and Vietnam, which had
similar experiences with France. Most were members of the Non-Aligned Movement.
After independence the government of Vanuatu furthered these ties by becoming a
member of the Non-Aligned Movement itself, something which in other parts of the world
would not have attracted much attention, but which in the South Pacific earned it the
reputation of being radical.

The 1980 intervention in Vanuatu by Papua New Guinea in some way marked a
watershed in South Pacific regional politics. The decision by the Chan government to send
the Kumul force was the first concrete example of the growing sentiment of pan-
Melanesian nationalism and solidarity that was to culminate in the formation of the
Melanesian Spearhead in 1986. It also marked the end of the special relationship between
Fiji and Papua New Guinea that had enabled them to exercise joint leadership within
regional bodies and to adopt a common position on the need to control the influence of the
metropolitan powers, particularly France and the USA, in the region.³⁵

New Caledonia was not the first issue to divide the region on Polynesian -
Melanesian lines. The Polynesian countries of Western Samoa, Tonga and the Cook
Islands resented the attempts by the Fiji-Papua New Guinea bloc to control the Forum and
tensions between the two groupings surfaced in 1978 over the question of the participation
of metropolitan powers in regional affairs.³⁶ At that time both Fiji and Papua New Guinea
were committed to reducing the influence of the metropolitan powers and therefore
opposed the efforts of the Polynesian bloc, led by Western Samoa, to have American
Samoa admitted to the Forum and the US admitted to the proposed Regional Fisheries

³⁵ Fry, "Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics", in R. May and H. Nelson (eds), Melanesia:
³⁶ Fry,"Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics", p. 662.
Agency.\textsuperscript{37} Both blocs nominated rival candidates for the important position of SPEC director.\textsuperscript{38}

The Polynesian bloc also opposed proposals by Fiji and Papua New Guinea as part of their broader strategy of reducing the influence of the metropolitan powers, to weaken the South Pacific Commission.\textsuperscript{39} Moreover, the close family ties that exist between the inhabitants of the independent Polynesian states and the dependent Polynesian territories - between the Cook Islands and French Polynesia and between Western Samoa and American Samoa - made them reluctant to do anything that would endanger those ties or reduce the importance of the only regional body that permitted co-operation between independent countries and dependent territories.\textsuperscript{40}

Indeed, they regarded the presence of the metropolitan powers not as undesirable but rather as a necessary counterbalance the growing influence of the Melanesian states. The more conservative attitude to decolonisation in New Caledonia may well have been a reaction to the changes to their stature and power within the Forum, changes that were the inevitable consequence of the entry of the newly independent Melanesian states into what had been largely a Polynesian club.

Furthermore, their distinctly hierarchical societies based on the traditional respect for a hereditary elite of chiefs made the Polynesian countries highly conservative in outlook and deeply suspicious of the radical policies of the Melanesian states and their challenge to the status quo.\textsuperscript{41} Though some Polynesian leaders, no doubt, would see it rather as a question of political maturity. This would appear to be what the Crown Prince of Tonga who is also his country's Minister for Foreign Affairs was implying in the

\textsuperscript{37} The disagreement over US membership of the Regional Fisheries Agency saw the emergence of proposals to formalise the Melanesian - Polynesian split. The Melanesian countries threatened to set up their own fisheries agency while the premier of the Cook Islands, Tom Davis, spoke of the need for a Polynesian alliance. see Fry, "Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics", p. 663.

\textsuperscript{38} Fry, "Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics", p. 663.

\textsuperscript{39} Fry, "Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics", p. 664.

\textsuperscript{40} Herr suggests Cook Islands Prime Minister Henry in proposing the formation of the Forum may have been trying to take some of the pressure to stop a situation arising whereby France might withdraw from the South Pacific Commission and take her dependent territories with her. Herr, \textit{Regionalism in the South Seas}, PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 1976, p.310.

following statement: "...there are many new nations amongst our neighbours. Tonga is different. We have been running our own government for over a century and we are used to making decisions that will render some advantage to Tonga within the foreign policies of other countries. I believe it is a problem to be faced by most new developing nations. For instance, they use language stronger than their determination but with older nations like Tonga, the language we use is softer than the determination we have in our hearts."\textsuperscript{42} The Melanesians for their part have been critical of what they perceived as a tendency by their Polynesian counterparts to talk a lot at Forum meetings and do nothing afterwards.\textsuperscript{43} They have also felt resentment at what they consider to be a tendency by Polynesians to look down upon them as inferior, unsophisticated and primitive\textsuperscript{44}. There are then profound differences between Polynesia and Melanesia not only in political attitudes but in political style.\textsuperscript{45}

The Papua New Guinea military intervention in Vanuatu did little to change the attitude of the Polynesian states concerning the value of the presence in the region. It did, however, profoundly alter Fiji's relation with the other countries of the region and with the metropolitan powers.\textsuperscript{46} The replacement of Somare by Chan as Prime Minister in 1980 had already seriously weakened the relationship, which had been based to a large extent on the close personal relations between Somare and Ratu Mara. The unilateral decision by Papua New Guinea to intervene in Vanuatu rather than wait for the constitution of a United Nations force was seen by Fiji as a direct challenge to its traditional leadership role in the South Pacific and forced it to re-assess the value of its alignment with the Melanesian states in the Forum, an alignment which had estranged it from the Polynesian states. The decision by Fiji to reverse its 1982 decision to ban all visits by US nuclear powered and/or armed ships to its ports is an indication of its change in attitude to the presence of metropolitan powers in the region.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{42} Matangi Tonga July-August 1988, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{43} see excerpts from speeches by Mamaloni and Somare quoted in Fry, \textit{South Pacific Regionalism}, p. 253.
\textsuperscript{44} Fry, \textit{South Pacific Regionalism}, p. 254.
\textsuperscript{45} Fry, \textit{South Pacific Regionalism}, p. 249.
\textsuperscript{46} Fry,"Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics", pp. 664-65.
\textsuperscript{47} Naidu, p.13.
The willingness of Fiji to follow Papua New Guinea as it moved toward an increasingly hard-line stand on New Caledonia was also affected by important economic considerations. With sugar sales comprising two-thirds of Fiji's export revenue in 1982 and the agreement with the EEC due for renegotiation in 1982, Fiji would have been particularly vulnerable to French pressure to moderate its stance on New Caledonia.48

The late 1970s and early 1980s, then, witnessed the increasing radicalisation of the Melanesian states and the shift of the Polynesian states and Fiji to a more conservative position on the question of the presence of the metropolitan powers, including France, in the region. It would appear that these two tendencies were mutually reinforcing. The more radical the Melanesians became, the more the Polynesians tended to favour the continued presence of the metropolitan powers. Conversely the increasing conservatism of the Polynesian leaders appears to have strengthened their determination of the Melanesians to rock the boat.

The Forum gives France the benefit of the doubt

Within the Forum the divide between the Polynesia/Fiji group and the Melanesian states was clearly visible over the issue of independence for New Caledonia. At the different Forum meetings between 1980 and 1985 the Melanesian states, particularly Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, lobbied vigorously for the re-inscription of New Caledonia with the United Nations Committee on decolonisation.

Until 1986, however, the Melanesian states were unable to convince the other members of the Forum that the Forum should propose the re-inscription of New Caledonia at the United Nations. Both their failure to do so at previous Forums and their success at the 1986 Forum were due to largely to events and circumstances in New Caledonia and France at the time.

48 Fry, "Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics", p.665.
The issue of decolonisation in New Caledonia had not been mentioned at the 1980 Forum which focussed on the threat that the secessionist movements in Vanuatu posed to that territory’s independence time-table. But from 1981 onwards New Caledonia was to become a central issue at Forum meetings. The speech by Tjibaou at the 1980 Waigani Seminar and the contacts between representatives of Vanuatu’s ruling Vanuaku Party and the Independence Front had revived Melanesian interest in the Kanak cause and the issue of re-inscription. However, the election success of the Socialist presidential candidate, François Mitterand, had raised the hopes of Forum members, especially those of the non-Melanesian states, and had encouraged them to adopt a more moderate position. These states believed that a socialist France would adopt policies and initiatives that would redress the inequalities and injustices in New Caledonia and hasten progress towards independence. Any move by the Forum to increase the pressure on France would be premature and only antagonise France at a time when its policies seemed to be moving in the right direction. Consequently the 1981 Forum decided against re-inscription and resolved instead to send a delegation to meet with President Mitterand to discuss the evolving French policies with respect to the decolonisation of the French Pacific territories.

Forum members found reassuring those statements by the new French Secretary of State for Overseas Territories and Departments, M Henri Emmanuelli in which he criticised the situation in New Caledonia and called for a radical change of policy in favour of the Melanesian people. Nevertheless, the assassination of Pierre Leclerc, Secretary General of the largest party in the Independence Front, the Union Calédonienne, did provoke a certain disquiet among even the moderate Forum leaders, with Ratu Mara comparing the situation in New Caledonia to that in Algeria in the 1950s. Mara also expressed concern that unless social, political and economic injustices were remedied law

50 PIM December 1980, p.6.
52 Backgrounder No 299 September 2 1981, pp.7-8.
and order would break down, posing a threat to the stability not only of the territory but of the region.\footnote{53}

Yet his visit to Paris in March 1982 as leader of the three member delegation sent by the Forum to meet with President Mitterand was enough to allay his fears so much so that at the end of his visit Mara expressed his satisfaction with the pace of the reforms being undertaken by France in New Caledonia.\footnote{54} Recent political developments in New Caledonia had also done much to reassure the Forum leaders. In June there was a split in the governing coalition in the Territorial Assembly resulting in the formation of a new coalition between the centrist FNSC (Federation for a new Caledonian Society) and the Front \textit{Indépendantiste}. The latter now enjoyed majority representation in the Council of Government and one of its leading members, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, was elected Vice-President of the Council.\footnote{55} This was followed by a round table meeting of representatives of the pro- and anti-independence parties and the French Government at Nainville-les Roches near Paris. In the final communiqué the French Government recognised the innate and active right of the Kanak people to independence.\footnote{56} As a result of these developments and Mara’s report on his visit to Paris the August 1982 Forum meeting in Rotorua once again rejected the Melanesian proposal calling for re-inscription. Instead it welcomed the French Government’s programme of reforms and hoped that it would continue the reform process.\footnote{57}

This pattern was to be repeated at each Forum until 1986. In the first half of 1983 there had been outbreaks of violence and an increasing polarisation over the issue of independence in New Caledonia.\footnote{58} Yet despite the violence France’s efforts to find a peaceful solution had once again been sufficient to reassure the Forum. They welcomed a statement by France’s new Minister for Overseas Territories and Departments, Lemoine, in which he declared that all options including that of complete independence were

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{54} Backgrounder No 325 March 24 1982, p. 4.
  \item \footnote{55} Backgrounder No 338 June 23 1982, p. 6.
  \item \footnote{56} Helen Fraser, \textit{New Caledonia}, pp. 12-14.
  \item \footnote{57} Forum Communique, Backgrounder No 345 August 11 1982, p. 3.
  \item \footnote{58} Fraser, pp.13-14.
\end{itemize}
possible. Indeed, Lemoine’s view that there was a double legitimacy in New Caledonia and as such a need for a solution that respected the rights of both the original Melanesian inhabitants and the genuine settlers was very close to their own. Furthermore, the talks organised by the French government prior to the 1983 Forum between the anti- and pro-independence parties at Nainville-les-Roches and a statement by the representatives of France acknowledging the "innate and active right to independence of the Kanak people" only served to strengthen the view of the majority of Forum members that France was moving in the right direction.59

The Final Communique of the 1984 Forum was less enthusiastic than that of the 1983 Forum about the reforms being undertaken in New Caledonia. Whereas the 1983 Communique welcomed French efforts to introduce reform the 1984 Communique outlines ways in which these efforts could be improved.60 This noticeable change in attitude was probably due to a large extent to the efforts of Vanuatu Prime Minister Walter Lini. Lini, dissatisfied with the position on New Caledonia that was to appear in the final communiqué, took the unusual step of calling a press conference at which he openly criticised the Forum’s decision not to proceed with re-inscription. Although the Forum did not change its mind over re-inscription, it did agree after three hours of debate to adopt a tougher stand.61 Clearly the New Caledonian issue had severely strained the Forum’s normal practice of making decisions by consensus and threatened the very unity of the Forum itself.

When violence broke out in New Caledonia in last months of 1984 and the first months of 1985 France proposed another programme of reforms known as the Pisani Plan. This plan offered sovereignty to the Kanaks and political guarantees to the Europeans. A referendum was to be held in July 1985 to allow voters a clear choice between independence or the status quo. Legislative Assembly elections would follow in October and depending on the results of the referendum, New Caledonia would be granted

59 Fraser, pp.13-14.
60 see The Communique of the Fifteenth South Pacific Forum held in Funafuti, Tuvalu on 27-28 August 1984 and The Communique of the Fourteenth South Pacific Forum held in Canberra, Australia, from the 29-30 August 1983.
61 Post Courier 30 August 1984, p. 11.
independence on January 1 1986. In the eyes of the majority of Forum members France seemed once again to be moving in the right direction. The decision to advance the referendum date from 1989 to 1987 was particularly reassuring to the more moderate members of the Forum since it accorded with the resolution passed at the 1984 Forum.

However, as a result of right-wing demonstrations and riots and the killing of an important FLNKS leader Eloi Machoro by police France was forced to modify its plan. Announced on April 25th, the revised version known as the Fabius Plan postponed both the referendum date and the date for independence until 1987. In the interim period the Territory was to be divided into four regions, each of which would enjoy wide powers. At the same time the French Government would undertake a programme of economic, social and cultural reforms designed to reduce social and economic inequalities between Kanaks and the European inhabitants of the Territory.

Because of this constructive attitude on the part of the Socialist Government of France between 1981 and 1986 the majority of Forum states remained convinced that France was moving in the right direction and that any initiative at the UN or elsewhere would jeopardise the reform process. It is not surprising then that despite the violence in New Caledonia and the intense lobbying of member states by Uregei the general consensus at the August 1985 Forum meeting in Rarotonga was that nothing should be done that might prove counter-productive to French efforts to get both sides to agree on a compromise.

France and the formation of the Melanesian Spearhead

The Melanesian states, however, were becoming increasingly frustrated at the failure of the Forum to adopt a tougher stance and support re-inscription. Between 1982 and 1986 they began to consult more regularly in order to co-ordinate their efforts to win
Forum approval for re-inscription. In 1982 during a visit by the Foreign Minister of the Solomon Islands to Papua New Guinea, both countries expressed their concern over the refusal by France to set a timetable for independence in New Caledonia that coincided with the Front Indépendantiste’s plans for independence in 1984.\textsuperscript{65} They also called on France to recognise the indigenous Melanesian inhabitants or Kanaks as the sole representatives of the people of New Caledonia even though they constituted less than 40\% of the population of the territory.\textsuperscript{66}

By 1985 these consultations had developed into a pre-Forum caucus of Melanesian states and representatives of the FLNKS, signalling the formation of a new sub-regional grouping, known as the Melanesian Spearhead. Two months prior to the August 1985 Forum in Rarotonga the Foreign Ministers of the three Melanesian states met in Port Vila with representatives of the FLNKS to discuss New Caledonia. They issued a statement condemning the violence and killings and criticising the methods employed by the French to bring about independence. They also questioned the decision by France to strengthen its military presence in New Caledonia, which they saw as signalling the French intention to maintain control of the Territory and hence incompatible with the objective of independence.\textsuperscript{67} They called on the Forum to support the move for re-inscription and to call on France to guarantee the rights of the Kanaks as the indigenous people. The Foreign Minister of Papua New Guinea warned that if the Forum did not take serious steps towards finding a solution in New Caledonia then the Melanesian states should begin questioning the continued existence of the Forum.\textsuperscript{68} Both Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu announced that they would seek observer status for the provisional government that had been formed

\textsuperscript{65} PNGFAR May 1983, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{66} PIM October 1982, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{67} The Bulletin, 21 May 1985, p. 94. PIM July 1985, p. 7; Islands Business July 1985, pp. 28-29. Mitterand had announced plans to build a strategic naval base in Noumea and to upgrade Tontouta air base on January 19 1985 while he was on a visit to New Caledonia. The plans were in fact an attempt to reassure the white settlers of the Territory that despite the offer of independence contained in the Pisani plan France was not about to abandon them. Nothing has been heard of the plan since. (Helen Fraser, p. 26; PIM March 1985, p. 26)
\textsuperscript{68} Islands Business July 1985, p. 29.
by the FLNKS at the August Forum in Rarotonga. There were even reports in the press that Vanuatu was prepared to allow arms for the FLNKS to transit through its territory.

The 1985 Forum once again failed to endorse the Melanesian resolution on re-inscription. Nevertheless, the final Forum resolution on decolonisation did reflect the strong feelings of the Melanesian states. Although the Forum decided against re-inscription at this point in time it did move one step closer to accepting it in agreeing to seek information from the UN on the applicability of the UN Charter and the 1960 Declaration on granting independence to colonial countries and peoples. It also decided to reconsider the whole question at the next Forum.

Furthermore the Forum took note of the concern of the Melanesian states over French intentions to upgrade its military facilities in New Caledonia and called on France to clarify its position. Rather than rejecting outright the request of both the FLNKS and French Polynesia for observer status at its meetings, the Forum tactfully decided to set up a working group to review the existing guidelines governing the question of granting observer status. A resolution condemning French nuclear testing once again provided the members of the Forum with an opportunity to unite in their opposition to France and thus compensate for their lack of unity over New Caledonia.

Yet the Melanesian states were still not satisfied by the Forum resolution and persisted in their campaign in support of the FLNKS objectives. At the 40th session of the United Nations General Assembly in October, Kenilorea, Lini, and Papua New Guinea’s Foreign Minister, Giheno, criticised France for its imperialist policies in the South Pacific and condemned its plans to increase its military presence in New Caledonia.

---

69 PIM August 1985, p. 20; Papua New Guinea Post-Courier July 24 1985, p. 3. The granting of observer status was a far more important step than would at first seem. Such status had previously been reserved for the elected representatives of a dependent territory which was about to become independent. Such status had been given to a delegation from the elected government of the New Hebrides in 1979, one year prior to the scheduled date of independence. In the case of New Caledonia, however, the FLNKS was not the elected government of New Caledonia and there was no scheduled date for the independence. To grant the FLNKS observer status then would have been tantamount to recognising it as legal government of the territory.


71 The Final Communique of the Sixteenth South Pacific Forum, held in Rarotonga from 5-6 August 1985.

72 PIM December 1985, p. 7; PNGFAR December 1985, p. 27.
In January and February 1986 in the first major diplomatic initiative undertaken by
the newly elected Wingti government, Foreign Minister Legu Vagi visited the Solomon
Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Australia and Indonesia. In his talks in the Solomon Islands and
Vanuatu Vagi stressed that the issue of decolonisation could not be seen in isolation from
other French activities in the region and particularly French nuclear testing at Moruroa.
All three countries agreed that regular consultations between their Foreign Ministers and
the FLNKS had been valuable and should be continued.73 Meanwhile Vanuatu had taken
the campaign to the heart of the French speaking world when he condemned French
nuclear testing and colonial practices in his address to the first summit of French speaking
nations.74

The Foreign Ministers of the three independent Melanesian countries met in
Goroka in July 1986 to discuss ways of co-ordinating their efforts and agreed to present a
common front at the next meeting of the Forum in Suva. They declared that the purpose of
this "spearhead group" was to monitor developments in New Caledonia and to foster
closer relations with the FLNKS.75 The Foreign Ministers also reaffirmed their support for
the inalienable right of the Kanaks to self-determination and independence and agreed that
electoral reforms were a necessary pre-condition to any act of self-determination. They
maintained their support for re-inscription and reiterated their opposition to the increase in
the French military presence in New Caledonia. They called on the Forum to send a
delegation to discuss New Caledonia with the French government.76 Another meeting, this
time between Prime Ministers Wingti and Lini and the Deputy Prime Minister of the
Solomon Islands Alebua, confirmed the decision of the Foreign Ministers.

The formation of the Spearhead Group was clearly a direct consequence of the
French presence in New Caledonia. Angered by the refusal of the French Government to
grant independence to the Melanesian people of New Caledonia, the independent
Melanesian states had tried separately to persuade the Forum to put pressure on France.
Their repeated failure to obtain Forum endorsement for re-inscription had convinced them

73 PNGFAR March 1986, pp. 7-8.
74 PIM April 1986, p. 17.
75 Islands Business, August 1986, p.16-17.
76 see Solomon Nius 31-07-86, p. 6.
of the need for regular consultations to co-ordinate their efforts and to increase the pressure on the other members of the Forum. To some extent, then, the formation of the Spearhead group parallels that of the Forum, itself a consequence of the frustration of independent South Pacific states at French policies and attitudes.77

The French presence in New Caledonia had united the Melanesian states and given them a common purpose. But it had done so at the expense of the unity of the Forum. The formation of the Spearhead group was to further this division, particularly between the Melanesian and Polynesian members of the Forum. The Melanesian states were aware of this danger from the outset. During talks with the President of Nauru just after the formation of the Spearhead group Lini reassured the Nauru leader that closer Melanesian ties would not threaten Forum unity. This theme was taken up by the three Melanesian states at the Suva Forum where all three countries made a concerted effort to demonstrate their attachment to regional solidarity.78 Papua New Guinea’s Foreign Minister Legu Vagi explained that the non-attendance of Prime Minister Wingti at the Conference should not be seen as an attempt to downgrade Papua New Guinea’s relations with the non-Melanesian members of the Forum. He was adamant that the July meeting of Melanesian leaders was not an attempt to split the Forum or to detract from the purpose and objectives of the organisation. In a similar vein, Lini stressed that the Melanesian bloc was not a political bloc but one which was based on common interests. The Solomon Islands’ Prime Minister also insisted that the so-called Melanesian bloc was not a formal or structured organisation.

---

77 The idea of establishing a Melanesian Alliance Body had already been proposed in the 1981 Programme of Action of the Government of the Solomon Islands. Lini had also suggested that the Melanesian states might form some kind of association in his article "Australia and the South Pacific: A Vanuatu Perspective", published in Australian Outlook in August 1982 (Vol 36, No. 2, p.31). Yet it was the issue of decolonisation in New Caledonia that actually provided the impetus for the Spearhead group.

France and the "Libyan threat"

In addition to contributing to the formation of the Melanesian Spearhead group, the French presence in the South Pacific, and more specifically in New Caledonia, was also responsible for the interest of Libya in the region, an issue that was to prove equally as divisive. The involvement of Libya in the South Pacific has to be explained in terms of both the decision of the FLNKS to seek outside assistance in its independence struggle and the eagerness of Khadafi to antagonise France in any way it could.

The decision of Libya to grant assistance to the FLNKS must be seen as largely a consequence of the state of hostility that existed between it and France in North Africa over Chad. This former French colony in Africa was torn by a bitter civil war. The support by France and Libya for opposing factions had led to military intervention by both countries in the war. Although direct hostilities between their military forces had been avoided, relations between them were extremely tense. Given its hostility towards France and its traditional support for liberation and revolutionary movements throughout the world, Libya's involvement in New Caledonia is not at all surprising. Moreover, Khadafi's attempts to weaken French influence was not restricted to the South Pacific. He also assisted the independence movement in Guadeloupe in the Caribbean.

Its involvement was, at least initially, the result of an initiative by the Secretary of the Union Calédonienne, Eloi Machoro. The Independence Movement in New Caledonia had become increasingly disillusioned with the limited reforms of the French Government. They were particularly angered by the refusal by the French to address their two principal demands - electoral reform and an early date for the proposed referendum. Without electoral reform, the indépendantistes faced certain defeat. Within the Front Indépendantiste (FI) the belief that more militant action was necessary had grown and

---

81 based on a statement by Helen Fraser in an interview with the author, March 1989.
82 Helen Fraser, New Caledonia, p. 14.
even a moderate such as Tjibaou called on supporters in July 1984 to be ready to fight a guerrilla war.  

In a move designed to convince both France and the Forum states of the gravity of the situation and to shock the French into supporting independence and the Forum states into endorsing re-inscription, Uregei and another militant leader, Eloi Machoro, announced that a group of young Kanak militants were to receive training in Libya. Machoro declared that the FI would accept help from whomever offered it, provided they were neither fascist or racist. One month prior to the Forum meeting in August 1984 both Uregei and Machoro had made a 10 day preliminary visit to Libya.

However, these moves had quite the opposite effect to that which had been intended. Instead of adopting a position that was more favourable to the Kanaks the Australian Prime Minister Hawke declared that Australia would not yield to blackmail. At the Forum meeting Vanuatu valiantly put forward the FI case. Without more concrete support from the Forum, Lini argued, the FI would feel alienated and turn elsewhere for help. If it were to persist with more radical measures such as the planned active boycott of the Territorial Assembly elections and its decision to set up a provisional government, he maintained, a violent confrontation would be inevitable. Yet the Forum members could not be persuaded. Once again the majority of members felt that France was moving in the right direction and that re-inscription could be counter-productive.

Following its failure once again to win the support of the Forum countries for re-inscription, the FI voted at a political congress in September 1984 to maintain its more radical stance. It decided to replace the FI by the FLNKS or Front de Liberation Kanak et Socialiste, to organise an active boycott of the November Territorial Assembly elections and to form a provisional government in Noumea on December 1 1984. The boycott was largely successful with less than 50% of registered voters and only 15% of Kanak voters taking part. Although the official results gave a landslide victory to the Rassemblement

83 Helen Fraser, p. 17.
84 David Robie, p. 18.
85 Fraser, pp. 17-18.
86 PIM, October 1984, p. 9.
87 PIM, October 1984, p. 21.
88 Backgrounder No 450 October 3 1984, p. 4.
pour la Caledonie dans la République (RCPR), the principal anti-independence party, it was clear that the FLNKS had won a moral victory.\(^9\)

The final months of 1985 saw the FLNKS adopt a more moderate position largely as a result of its decision to accept the concessions made by France in the Fabius Plan and therefore to abandon its confrontationist policy of active boycott which had brought New Caledonia to the brink of civil war. In the regional elections that were held in September 1985 in accordance with the terms of the Fabius Plan it had gained control of three out of the four regions and it had decided to utilise its new found political power to consolidate social and economic progress and build independence at a grass roots level. The new FLNKS policy was to avoid confrontation and to concentrate its efforts on fostering economic development of its regions and on the campaign for re-inscription abroad.\(^0\)

Realising that the FLNKS ties with Libya were harming its relations with the other South Pacific states, Tjibaou, the leader of the largest party in the coalition rejected Uregei's proposal to send a delegation to Libya to attend the Conference of Independence Movements in April. When Uregei defied the ban and led a 6 member delegation to Libya, the FLNKS supported Tjibaou's stance and suspended him from his position of official FLNKS spokesperson.\(^1\)

But the controversy over Libyan assistance to the FLNKS did not stop with the FLNKS distancing itself from Uregei. Vanuatu had also sent a delegation to Tripoli for the conference and allegations were made in the FLNKS magazine Bwenando about the existence of a "terrorist alliance" involving the FULK, the guerrilla movement of West Papua (the OPM) and the Vanuaku Party of Vanuatu.\(^2\) Vanuatu dismissed criticism from Australia, New Zealand and the Cook Islands of its relations with Libya, accusing them of hypocrisy and over-reaction. A spokesman for the Vanuatu Prime Minister explained that the decision to establish diplomatic relations with Libya was part of an overall strategy to diversify the country's sources of aid by seeking aid from Middle Eastern nations. He also

\(^89\) Helen Fraser, p.19.
\(^90\) Helen Fraser, p. 28.
\(^91\) PIM February 1986, pp. 7, 13; Islands Business April 1986, p. 27.
\(^92\) Robie, p. 20.
pointed out that the real perpetrators of terrorism in the South Pacific were not the Libyans but those responsible for the deaths of Melanesians in New Caledonia and Irian Jaya.93

The Libyan interest in the South Pacific was both a direct and indirect consequence of the French presence in the region. Because of its rivalry with France in North Africa, Libya was eager to challenge France’s influence in other regions, including the South Pacific. Moreover, the French refusal to decolonise in New Caledonia encouraged the indépendantistes to seek outside assistance. Similarly, French threats to cut off its aid to Vanuatu if Vanuatu continued to support the indépendantiste cause in New Caledonia certainly motivated the ni-Vanuatu government to seek alternative sources of foreign aid. There was, then, a convergence of interests on the part of Libya and Vanuatu and the indépendantistes.

The question of Libyan involvement in the region, however, was to prove rather divisive. Although Australia and New Zealand were the most vocal in expressing their alarm at the Libyan involvement, Island countries such as Fiji and Tonga, with their pro-Western and pro-American foreign policies, were also concerned. The so-called "Libyan threat", like the formation of regional sub-groupings, threatened, for the first time, to divide the region along ideological lines, placing regional unity and co-operation in jeopardy.94

The Forum endorses re-inscription

In the early 1980s the French presence in the South Pacific had a destabilising effect on the region. It not only threatened regional unity by dividing the South Pacific states into blocs, it also provided outsiders such as Libya with an opportunity to become involved in regional politics.

93 Robie, p. 18.
94 The question of the "Libyan threat" and interstate relations in the South Pacific is discussed more fully in Chapter Four.
Although Papua New Guinea and the other Melanesian states had long held the view that France was a destabilising influence in the South Pacific, it was a view that the other members of the Forum were to increasingly share.\textsuperscript{95} The revelation that the French secret service had been behind the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland Harbour in July 1985 demonstrated once more the complete and utter disregard on the part of France for the sovereignty of South Pacific nations. The French action increased hostility to France, particularly among those Forum states that had previously taken a more moderate line on New Caledonia.\textsuperscript{96}

The defeat of the Socialist government by Jacques Chirac's centre-right coalition in the March National Assembly Elections in France was to dramatically alter both the situation in New Caledonia and the attitude of the Forum states to re-inscription. The new Minister for French Overseas Departments and Territories, M. Pons, announced a series of measures which amounted to a reversal of the previous government's policy of reforms. In a move which was specifically aimed at obstructing FLNKS development projects in the regions it controlled, power was once again centralised in the hands of the High Commissioner, the French Government's representative in Noumea.\textsuperscript{97}

Alarmed by the actions of the new French Government, the Melanesian states met in July and agreed to work together as a bloc at the August Forum in Suva to obtain a decision in favour of re-inscription. The Suva Forum was preceded by intense lobbying by both France and the FLNKS. The French Government had informed Australia that any

\textsuperscript{95} In 1981 Papua New Guinea's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Levi expressed his concern about instability not only in New Caledonia but also in the South Pacific as a result of the independence struggle in New Caledonia. See \textit{Papua New Guinea Post Courier}, September 24 1981, p.3; In 1984 Foreign Minister Namaliu saw the delay in decolonisation in New Caledonia as a threat to stability in the South Pacific. PNGFAR, December 1984, p. 9. The Australian Government had already voiced its concern to the US about the destabilising effects of French policies in the South Pacific. The US chose, however, to ignore the warnings of the Australian Ambassador to Washington that the French nuclear tests in the South Pacific were prejudicing the Island states against the West. Rather than using its influence to force France to modify its policies the US accepted the French assertion that the continuation of its tests was essential to the modernisation of its nuclear deterrent and to the defence of the Free World. \textit{PIM} October 1985, p. 15. \textit{The Wall Street Journal} went so far as to maintain that the French presence in the South Pacific made the world stronger, \textit{PIM} December 1985, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{96} Australia's acting Minister for Foreign Affairs Gareth Evans described the bombing as an act of terrorism. \textit{Backgrounder} No 494 September 4 1985, Statements I.

\textsuperscript{97} Helen Fraser, p. 28; Islands Business May 1986, p. 23.
move by the Forum at the United Nations could have adverse consequences and would be considered an unfriendly act. The Kanak delegation to the Forum was received by the Chairman of the Suva Forum, Ratu Mara, who, concerned by this sudden about face by France in its policy on New Caledonia, and convinced that there was a need for immediate action if the Kanak cause was not to be lost, decided to press for re-inscription.

The final result was a unanimous vote in favour of re-inscription. Despite some initial opposition by the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands who had just returned from consultations in Paris, the Forum adopted a resolution that was highly critical of the approach of the new French Government which unlike its predecessor appeared committed not to a form of independence but to New Caledonia remaining as a territory of France. The resolution requested Fiji as the only Forum country that is a member of the Committee of 24 to ask the Committee to recommend the re-inscription of New Caledonia to the General Assembly. It also requested Vanuatu as the only Forum country that is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement to seek the support of the Movement at its next meeting in Harare.

In December 1986 the UN General Assembly voted 89 to 24 in favour of re-inscribing New Caledonia Committee on Decolonisation. The size of the victory was particularly impressive given the strong economic pressure that France had exerted on the smaller UN members in an attempt to influence their vote. The vote was a major victory not only for the FLNKS but also for the states of the South Pacific who for the second time in two decades had succeeded in mobilising the international community against one of its most powerful members. It was a victory especially for the Melanesian states who despite their limited diplomatic and financial resources had succeeded in having a major foreign policy goal adopted by the UN General Assembly.

Yet, notwithstanding the credit that must go to the various states for their part in this diplomatic success, it was the sudden reversal of French policy that had made it all possible. Once again France had managed to unite the South Pacific states in their

100 Final Communique, 17th South Pacific Forum, Suva, 8-11 August 1986.
101 Helen Fraser, p. 31.
opposition to its policies. At previous Forums the decolonisation issue had constantly divided the Forum and exacerbated pre-existing tensions between the Melanesian and Polynesian states to the point that it threatened to break up the Forum and split the South Pacific into two blocs - a Melanesian bloc in favour of re-inscription and a Polynesian bloc which includes Fiji wary of Melanesian radicalisation and of Melanesian domination of regional bodies. At the 1986 Forum France again provided the states of the South Pacific with a common foe against which to unite.
CHAPTER FOUR

FRANCE'S NEW SOUTH PACIFIC POLICY

The victory of the centre-right coalition under the leadership of Jacques Chirac in France in 1986 saw France completely reverse its previous policies concerning both New Caledonia and its relations with the independent Island states. This reversal gave France two seemingly contradictory faces in the region: a conciliatory face in the South Pacific and hard-line face in New Caledonia.

Previously France had made little attempt to establish closer links with the other non-French speaking Pacific states. Why had this been the case? The easy answer to this question would be to see it as a consequence of the attitude of the South Pacific Island states themselves who after all had excluded France from the South Pacific Forum.

Yet there had also been a deliberate policy on the part of France to isolate its Pacific territories. This was partly an attempt to insulate them from the wave of independence that was sweeping the world after WWII and partly the result of its decision to integrate them into the French polity.1 As such France had shown little interest in the independent Island states and had given little in the way of bilateral economic assistance to them. All this was to change dramatically with the victory of the conservative centre-right coalition in the 1986 National Assembly elections in France. France suddenly became interested in providing funds for development projects in the independent Island countries. As well as increasing its bilateral aid to these countries, France established the South Pacific Co-operation Fund to provide finance for development and technical assistance programmes. Its initial budget of 10 million FF in 1986 was increased to 29 million FF in 1987.2

---

1 This attitude was reflected in French and British efforts in the SPC to limit the involvement of UN agencies in SPC development projects perhaps because they saw the United Nations as an advocate of independence and decolonisation. see R.A. Herr, Regionalism in the South Seas, PhD Dissertation, Dukes University, 1976, pp. 132-33.

2 Statistics provided by the French Embassy in Canberra.
The origins of France’s new South Pacific policy

There had been plans for a new approach to the South Pacific well before 1986. In late 1978 under the centre-right Giscard administration a meeting had been arranged in Paris of high commissioners, governors, ambassadors from the South Pacific region to discuss possible French strategy. Under the so-called Dijoud Plan a new distribution of power and wealth was envisaged in New Caledonia to give France a more liberal image and greater co-operation in cultural and technical activities was planned with France’s neighbours in the Pacific.3

An article published in 1980 by the Documentation Française, commenting on the recent visits by Stirm to some of the Forum states, drew attention to the growth of pan-Melanesian nationalism and the poor receptiveness of Oceanic people to French reasoning. According to the article, France needed to wage a sustained campaign to explain its presence in the South Pacific.4 The fact that this call for a new approach to the South Pacific coincided with the push by some South Pacific states for the decolonisation of New Caledonia is significant. This would seem to suggest that France was not motivated by altruism but rather by a desire to protect its own national interests and to contain any movement in favour of the independence of New Caledonia and French Polynesia.

It was not, however, until the election of a socialist president and a socialist government in 1981 that further steps were taken to improve France’s relations with the states of the South Pacific. In May 1982 a five day conference of 18 French consuls and ambassadors of the Pacific rim was held in Paris to map out a new approach to the Pacific.5 This initiative by the French government was more a response to the increasing

3 PIM January 1979, p. 27.
5 PIM July 1982, p.5.
importance of certain Pacific rim countries in the world economy than an attempt to improve French relations with the small Pacific Island states.

Yet nothing more was done about this for another two years. The explanation for this would seem to be that the original scope of the initiative had been too broad. According to Claude Cheysson, who was French Foreign Minister at the time, the diverse nature of the states of the Pacific Hemisphere made it impossible to treat it as a single entity. It was decided to focus on the South Pacific Island states and a meeting of French representatives in the South Pacific had been planned for Autumn 1984. But it was not until September 1985 during a visit to Moruroa that Mitterand announced the establishment of the Council of the South Pacific in order to show French determination to stay in the region. Composed of key cabinet ministers, the French High Commissioners for New Caledonia and French Polynesia and top diplomats from French missions in the South Pacific, it was attached to the office of the president under the direction of a secretary general, Régis Debray.

There would seem to be several reasons for the delay. The French Government had been too preoccupied with its economic problems at home and its efforts in the South Pacific were directed at finding a solution to the actual crisis within New Caledonia itself. Besides, the majority of Forum states viewed favourably French plans for reforms in New Caledonia. The attempts by the Melanesian states to have their proposal for the re-inscription of New Caledonia with the Committee of 24 endorsed by consecutive Forum meetings had not been successful. All this was to change with the signing of the Treaty of Rarotonga at the 1985 Forum and the uncovering of French complicity in the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior as a result of which France’s image in the South Pacific deteriorated considerably. The endorsement by the Forum of re-inscription at its next meeting had become a definite possibility.

The first meeting of the Council of the South Pacific was held in Paris in February in what were to be the final days of the Socialist government. Given the importance placed

---

7 PIM September 1984, pp. 65-66  
8 Islands Business April 1986, p. 27.
by France on the propagation of the French language and culture and the belief expressed by Debray himself that antagonism to France in the region was being spread by the English-speaking University of the South Pacific in Suva, it was not surprising that the first decision of the Council should be to endorse a proposal to establish a French-speaking university with campuses in Noumea, Tahiti and Vanuatu.9 The Council also announced that 50 scientific and cultural programmes would be prepared to develop research, aid and other forms of co-operation with the independent South Pacific states, particularly in the areas of ocean research, medicine, energy and the environment, in the aim of developing ties with the independent South Pacific Island nations that were critical of French policies in the region.10

Chirac's double-edged sword: Pons and Flosse

Only three months after the first Council meeting the Socialist Government was defeated at the polls and, although Mitterand was to remain President, policy decisions concerning the future of New Caledonia and French diplomatic initiatives in the South Pacific were now the preserve of the right wing Prime Minister Jacques Chirac. Consequently the Council of the South Pacific became inoperative. The new government announced the appointment of Pons as Minister for DOM-TOM and the government's new plan for the future status of New Caledonia, called the Pons plan, favoured a return in New Caledonia to the status quo that had existed before the socialists i.e a continuation of white dominance of all aspects of the territory's political and economic life and an end to measures designed to redress one hundred years of inequalities and bias in favour of the white community.11

This new hard-line approach to the crisis in New Caledonia was not unexpected. As opposition leader, Chirac had already proclaimed during a visit to Noumea that it was

9 PIM April 1986, p. 17
10 PIM April 1986, p. 17; Islands Business, April 1986, p. 27.
11 Islands Business May 1986, p.23.
his intention to keep New Caledonia French. What was more surprising was the decision to reverse France's previous policy of isolation and the use of threats as a diplomatic tool to influence the behaviour of the independent South Pacific states, and to replace it by constructive co-operation and gentle persuasion. Of course it is easy to see the rationale behind such a policy. No longer able to placate the Forum states with a policy of reforms in New Caledonia the new French government hoped to take advantage of extreme economic dependence of these countries and to mute their protests in the international arena by providing them with financial and technical assistance.

Parallel to the announcement of the Pons plan, the French Government announced in March 1986 the appointment of Gaston Flosse as Minister of State for the South Pacific. Flosse had played an active role in the Polynesian parliament since 1965. In 1984 he was elected President of the Territorial Government. A part-Polynesian, he was the first Pacific Islander to be given a relatively high position in a Metropolitan government. This fact together with his ability to speak Polynesian was to ensure him an audience among the independent Polynesian states who, according to the then Prime Minister of Western Samoa, Va'ai Kolone, felt great pride at seeing one of their number hold such an important position.

In an attempt to answer charges that French Policy in the South Pacific was a result of decisions made by bureaucrats some 20,000 kilometres away in France oblivious to the realities of the Pacific territories, Flosse emphasised his identification with the region by selecting Papeete as his base rather than his office in Paris.

As Minister of State for the South Pacific, Flosse was expected to keep a close eye on French policy and economic development in the French territories in conjunction with the Minister for Overseas Departments and Territories (DOM-TOM). He was also given the task of improving France's relations with the other countries of the South Pacific in collaboration with the Minister for Foreign Affairs to ensure France's role as a major, and

---

13 A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, Nr 0 October 1986, p.1.
14 The Prime Minister of Western Samoa, Va'ai Kolone, made a statement to this effect during a visit to Papeete in July 1987. see La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat chargé du Pacifique Sud, No 6, August 1987, p. 1.
15 La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat chargé du Pacifique Sud, No 6, p.2.
accepted, force in the development of the region.\textsuperscript{16} Nevertheless, Flosse's brief concerning France's policies in the South Pacific Territories specifically excluded New Caledonia.\textsuperscript{17}

The Flosse initiatives: the method

The task of improving relations with the other South Pacific states was approached in two different ways. The first was to engage in what was basically an explanatory mission. France saw the hostility of the Islanders as having arisen from a misunderstanding, from false perception on the part of the Islanders.\textsuperscript{18} As far as the French were concerned, it was Australia and New Zealand who were largely responsible for this misperception on the part of the Islanders. Both countries, France believed were intent on spreading misinformation about French policies, in order to expand their own influence in the region at France's expense. It was not surprising that the new Government's policy was one of competition rather than collaboration with these two countries. There was therefore no need, the French believed, for France to change its policies. She just had to explain them better. Once the French policies concerning New Caledonia and nuclear testing had been properly explained the Islanders would see their fears as to be completely irrational and without foundation.

The second required France to play a more constructive and active role in the development of the region and in the promotion of its welfare.\textsuperscript{19} In order see that these tasks were being adequately attended to and to assess the progress or lack of it, regular meetings of French mission heads, high commissioners and ministers were held to map out future political, economic and military strategies in the region.\textsuperscript{20} For the first time

\textsuperscript{17} Islands Business May 1986, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{18} A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, No 4 May 1987, p.1.
\textsuperscript{19} A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, No 4 May 1987, p.3; A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, Nr 0 October 1986, p.3.
\textsuperscript{20} One such meeting took place in Noumea from May 15 to 17 under the chairmanship of Gaston Flosse who announced the setting up of a fund of about US$6 million for the 1988 aid programme. A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, No 4 May 1987, p.3.
French foreign policy in the South Pacific was to follow a well-thought out plan of action. France was to take the initiative rather than simply react as it had done previously in an ad hoc and incoherent way.

During his short term as Minister, Flosse was to call frequently on the leaders of the South Pacific states, particularly those of Polynesia. He also invited Island leaders to visit French Polynesia where they were able to see for themselves the benefits of being part of France in terms of high living standards and modern facilities. In another dramatic change from the past, France lifted the veil of secrecy that had shrouded Moruroa since the 1960s and invited South Pacific leaders to visit the testing site to see for themselves how harmless the French tests were.

For his visits Flosse often made use of French naval vessels and aircraft in an what could be seen as an effort to make the French military presence more acceptable. Courtesy calls by French naval vessels on South Pacific ports were also stepped up. Leaders were also invited by Flosse to France where they were warmly received by leading politicians and shown the best of French industry and technology.

Another was also held in Noumea from March 10 to March 12. At the meeting were the French ambassadors to Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Fiji, military officers, the French High Commissioners in Noumea and Papeete and representatives of four French Ministries: Foreign Affairs, Defence, Trade and Overseas Departments and Territories. The main items on the agenda were the political, social and economic changes in the French Territories and how to foster better relations with the South Pacific Island nations. Radio Australia Transcripts, 5-03-88.

In April 1987 Flosse hosted a visit by a group of Catholic Church leaders from the South Pacific. In July 1987 the King of Tonga and the Western Samoan Minister for Financial affairs were taken on an inspection tour of Moruroa. Cook Islands Prime Minister Dr Robati visited the French nuclear testing site in August 1987. La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud, No 5 June 1987, p.8; La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud, No 6 August 1987, p. 3; Radio Australia Transcripts 31-08-87.

The patrol boats Railleuse and Gracieuse called at Fiji 5-8 October. The Gracieuse toured the Cooks, Tonga and both Samoas in December 1987 to "further develop relations of friendship and co-operation". During the voyage it delivered audio-visual equipment to a catholic mission in Tonga and medical equipment to two French doctors in Western Samoa. A letter from the Minister for the South Pacific Nr 8 January 1988, p. 11.


In September 1987 the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of the Cook Islands visited Paris to a financial agreement worth 150 million francs with the French Government. The French loan was to be used for the reconstruction of Rarotonga, which had been devastated by cyclone Sally earlier that year. In October 1987 Flosse hosted visits to Paris by the Deputy Prime Minister of Western Samoa, the Lieutenant Governor of American Samoa and the Tongan Minister of Education. see La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud, No 7 November 1987, pp. 5-6.
establishing a French University of the South Pacific was endorsed by the new conservative Government. Furthermore, as part of the explanatory campaign Flosse set up a newsletter with editions in English and French to publicise his initiatives in the region.

The second approach to improving the image of France in the South Pacific was for France to play a more constructive role in the development of the region and in the promotion of its welfare. France offered the independent states two kinds of assistance. One was of a more circumstantial or fortuitous nature since it involved the provision of humanitarian aid in the form of material and financial assistance to countries that had been devastated by cyclones and were therefore only too willing to accept emergency relief from whatever quarter. The other took the form of various programmes of technical and financial assistance that France signed with the independent states to help them with their economic development.

Flosse had not long been appointed when Cyclone Namu devastated parts of the Solomon Islands in May 1986, killing more than a hundred and leaving 90,000 homeless. But he was quick to demonstrate France's new spirit of co-operation. The French naval vessel "Jacques Cartier" spent one week carrying out humanitarian missions in the Solomons Islands, French soldiers helped clear away the debris and French medical teams gave succour to the victims. France also dispatched several tonnes of food and medical supplies to the islands while Flosse offered to assist the Solomon Islands government materially and financially in the awesome task of reconstruction. As Flosse proudly pointed out French aid was equal to that of the USA and second only to that of Australia.25 France was to provide similar kinds of humanitarian aid the following year to the Cook Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu, all of which were also devastated by cyclones.26 What is significant in all these operations was the prominent role played by the French military, a role which, as in the case of the courtesy visits by French naval vessels, could be seen as a means of legitimising the French military presence in the South Pacific.

---

25 A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, Nr 0 October 1986, p.3.
26 The Cook Islands were ravaged by cyclone Sally in January 1987. France was particularly generous in offering the Cook Islands Prime Minister a six year term loan of $15 million at 5% with the first payments to be deferred for six years. Islands Business February 1987, p. 34.
In addition to providing generous humanitarian aid, France embarked on a new policy of actively encouraging the independent South Pacific nations to accept French technical, scientific and financial assistance. In providing that assistance France was fortunate in being able to call on the 15 research organisations and 500 scientists already in the French Pacific territories. In what was to be the first of a series of meetings with French scientists and research workers, Flosse addressed the annual meeting of French researchers in Noumea in August 1986. In what amounted to a complete reversal of previous French policy, he urged researchers to come up with programmes of undeniable regional interest. Priority should be given to those programmes which have a rapid impact on the development of countries in the South Pacific and whose implementation will involve international organisations and, most of all, the South Pacific Commission. Their uppermost aim, he maintained, should be the promotion of France.\textsuperscript{27} At the second meeting of this kind held in Papeete in July 1987 this orientation was reaffirmed. Presided over jointly by Flosse and the French Minister of Research and Tertiary Education, the Papeete meeting was attended by the Councillors for research, technology and aid from the French embassies in Fiji, Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea and over 100 scientists and engineers from the major French research institutes in the South Pacific.\textsuperscript{28} The meeting reviewed the 18 projects that had already been undertaken since Flosse's programme of action for research had been announced in August 1986. These projects represented an additional 10 million Francs in French credits in areas such as agronomy, oceanology, geology and raw materials, resources and the environment, renewable energy, health, the social sciences and teledetection.\textsuperscript{29}

In 1987 alone, the French government set aside US$4 million for its new South Pacific Co-operation Fund. The fund had been established to finance those projects put forward by Pacific Island country governments that, if realised, would represent a real

\textsuperscript{27} A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, Nr 0 October 1986, pp.2,5,6.  
\textsuperscript{28} The major French research institutes in the South Pacific are ORSTOM, IFREMER, CNRS, CIRAD, CEA, BRGM, Pasteur Institute, Malarde Institute.  
\textsuperscript{29} La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud, No 6, August 1987, p. 4. The projects included the use of French SPOT satellites to gather agricultural, mining and marine data for the South Pacific Island countries, the development of high yield food crop seeds and disease resistant animal stock. see Islands Business April 1987, p. 19.
technical, economic, social and cultural advancement for the country concerned.\textsuperscript{30} During his tour of the Samoas and Tonga in the first half of 1987, Flosse received requests from the governments of these countries for funding for projects in the areas of health, education, agriculture, audio-visual communication, energy production and sport.\textsuperscript{31} The governments of Western Samoa and Tonga also expressed interest in a plan to establish in Paris a "House of the Pacific", a sort of communal embassy for Pacific Island nations that would otherwise not be able to finance a diplomatic and commercial presence in Paris.\textsuperscript{32} His tour of the Samoas and Tonga was followed by official visits to Nauru, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Niue where once again Flosse offered French financial assistance for projects in the areas of health, education and telecommunications.\textsuperscript{33}

Political developments in Fiji during Flosse's period in office provided a favourable opportunity for France to improve its relations with one of the most important Island nations. As a result of the military coups of May and September 1987 the new Fiji regime, led by military commander Colonel Rabuka, found itself ostracised by both Australia and New Zealand and expelled from the Commonwealth. The decision by Australia, New Zealand and the United States to suspend their aid to Fiji forced the new regime to look for other benefactors.\textsuperscript{34} France was quick to seize this opportunity to increase its influence with the Fiji government by providing it with financial assistance and some much needed international recognition.

In October 1987 the French and Fijian navies conducted a joint exercise during the visit of a French patrol boat to Suva. The French government downplayed the significance of the exercise, coming as it did so soon after the second coup, claiming that it did not imply French endorsement of the coup since it had always been French policy to recognise states and not governments.\textsuperscript{35} According to a French spokesperson, the exercise was simply designed to familiarise the two crews with each other's operational procedures and

\textsuperscript{30} La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud, No 5 June 1987, p.5.
\textsuperscript{31} La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud, No 5, p.6.
\textsuperscript{32} La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud, No 5, p.7.
\textsuperscript{33} La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud, No 7 November 1987, p.3.
\textsuperscript{34} The United States had suspended its military and economic aid to Fiji in 1987 in response to the overthrow of the elected government. Economic aid was restored in December 1988. USIS Wireless Report, 11-04-89, p.38.
\textsuperscript{35} Radio Australia Transcripts, 8-10-87.
to foster friendly relations between the two navies. It is difficult to deny, however, the importance of such an exercise for a regime that at the time found itself the object of condemnation from much of the international community.

In the following months France increased its overtures towards Fiji. In a statement following a special meeting of the French inner cabinet at which Flosse gave a report on the situation in the South Pacific French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac was careful to avoid any condemnation of the coup. Instead he expressed the hope that France could contribute to establishing understanding between the ethnic groups in Fiji. France was nevertheless cautious about whether it would accede to several requests from Colonel Rabuka for military and development assistance. By December 1987 France seemed to be moving to fill the vacuum left by the withdrawal of Australian and New Zealand aid. Following the visit by a French fact-finding mission to Fiji in December, the French Secretariat for the South Pacific announced that France would provide Fiji with aid worth more than $A 16 million. This aid was to buy a helicopter ambulance and trucks for rural development and to finance development projects in the sugar cane and tourism industries.

In Paris to sign an aid agreement with the French Government the Prime Minister of Fiji, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara held talks with his French counterpart on how French relations with Fiji and the other South Pacific nations could be improved. Mara was particularly impressed by the warm welcome he received in Paris, coming as it did at a time when Fiji’s traditional allies were giving it the cold shoulder. The purpose of this sudden bout of generosity towards Fiji on the part of France was all too obvious to deposed Prime Minister Dr Bavadra who accused France of capitalising on Fiji’s political and economic misfortunes in attempt to buy a more sympathetic policy on both New Caledonia and French nuclear testing.

36 Radio Australia Transcripts, 23-10-87.
38 Radio Australia Transcripts, 6-04-88.
As well as taking advantage of the situation in Fiji to improve its relations with that country France was to use it to justify both its policies in New Caledonia and its presence in the South Pacific. At the same time that France was providing the Fiji regime with financial and material aid, its official spokesperson in the South Pacific, Gaston Flosse, was using comparisons between the situation in New Caledonia and that in Fiji in an attempt to disarm or at least confuse those opposed to French policies. He pointed out the contradictions in the policies of certain South Pacific states that found unacceptable the desire of the coup leaders to deny the Indian community its rightful place in the political life of Fiji and yet insisted that the future of New Caledonia should only be decided by Kanaks.\(^4\) He also highlighted the double standards of the Apia Forum Communique which treated New Caledonia as an international problem but decided that the problem of Fiji was an internal matter only.\(^4\)

The Flosse initiatives: an evaluation

Having described the extent of the diplomatic initiatives that were undertaken by France in order to legitimise its presence in the South Pacific and improve its relations with the states of the region, it is necessary to consider how effective these initiatives were. It is obvious from the relative absence of references to the Melanesian countries in the account above that France was not successful in wooing either Papua New Guinea or Vanuatu. Indeed Flosse is reported to have complained of "systematic hostility" from Vanuatu which had "spat in our face" and by Papua New Guinea.\(^4\)

Papua New Guinea continued its attacks on French policy on both New Caledonia and nuclear testing at Moruroa at the United Nations.\(^4\) Convinced that there was a need to go beyond re-inscription, Papua New Guinea began to look at additional means of

\(^{40}\) *Islands Business* July 1987, p. 50.

\(^{41}\) *Islands Business* July 1987, p. 50.

\(^{42}\) *Post Courier* 27-02-87, p.6.

\(^{43}\) During the United Nations debate on re-inscription in 1986 the Papua New Guinea Ambassador to that body compared the situation in New Caledonia to that in Namibia (see *PIM* December 1986, p.16).
increasing the pressure on France. Foreign Affairs Minister Diro raised the possibility of a boycott of French goods by Forum countries and a resolution calling for the South Pacific Games that were scheduled to be held in Noumea in December 1987 to be transferred to another venue. In August 1987 Lemeki, the Papua New Guinea Minister for Provincial Affairs, suggested that his country’s troops could be sent to New Caledonia to support the Kanaks just as they had been sent to Vanuatu in 1980 to assist Father Lini.

Although the government immediately distanced itself from what the Minister had said, his statement was indicative of the growing sense of frustration and impatience that was felt not only by the government but by students and trade unionists as well as France continued to ignore both world opinion as expressed by the vote in favour of re-inscription at the United Nations and the opinion of the Forum countries. In a strongly worded statement condemning France, Prime Minister Wingti warned that Papua New Guinea’s efforts would not stop with the re-inscription of New Caledonia but would continue until France granted independence to New Caledonia on terms that were acceptable to the Kanak people. He also underlined the threat that the continuation of French rule in New Caledonia and the French military build-up there posed to the stability of the region and called on Great Britain and the United States to put pressure on France to quit New Caledonia rather than waiting until the situation deteriorated to the point that France is forced to quit leaving behind a mess that could destabilise the whole region. Papua New Guinea and the other Melanesian states would not sit back and wait for this to happen. “We are carefully examining all available diplomatic options and will not rest until we see an early end to French rule in New Caledonia.”

Following the overwhelming vote against independence in the September referendum and the equally massive boycott by Kanaks, there were, however, suggestions

---

44 Islands Business February 1987, p. 41.
45 Radio Australia 24-08-87.
46 Radio Australia 25-08-87. In response to the French refusal to call off the referendum in New Caledonia students in Port Moresby organised a large demonstration outside the French Embassy which resulted in several arrests. The biggest trade union in the country, the Public Employees Union, came out in support of the campaign to close the French Embassy in Port Moresby. See Radio Australia 11-09-87 and 21-09-87.
47 Papua New Guinea Foreign Affairs Recorder September 1987, p. 12. One possible diplomatic option under consideration was the formal recognition of the FLNKS as the provisional government of New Caledonia. See Radio Australia 9-09-87.
that non-diplomatic options might be considered. According to Helen Fraser, Diro had been receptive to a request by Uregei that Papua New Guinea supply him with military equipment.\textsuperscript{48} Papua New Guinea’s Acting Foreign Minister Matiabe warned that by its actions France was forcing the Kanaks into a situation where they would seek help from Libya and the Soviet Union in order to wage an armed struggle. Papua New Guinea, he said, would continue to support the FLNKS but not necessarily in terms of supplying them arms.\textsuperscript{49} Matiabe also suggested that Papua New Guinea might recognise the FLNKS as the Government in exile and even went so far as to offer the FLNKS facilities in Port Moresby to do so.\textsuperscript{50}

Hostility towards France also increased in Vanuatu during Flosse’s period in office. But again, as in the period from 1980 to 1986, this was as much due to internal politics as to events in New Caledonia. Once again France tried to use its aid to Vanuatu as leverage to force Vanuatu to stop supporting the FLNKS. At the same time that Flosse was looking at ways to increase French aid to the independent South Pacific Island states, he announced that countries such as Vanuatu should not continue to receive more money while they were doing everything that they could to chase France out of the Pacific.\textsuperscript{51} French aid to Vanuatu fell from 66 million French Francs on 1986 to 52 million in 1987.\textsuperscript{52} The Vanuatu representative at the United Nations speaking in support of the re-inscription of New Caledonia told the General Assembly of the French threat to cut off aid to his country.\textsuperscript{53} In the lead up to the national elections in Vanuatu, Prime Minister Lini accused the French of funding the Union of Moderate Parties, the French-speaking opposition party and expelled the French Ambassador.\textsuperscript{54} When France announced that it would retaliate by cutting its aid to Vanuatu, Lini asked France to withdraw two more

\textsuperscript{48} Helen Fraser, \textit{Pacific Report}, Vol. 2 No. 12, 6 July 1989, p. 2.  
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Radio Australia} 15-09-87.  
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Post Courier} 10 September 1987, p. 3.  
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{PIM} December 1986, p. 8.  
\textsuperscript{53} Gabriel and Kermel, Footnote 23, p. 124.  
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Islands Business} November 1987, p. 13; \textit{Radio Australia} 1-10-87.
diplomats.\textsuperscript{55} France responded by ordering a $1 million reduction in its aid and the withdrawal of 30 of its nationals working on technical assistance programmes.\textsuperscript{56}

In contrast to the marked deterioration in relations between France and both Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, it at first seemed that France would have much more success with the Solomon Islands as a result of the material and financial assistance it had provided the Solomon Islands Government in the wake of cyclone Namu. But the French efforts to improve their relations with the Solomon Islands and with Prime Minister Kenilorea in particular, backfired. The Opposition seized the opportunity to destabilise the ruling coalition and capitalise on anti-French sentiments. They accused the Prime Minister of having sold the sovereignty and integrity of the nation to a government whose colonial policies and nuclear testing the Solomon Islands bitterly opposed in return for reconstruction aid worth $S129,000 from France for his own home village.\textsuperscript{57} Following the resignation of 5 of his coalition cabinet ministers Kenilorea himself was forced to resign on November 17.\textsuperscript{58}

His successor Ezekiel Alebua reaffirmed his country’s pro-FLNKS stance and declared that the Solomon Islands would use every channel to demonstrate its solidarity with the Kanaks and to dissuade France from testing in the South Pacific.\textsuperscript{59} He even adopted a harder line than Papua New Guinea on the call by the Forum for a boycott of the South Pacific Games to be held in Noumea.\textsuperscript{60} There can be little doubt, then, that the Flosse initiatives were unsuccessful in improving relations between the Melanesian states and France. In fact, the state of France’s relations with these countries reflected those between France and the FLNKS and consequently deteriorated rapidly as a result of the Pons Plan.

\textsuperscript{55} Radio Australia 23-10-87.
\textsuperscript{56} Radio Australia 10-11-87.
\textsuperscript{57} According to the opposition the decision to finally allow the French Ambassador to present his credentials after having refused to do so since 1981 was an example of this. Alebua on becoming Prime Minister deferred yet again accreditation formalities.
\textsuperscript{58} Islands Business December 1986, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{59} Solomon Star 12-12-86, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{60} The Solomon Islands Government cancelled the landing rights of the plane that was to take its delegation to the Games. (Radio Australia 3-12-87)
Flosse's initiatives are generally thought to have yielded more favourable results in Fiji, Polynesia and even Micronesia. Perhaps the clearest case of success would be the Cook Islands. The Prime Minister, Sir Thomas Davis, fresh from a visit to Paris, had been prepared to put the French government's case against re-inscription at the 1986 Suva Forum. In 1987, his successor, Dr Robati, visited Moruroa and declared that he had been reassured by the safety arrangements there. Yet it can also be argued that this relationship between France and the Cook Islands had existed before the Flosse initiatives and were in fact a consequence of the close family and cultural ties that existed between French Polynesia and the Cook Islands. Thus Davis, although opposed to French nuclear testing at Moruroa, had already declared in 1982 that the French presence was necessary for the security of the region. At the same time the Cook Islands was moving closer to French Polynesia. In June 1984 it agreed to two meetings a year to discuss technical exchanges and co-operation in the areas of education and agriculture. Moreover, Davis had supported French Polynesia's application for observer status to the Forum in 1985, before Flosse was appointed Minister of State for the South Pacific. Ironically France was indirectly responsible for the downfall of Davis which resulted from public disquiet over the circumstances of a pending loan from France for a wood-burning scheme and the disaffection of members of Davis' Cabinet due to his failure to consult them over the $15 million loan from France. There was a further scandal over the allocation of the houses that Flosse had promised after Cyclone Sally. Moreover, the fact that the Cook Islands had applied to be a party to the Lomé convention and required the approval of France might be a further its relative silence over the events in New Caledonia in April and May of 1988.

61 see Stephen Henningham, France and the South Pacific: Prospects into the 1990s, pp.37, 45.
68 Cook Islands News 29 February 1988, pp. 1, 6, 7.
France also appears to have been able to improve its relations with Fiji as a result of the difficult situation in which that country found itself after the military coups of 1987. Following the coups Fiji adopted a much lower profile on New Caledonia and French nuclear testing, though this could also have been because it was too preoccupied by other matters. According to Fijian Foreign Affairs officials, Fiji had acted to ensure that the Forum submission on New Caledonia to the United Nations Decolonisation Committee in August 1988 was moderate. Yet Fiji, as the sole representative of the Forum countries on the Special Committee of Decolonisation, did not waver in its pursuit of the Forum objective of re-inscription. Moreover, in his opening statement at the 43rd General Assembly debate of October 1988, the Fiji delegate joined with the other South Pacific delegates to criticise French nuclear testing in the region.

Tonga could be seen as yet another example of a country where the Flosse initiatives were successful in improving France’s relations with its "Pacific neighbours". It is a country whose foreign policy is basically conservative and that is said to support the French presence in the Pacific. As a result it has refrained from publicly criticising French nuclear testing. After his visit to the French nuclear testing site of Moruroa, the King was reported to have said that he had been impressed by the conditions of perfect safety in which the people on the island worked and lived and that he had taken note of the measures taken by France to keep a constant watch over the environment and to ensure that nothing would disturb the life of the people of French Polynesia. There was also very little criticism from Tonga of the decision by France to proceed with the referendum in New Caledonia.

Tonga’s position on both nuclear testing and New Caledonia, however, has always been somewhat ambivalent. After the 1986 Forum in Suva had decided to go ahead with the re-inscription of New Caledonia at the United Nations Tonga’s Foreign Minister, Crown Prince Tupouto’a, although he had agreed to this move, seemed to indicate that he

70 Henningham, p. 43.
73 la lettre du Secrétaire charge du Pacifique Sud, Nr 6 August 1987, p. 3.
74 Ed Rampell, "Behind the celebrations", PIM September 1988, p. 36.
still had some doubts as to its appropriateness when he declared that the Forum had played into French hands.75 The King also seems to have had second thoughts about Moruroa. Not long after the demise of Chirac and Flosse the King declared that "there have been so many tests on Moruroa they’ve created gaping holes under the land and are conducting some tests in the lagoon. I think they’re probably moving away before the island collapses".76

As far as relations with Western Samoa were concerned, Flosse gave prominence to statements made by two Ministers in the Western Samoan Government. The first was a statement by the Minister for Economic Affairs, Le Tagoloa Pita, in which he described the French nuclear testing programme as a stimulating adventure for science and the promotion of understanding between peoples.77 The second was a statement by Deputy Prime Minister Tupuola Efi who praised France for its more constructive role in the South Pacific and implied an acceptance of the French presence in the South Pacific.78 Yet Flosse conveniently overlooked the fact that the Deputy Prime Minister had qualified his remarks by saying that there were still differences between the two countries about nuclear tests and other problems, while the Minister for Economic Affairs, under attack from the opposition in a parliamentary debate, denied that his visit to Moruroa showed that he supported French nuclear testing.79 Statements by other government representatives would seem to indicate that even though it had accepted French aid, Western Samoa still maintained its opposition to French policies in New Caledonia.80 Significantly, the leader of the opposition, Alesana accused the government party at the time of the general elections of April 1988 of having received money from an undisclosed source in Tahiti to

75 Islands Business September 1986, p. 20.
76 PIM September 1988, pp. 36-38.
77 A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, Nr 6 August 1987, p. 3.
78 A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, Nr 7 November 1987, p. 5.
79 Radio Australia Transcripts 19-12-87.
80 Radio Australia Transcripts 17-09-87: The Western Samoan Chairman of the Forum called for a boycott of the South Pacific Games in Noumea. See also Radio Australia Transcripts 10-10-87: In his address to the UN General Assembly, the Western Samoan Prime Minister declared the referendum result to be invalid and criticised French efforts to produce a result that favoured a continuation of French rule. See also Radio Australia Transcripts 15-10-87: The Western Samoan representative at the United Nations condemned the French tests and called on France to conduct them in France.
assist it in its campaign for re-election. It is perhaps not surprising that, as Prime Minister, Alesana has been critical of the French nuclear testing programme in the South Pacific. "Some scientists feel that Moruroa can be damaged and nuclear radiation can seep into the sea. The big question is if the tests are safe why not do them in France. .......(The French) cannot answer that. No-one can say there is no danger in testing at Moruroa. But human beings always find excuses for things that are beneficial to them."82

On the whole, then, the Flosse initiatives would seem to have been much less successful than was claimed by Flosse.83 French aid sometimes seemed tainted by corruption and scandal. Many of the beneficiaries of French aid declared that as developing countries they needed all the aid that they could get.84 They welcomed the entry of new aid donors since it enhanced their independence by increasing their ability to negotiate more favourable terms from their traditional donors.85 They maintained that economics and trade could be separated from politics and that although they had accepted French aid they would continue to criticise France over nuclear testing and over New Caledonia.86

At the regional level there seems to be little evidence that the Flosse initiatives had succeeded in moderating the stance of the Forum on New Caledonia. A meeting of Forum Foreign Ministers held in March 1987 to discuss New Caledonia called on France to delay the referendum and to engage in constructive dialogue with the FLNKS. 87The Apia Forum not only reaffirmed the position adopted at the previous Forum in Suva, it adopted resolutions that indicate a hardening of that position. The final communique called on France to abandon its proposed referendum, describing it as divisive, futile and a recipe for disaster. It called upon the United Nations special Committee on Decolonisation to recommend to the 1987 United Nations General Assembly that it endorse a UN sponsored

81 PIM September 1988, p. 47.
83 see his speech to French parliament in A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, Nr 8 January 1988, p.2.
84 Helen Fraser, Interview with Iremia Tabai, Islands Business January 1988, p. 12.
85 Helen Fraser, Interview with Iremia Tabai.
86 Helen Fraser, Interview with Iremia Tabai; Radio Australia Transcripts 19-12-87.
87 see also the statement by the then leader of the Opposition in the Cook Islands, Geoffery Henry: Cook Island News 23 February 1988, p. 4.
88 Post Courier 5 March 1987, p.2; Islands Business May 1987, p. 9.
referendum in New Caledonia consistent with the universally accepted principles and practices of self-determination and independence. It also endorsed a resolution from Papua New Guinea calling on the South Pacific Games Council to change the venue of the Games that were scheduled for New Caledonia.88

France: A force for stability in the South Pacific?

Having examined the change in the French attitude to the South Pacific from 1986 onwards and how this affected the attitudes of the various South Pacific Island countries to France and the French presence in their region, we will now consider what effect this presence had on relations between the Island states and on regional organisation. While the Flosse initiatives were to have only a limited effect on the relations between the members of the Forum, the same cannot be said of two phenomena that have already been shown in the previous chapter to be directly attributable to the French presence: the formation of sub-regional groupings and the Libyan threat.89 Both these phenomena provoked regional disunity and at times seemed to threaten the Forum itself.

Flosse, of course, could not admit to France being in any way responsible for destabilising the region. He tried instead to turn to France’s advantage what he called “political changes”: the increased interest of foreign powers such as Japan, Russia and Libya in the region and the tensions that had arisen between members of the South Pacific Forum. "As such, France will continue to make its contribution to the political balance and the strategic stability of the South Pacific."90

Playing on the concern of some Forum members at the likely consequences for the stability of the region if the situation in Fiji should deteriorate, Flosse maintained that a

88 Communique of the 18th South Pacific Forum held in Apia May 29-30 1987.
89 See, for example, the statement made by Hayden to reporters: “In the view of the Australian government the decolonisation experiences of Vanuatu and New Caledonia are directly responsible for the Libyans arriving to stir the South Pacific pot. ...The Australian government welcomes reports that France intends to increase its financial and other assistance to the South Pacific region. But it does seem a great contradiction to do this and at the same time help create circumstances in which Libyan agents will prosper.” PIM June 1987, p. 18.
90 A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, Nr 4 May 1987, p. 3; Nr 5 June 1987, p. 8.
French withdrawal from New Caledonia would result in a much worse situation than that in Fiji. Without French troops in the territory there would be civil war between the Caldoches and the Kanaks. France, he concluded, was a stabilising force in the South Pacific. He also attempted to exploit renewed fears by some Forum countries about the increased involvement of Libya and the Soviet Union in the region to convince the South Pacific states of the need for a continuation of the French presence in New Caledonia. Should France leave New Caledonia, he claimed, the USSR and Libya would be quick to fill the resulting power vacuum. As part of his campaign for a strengthening of the Western Alliance in the Pacific he called for a conference of all the Pacific powers concerned including Australia, New Zealand, the United States, France and Great Britain to define a policy for the South Pacific.

Some South Pacific leaders, particularly those of Melanesia, continued to see France as a destabilising influence in the region. Renagi Lohia, Papua New Guinea Ambassador at the United Nations, declared that: "The French government's colonial policies together with its nuclear and military expansion policies in the South Pacific are a direct threat to peace, security and stability that we all enjoy in our region and they have serious implications for international peace and security." The issue of Libyan ties with the ni-Vanuatu government and the Independence movement in New Caledonia re-emerged in 1987 when the Australian media claimed that both the Front Uni pour la Liberation Kanak, and prominent figures in Vanuatu had received large sums of money from Libya and that a group of 50 ni-Vanuatu were to be sent to Libya for para-military training. Vanuatu had been the only South Pacific state to criticise the US bombing raid on Libya in 1986 and had established diplomatic relations with Libya that same year. In March 1987 a Libyan delegation reportedly visited Port Radio Australia Transcripts, 27-05-87.

93 Radio Australia Transcripts, 3-06-87.
94 Islands Business, April 1987, p. 19; see also Wingti's speech earlier in this chapter.
95 David Hegarty, p. 11.
96 Islands Business May 1987, p. 7.

For the present attitude of the FLNKS towards Libya and the link between the personal ambitions of FULK leader, Uregei, and the Libyans see Fraser, Pacific Report, Vol. 2 No. 12, 6 July 1989, pp. 1-2.
Vila to discuss the opening of a "people's bureau" there and economic aid. The controversy reached a climax when in response to reports that Australia intended to make relations between island countries and Libya an important issue at the Apia Forum, Vanuatu’s Prime Minister Lini warned that if that were to happen then it would be the end of the Forum. The Prime Minister of Western Samoa, as Chairman of the Forum, criticised Australia for overreacting on the issue of Libya.

Although the other Melanesian states had earlier indicated that they shared Australia’s concern over Libyan influence in the South Pacific, at the May Melanesian Spearhead Group meeting in Rabaul in May 1987, Prime Minister Alebua of the Solomon Islands issued a statement in the name of the group warning the superpowers against using the Libyan issue to divide the group. In what could only have been a reference to French actions in the region, he declared: "We believe that the powers that perpetuate terrorism in the region do not include Libya." Prime Minister Wingti of Papua New Guinea criticised Australia for getting its priorities wrong. The struggle of the Kanaks, he maintained was more important than the situation in Fiji or the alleged destabilisation by Libya.

Whereas the storm over links with Libya mainly affected relations between Australia and New Zealand and the Melanesian states, the formation of sub-regional groupings such as the Melanesian Spearhead and the Polynesian Community threatened to divide the Island states on the basis of race. We have already seen in the previous chapter how the dissatisfaction of the independent Melanesian states with the Forum’s stance on New Caledonia had led to the formation of the Melanesian Spearhead. Yet even after the Melanesian States had obtained Forum endorsement of re-inscription at Suva in 1986 their interest in the Spearhead did not wane. The consolidation of the Spearhead over the next two years was probably due to the realisation on the part of the Melanesian countries of the value of pre-Forum caucuses in achieving common objectives at the Forum. It may

97 Islands Business June 1987, p. 28.
98 Islands Business June 1987, p. 25.
100 Post Courier 21 May 1987, p. 2.
101 Radio Australia Transcripts 27-05-87.
have been, too, that the leaders of the Melanesian countries at that time saw the existence of such an alliance as useful for the purposes of domestic politics. It is also likely that, with the deterioration of relations between the French authorities and the Kanaks in New Caledonia, the three independent Melanesian states saw in the Spearhead the best means of demonstrating their solidarity with the struggle of their fellow Melanesians for an independent Kanaky.

On the 14th March 1988 the Prime Ministers of the three independent Melanesian states met in Port Vila to sign a document that gave formal recognition to the existence of the Spearhead group. Called the "Agreed Principles of Co-operation among independent states in Melanesia" the document reaffirmed the Group’s support for the FLNKS by declaring independence to be the inalienable right of colonial countries and peoples. At the same time, however, the three signatories were very much aware of the dangers of such a regional sub-grouping. By emphasising in the agreement their commitment to work to promote co-operation within existing regional structures, they were attempting to reassure those who might perceive the formation of the group as a threat to the unity of the Forum.102 Their subsequent denials that the Spearhead in any way threatened regional solidarity and Melanesian support for the Forum would seem to indicate that there was a genuine fear that the group could jeopardise regional unity.

Moves by the Polynesian states to form their own regional sub-grouping would seem to confirm that this fear was in fact well-grounded. There is some uncertainty as to who first proposed the idea of a Polynesian Community but as with the Spearhead Group France has to bear at least some of the responsibility. Flosse was quite eager to give the credit for the idea to the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands at the time, Sir Tom Davis, who according to Flosse was concerned by the exclusion of the dependent territories of American Samoa and French Polynesia from the regional trading and transport agreements of the Forum. Nevertheless, some commentators have seen it as a "French plot", an important part of France’s overall strategy to increase its influence in the region and undermine the consensus that existed among the Forum states over New Caledonia.103

103 Islands Business February 1988, p. 38; PIM September 1988, p. 49.
Yet even if the idea did not originate with Flosse, he certainly did everything he could to promote it. The idea to set up some kind of organisation to economic, cultural and social co-operation between the Polynesian peoples was discussed at a meeting organised by Flosse between himself, the King of Tonga, the Western Samoan Minister for Financial Affairs and the Cook Islands Foreign Minister in Rarotonga in July 1987.\textsuperscript{104} Flosse is also reported to have raised the matter with visiting delegations from Western Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands in Paris in October that year.\textsuperscript{105} Moreover, the fact that the idea of a Polynesian Community has faded from the scene since the political demise of Flosse in May 1988 would seem to support the assertion that Flosse was a major force behind the push for such a Community.

At a meeting in Apia in November 1987 Flosse, the Deputy Prime Minister of Western Samoa, Tupuola Efi and the Lieutenant Governor of American Samoa, Eni Hunkin, decided that a working committee would meet on Rarotonga in March 1988 to draw up a formal agreement to be signed by the participating countries at a later date. The agreement was to cover co-operation in trade, transportation, cultural and sporting activities, education and technical assistance. Despite the concern expressed by some of the participants that the Polynesian Community might be seen as an attempt to negate the Melanesian group in the Forum, the fact that the development of the organisation largely paralleled that of the Spearhead Group would seem to suggest that the move to set up the Polynesian Community, if not an attempt to negate the Melanesian Spearhead, was definitely a reaction to it.\textsuperscript{106}

The return of the Socialists: the dawn of a new era?

The events of April 1988 in New Caledonia threatened to negate even the limited successes of the Flosse initiatives. The dramatic events at Ouvea and the military

\textsuperscript{104} A letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, Nr 6, August 1987, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{105} A letter from the Minister for the South Pacific, Nr 7, November 1987, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{106} Islands Business February 1988, pp. 9, 38; see also the comment by the Crown Prince of Tonga to this effect: Matangi Tonga July-August 1988, p. 11.
operation mounted by France to end the siege brought sharp criticism from countries which until then had remained silent.\textsuperscript{107} Fiji Prime Minister Ratu Mara called on France to exercise restraint and understanding in its handling of New Caledonia and said that Gunboat diplomacy was not the solution. He compared the situation of the Kanaks to that of the indigenous Fijians and called for the birthrights of the Kanaks to be preserved and consolidated.\textsuperscript{108}

Just when it seemed that the Forum would have to adopt an even tougher stance on New Caledonia an event 20,000 kilometres away in Europe was once again to change the direction of the crisis in New Caledonia. The victory of Mitterand in the French presidential elections and the subsequent defeat of the centre-right coalition in the elections for the National Assembly was welcomed by the Forum members who preferred to await, just as they had done in 1981, the announcement of the new French government’s policies on New Caledonia before they considered taking any further action themselves.\textsuperscript{109}

The announcement of the Rocard Plan and the signing of the Matignon Accords on June 26 1988 by the representatives of the two opposing sides in the New Caledonian conflict, Jacques Lafleur and Jean-Marie Tjibaou, was well-received by the members of the Forum.\textsuperscript{110} Consequently for the first time in seven years New Caledonia was not a major issue at the annual Forum meeting. The final communiqué of the 1988 Nuku’alofa Forum declared that the Forum was encouraged by the new spirit of constructive dialogue in its relations with France.\textsuperscript{111} Even ni-Vanuatu Prime Minister Lini declared that as far as New Caledonia was concerned the Forum had done all it was supposed to and that the emphasis would now be on economic rather than political issues.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{107} For a detailed account of these events see \textit{Islands Business} May 1988, pp.5, 9.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Radio Australia Transcripts} 2-05-88.
\textsuperscript{109} The special July meeting of Forum Foreign Ministers called to review the Forum position on New Caledonia before the August 10 session of the United Nations Decolonisation Committee was cancelled at the request of Fiji and Tonga who considered it premature and unnecessary: Helen Fraser, \textit{Pacific Report No. 9}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Islands Business} August 1988, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Islands Business} October 1988, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Islands Business} October 1988, p. 12.
The present atmosphere of goodwill that prevails in the South Pacific would seem more conducive to the success of initiatives such as those undertaken by Flosse. Ironically the socialist victory in France that was largely responsible for this was also responsible for the demise of Flosse. With the defeat of the centre-conservative government of Jacques Chirac the position of Secretary for State for the South Pacific was abolished and Flosse lost his job.\textsuperscript{113}

Yet the Socialists were to honour the agreements signed by Flosse and to maintain French efforts to improve its image and its relations with the states of the South Pacific. During a visit to the region in February 1987, France’s Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs Edwige Avice, announced that her country planned to give more aid to the South Pacific countries for development projects in areas such as health, transport and education and envisaged a greater role for regional bodies in administering these projects. She also said the new French government would encourage links between the French University of the South Pacific and Australian universities.\textsuperscript{114} France has continued to focus its attention on Fiji and is now Fiji’s largest single aid donor.\textsuperscript{115} The extensive aid package consented to by the previous French government has been maintained. There were even reports that France was considering funding a naval base in Fiji.\textsuperscript{116}

The South Pacific Council that had been established under the previous socialist administration has been re-activated.\textsuperscript{117} The new Government’s approach to the South Pacific maintains the basic objectives of its predecessor: increased co-operation between the French territories and the independent island states of the South Pacific, greater involvement of the dependent territories in the conduct of French foreign policy in the region and a closer integration of France in the region.\textsuperscript{118} Moreover, the socialists, like their predecessors, still insist on the right of France to be a full member of the South Pacific community on an equal footing with the Forum countries and that as a Pacific nation France is entitled to use its territory in the Pacific to test its nuclear weapons.

\textsuperscript{113} He also lost his seat in the National Assembly: \textit{Islands Business} August 1988, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{The Australian}, 6-07-89, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Radio Australia Transcripts}, 16-06-89.
\textsuperscript{117} Helen Fraser, \textit{Pacific Report} No. 18, 24 November 1988, p. 5.
real change as far as French policy is concerned seems to be that, whereas the previous government had seen itself in competition with Australia and New Zealand for influence in the region, the Rocard Government stresses collaboration and consultation with these countries to promote development, stability and moderation in the region.

The return to a situation of relative peace in New Caledonia has been accompanied by a marked loss of interest by Forum states in sub-regional groupings. With changes of government in Western Samoa, the Cook Islands and French Polynesia support for the idea has waned, despite the King of Tonga’s enthusiasm for such an initiative. Alesana, who became Prime Minister of Western Samoa in early 1988, has made no secret of his opposition to sub-regional groupings: “I abhor Spearhead Group of Melanesian Nations because I do not support the idea of small regional blocs created within the region because of colour, creed of religious belief. ...This would not result in any form of stability or harmony.”

A similar change in attitude to regional sub-groupings has also occurred in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, it too a result of changes of government in these two states. Michael Somare, Foreign Minister in the new Papua New Guinea Government of Namaliu, has made quite clear his opposition - on grounds similar to those advanced by Alesana - to the continuation of the Melanesian Spearhead Group. The region, he said, should not be divided along racist lines. With its major proponent, Paias Wingti, no longer in office and its initial raison d’être, the New Caledonian crisis over, if not permanently then at least for the time being, the group has lost its momentum. Significantly, there was no Melanesian caucus as in previous years either before or during the 1988 Tonga Forum. The Libyan threat has also ceased to be a major concern.

Yet although some of the manifestations of France’s destabilising influence in the South Pacific have almost vanished, the problems that gave rise to them still remain, problems which at any moment could destabilise the region. France continues to test its nuclear weapons at Moruroa despite alarming scientific reports about the risks of radio-

119 Islands Business June 1988, p. 27.
120 Pim September 1988, p. 49.
121 Helen Fraser, Pacific Report No. 9, 21 July 1988, p. 3.
active leaks and the South Pacific Island states continue to voice their opposition to these tests\textsuperscript{123}. Although the French government has recently announced that it will reduce the frequency of its tests - not out of deference to Island opinion but as a measure to cut defence spending - it has also declared that it has no intention of ending its testing programme.\textsuperscript{124}

Furthermore, it is still not certain that a lasting solution to the problem of New Caledonia has been found. Indeed as the recent tragic killing of Tjibaou and Yeweine has shown, the peace in New Caledonia is an uneasy one and very much dependent on how the territory evolves in the future. The situation could deteriorate quite rapidly into one of violent confrontation and the Forum would then find itself confronted once again with the problem of New Caledonia.\textsuperscript{125}

The evolution of the situation in New Caledonia, however, is not the only factor that will determine the success of the Matignon Accords. Their successful implementation is also contingent on political developments in metropolitan France. With at least one more general election and one presidential election scheduled to be held in France before the 1996 referendum that will decide the future of New Caledonia, there is still the possibility that a future administration in France might overturn the present socialist government’s policy on New Caledonia just as Chirac did in 1986. Despite French claims to be a Pacific nation, its national policy, determined in Paris, still reflects its preoccupation with domestic and European concerns. As a democratic country with the overwhelming majority of its electors in Europe this can hardly be otherwise.

The period from the victory of the centre-right coalition in France in 1986 to the present-day has witnessed a change in France’s attitude to the independent Island states of the South Pacific. With the Flosse initiatives of the Chirac Government France set about developing its relations with its South Pacific neighbours, mainly through bilateral economic and technical assistance programmes and generous grants and loans. This new policy of co-operation and gentle persuasion, however, had a twofold purpose. Firstly, it

\textsuperscript{123} Andrew Revkin, "Death Atoll", The Sydney Morning Herald 13-05-89, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{124} "France to continue Pacific nuclear tests", Canberra Times 19-06-89, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{125} Tjibaou had already criticised its lack of progress and emphasised the fact that the peace plan might not last 5 years in an interview in The Age, 9-01-89, p. 8.
was supposed to overcome the hostility of the South Pacific states towards France. Secondly, it was designed to offset the negative reactions of the Island countries to the Chirac Government’s new policy in New Caledonia.

The Flosse initiatives failed to reduce the hostility of the Melanesian countries towards France and despite claims to the contrary there is no conclusive evidence that they had a moderating effect on the attitude of the Polynesian states. The Forum as a whole continued to actively pursue the re-inscription of New Caledonia at the United Nations. On many occasions Flosse’s initiatives actually backfired, resulting in a deterioration of relations between France and the country concerned and the discrediting of those politicians who had been involved.

More significantly, the initiatives undertaken by the Chirac Government in both New Caledonia and in the South Pacific region generally had negative consequences for the stability and unity of the region. The implementation of the Pons Plan in New Caledonia brought about a consolidation of the Melanesian Spearhead Grouping while France openly encouraged the formation of the Polynesian Community in what would appear to be a replay of the age old game of divide and rule. This return to a policy of confrontation in New Caledonia also encouraged a faction of the FLNKS and the Vanuaku Party of Vanuatu to consolidate their ties with Libya. Both the formation of regional sub-groupings and the threat of Libyan involvement in the region became divisive issues in regional politics.

With the return of a socialist Government in France in 1988 these tensions have subsided. The Forum states, be they Polynesian or Melanesian, have welcomed France’s new political initiatives in New Caledonia. The socialist Government has continued with its predecessor’s policy of promoting co-operation between France and the independent Island states. It has even gone one step further by declaring that there should be greater integration of its Pacific territories in the region.

Yet despite this new spirit of co-operation, France still insists on its right to be part of the region and on its right to continue testing its nuclear weapons there in defiance of the expressed wishes of the independent states of the region. The conflict between two
legitimate perceptions of world order remains. France still asserts the right of a the larger power to impose its will and its interests on those too weak to prevent it from doing so. The Island states continue to maintain that they have the right to determine collectively what outside powers can and cannot do in their region.
The French presence in the South Pacific is a major, if not the major, determining factor of inter-state relations in the South Pacific. In the earlier period, covered in Chapter Two, France resisted Islander demands that they should control the South Pacific Commission and insisted on its right to test its nuclear weapons in the South Pacific against the wishes of the states of that region. This opposition to Island demands for regional self-determination was shown to have been instrumental in the formation of the South Pacific Forum by ensuring Islander support for a type of regional organisation that had been originally conceived to serve the needs of the colonial powers and as such was an important agent of regional unity.

In the 1980s, however, the French presence, far from being a source of regional unity, was to have a divisive and destabilising effect on inter-state relations in the region. Chapters Three and Four showed how the issue of decolonisation in New Caledonia came to dominate discussions at the annual meetings of the South Pacific Forum, with members divided over what action the Forum should take to encourage the decolonisation process. The differences of opinion over New Caledonia reinforced existing ethnic and cultural divisions in the region and there were moves to formalise these divisions through the formation of two sub-regional groupings: the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Polynesian Community.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group was a consequence of the dissatisfaction of the three Melanesian states, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with both French policy on decolonisation and the position adopted by the Forum in relation to that policy. It grew out of what had initially been an attempt by these three states to coordinate their efforts to change French policy on decolonisation and to obtain the endorsement of the Forum for the re-inscription of New Caledonia at the United Nations. France had an even more direct role in the moves to establish the Polynesian community. Although in part a reaction to the formation of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, these
moves were vigorously promoted, perhaps even instigated, by France in order to divide the Forum and thus weaken opposition to its policies in the South Pacific in general and undermine support for the re-inscription at the United Nations in particular.

Chapters Three and Four also showed how the French presence in the South Pacific encouraged the Libyans to take an interest in the region and how its policies both in New Caledonia and in the South Pacific generally led sections of the FLNKS and the government of Vanuatu to seek Libyan assistance, thereby adding to the sources of regional tension and disunity.

The question arises as to why France should be so determined to maintain its presence in the region when that presence was having such a destabilising effect in a region that had previously been the preserve of the Western powers. In Chapter One France's strong commitment to remaining in the South Pacific was shown to be a consequence of its firm belief that such a presence was vital to its national security and to its status as a medium-sized world power.

The real problem with the French presence in the South Pacific is that in any conflict between its national security interests in Europe and regional interest in the South Pacific the former will inevitably take precedence, as was demonstrated in the Rainbow Warrior incident. Until recently there had been no attempt by the French to comprehend the dynamic of regional relations. Little effort was made to improve contacts between its territories and the other states in the region. The territories were parts of European France in the Pacific. The French, preoccupied with problems of more relevance to their national security in Europe and Africa, were largely indifferent to the security of the states in the South Pacific region. Yet its exhortations to those Forum states, rightfully concerned about the stability of their region, to stop interfering in its internal affairs, was in stark contrast to its own interference in the internal affairs of Poland in Europe.

The conflict between France and the independent Island states of the South Pacific is a contest between two diametrically opposed perceptions of world order for legitimacy, a contest between the French view that it is legitimate for a larger power to impose its will on weaker states and the view of the Island states that what happens in their region should
be determined by them. Although France now seems prepared to make some changes to its now acknowledged position of arrogance, certain things remain unnegotiable. How long they remain so will depend on developments affecting changes in the attitude of the French state and the French electors vis a vis their national security and their role in world affairs. As France surrenders more and more of its sovereignty to the European Community, it is likely to be less preoccupied with the maintenance of its image as a world power. It will no longer need the remnants of its Empire to give it the status of a medium-sized world power, since the European Community in terms of economic and military capacity is a world power.

Current trends in international politics would suggest that France’s commitment to modernising and upgrading its nuclear arsenal will suffer a similar fate. The Gorbachev initiatives concerning reductions in both conventional and nuclear weapons in the European theatre and the wave of liberalisation that is sweeping Eastern Europe are overcoming the perennial feelings of distrust, suspicion and insecurity of the Western Europeans. This change in attitudes has been reinforced by similar developments on the global scene where economic concerns seem to be replacing military strategic interests as the major determinants of national policy and of alliances between states.

As East-West tensions diminish and the priority shifts from military security to economic competitiveness, France is likely to become less willing to waste valuable resources on the modernisation of its nuclear weapons. As such it will be less convinced of the necessity to test in the South Pacific and less committed to maintaining its presence in that part of the world.
NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

The Age
The Australian
A letter from the Minister for the South Pacific
Backgrounder
Bulletin
The Canberra Times
The Cook Islands News
The Dominion
The Financial Review
Islands Business
La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat chargé du Pacifique Sud
Le Monde
Libération (Paris)
Matangi Tonga
Niugini Nius
Pacific Islands Monthly (PIM)
Pacific Report
Papua New Guinea Foreign Affairs Recorder
The Post Courier (Port Moresby)
Radio Australia Transcripts
The Solomon Star
The Sydney Morning Herald
United States Information Service Wireless Reports
BOOKS, THESES AND ARTICLES


Dornoy, Politics in New Caledonia, Sydney University Press, Adelaide, 1984, p. 68


Forsyth, W.D., "France and the South Pacific Commission", in New Guinea and Australia, the Pacific and South East Asia, Sept./Oct. 1970


Fry, G.E., "Regionalism and International Politics of the South Pacific" *Pacific Affairs*, Fall 1981


Standish, Bill, "Melanesian Neighbours", Basic Paper No. 9, Legislative Research Service, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 1984


Young, P. Lewis, "France, still a power, though far from home", Pacific Defence Reporter, March 1986.

**MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS**

*ADAB Submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence: Australia’s Relations with the South Pacific, March 1987.*


*Decolonisation* Vol.II No.6 December 1975, UN Department of Political Affairs, Trusteeship and Decolonisation, pp.4-6.


"Le Pacifique Sud", a dossier constituted by Isabelle Mallézé in the series *Problèmes Politiques et Sociaux*, No. 545, La Documentation Française.
