The South Pacific Island Countries and France:

A Study in Inter-state Relations

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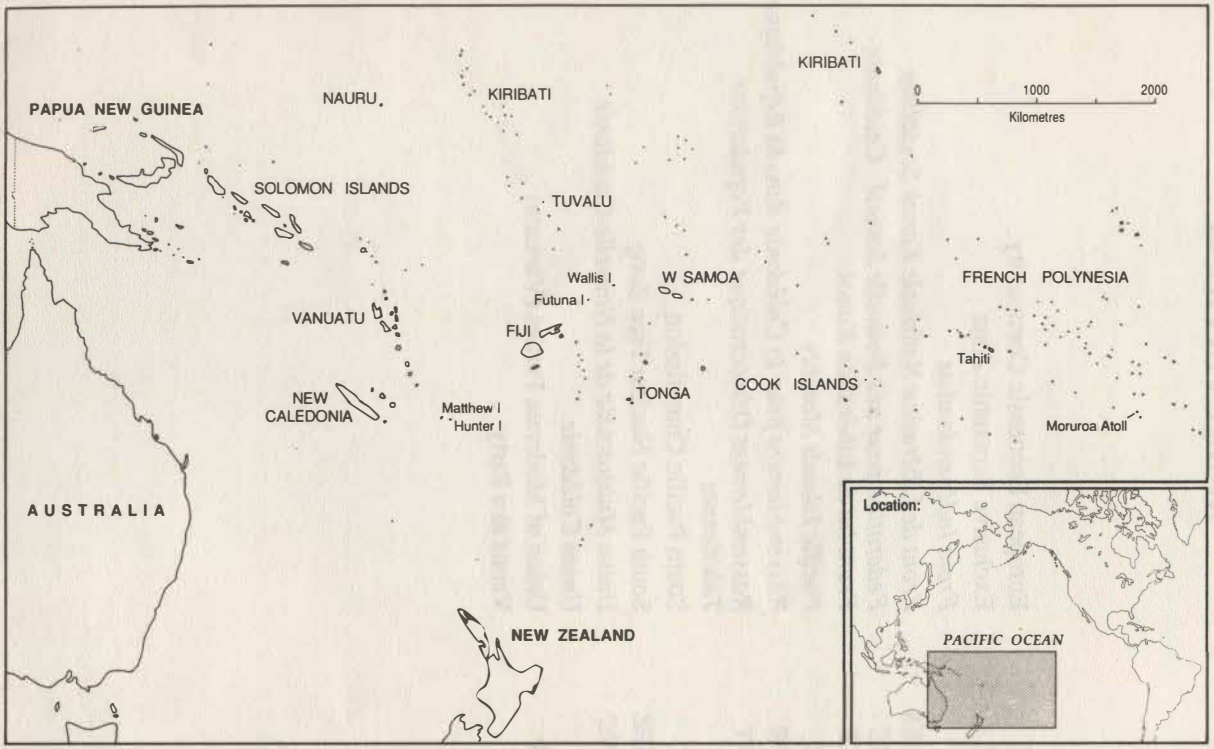
ABBREVIATIONS

EEC	European Economic Community
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FI	*Front Indépendantiste*
FLNKS	*Front de Libération Nationale Kanak Socialiste*
FNSC	*Federation pour une Nouvelle Societé Calédonie*
FULK	*Front Ini de Libération Kanak*
PIM	*Pacific Islands Monthly*
RCPR	*Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République*
RDPT	*Rassemblement Démocratique des Populations Tahitiennes*
SPC	South Pacific Commission
SPNFZ	South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone
UMNC	*Union Multiraciàle de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*
UC	*Union Calédonie*
UMP	Union of Moderate Parties (Vanuatu)
VP	Vanua'aku Party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NEW CALEDONIA
Matthew I
Hunter I
TONGA
COOK ISLANDS
Moruroa Atoll
AUSTRALIA
NEW ZEALAND
Location:
PACIFIC OCEAN

INTRODUCTION

This monograph examines the impact of the French presence in the South Pacific on interstate relations in the region from 1960 to 1990. 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 the independent South Pacific Island states and on regional stability and unity in general.

For the purposes of this study the independent South Pacific Island states are the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Western Samoa. The group is co-extensive with the South Pacific Forum, with the notable exceptions of Australia and New Zealand.

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 five of the twenty-three colonial territories in the South Pacific—Fiji, Tonga, Western Samoa, Nauru and the Cook Islands—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. 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 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.

Inter-island relations have been affected by the French presence in the South Pacific in several ways. Island countries have reacted, sometimes similarly, sometimes differently, to French nuclear testing, to French policies on decolonisation in its South Pacific territories and to French official attitudes concerning the role and structure of the South Pacific Commission. Relations between the Island states have also been affected by French aid diplomacy in the region, particularly after 1986. They have also been affected, albeit indirectly, by France's privileged relations with two outside powers—the United States and the United Kingdom—through its membership of the Atlantic Alliance, by its relations with other non-South Pacific countries such as Japan and Libya, and finally by its relations with the two non-Island members of the South Pacific Forum, Australia and New Zealand.

Indeed, the effects that France's relations with non-Island countries have had on inter-island relations have been far from insubstantial. 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 and New Zealand who have had to choose between their allegiance to the Western Alliance and the necessity to preserve stability in the region, between solidarity with other members of the Forum and trade opportunities with France and the EEC.

Relations between France and the non-Island states are not dealt with in this monograph. The decision to exclude them was not an arbitrary one. The author firmly believes that their exclusion enables the study to focus more on the concerns of the independent Island countries, concerns which in other studies have too often been overshadowed by those of Australia, New Zealand and the so-called great powers. Further, such an exclusion makes it possible to view the French presence from a Pacific Island perspective rather than from the more usual East-West perspective. The study does, however, make 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 those states.

It has been alleged by certain 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.[1] 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.[2] The present study does not attempt a full and systematic account of these internal developments, but is interested in them to the extent necessary to understand their impact on inter-state relations in the South Pacific. 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.[3]

Chapter One analyses the nature of the presence while Chapter Two considers the strength of France's commitment to remaining in the region. The third chapter examines the early incidence 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 Four looks at how the issue of the decolonisation of the Anglo-French condominium of the New Hebrides became a concern of the independent Island states and a source of tension between these states and France. Chapter Five demonstrates the effect of French policies on decolonisation in New Caledonia and events within the Territory itself on the relations of Island countries both with France and with each other during the period from 1981 to 1986 when the Socialists were in government in France. Chapter Six examines the initiatives that were taken by the conservative French government of Jacques Chirac to improve its relations with the independent South Pacific Island states and evaluates their effect on the attitudes of these countries both to the issue of decolonisation in New Caledonia and to France generally. It also analyses the impact of the concomitant changes in French policy on decolonisation in New Caledonia not only on the relations of the Island nations with France but also on relations between the Island countries themselves. The

seventh 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 1988.

Endnotes

1 Jean Chesneaux, 'France in the South Pacific: Global Approach or Respect for Regional Agendas', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol.18, No.2, 1986; John Dalton, 'France and Conflict in the South Pacific', a paper presented at the International Conference on Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies, USP, Suva, Fiji, December 1985; Stephen Henningham: 'France and the South Pacific', *Discussion Paper No.2*, Legislative Research Service, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 1988.

2 John Connell, *New Caledonia or Kanaky: The Political History of French Colony*, National Centre for Development Studies, Canberra, 1987; Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign*, Penguin Books, rev. ed., Melbourne, 1986; Myriam Dornoy, *Politics in New Caledonia*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1984; Helen Fraser, 'New Caledonia: Anti-Colonialism in a Pacific Territory', *Discussion Paper No.2*, Legislative Research Service, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 1987; Claude Gabriel and Vincent Kermel, *Nouvelle-Calédonie: La Révolte Kanak*, PEC, Montreuil, 1985.

3 Ron Crocombe and A. Ali (eds), *Foreign Forces in Pacific Politics*, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1983; Stewart Firth, *Nuclear Playground*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1987; G.E. Fry, *South Pacific Regionalism*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Department of Political Science, ANU, 1979; R.A. Herr, *Regionalism in the South Seas*, PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 1976; John Ravenhill, *No Longer an American Lake? Alliance Problems in the South Pacific*, edited by John Ravenhill, Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1989.

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 region.

The French presence in the region 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.[1] 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] 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.[3] 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.[4] France has the third largest contingent in the South Pacific after Australia and New Zealand. In 1988 there were 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.[5] There were 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) were gendarmes who although nominally under the command of the army are actually responsible for maintaining internal law and order. Thirteen hundred personnel were attached to the Pacific Naval Squadron in Noumea. This squadron had two frigates, four patrol and coastal boats, three amphibians, some six support craft and four Guardian maritime reconnaissance aircraft.

Whereas the number of military personnel stationed in French Polynesia has changed only slightly in the last five years, the number of those stationed in New Caledonia has been subject to quite substantial variations. These are a reflection of the internal security situation in New Caledonia rather than a response to variations in external threat perceptions. Thus in 1984 there were about 5,000 in French Polynesia but only 2,800 in New Caledonia. In 1986 and 1987 while there were still some 5,400 military personnel in French Polynesia the military presence in New Caledonia had been increased to 4,900. This increase was a reaction not to any new external threat to the region but to internal unrest. Consequently following the return of the socialists to government in France in 1988 and the signing of the Matignon Accords the French military presence in New Caledonia has been considerably reduced.

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 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.[6]

France also maintains a large scientific and technical research presence. Many of France's leading research institutes have bases in its South Pacific 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 Malarde* is a world leader in research on ciguatera (fish poisoning), leprosy and filariosis.[7] 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.[8] Although the lion's share of French aid goes to its own territories—in 1986 $US452.33 million out of a total of $US460.23 million—France does give bilateral aid to some of the independent South Pacific countries.[9] In 1986 some 64.7 million FF was set aside for Vanuatu and a further 18.5 million FF for the other independent South Pacific states.[10] Of this Fiji received 5.3 million FF, the Cook Islands 6.9 million FF and Papua New Guinea 1.7 million FF.[11] An additional 10 million FF was set aside for emergency aid or special projects. In 1987 there was a significant increase in French aid to the independent South Pacific Island countries. This increase, however, was largely attributable to a substantial increase in the funds set aside for special projects and emergency aid, the distribution of which was the responsibility of the French Secretary of State for the South Pacific Gaston Flosse, and to a sixfold increase in French aid to Fiji. Moreover, this increase was offset by a reduction of over 50 per cent in French aid to Vanuatu. Whereas France gave 17.4 million FF to the other South Pacific Island states and only 28.3 million FF to Vanuatu, an extra 30 million FF went to Fiji and 29 million FF to the South Pacific Co-operation Fund for special projects and emergency aid. It should also be remembered that 1986 and 1987 were both exceptional years in terms of French aid to the region. As we shall see later in Chapter Five this increase in French aid to the independent South Pacific Island states, with the notable exception of Vanuatu, was part of a diplomatic initiative by the newly elected Chirac government to change regional attitudes towards France and its presence in the South Pacific.

France makes substantial contributions to multilateral aid in the region. A member of the South Pacific Commission, it 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 contribution to the Commission's budget was US$649,000 or 13.9 per cent of the total, making France the fourth largest contributor after Australia, the US and New Zealand.[12] It also contributed US$678,000 in extra budgetary funds (6.9 per cent of the total), the second largest contribution after that of the US.[13] A member of the EEC, France contributes to the Development Fund of the Lomé Accords, 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 per cent 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.[14] In 1986 France's contribution to the development Fund was 33 million FF or 23.5 per cent of total contributions.[15]

France also has a considerable diplomatic and cultural presence with embassies in Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Vanuatu. There are *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, although Vanuatu still has strong commercial ties with the French territory of New Caledonia.

France, therefore, has quite a considerable presence in the region and one that exceeds by far that of its traditional rival in the region, Great Britain. Indeed, whereas the British colonial presence has diminished rather markedly in the 1970s and 1980s with the granting of independence to all but one of its former possessions in the region, that of France has remained as strong if not stronger.[16]

Endnotes

1 The following information concerning the annexation by France of its South Pacific territories is taken from Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The French Pacific Islands*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971, pp.15-16.

2 Thompson and Adloff, p.239.

3 Thompson and Adloff, p.231.

4 P. Lewis Young, 'France, still a power, though far from home', *Pacific Defence Reporter*, March 1986, p.13.

5 These and subsequent figures concerning the French military presence in the South Pacific are from the 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89 annual editions of *The Military Balance*, IISS, London.

6 Young, p.45.

7 *Islands Business*, November 1986, p.18.

8 *ADAB Submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on Australia's Relations with the South Pacific*, March 1987, p.54.

9 *ADAB Submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on Australia's Relations with the South Pacific*, p.S2719.

10 In December 1986 $1 US was worth 6.6 FF. In December 1987 $1 US was worth 5.5 FF.

11 Figures obtained from the French Embassy in Canberra: see Annex 1.

12 Figures obtained from *Proposed Integrated Work Programme and Budget for the 1989 Financial Year*, SPC, Noumea, 1988, p.14.

13 Figures obtained from *Proposed Three-Year Integrated Work Programme and Budget-1990-1992*, SPC, Noumea, 1989, p.201.

14 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.

15 Figures obtained from the French Embassy in Canberra: see Annex.

16 The one remaining British possession is Pitcairn Island.

Chapter Two

THE STRENGTH OF THE FRENCH COMMITMENT TO REMAINING IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

While Chapter One looked briefly at the French presence both past and present, it did not explain why France is committed to remaining in the South Pacific in defiance of the global trend towards decolonisation. Yet the effects of the French presence on inter-state relations in the region are largely the result of the reactions of the independent Island states to France's unwillingness to change the fundamental nature of its presence. This chapter will examine the reasons advanced by both French and non-French commentators to explain why France has maintained and even reinforced its presence in the South Pacific.

Any discussion of the reasons for the continued French presence is however 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 validity of a particular reason for that of the French state.[1] 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 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.[2]

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, France had resigned itself to the gradual but inevitable loss of its colonial empire.[3] The 1957 decree which gave increased local autonomy to French colonies was quickly followed by the granting by France of independence to all but one of its African possessions.[4] 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, in 1963 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.[5] 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 World War II, 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.[6] By acquiring their own nuclear deterrent, the French hoped to overcome any doubts in their own minds and more importantly 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.[7]

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 World War II 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.[8] 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.[9]

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 thirty-six per cent of the votes.[10] 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.[11] Pouvanaa himself denounced the shameful frame-up and the political character and purpose of his imprisonment and trial.[12] Despite the complete absence of any evidence that Pouvanaa had been the instigator of the arson, he was found guilty and sentenced to eight years of solitary confinement and fifteen years of banishment from French Polynesia.[13] He was sent to France where he remained until 1968. De Gaulle had effectively neutralised him.[14]

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* in the Territory 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.[15]

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 the 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. 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.[16] 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.[17] 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.[18]

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.[19] Pressure from such countries on France to abandon its tests is likely to be far more effective than that of small and remote Pacific states. Such a move would also increase domestic awareness of the issue and risk destroying the 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 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.[20]

Criticism of French policy has not 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.[21]

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 government's commitment to the 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. 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.[22] Nuclear weapons still form the basis of French strategic military doctrine. Those in charge of France's 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. Its commitment to remaining in the South Pacific—or at least in French Polynesia—has been very strong.

A further indication of the strength of France's commitment to continue testing in the Pacific was the cession in 1964 of the atolls Moruroa and Fangataufa by the Territory to France 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.[23]

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 that 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.[24] 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.

France's reluctance to decolonise in New Caledonia has been attributed to the fact that it, along with another remnant of the French Empire, the island of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, is of strategic importance to the French nuclear programme in that it serves as a port of

transit for much of the maritime and naval back-up for the tests.[25] Component parts for the tests are flown to Moruroa via the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. Without such staging posts, it is argued, France would be at the mercy of foreign governments who could deny it 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.[26] 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.[27] 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.[28] Already in 1974 J.-C. Guillebaude, a French journalist, had written in an article in *Le Monde* that 'France does not want to give up the New Hebrides for fear of setting off a chain reaction in other French territories'.[29]

Other arguments have been put forward that account for French reluctance 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 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.[30] The largest known deposit of nickel in the world is to be found in New Caledonia making France the third largest producer of nickel in the world.[31] 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.[32] Moreover, the development of special purpose nickel alloys capable of substituting for 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.[33] 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 investment in the civil nuclear energy programme designed to make France less dependent on imported sources of energy is perhaps the most striking example.

A dramatic increase in the price of nickel during the Vietnam War no doubt alerted France to the importance of safeguarding its access to such a strategic metal. According to an OECD report a directive of the US Bureau of Commerce ordered the principal US suppliers of nickel to set aside a considerable share of their average monthly shipments for defence related orders. The giant US transnational corporations distributed nickel in such a way that Japanese and European consumers had to buy Soviet nickel at prices five times the list price.[34] 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 *loi Billotte* in 1969 increased government control over mining permits and regulations.[35] 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, thereby increasing the Territory's dependence on the French government. 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.[36] In fact, France was accused of sacrificing the economic interests of New Caledonia in order to safeguard its own national interests. France, it was claimed, had chosen to plunge the local economy into recession rather than allow the nickel industry to fall into foreign hands.[37]

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 recognised 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.[38] In 1977 French Rear-Admiral Gérard de Castelbajac, Commander-in-Chief of the French Armed Forces in the Pacific and Commander of France's nuclear testing

facility (the *CEP*), declared that the 'increasingly important role played by the sea in national economies, the probable creation of economic sea limits of 200 miles, can only encourage us to play an active and constructive role in this sphere'.[39]

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.[40] Because of the depths at which these nodules are found—between 5,000 and 7,000 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 6,000 metres and Japan is constructing one for use off Vanuatu and Fiji.[41] 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.

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 in the early and mid 1980s 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.[42] 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 yester-year, 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'.[43] '(France's) eviction from the Pacific would amount to a marginalisation foreboding an irremediable decline'.[44] 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.[45]

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 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.[46] It is France's overseas territories and departments which according to former French Prime Minister Raymond Barre provide it with an important world dimension.[47] France believes that its presence in different regions will enable it to play a balancing role in these regions and in the world.[48] Just as the possession of nuclear weapons has enabled France to preserve its status as 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 naval fleet larger than France could 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.[49] 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.[50]

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. By maintaining control of islands strategically placed throughout the world, France would be able to meet this necessity.[51] Moreover, France's overseas possessions provide its navy with permanent shelter for its vessels throughout the world, thus enabling it to reach most points without needing to ask permission of any other sovereign nation.[52]

Finally, if one accepts the arguments advanced by French security analysts concerning economic growth both in the Pacific and in Europe, then French participation in the economic dynamism of the Pacific would appear to be essential to the maintenance of its nuclear defence strategy and of its status as a middle-sized world power. Without such participation the French economy would continue to stagnate and the French government would find it increasingly hard to find the necessary resources to modernise and upgrade its nuclear deterrent. France would be increasingly marginalised as a military 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's Self-image as a 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 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, as a defender of human rights and of the right of people to self-determination.[53]

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.[54] 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.[55]

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'.[56] 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.[57]

Other French strategic analysts argue that with the aid capacity of Australia and New Zealand already stretched beyond its limits, these two countries will be unable to meet the aid requirements of New Caledonia and French Polynesia.[58]

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.[59] 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.[60] 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'.[61]

The strategic importance of New Caledonia is another common theme of French security analysts, many of whom have strong connections with the French military 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.[62] Indeed, New Caledonia is often referred to by French security analysts as being a giant natural aircraft-carrier.[63]

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.[64] 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.[65] 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.[66]

It is true that President Mitterrand 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.[67] But as nothing has ever come of it, it would appear that this was simply a ploy to win the support of some of the loyalists for the beleaguered Pisani plan.[68] The increase in the number of forces in the region that occurred in the mid 1980s was of necessity, not design. It was a response to the increase in civil unrest within New Caledonia 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 regional defence 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 the Second World War, reserve its forces for the defence of metropolitan France, leaving the United States the task of defending the French territories in the Pacific.[69] New Caledonia may be a natural aircraft-carrier but its facilities would not be used by France but lent, as was the case in the Second World War, to those of its allies having the forces to use them.[70]

Another 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 per capita gross national products that are as much as ten times that of the richest of the independent states, Papua New Guinea.[71] Thus in 1987 the GNP per capita of Papua New Guinea was $US730, that of New Caledonia was $US5,470 and that of French Polynesia $US8,250.[72]

The fact, however, that France spends more on its Pacific territories than Australia and New Zealand combined give in aid to the rest of the South Pacific, alerts us to the highly artificial nature of these statistics.[73] The truth of the matter is that it is the French tax-payer who provides most of the 'national' product of the territories. In terms of its gross national product French Polynesia is one of the fifteen richest countries in the world. Yet it is also one of the most dependent. It imports 92 per cent of its energy needs, 88 per cent of its food and has an excessively large balance of payments deficit.[74] Much of this dependence is a consequence of the twenty-five year old French nuclear testing programme. According to the Léontieff Plan, a development plan that was endorsed by the Government of French Polynesia in 1988 but not surprisingly was rejected

by the Chirac government, the testing programme has distorted the local economy, creating high material expectations among the local population and welfare dependence.[75] 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 per cent of the French national budget.[76] But once again the 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.[77]

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 gross national product 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.[78] 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.[79] 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.[80] 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. But it is necessary to 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 for 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.[81] 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. It cannot be regarded as an important motive for France's strong commitment to remaining in the region.

There remains one other 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.[82] Perhaps French Secretary of State for Overseas Departments and Territories, Olivier Stirn, had this ideal in mind when speaking of the people of France's Pacific territories he declared that there existed between them and France common feelings and traditions, all of which made the overseas populations feel an integrated part of French civilisation, while at the same time, they largely contributed to enrich it.[83]

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. It has been shown that the principal motives are France's firm conviction that its presence 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, often overlooked by commentators, is almost inseparable from the necessity to maintain nuclear testing and is therefore just as crucial to any understanding of why the French commitment to remain in the region has been so strong.

Endnotes

1 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 per cent 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.

2 Jean Chesneaux, *Transpacifique*, Editions La Découverte, Paris, 1987, p.131; Jean Chesneaux, 'France in the Pacific: Global Approach or Respect for Regional Agendas', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol.18, No.2, 1986, pp.74-5.

3 For a detailed account of French decolonisation elsewhere see Henri Grimal, *Decolonization*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1978 and Xavier Yacono, *Les Etapes de la Décolonisation française*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1985.

4 Claude Gabriel and Vincent Kermel, *Nouvelle-Calédonie: La Révolte Kanak*, PEC, Montreuil, 1985, p.96.

5 Gabriel and Kermel, p.97; Yann Céléné Uregei, 'New Caledonia: Confrontation and Colonial Rule', in Ron Crocombe and A. Ali, *Politics in Melanesia*, USP, Suva, 1982, p.122.

6 Denis Warner, *Pacific Defence Reporter*, March 1987, p.17.

7 *French Nuclear Tests*, brochure realised with the assistance of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence and the French Atomic Energy Commission, SGDN, Brétigny-sur-Orge, 1987, p.7. For a more detailed analysis of the rationale behind French defence policy see Daniel Yost, 'France's Deterrent Posture and Security in Europe', *Adelphi Papers*, Nos.194-5, IISS, London, 1984.

8 Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign*, Penguin Books, Rev. ed., Melbourne, 1986, pp.43-4.

9 Danielsson and Danielsson, p.48.

10 Danielsson and Danielsson, pp.36-42; *PIM*, November 1958, pp.20, 155.

11 Danielsson and Danielsson, p.39-40.

12 Danielsson and Danielsson, p 39.

13 Danielsson and Danielsson, p.40; *PIM*, November 1959, p.17.

14 Danielsson and Danielsson, p.43; *PIM*, January 1969, pp.62, 69. Pouvanaa was, however, not forgotten by his supporters. As a result of petitions and representations to successive French governments he was eventually pardoned by De Gaulle in 1968 and amnestied by his successor, President Pompidou. In 1971 he was elected to the French Senate: *PIM*, March 1977, p.68.

15 Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The French Pacific Islands*, University of California Press, London, 1971, pp.53-5.

16 Danielsson and Danielsson, p.211.

17 Danielsson and Danielsson, p.276.

18 Chesneaux, 'France in the Pacific', p.75.

19 Pierre Lellouche at a seminar given at ANU in 1988.

20 Chesneaux, *Transpacifique*, p.132.

21 Sanguenetti, 'The Other Side of the French Coin', *Dominion*, 19 December 1985, cited in Chesneaux, *France in the Pacific*, p.75.

22 *Canberra Times*, 19 June 1989, p.1; see also *French Nuclear Tests*, 'S.G.D.N.', November 1987, p.7.

23 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', *Défense Nationale*, March 1988, p.29.

24 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.

25 Warner, p.18.

26 John Connell, *New Caledonia or Kanaky: The Political History of French Colony*, National Centre for Development Studies, Canberra, 1987, p.379; J. Dalton, *France and Conflict in the Pacific*, paper presented at the International Conference on Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies, USP, Suva, Fiji, December 1985, pp.7-8; Jean-Pierre Gomane et al., *Le Pacifique, Nouveau Centre du Monde*, Strategies, Berger-Levrault, 1983, p.229.

27 Connell, p.384; Hervé Coutau-Bégarie in Jean-Louis Seurin, *Nouvelle-Calédonie: les Antipodes de la Démocratie*, Lieu commun, Paris, 1986, p.201.

28 Dalton, p.3.

29 *PIM*, March 1974, p.11.

30 See comments in *PIM*, January 1976, p.8: France's reluctance to decolonise the New Hebrides is said to be due to its fear that it could set off a chain reaction and lose the rich nickel deposits of New Caledonia as well as its nuclear testing facility in French Polynesia.

31 Gabriel and Kermel, p.69.

32 Michael Tanzer, *The Race for Resources*, Heinemann, London, 1980, p.194.

33 Dalton, p.5.

34 OECD, *Facing the Future: Mastering the Probable and Managing the Unpredictable*, Paris, 1979, p.53.

35 Gabriel and Kermel, p.74.

36 Tanzer, pp.162-63; Uregei, p.121.

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Chapter Three

EARLY HOSTILITY TOWARD FRANCE: A CATALYST FOR REGIONAL UNITY

In Chapter Two we examined the strength of the French commitment to a continued presence in the Pacific but did not inquire why that presence should have met with a hostile reaction from the Islanders. Chapter Three will consider 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, over the period from 1960 to 1979. It will both elucidate the basis of that hostile reaction and analyse some of the forms which it has taken and, more importantly, the effects that it has had on interstate relations in the South Pacific region.

Before we examine these two 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, among the most important being its weight in the international community in terms of its military and economic bargaining power, the size of its diplomatic representation, 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 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 its persistent use of two atolls in the Tuamotu Archipelago as sites for its nuclear tests. As we saw in Chapter Two, 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. 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.[1]

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 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 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'.[2] Barak Sope, the then Secretary General of the ruling Vanua'aku 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.[3]

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'.[4] A similar protest motion was passed by the Cook Islands Assembly that same year.[5] This stand was reaffirmed two years later when the Assembly asked the New Zealand government, which still had responsibility for the country's external affairs, to communicate its expression of censure to the French government. One Assembly member blamed nuclear fall-out for outbreaks of ciguatera or fish poisoning.[6] Other independent South Pacific states were to share these fears concerning the effects of nuclear testing on their inhabitants' health and livelihood. The first meeting of the Heads of Government of the South Pacific Forum in 1971 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.[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.[8] The Cook Islands Legislative Assembly had expressed its concern at testing on nearby Christmas Island later in that same year.[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.[10] The resolution, which was co-sponsored by Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, had the support of fifteen states in the Pacific region.

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.[11] But France declared that it would not comply 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.[12] 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.[13] 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.[14]

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 radioactive fall-out had been replaced by the far less visible and seemingly more remote risk of radioactive leakage through cracks in the underwater base of the atoll into the surrounding ocean.[15] Such leaks, were they to occur, could contaminate the fish which would then 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.[16]

Yet the only way of determining whether cracks existed in the underwater base of Moruroa atoll would be to send deep-sea divers and scientists to the island, something which until recently the French had to refused 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. 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.[17] 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 four days in October 1983. Their findings were detailed in a report known as the Atkinson Report. According to the report ambient radiation levels both in the Moruroa base accommodation area and in the inhabited areas of French Polynesia were lower than world average levels. It also found that cancer statistics for the region did not reveal high rates for types of cancer that might be associated with excessive exposure to radioactive fallout. However, the report also found that as a result of underground testing the structural integrity of the upper section of the coral atoll was impaired and although there was no evidence of short term leakage, leakage could occur within a period of a thousand years.[18]

The validity of their findings has been questioned on several grounds.[19] Firstly, their findings concerning the incidence of fall-out related cancer were based on statistics supplied by the French military. Secondly, the team was not allowed to take samples of the sediments from the lagoon itself. Thirdly, no diving was done. Fourthly, 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. The third team led by Cousteau in June 1987 was also severely criticised for not investigating at the depths where the tests occur.[20] In his report to the French government Cousteau stated that

there was no evidence at present of dangerous radioactivity in the area. However, he went on to say that the atoll had been deeply cracked and warned that long term risks were difficult to evaluate.[21]

The task of assessing whether there is a risk of such leaks occurring is made even more difficult by the fact that, given the long life of radioactive material the danger of contamination would be just as great even if a crack were to appear in five hundred years time. Nonetheless, the French authorities have repeatedly denied that any such risk exists.[22] 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.[23]

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 away as possible, 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 the New Hebrides and more recently in New Caledonia.

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

The anti-nuclear 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.[24] In 1970 the Tongan Parliament voted to ask the French government to stop nuclear testing in the Pacific in response to a petition of 2,464 signatures.[25] In 1970 the Students' Association of the University of the South Pacific, the Fiji Council of Churches and the Fiji YWCA organised a public meeting in the Suva Town Hall to launch a campaign against the French tests.[26] The President of the Fiji Council of Churches, the Reverend Davis, told the meeting that his organisation would use the

Pacific Council of Churches to urge churches in other territories to put anti-test pressure on their territorial governments. Four years later the Executive Committee of the Pacific Council of Churches, the regional body of the protestant churches of the South Pacific, passed a resolution urging all governments to renew their efforts to persuade France to halt its tests.[27]

Speaking at the 1970 Suva public meeting, the then President of the Students' Association of the University of the South Pacific, Francis Saemala, declared that his association would write to all South Pacific leaders urging them to take a stand against further radioactive poisoning of the region's atmosphere. He was later to become the Secretary of the Solomon Islands Department of Foreign Affairs and Permanent Representative of the Solomon Islands to the UN. Barak Sope, who was also involved in the anti-nuclear movement as a student at the University of the South Pacific, later became the Secretary of Vanuatu's Department of Foreign Affairs and his country's roving Ambassador. 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.

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.[28] The Treaty, adopted by the South Pacific Forum in August 1985 at 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 to end its testing in the South Pacific. To date, however, only the 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.

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 have allowed their policy in the South Pacific to be determined by what they perceive to be their global security and political 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.

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. Accusations that France is insensitive to the feelings of the Pacific peoples and that it has persistently ignored their wishes have been made by different Island government leaders and representatives. 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'.[29] Western Samoa's Finance Minister, Vaovasamanaia, speaking before the United Nations General Assembly, declared that 'if the Pacific people had been consulted on the question (of nuclear weapon tests) in the first place, they would have wanted the area to be nuclear-free'.[30] Ebia Olewale, the then Papua New Guinea Minister for Foreign Affairs, in an 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.'[31] 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.[32] In the same year Rabbie 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'.[33]

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 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'.[34] 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.[35]

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.

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.[36]

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.[37] Indeed, Australia, 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.[38] 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.[39]

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. 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.[40]

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.[41] 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'.[42] 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.[43] Such demands were anathema to the French, who were wary of any proposal that might give increased responsibility to the Islanders.[44]

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.[45] 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.[46]

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.[47] On several occasions delegates from the French territories spoke out against French nuclear tests or criticised France for restricting their already limited autonomy. At the 1970 Conference in Suva French Polynesian delegate Romauld Allain blamed the French nuclear tests for the social and economic problems of the territory.[48] 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.[49] On both occasions the French delegate Nettre walked out.

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. 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.[50] At the 1973 Conference in Guam a delegate from the Cook Islands asked how ocean ecology could be protected while France exploded nuclear devices in the Pacific.[51] Each time they met with fierce opposition from France 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.[52]

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'.[53]

Yet France did not leave the Commission and, rather than risk exclusion, conceded control of the Commission to the Islanders in 1974.[54] 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.[55] 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.

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.[56]

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.[57] 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. 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.

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.[58] 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'.[59] 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. In the words of Father John Momis, '(t)he 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'.[60] 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 convinced Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa of the need to for an alternative to both the Commonwealth and the SPC.[61]

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.[62]

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.[63]

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 Pacific 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 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.

Endnotes

1 *PIM*, October 1970, pp.18-19.

2 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*, 9 October 1984, p.3.

3 Stewart Firth, *Nuclear Playground*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987, p.136.

4 *PIM*, July 1963, p.7.

5 *PIM*, November 1965, p.23.

6 Research by Dr Ruff, a Monash University medical researcher, would appear to support claims that such contamination does occur. According to Ruff the most plausible explanation for the outbreak of ciguatera in the

1950s in the Marshall Islands and after 1965 at Hao, the French staging base for nuclear testing, was the intensive military infrastructure and activities related to nuclear testing. High incidences of ciguatera poisoning have also been reported at Moruroa and in other parts of French Polynesia, such as the Gambier Islands and the Tuamotu Archipelago. See Helen Fraser, *Pacific Report*, Vol.2, No.9, 25 May 1989, pp.1-2; *Islands Business* October 1989, p.56.

7 *Joint Final Communique* South Pacific Forum Wellington 5-7 August 1971.

8 *PIM*, June 1956, p.24.

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11 Danielsson and Danielsson, p.198.

12 Firth, p.98.

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21 Fraser, *Pacific Report*, Vol.1, No.18, 24 November 1988, p.3; Revkin, p.82.

22 See Danielsson and Danielsson, p.244 regarding the unsuitability of using an atoll as a site for underground nuclear testing.

23 Revkin, p.82.

24 For a detailed account of the role of groups such as the ATOM, the Pacific Peoples Action Front and the Nuclear Free Pacific Conferences, see Vijay Naidu, *The Fiji Anti-Nuclear Movement: Problems and Prospects*, A paper presented at the United Nations University Conference: 'Peace and Security in Oceania' in Auckland, 3-6 April 1986; Charles W. Forman, *La Voix des Océans: un quart de siècle de la Confèrence des Eglises du Pacifique*, Lotu Pasifika Press, Suva, 1986, pp.66-9; G.E. Fry, *South Pacific Regionalism*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Department of Political Science, ANU, 1979, pp.217-18.

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26 *PIM*, July 1970, pp.33-4.

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30 *PIM*, December 1978.

31 *PIM*, February 1979, p.9.

32 *PIM*, June, p.5.

33 *PIM*, September 1983, p.5.

34 Momis, p.6.

35 Momis, p.6.

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37 Richard A. Herr, *Regionalism in the South Seas*, Dissertation, Duke University, 1976, p.97-8; Forsyth, p.38.

38 Forsyth, p.38; Thompson and Adloff, p.346.

39 Thompson and Adloff, p.349.

40 See Herr, pp.138-9. Also Forsyth, p.39; Fry, *South Pacific Regionalism*, p.62.

41 Herr, pp.178-9; *PIM* September 1963, pp.57-9.

42 *PIM*, August 1965, pp.24-5.

43 Fry, *South Pacific Regionalism*, p.79.

44 Herr, p.198.

45 *PIM*, February 1967, p.55; Thompson and Adloff, p.354.

46 Forsyth, p.39; *PIM* November 1967, p.25.

47 Forsyth, p.42.

48 *PIM*, October 1970, p.18.

49 *PIM*, November 1971, p.55.

50 *PIM*, November 1972, p.108.

51 *PIM*, October 1973, pp.6-7.

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53 *PIM*, October 1973, p.6.

54 G.E. Fry, 'Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics', in R. May and H. Nelson (eds), *Melanesia: Beyond Diversity*, RSPacS Canberra, ANU, 1982, p.654.

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56 For a more detailed discussion of the origins of the South Pacific Forum see Fry, *South Pacific Regionalism*, pp.104-10.

57 Fry 'Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics', p.654.

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59 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.

60 Momis, p.6.

61 *PIM*, February 1971, p.28; Herr, p.106.

62 See the Final Communiques of the South Pacific Forum 1971-76.

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Chapter Four

ISLAND HOSTILITY TO FRANCE 1975-80: DECOLONISATION AND REGIONAL POLITICS

By the mid-1970s the issues which had been the focus of Pacific Island hostility had receded. With the establishment of the South Pacific Forum in 1971, the independent South Pacific Island states no longer felt such a pressing need to transform the SPC into a forum for political discussions. By 1974 France had conceded control of the SPC to the Island representatives, removing what had been a constant source of conflict between itself and the South Pacific Island states. The decision by France to cease atmospheric nuclear testing and to shift to underground testing dampened the international campaign to halt French testing in the Pacific. Although Island governments continued to voice their opposition to the tests in international fora, the issue of decolonisation became the major source of conflict between France and the independent Island states.

This chapter examines how the issue of the decolonisation of the Anglo-French condominium became a concern of the independent Island states and a source of tension between them and France. It looks at the role played by the United Nations in this conflict and demonstrates how and why the concern of the Island countries shifted from the New Hebrides to New Caledonia.

The New Hebrides and the United Nations

The 1970s had witnessed increasing agitation for self-government and/or independence in both French Polynesia and the Anglo-French condominium of the New Hebrides as well as in New Caledonia. Although the various criticisms by the South Pacific states of the French failure to decolonise were a reaction to events in all three territories, until the late 1970s these criticisms were more directed at the French attitude concerning the situation in the New Hebrides.

The United Nations has provided a useful forum for both the independent Island states and the French territories to condemn France's reluctance to decolonise in the South Pacific. The principle of decolonisation and the right of colonised peoples to self-determination

have been constant concerns of the United Nations since it was first established. Indeed, Chapter XI of the United Nations Charter is subtitled: 'Declaration regarding non-self-governing territories'. One of its two articles sets out the obligations of UN member countries towards the inhabitants of the non-self-governing territories that they administer. In particular, they are required 'to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and their varying stages of development'.[1] It also requires them 'to transmit regularly to the Secretary-General ... statistical and other information of a technical nature relating to economic, social and educational conditions in the territories for which they are respectively responsible'.

The increasing importance of decolonisation as an issue of international concern led to the establishment by the United Nations General Assembly in 1961 of the Special Committee on the situation with regard to the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. 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 twenty-four, hence its more common appellation: the Committee of 24.

In 1947, however, France had made a unilateral decision to cease the transmission of information to the United Nations with respect to all its remaining territories including French Polynesia and New Caledonia.[2] When called upon to justify its action France contended that the determination of territories whose peoples had not yet attained a full measure of self-government lay exclusively within the competence of the States responsible for the administration of such territories. France maintained that since constitutional reform had granted the peoples of these territories extensive political rights and provided them with a regime closely resembling that of metropolitan France, these territories were no longer non-self-governing. Only the New Hebrides, which because of its status as an Anglo-French condominium could not be incorporated into

France, remained subject to the provisions of Chapter XI and to the scrutiny of the Committee of 24.

In 1971 the Nagriamel movement of the New Hebrides, taking advantage of the fact that the condominium was still subject to the provisions of Chapter XI, petitioned the United Nations for immediate independence.[3] Although unsuccessful it drew the attention of the Committee of 24 to the situation in the condominium. In August 1973 the Committee criticised both the UK and France for their refusal to provide it with up-to-date information concerning the New Hebrides and urged them to execute reforms so that full governmental authority might be transferred to the people.[4] The Nagriamel petition had also aroused interest in the idea of independence within the condominium resulting in the formation of several political parties. Walter Lini, leader of the National Party, was invited by Jamaica and Tanzania to address the Committee of 24 in March 1974. Lini criticised the failure of Britain and France to accede to the people's demands for a legislative assembly.[5] By contrasting the lack of progress towards self-government in the condominium with the programmes undertaken by Britain in the Solomons and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands he seemed to imply that it was France that was to blame.[6]

The Decolonisation of the New Hebrides and the Island States

The South Pacific states were restricted in their use of the United Nations before 1970 simply by the fact that none of them were members. Most were still under colonial rule and those which were independent, namely Tonga and Western Samoa had not joined the United Nations. In 1970 Fiji achieved its independence and became a member of the UN. Its election to the Committee of 24 placed it in an excellent position to comment on decolonisation issues in the South Pacific and to support other Pacific Island peoples in their efforts to achieve independence.

Fiji's representative at the meeting of the UN Trusteeship Council in March 1975, while welcoming the announcement by Britain and France at the end of 1974 that they planned to implement reforms in the New Hebrides, regretted that there were still examples of colonial exploitation in the Pacific region in New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna and French Polynesia. In criticising the administering power—i.e. France—for its failure to take steps towards implementing the United Nations Declaration on Decolonisation he was rejecting France's claim that its Pacific territories were not colonies but an integral part of France.[7] During the General Assembly debate in December 1975 on a resolution from the Committee of 24 Fiji's delegate singled out France for its failure to supply

information to the Committee concerning the New Hebrides and accused it of being unclear if not negative with respect to the future of the condominium.[8] The final resolution not only criticised France's attitude and its refusal to permit access by UN visiting missions to the New Hebrides, it also expressed concern at the fact that France was continuing to test in the South Pacific despite the strong opposition expressed by the peoples of the region. The resolution was voted overwhelmingly, with 121 for, one against (France) and eleven abstentions (including Britain and the US).

In July 1976 the New Hebrides National Party sent telegrams to the delegations at the South Pacific Forum meeting in Nauru asking them to endorse a declaration of no-confidence in the colonial administration and urging forum members to support its mission to the Committee of 24.[9] In August 1976 criticisms of France were again heard in the Committee of 24. Walter Lini accused the French of supporting the Nagriamel separatist movement in the New Hebrides in a deliberate attempt to unite other pro-French parties, thereby creating a united front against the Vanua'aku Party's wishes for independence.[10] He drew a parallel between the situation in the New Hebrides and what had occurred in the former French territory of the Comoro Islands. In a referendum held in 1974 three of the four islands of the Comoros had voted in favour of independence. When independence had been declared in 1975 France had retained the fourth island, Mayotte, as a territory of France, despite protests from the international community. Lini warned against the danger of a Mayotte style government being set up on Santo in the northern part of the condominium and called for independence in 1977. His fears were echoed by the leader of a rival French-speaking party, Vincent Boulekone, who accused France of trying to balkanise its own territories.

Other South Pacific Island states, on joining the United Nations, expressed their support for decolonisation in their region and were especially critical of France for its failure to fulfil its obligations as laid down in Chapter XI of the UN Charter. In September 1976 Papua New Guinea Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sir Maori Kiki in his address to the UN General Assembly showed that the newly independent country of Papua New Guinea also intended to support other Pacific peoples in their quest for independence. He called for progressive movement towards the decolonisation of the various Pacific territories in accordance with the wishes of the people and spoke of his country's deep commitment to the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Pacific.[11]

In 1977, a year after Western Samoa had joined the United Nations, the then Prime Minister, Tupuola Efi, told the General Assembly that his

country paid particular attention to the issue of colonialism.[12] He reminded the Assembly that although the Solomon Islands, the Gilbert Islands and Tuvalu would soon achieve their independence the elements of colonialism still lingered in the Pacific as well as elsewhere. He also expressed his support for those in the New Hebrides who wanted independence, saying that his country looked forward to the day, hopefully soon, when the New Hebrides would achieve full independence and nationhood.

Why were the independent South Pacific Island states so interested in the decolonisation of the New Hebrides? Perhaps the most obvious reason was empathy. Having just achieved independence themselves, they were keen to help other peoples in the region become independent. The wave of independence fervour that had swept Africa in the 1960s had created an international environment that was favourable to the granting of independence. This favourable environment undoubtedly affected the attitudes of the newly independent South Pacific Island states towards the struggles of other peoples in their region.

There were, however, other factors that were equally as important, especially in explaining the support that the struggles for independence in the New Hebrides and later in New Caledonia obtained particularly from 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'.[13]

The favourable attitude of the newly independent Island states to decolonisation was also the result of internal pressure from individuals and non-government organisations. A network of anti-nuclear groups extending across the South Pacific had developed.[14] 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.[15] In April 1975 at the Nuclear Free Pacific Conference in Suva the theme of colonialism and imperialism dominated.[16] Delegates from New Caledonia and the New Hebrides took

the opportunity to apprise those attending of their respective struggles for self-determination. The root cause of France's nuclear activities was said to be racism, colonialism and imperialism and the real problem was the exploitation and control of the Pacific by an outside power. Many members of the movement were later to enjoy high positions in their countries' governments and administrations and their negative attitude towards France as a result of nuclear testing made them more receptive to the Kanak demands for independence.[17]

Church organisations were particularly important in shaping the attitudes and policies of certain Island governments on decolonisation. Firstly, as mass organisations they were able to influence public opinion. Secondly, many senior bureaucrats and politicians had been educated in church schools and some such as Father John Momis of Papua New Guinea and Father Walter Lini of Vanuatu were both government ministers and church priests. The 1976 Pacific Conference of Churches in Port Moresby demanded immediate self-government and eventual independence for the New Hebrides.[18] In 1977 at a meeting in Honiara of politicians, church leaders and representatives of women's organisations, delegates from the French territories, the New Hebrides and West Irian called on the Forum to support them in their efforts to gain independence.[19] Father Momis, who took a keen interest in the issue of decolonisation, was present at the 1977 Honiara meeting.

In 1978 a further meeting of church, community and independence movement leaders organised by the Pacific People's Action Front and the Pacific Conference of Churches took place in Ponape in the Caroline Islands.[20] Delegates at the meeting adopted the twin goals of independence and a nuclear-free Pacific. The meeting called for immediate independence for the New Hebrides and New Caledonia and urged that New Caledonia and French Polynesia be re-inscribed on the UN's list of non-self-governing territories.[21] By acting as resource persons at the meeting the two delegates of the New Hebrides National Party or the Vanua'aku Party (VP) as it was now called provided a clear indication of the attitude of the future government of Vanuatu to decolonisation and the role it would play in relation to other anti-colonial struggles in the region. The fact that one of these delegates was Father Walter Lini makes their action even more significant.

Attention Shifts to New Caledonia

1977 and 1978 were years of considerable political turmoil in the New Hebrides. The decision by the VP to boycott the elections to the

Legislative Assembly in November 1977 was followed by the establishment of a People's Provisional Government.[22] The VP made a concerted effort to win support both local and international. During a parliamentary debate on the issue the leader of the Solomon Islands Opposition declared that the Government had a responsibility to fellow Melanesian brothers and sisters and should support the VP.[23]

In August 1978 the President of the VP, Walter Lini, and the Secretary-General, Barak Sope, presented their case once more before the Committee of 24.[24] The independent South Pacific Island states supported independence for the New Hebrides. Perhaps even more significant, however, was the fact that in their statements of support they called on France to allow not only the inhabitants of the New Hebrides the right to self-determination and independence but those of its other Pacific possessions. That the New Hebrides was listed as a non-autonomous territory with the United Nations and France's other territories were not made no difference. The same rights to self-determination and independence applied. In December 1978 at the 33rd 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.[25] Mr Vaovasamanaia, representing Western Samoa, expressed his country's deep concern that some Pacific countries which want to gain independence have yet to do so. He was critical of certain colonial powers who had not acknowledged the wishes of these countries and warned that although those who had achieved independence thus far had done so peacefully, there were dangers in straining patience beyond endurance. Fiji's representative declared that Fiji through its membership of the Committee of 24 would work to ensure that all peoples that were under any form of foreign domination were given the opportunity to exercise their unalienable right to self-determination.

Papua New Guinea Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ebia Olewale, expressed the hope that all Pacific territories would soon be liberated.[26] In his address to the 33rd Session of the UN General Assembly, Olewale singled out France for not giving people under its colonial rule the chance to express their views in line with various United Nations declarations on decolonisation and called on France to change its attitude towards decolonisation in the South Pacific. He hoped that France would 'ensure that the people in those territories under its administration will be given the opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination

and independence rather than exploiting them by saying that those territories are an integral part of the metropolitan state'.[27]

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.

However, before the issue could be raised at the Forum the crisis in the New Hebrides was resolved. On 21 December 1978, an agreement was reached between the VP, the existing government and the French and British authorities on the formation of a government of national unity.[28] But the momentum of the push for decolonisation could no longer be stopped. The question of decolonisation was no longer limited to the New Hebrides and the attention of the independent South Pacific Island states was already shifting to France's other Pacific territories and in particular to New Caledonia. 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 Pacific including those of French Polynesia.[29]

How could the attention of the independent South Pacific Island states shift so quickly from the New Hebrides to New Caledonia? 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.[30] 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 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.

The visits of Yann Céléné Uregei 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-Calédonie* (*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 there.[31] 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.[32] In January 1976 Uregei visited Fiji and had talks with Fiji's Deputy Prime Minister Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau.[33]

In 1978, on a world tour organised by the VP, he visited the UN, the World Council of Churches Commission on Human Rights, Denmark, Holland, Algeria, the Sudan, Hong Kong, Tonga and Papua New Guinea.[34] 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.[35] In November 1979 he went on another tour, this time with George Kalkoa of the VP. He visited the UN General Assembly, the Organisation of African Unity and Europe and stopped in Port Moresby on his return.[36] In the early 1980s Uregei would regularly visit many 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.

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 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.[37] The Pacific People's Action Front, an organisation that had grown out of the anti-nuclear protests, held a pro-independence demonstration of about 500 people outside the French Embassy in Suva on 24 September 1979 to mark 124 years of French rule in New Caledonia.[38] In Papua New Guinea decolonisation also became an issue in domestic politics when the Pacific People's Action Front criticised the Papua New Guinea government's decision to allow France to establish an embassy in Papua New Guinea despite France's attitude to decolonisation.[39]

The announcement by Papua New Guinea 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 had not escaped the notice of France. In a move that underlined the seriousness with which the French government regarded the matter Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Olivier Stirn toured the region twice within the space of six months, 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 and to dissuade Forum members from endorsing the Papua New Guinea resolution.[40] Stirn also warned them that France would consider any attempt to have New Caledonia re-inscribed as an unfriendly act.[41]

In an attempt to counter the pro-Kanak lobby within the Forum countries Stirn 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.[42] Deputy Prime Minister Olewale rejected Stirn's objections that the Forum was interfering in the internal matters of another state. The right of all people to self determination was, he maintained, an international matter.

The visit by Stirn was followed by a visit by President Giscard to France's Pacific territories in September 1979. The fact that it was the first such visit by a French president in thirteen years would also seem to suggest that it was a result, in part at least, of the increased interest being shown by South Pacific countries in the French territories. While in New Caledonia Giscard gave some indication of France's concern with

international opinion when he warned the French settlers that 'France's image must no longer be tarnished by the sequels of the colonial era'.[43]

The 1979 Forum Heads of Government meeting in Honiara was attended by a delegation from the *Front Indépendantiste* (*FI*), the recently formed coalition of five New Caledonian political parties that wanted independence from France. Although not invited officially the representatives of the *FI* had come to convince Forum members that the Forum should ask for the inclusion of New Caledonia in the list of non-autonomous territories before the United Nations Committee of 24 on decolonisation.[44] As was mentioned earlier in this chapter in 1947 France had taken a unilateral decision to cease the transmission of information with respect to all its remaining territories including French Polynesia and New Caledonia, thereby removing those territories from the list of non-autonomous territories. The Committee of 24 had, however, already re-inscribed two French territories, the Comoro Archipelago and French Somaliland, in 1965 and 1972 respectively. The *FI* demand for re-inscriptions was not without precedent.

The day before the Honiara meeting of the Forum the delegation from the *FI* met with Papua New Guinea's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ebia Olewale and then proceeded to lobby other heads of delegations.[45] The resolution that Papua New Guinea proposed at the Forum was moderate in tone. It did not specifically mention re-inscription. It required the Forum to take note of the request of the *FI* as well as similar requests from French Polynesia and to call upon France to allow the people of its remaining possessions in the Pacific to determine their own future in such a way which would allow them genuine freedom of choice, and in particular would safeguard the interests of the indigenous people. Nevertheless discussion of the resolution took up half the meeting and 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 internal affairs of France.[46] Although it 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 in that it did not refer specifically to the French territories. Nor did it commit the Forum to

support the re-inscription of New Caledonia at the UN. It did, however, leave it open to individual states to do so.[47]

The 1979 Forum meeting was also important in that it allowed the *FI* to acquaint Forum members of the situation in the territory and with the true nature of the problem. Many delegates were actually surprised to learn that the Kanaks were a minority in New Caledonia. In raising the issues of the rights of the indigenous people and the principle of self-determination it also gave some indication as to the direction the debate would take in future meetings.

The Santo Rebellion

Unfortunately for France, developments in the New Hebrides prior to its independence in 1980 were to reinforce its negative image, particularly in the eyes of the Melanesian states. They were also to divert the attention of the Forum, albeit briefly, away from New Caledonia.

The at times not too covert support of the French for the secessionists on the Vanuatu island of Santo and the subsequent refusal by France to use force to put down the 1980 rebellion were severely criticised by Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Fiji.[48] In July 1980 the Prime Minister of Fiji, Ratu Mara, and Papua New Guinea Foreign Minister, Noel Levi, condemned the action of the secessionists and upheld the legitimacy of the Lini government.[49] Ratu Mara called upon the governments of France and the United Kingdom to take all necessary measures in full consultation and co-operation with the government of Father Lini to restore law and order in the New Hebrides, to safeguard its territorial integrity and to ensure its uninterrupted transition to independence. Levi declared that Papua New Guinea would give serious consideration to allowing a police contingent to go to the New Hebrides as part of a formal South Pacific Forum force.

The 1980 Forum meeting in Kiribati gave its support to the government of Father Lini and called on Britain and France to end the rebellion immediately and promote the stability and integrity of the new state after independence.[50] Mara informed Lini that Fiji would send troops if called on by the UN to do so. 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.[51]

With the end of the rebellion in Santo, French interference in Vanuatu ceased to be a major concern for the Forum. But subsequent events in New Caledonia were to ensure that the decolonisation of the French Pacific Territories remained high on the agenda of the annual

meetings of the Forum Heads of Government from 1981 until 1988. Vanuatu's difficult decolonisation experience had not only drawn the attention of the independent Island states to French policies in its South Pacific territories. It had, as we shall see in following chapters, a profound effect on the foreign policy outlook of Vanuatu. In particular, it was to ensure that a Vanuatu led by Father Lini would be hostile to France and a fervent supporter of decolonisation in neighbouring New Caledonia. The campaign against French decolonisation policies had begun in earnest. 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.

Endnotes

1 United Nations, *Non-Self-governing Territories*, Lake Success, New York, Appendix 1, p.146.

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

3 Chris Plant (ed.), *New Hebrides: The Road to Independence*, Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, Suva, 1977, p.23.

4 Plant, p.99.

5 Plant, pp.99-100.

6 This was also the view of J.-C. Guillebaud who, writing in *Le Monde* on his recent visit to the New Hebrides, claimed that France did not want to give up the New Hebrides for fear of setting off a chain reaction in other French territories: *PIM*, March 1974, p.11.

7 *PIM*, March 1975, p.4.

8 Plant, p.100.

9 *PIM*, October 1976, p.16.

10 Plant, p.101.

11 *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 27 September 1976, p.4.

12 *Vanua'aku Viewpoints*, Vol.7, Nos.9-12, 1977, p.25.

13 *News from Fiji*, 19 September 1973.

14 See Chapter Three, footnote 23.

15 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 Vijay Naidu, 'The Fiji

Anti-nuclear Movement: Problems and Prospects', a paper presented at the United Nations University Conference: 'Peace and Security in Oceania', in Auckland, 3 March, 1986, pp.13-14.

16 *PIM*, June 1975, p.25.

17 For examples see **French nuclear testing in the South Pacific** in Chapter Three.

18 *PIM*, March 1976, p.15.

19 *Papua New Guinea Newsletter*, Week ending 9 September 1977.

20 *Vanua'aku Viewpoints*, Vol.8, No.7, p.7.

21 *PIM*, January 1979, pp.26-7.

22 *PIM*, January 1978, p.5.

23 *PIM*, February 1978, p.19.

24 *Vanua'aku Viewpoints*, Vol.8, No.6, p.8.

25 *PIM*, February 1979, pp.9-10.; G.E. Fry, *South Pacific Regionalism*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Department of Political Science, ANU, 1979, pp.215-16.

26 *PIM*, March 1979, p.28; *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 3 May 1979.

27 *PIM*, February 1979, p.9; *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 14 December 1978, p.3.

28 *PIM*, February 1979, p.21.

29 *PIM*, March 1979, p.28.

30 *PIM*, December 1978, p.26.

31 The UMNC became the *Front Uni de Libération Kanak* (*FULK*) in 1977.

32 Myriam Dornoy, *Politics in New Caledonia*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1984, pp.68, 82.

33 *PIM*, February 1976, p.76.

34 *Vanua'aku Viewpoints*, Vol.8, No.6, p.8.

35 *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 27 October 1978, p.3; *Vanua'aku Viewpoints*, Vol.8, No.6, p.8.

36 *Papua New Guinea Newsletter*, Week ending 23 November 1979.

37 *PIM*, November 1979, p.11; *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 27 September 1979, p.1.

38 *PIM*, November 1979, p.11.

39 *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 11 October 1978, p.19.

40 *PIM*, August 1979, p.7.

41 *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 18 January 1980, p.2; 9 July 1979, p.1.

42 *PIM*, March 1980, p.6.

43 *PIM*, September 1979, p.25.

44 *Decolonisation*, Vol.II, No.6, pp.4-6.

45 *PIM*, September 1979, p.10.

46 *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 12 July 1979, p.4.

47 *PIM*, August 1979, p.7.

48 For an analysis of the factors leading to the attempt at secession see *Backgrounder*, No.239, 18 June 1980, p.7; *Backgrounder*, No.252, 17 September 1980, p.9; Elise Huffer, *Politique Extérieure blong Vanuatu*, *Rapports Sciences Humaines*, No.1, ORSTOM, Noumea, 1989, p.4.

49 *PIM*, July 1980, p.11.

50 *PIM*, August 1980, p.17.

51 *Backgrounder*, No.247, 13 August 1980, pp.6-7; *Backgrounder*, No.250, 3 September 1980, p.17.

Chapter Five

ISLAND HOSTILITY TO FRANCE 1981-86: THE FORUM DIVIDED OVER NEW CALEDONIA

For most of the 1980s the decolonisation of New Caledonia was to be a major issue in international politics in the South Pacific. It was to figure prominently on the agenda of the annual meetings of the Forum Heads of Government and provoke considerable discord and division among Forum member states. This chapter will examine how the issue of New Caledonia affected the relations of Island countries both with France and with each other during the period from 1981 to 1986 when the socialists were in government in France. It looks at the attitudes of the different South Pacific Island governments to decolonisation in New Caledonia and the divisions that arose over both the adequacy of the programme of reforms adopted by the new French government in relation to the Territory and the most appropriate means of ensuring that such reforms were fully implemented. There is also an analysis of the relationship between the issue of Kanak independence and two other regional developments: the moves to set up a Melanesian Spearhead Group and the so-called 'Libyan threat'.

The Attitudes of Individual Island Countries to the Decolonisation of New Caledonia

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 that newly independent state 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 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 Vanua'aku Party of Vanuatu and the independence movement in New Caledonia. Representatives of the *Front Indépendantiste* (*FI*), the coalition of pro-independence parties in New Caledonia, often visited Port Vila for consultations while members of the Vanua'aku Party (VP) attended important meetings of the *FI*. These ethnic ties and in particular the importance that the VP has always placed on customary land rights and the concept 'man ples' provide the basis for VP support for the claim of the Kanak *indépendantistes* that the Kanak people alone should decide the future of their country.[1] They are also the basis for the assertion by VP members that only they can understand the true nature of the problem in New Caledonia.

The strength of these ties can be seen in the way the strategy employed by the *FI* was often modelled on that which had been used by the VP to obtain independence for Vanuatu. One example of this was the decision by the *FI* to set up a provisional government in 1984 as the VP had done in 1977. Although *FI* had originally planned to base the provisional government in Port Vila they were eventually dissuaded from doing so by Vanuatu and decided to base the provisional government in New Caledonia itself.

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, which 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 customary 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. Given the substantial numbers of French speaking ni-Vanuatu the VP has seen French influence as a potential source of internal destabilisation.[2] Since the principal opposition to Lini's VP 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 VP.

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.[3] 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.[4]

In 1982 and 1983 relations between France and Vanuatu were also affected by a territorial dispute. Both countries claimed sovereignty over the Matthew and Hunter Islands, two uninhabited islands to the east of New Caledonia and to the south of Vanuatu.[5] At stake was not just possession of the islands but also sovereignty over their extensive EEZ.

Vanuatu's pre- and post- independence experiences with France have not only coloured 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.[6] 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 assistance from countries outside 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 VP 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 decision by Vanuatu to establish diplomatic relations with some of the socialist members of the Non-Aligned Movement alarmed other Forum members. In 1984 Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister, Michael Somare, voiced the concern of Pacific leaders over Vanuatu's ties with Cuba.[7] Lini responded by maintaining that the real threat to the region was not Cuba but the possibility of superpower confrontation between the United States and its allies and the USSR and the threat of contamination by the French nuclear testing in Moruroa.[8] Vanuatu's relations with Libya were also to become a matter of concern, as we shall see later in this chapter.

The fact that, of all the independent South Pacific states, Vanuatu has been the most vehement in its opposition to the presence of nuclear weapons in the region must also be in part a consequence of its stormy relations with France. In 1982 Vanuatu declared itself a nuclear free state. The same year it refused to allow two US warships port access when the US authorities would neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons on board.[9] It refused to ratify the SPNFZ in 1985, claiming it did not go far enough.[10]

From the start of the campaign for the decolonisation of New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea assumed a high profile. 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.[11] He declared that if approached Papua New Guinea would commit itself to a pro-independence fight in French Polynesia.[12] 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.[13]

In 1980 relations between France and Papua New Guinea were soured by the latter's intervention in Santo. In August a demonstration in

Noumea called for French paratroopers to be sent to Vanuatu to protect the French community. Papua New Guinea made a formal protest over the continued inflammatory involvement of French citizens in the affairs of Vanuatu. It condemned the anti-Papua New Guinea and anti-Vanuatu radio broadcasts from Noumea, the continued collaboration of expatriate French citizens with rebel elements in Santo and the harassment of fishermen from Papua New Guinea by French citizens in Noumea.[14]

Throughout the early 1980s Papua New Guinea 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. 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.[15] In 1984 Foreign Minister Rabbie Namaliu in his address to the 39th Session of the General Assembly noted the close relation between French nuclear and colonial policies in the South Pacific.[16] At the July 1985 meeting of ASEAN Papua New Guinea sought the endorsement of that body for re-inscription.[17] 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.[18]

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.[19] 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.[20] 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.[21]

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.[22] 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.

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.[23]

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.[24] 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 Agency.[25] 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. Both blocs nominated rival candidates for the important position of the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation director.[26]

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.[27] 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. It has been suggested that 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 its dependent territories with it.[28]

The Polynesian bloc regarded the presence of the metropolitan powers not as undesirable but rather as a necessary counterbalance to 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 status 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.[29] 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 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'.[30] 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.[31] 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.[32] There are then profound differences

between Polynesia and Melanesia not only in political attitudes but in political style.[33]

The Papua New Guinea military intervention in Vanuatu did little to change the attitude of the Polynesian states concerning the value of the presence of the metropolitan powers in the region. It did, however, profoundly alter Fiji's relation with those powers and with the other countries of the region.[34] 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.[35]

Fiji's willingness 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.[36]

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 the 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, attempted to persuade the Forum to sponsor a resolution calling on the

United Nations Committee on Decolonisation to re-inscribe New Caledonia as a non-self-governing territory. Until 1986, however, their attempts had not been successful. Both their failure to do so at previous Forums and their subsequent success at the 1986 Forum were due largely to events and circumstances in New Caledonia and France at the time.

The issue of decolonisation in New Caledonia had not been mentioned in the 1980 Forum communique which had focused instead on the threat that the secessionist movements in Vanuatu posed to that territory's independence time-table.[37] But from 1981 onwards New Caledonia was to become a central issue at Forum meetings. The speech by Jean-Marie Tjibaou at the 1980 Waigani Seminar and the contacts between representatives of Vanuatu's ruling VP and the *FI* had renewed Melanesian interest in the Kanak cause and the issue of re-inscription.[38]

However, the election success of the Socialist presidential candidate, François Mitterrand, 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, they maintained, would be premature and only antagonise France at a time when its policies seemed to be moving in the right direction.

Among those Forum members disinclined to antagonise France were Australia and New Zealand. Although a detailed examination of their actions and the motives for these actions is beyond the purview of this study, their role in the blocking of the Melanesian initiatives on New Caledonia cannot be overlooked. The fact that conservative governments were in office in both countries in the early 1980s does not fully explain their opposition, since Australia continued to oppose re-inscription even after the election of a Labor government in 1984. Perhaps even more important were factors that applied to both sides of politics: economic considerations such as the sale of Australian uranium to France and the dependence of New Zealand on the EEC as a market for its produce; and a value system that prefers compromise to confrontation and pluralist democracy to the disenfranchisement of minorities.

The 1981 Forum decided against re-inscription and resolved instead to send a delegation to meet with President Mitterrand to discuss the evolving French policies with respect to the decolonisation of the French Pacific territories.[39] 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.[40]

Nevertheless, the assassination of Pierre Declercq, Secretary General of the largest party in the *FI*, 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 and order would break down, posing a threat to the stability not only of the territory but of the region.[41]

Yet his visit to Paris in March 1982 as leader of the three member delegation sent by the Forum to meet with President Mitterrand was enough to allay his fears. At the end of his visit Mara expressed his satisfaction with the pace of the reforms being undertaken by France in New Caledonia.[42] 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 *FI*. 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.[43] Despite violent protests by right-wing anti-independence groups the new majority in the Assembly endorsed a programme of reforms that had been drawn up by Christian Nucci, the High Commissioner of New Caledonia and a socialist deputy in the French National Assembly.[44] These reforms were designed to improve the situation of the Kanaks with respect to land ownership and to give greater recognition to Kanak culture and law. 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.[45]

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.[46] 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, Georges Lemoine, in which he declared that all options including that of complete independence were 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. 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.[47]

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 outlined ways in which these efforts could be improved.[48] This noticeable change in attitude was probably due to a large extent to the efforts of Vanuatu Prime Minister Walter Lini. Before leaving for the 1984 Forum meeting in Tuvalu, Lini, no doubt foreshadowing the arguments that he intended to use to persuade the other members, declared that re-inscription was necessary to guarantee a smooth decolonisation process and to keep the situation in New Caledonia under international scrutiny in case of an outbreak of violence.[49] In reply to comments by some Forum members that France had been doing all it could and should be given more time he emphasised that French decolonisations had not all been peaceful and regretted that no other Forum member apart from Vanuatu had experience in the matter. He maintained that the demographic composition of New Caledonia was a colonial imposition and should not be used as an excuse to delay independence for the indigenous inhabitants. He rejected the new French Statute of Internal Self-Autonomy claiming that, although independence was said to be an option, it was impossible since the 1989 referendum would be conducted under the existing legislation which ensured that the majority votes would be against independence. 'The decision to re-enlist New Caledonia should not be viewed as embarrassing the French government but should be seen as helping it to decolonise according to the wishes of the colonised people as provided for in the United Nations Charter.'

At the Forum Lini stressed that the decision taken by the Forum over re-inscription would determine whether the Kanak people would still look to the Forum for assistance or would feel alienated and turn elsewhere outside the region for assistance. He also warned of the possibility of disruptions, violence and outside interference. Dissatisfied with the position on New Caledonia that was to appear in the final communique, he 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.[50] Re-inscription was to be kept under continuing review and a five member group was set up at ministerial level to discuss the Forum resolution with the *FI* and French authorities.[51] 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.

Lini's fears of violence breaking out in New Caledonia were realised in the last months of 1984 and the first months of 1985.[52] In response to the rapidly deteriorating situation in the Territory he called on France to cancel the election results and hold fresh ones based on the principles of Nainville-les-Roches.[53] France proposed another programme of reforms known as the Pisani Plan which offered sovereignty to the Kanaks and political guarantees to the Europeans. Under the Plan 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 independence on 1 January 1986.[54] In the eyes of the majority of Forum members France seemed once again to be moving in the right direction.[55] The decision to advance the referendum date from 1989 to 1985 was particularly reassuring to the more moderate members of the Forum since it accorded with the resolution passed at the 1984 Forum.

France and the Formation of the Melanesian Spearhead

Despite intense lobbying by Vanuatu between 1981 and 1985 four successive annual meetings of Forum Heads of Government had failed to endorse the resolution that Forum move the re-inscription of New Caledonia at the United Nations. Because of the constructive attitude on the part of the Socialist government of France between 1981 and 1985 the majority of Forum states remained convinced that France was moving in the right direction and that any initiative at the United Nations or elsewhere would jeopardise the reform process.

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 *FI*'s plans for independence in

1984.[56] 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 50 per cent of the population of the territory.[57]

By 1985 these consultations had developed into a pre-Forum caucus of Melanesian states and representatives of the *Front de Libération Nationale Kanak Socialiste* (*FLNKS*), signalling the formation of a new sub-regional grouping, known as the Melanesian Spearhead.[58] 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.[59]

Yet it was the issue of decolonisation in New Caledonia that actually provided the impetus for the Spearhead group. Right-wing demonstrations and riots and the killing by police of Eloi Machoro, an important leader of the newly formed *FLNKS*, forced France to modify the Pisani plan.[60] Announced on 25 April 1985, 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.[61]

The Government of Vanuatu continued its attacks on France for its handling of the situation in New Caledonia. It declared that the longer the French government continued to withhold the granting of independence to the 'true colonized people' of New Caledonia, violence and instability would intensify.[62] It accused the French government of deliberately allowing the situation to deteriorate so that it could use it to justify its conventional and nuclear build-up in the territory.

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 an intention to maintain control of the Territory and hence incompatible with the objective of independence.[63] Mitterrand had announced plans to build a strategic naval base in Noumea and to upgrade Tontouta air base on 19 January 1985

while he was on a visit to New Caledonia. Although the plans were taken quite seriously by the Melanesian Spearhead group, with hindsight it seems now that they had been 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 plans since.[64]

The Foreign Ministers of the three independent Melanesian states also 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. They reaffirmed the legitimate right of the Kanak people to independence and declared that there was no need for any referendum on the question of independence without electoral reforms which would guarantee Kanak independence. 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 its continued existence.[65] His warning was echoed by Lini who declared that if the Forum failed to address the issue of New Caledonia in a more positive and concrete manner it might lose its credibility as the foremost political organisation in the region.[66] Both Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu announced that they would seek observer status for the provisional government that had been formed by the *FLNKS* at the August Forum in Rarotonga.[67] There were even reports in the press that Vanuatu was prepared to allow arms for the *FLNKS* to transit through its territory.[68]

Yet despite the violence in New Caledonia, the intense lobbying of member states by Uregei and the co-ordinated efforts of the independent Melanesian states the 1985 Forum once again failed to endorse the Melanesian resolution on re-inscription. The French government, no doubt aware of this increased pressure on Forum to endorse re-inscription, had dispatched the French Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Jean-Michel Baylet to the region to present the French case against re-inscription to various Forum member countries prior to the August 1985 Forum meeting in Rarotonga.[69]

The general consensus at the Forum was that nothing should be done that might prove counter-productive to French efforts to get both sides to agree on a compromise. According to Lini, Fiji, Australia and New Zealand had opposed the resolution on the grounds that it was a regional and not an international matter and that they did not want to embarrass France and its people.[70] 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 United Nations concerning the applicability of the United Nations 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.[71]

Furthermore the Forum took note of the concern of the Melanesian states over France's intentions to upgrade its military facilities in New Caledonia and called on it 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 guide-lines 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, Solomon Islands Prime Minister Kenilorea, Lini, and Papua New Guinea's Foreign Minister, Giheno, criticised French policies in the South Pacific and condemned its plans to increase its military presence in New Caledonia.[72] Kenilorea described French policies as 'imperialistic' and French claims to New Caledonia as 'colonialistic'.

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 Lini 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, reaffirmed 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 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.

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.[77] Papua New Guinea's Foreign Minister Legu Vagi explained that the non-attendance of Prime Minister Wingti at the Suva Forum should not be seen as an attempt by Papua New Guinea to downgrade its 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.

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 shown by Libya in the region. It was 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 he 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.[78] 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 were not restricted to the South Pacific. He also assisted the independence movement in Guadeloupe in the Caribbean.[79]

Libya's involvement was, at least initially, the result of an initiative by the Secretary of the *Union Calédonienne* (*UC*), Eloi Machoro.[80] 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.[81] Without electoral reform, the *indépendantistes* faced certain defeat. Within the *FI* the belief that more militant action was necessary had grown and even a pragmatist such as Tjibaou called on supporters in July 1984 to be ready to fight a guerrilla war.[82]

In a move designed both to convince 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.[83] Machoro declared that the *FI* would accept help from whomever offered it, provided they were neither fascist nor racist. One month prior to the Forum meeting in August 1984 both Uregei and Machoro had made a ten day preliminary visit to Libya.[84]

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.[85] 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 in spite of difficult circumstances was moving in the right direction and that re-inscription could be counter-productive.[86]

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 Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste*, to organise an active boycott of the November Territorial Assembly elections and to form a provisional government in Noumea on 1 December 1984.[87] The boycott was largely successful with less than 50 per cent of registered voters and only 15 per cent of Kanak voters taking part. Although the official results gave a landslide victory to the *Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République* (*RCPR*), the principal anti-independence party, it was clear that the *FLNKS* had won a moral victory.[88]

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.[89] 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 six member delegation to

Libya, the *FLNKS* supported Tjibaou's stance and suspended him from his position of official *FLNKS* spokesperson.[90]

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 Vanua'aku Party of Vanuatu.[91] 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 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.[92] In an interview on Radio Vanuatu Lini declared that whereas a court of law had found the French government guilty of a terrorist act in the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior no country's court had found Libya guilty of acts of terrorism.[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 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.

Papua New Guinea and the other Melanesian states had long held the view that France was a destabilising influence in the South Pacific. 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.[95] In 1984 Foreign Minister Namaliu saw the delay in decolonisation in New Caledonia as a threat to stability in the South Pacific.[96] It was a view that the other members of the Forum were to increasingly share.

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. Australia's acting Minister for Foreign Affairs Gareth Evans and Prime Minister Hawke described the bombing as an act of international terrorism.[97] The Australian government voiced its concern to the US about the destabilising effects of French policies in the South Pacific.[98]

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, Bernard Pons, announced a series of measures known as the Pons Plan which amounted to a reversal of the previous government's policy of reforms. Like the Fabius Plan the Pons Plan called for a referendum on the nature of New Caledonia's future ties with France, to be held within a year. Yet it was not the referendum *per se* which was to alarm the members of the Forum and bring about a reversal in their attitude towards re-inscription. The Fabius Plan had also made provisions for a referendum to be held in 1987 and the *FLNKS* had previously called for a referendum on independence—though their proposal did lay down stringent conditions on who would be eligible to vote. It was rather the fact that the certainty of a loyalist victory combined with the other key measures of the Plan would see the Kanaks completely

marginalised both politically and economically in their own land. The Pons Plan rejected the decentralisation of authority that had taken place under the Fabius Plan. In a move which was specifically aimed at obstructing *FLNKS* development projects in the three regions it controlled, power was taken away from the four regional governments and centralised once again in the hands of the High Commissioner, the French government's representative in Noumea.[99] Furthermore the land board that had been set up under the Fabius Plan to buy land from the French settlers and return it to the Kanak tribes was replaced by one which seemed more likely to favour the interests of the settlers than those of the Kanaks.

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 move by the Forum at the United Nations could have adverse consequences and would be considered an unfriendly act.[100] 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.[101]

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.[102]

In September the Non-Aligned Movement at the request of Vanuatu voted to give the *FLNKS* observer status and to support the re-inscription of New Caledonia at the United Nations.[103] In December 1986 the United Nations General Assembly voted 89 to 24 in favour of re-inscribing New Caledonia. The size of the victory was particularly impressive given the strong economic pressure that France had exerted on the smaller United Nations members in an attempt to influence their vote.[104] The vote was a major triumph 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 United Nations 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 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 included 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.

Endnotes

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2 Elise Huffer, 'Politique Extérieure blong Vanuatu', *Rapports Sciences Humaines*, No.1, ORSTOM, Noumea, 1989, p.25.

3 *PIM*, December 1980, p.37.

4 *PIM*, May 1981, p.5.

5 *PIM*, July 1982, p.35; January 1983, p.5; March 1983, p.5; April 1983, p.5; May 1983, p.10.

6 See Lini's speech on Vanuatu foreign policy in *Australian Outlook*, August 1982, Vol.36, pp.29-31. Vanuatu's foreign policy was also strongly influenced by that of Tanzania: Huffer, p.8.

7 *PIM* March 1984, pp.25, 27.

8 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 4 May 1985, p.17.

9 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 23 February 1985, p.12.

10 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 17 August 1985, p.1.

11 *PIM*, December 1979, p.15.

12 *Papua New Guinea Newsletter*, Week ending 19 October 1979.

13 *PIM*, April 1980, p.9

14 *PIM*, October 1980, p.5.

15 *PNGFAR*, December 1983, pp.6-7, 20.

16 *PNGFAR*, December 1984, p.40.

17 *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 24 July 1985, p.3.

18 *PNGFAR*, December 1985, p.27

19 *Backgrounder*, No.309, 11 November 1981, p.8.

20 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.

21 See 'Why we're uniting: the Melanesian Bloc', *Islands Business*, April 1988, p.26.

22 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 G.E. Fry, *South Pacific Regionalism*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Department of Political Science, ANU, 1979, pp.245-9.

23 G.E. Fry, 'Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics', in R. May and H. Nelson (eds), *Melanesia: Beyond Diversity*, RSPacS, ANU, Canberra, 1982, p.662.

24 Fry, 'Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics', p.662.

25 See Fry, 'Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics', p.663.

26 Fry, 'Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics', p.663.

27 Fry, 'Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics', p.664.

28 R.A. Herr, *Regionalism in the South Seas*, PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 1976, p.310.

29 For a description of some of the basic differences between Melanesia and Polynesia see Fry, 'Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics', p.667, and 'Regionalism and the International Politics of the South Pacific Region', *Pacific Affairs*, Fall 1981, pp.475-6; R.G. Crocombe, *The New South Pacific*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1973, pp.37-8.

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32 Fry, *South Pacific Regionalism*, p.254.

33 Fry, *South Pacific Regionalism*, p.249.

34 Fry, 'Melanesia and South Pacific Regional Politics', pp.664-5.

35 Vijay Naidu, 'The Fiji Anti-nuclear Movement: Problems and Prospects', a paper presented at the United Nations University Conference: 'Peace and Security in Oceania', in Auckland, 3 March, 1986, p.13.

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37 *Backgrounder*, No.243, 16 July 1980, pp.7-8.

38 *PIM*, December 1980, p.6.

39 *Backgrounder*, No.296, 12 August 1981, Annex A 1.

40 *Backgrounder*, No.299, 2 September 1981, pp.7-8.

41 *Backgrounder*, No.303, 30 September 1981, p.1; *PIM*, November 1981, p.18; *Backgrounder*, No.314, 16 December 1981, pp.2-3.

42 *Backgrounder*, No.325, 24 March 1982, p.4.

43 *Backgrounder*, No.338, 23 June 1982, p.6.

44 Helen Fraser, 'New Caledonia: Anti-Colonialism in a Pacific Territory', *Discussion Paper No.2*, Legislative Research Service, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 1987, pp.11-13.

45 Forum Communique, *Backgrounder*, No.345, 11 August 1982, p.3.

46 Fraser, pp.13-14.

47 Fraser, pp.13-14.

48 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.

49 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 25 August 1984, p.12.

50 *Post Courier*, 30 August 1984, p.11.

51 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 8 September 1984, p.14.

52 The internal developments in New Caledonia at this time are treated in greater detail later in this chapter under the sub-heading **France and the 'Libyan threat'**.

53 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 24 November 1984, p.7.

54 Fraser, pp.22-3.

55 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 22 December 1984, p.15; *Vanuatu Weekly*, 5 January 1985, p.14.

56 *PNGFAR*, May 1983, p.36.

57 *PIM*, October 1982, p.45.

58 It was decided to replace the *FI* by the *FLNKS* at a congress in September 1984.

59 Vol.36, No.2, p.31.

60 Fraser, p.26.

61 *Backgrounder*, No.480, 29 May 1985, p.3.

62 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 11 May 1985, p.1.

63 *The Bulletin*, 21 May 1985, p.94. *PIM*, July 1985, p.7; *Islands Business*, July 1985, pp.28-9; *Vanuatu Weekly*, 8 June 1985, p.12-13.

64 Fraser, p.26; *PIM*, March 1985, p.26; *Vanuatu Weekly*, 27 April 1985, pp.1, and 18 May 1985, p.10.

65 *Islands Business*, July 1985, p.29.

66 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 7 August 1985, p.12.

67 *PIM*, August 1985, p.20; *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 24 July 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.

68 *The Bulletin*, 2 July 1985, pp.46-7.

69 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 27 July 1985, p.1.

70 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 17 August 1985, p.12. For an explanation of the Australian position from a Vanuatu perspective, see *Vanuatu Weekly* 24 August 1985, p.16.

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.

73 *PNGFAR*, March 1986, pp.7-8.

74 *PIM*, April 1986, p.17.

75 *Islands Business*, August 1986, p.16-17.

76 *Solomon Nius*, 31 July 1986, p.6.

77 *Islands Business*, September 1986, p.21.

78 David Hegarty, 'Libya and the South Pacific', *Working Paper No.127*, SDSC RSPacS, ANU, Canberra, 1987, p.21.

79 Hegarty, 'Libya and the South Pacific', Footnote 31; David Robie, 'A Stir over Libyan Links', *Islands Business*, June 1986, p.20.

80 Based on a statement by Helen Fraser in an interview with the author, March 1989.

81 Fraser, *New Caledonia*, p.14.

82 Fraser, p.17.

83 Robie, p.18.

84 Fraser, pp.17-18.

85 *PIM*, October 1984, p.9.

86 *PIM*, October 1984, p.21.

87 *Backgrounder*, No.450, 3 October 1984, p.4.

88 Fraser, p.19.

89 Fraser, p.28.

90 *PIM*, February 1986, pp.7, 13; *Islands Business*, April 1986, p.27.

91 Robie, p.20. The recent split between Lini and Sope has led some commentators to assert that the Libyan initiatives were undertaken by Sope without the approval of the VP. The *Front Uni de Libération Kanak* (*FULK*) had been formed out of the *UMNC* in 1977 (see Chapter Four).

92 Robie, p.18.

93 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 24 May 1986, p.1.

94 The question of the 'Libyan threat' and interstate relations in the South Pacific is discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

95 *Papua New Guinea Post Courier*, 24 September 1981, p.3.

96 *PNGFAR*, December 1984, p.9.

97 *Backgrounder*, No.494, 4 September 1985, Statements I; *Vanuatu Weekly*, 2 November 1985, p.10.

98 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. *PIM*, October 1985, p.15. *The Wall Street Journal* went so far as to maintain that the French presence in the South Pacific made the world stronger, *PIM*, December 1985. p.5.

99 Fraser, p.28; *Islands Business*, May 1986, p.23.

100 *Islands Business*, September 1986, p.12.

101 *Islands Business*, September 1986, p.13.

102 *Final Communique*, 17th South Pacific Forum, Suva, 8-11 August 1986.

103 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 20 September 1986, p.1.

104 Fraser, p.31.

Chapter Six

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 a 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 the Second World War 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]

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 1975 the then French Secretary of State for Overseas Departments and Territories, Olivier Stirn, had declared in an interview in *PIM*

that France had no wish to isolate itself in its Pacific territories and that it was its desire to see them forge new relations and exchanges of all kinds, principally in the fields of culture and economics, with their neighbours.[3] He was concerned that French policies in the region accord with France's liberal and democratic traditions. 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. The meeting endorsed the so-called Dijoud Plan which envisaged a new distribution of power and wealth in New Caledonia to give France a more liberal image. Greater co-operation in cultural and technical activities was planned with France's neighbours in the Pacific.[4]

An article published in 1980 by the Documentation Française, commenting on the recent visits by Stirn to some of the Forum states, drew attention to the growth of pan-Melanesian nationalism and the poor receptivity 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.[5] 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 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 eighteen French consuls and ambassadors of the Pacific rim was held in Paris to map out a new approach to the Pacific.[6] Nevertheless, this initiative by the French government was more a response to the increasing 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.[7] 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.[8] But it was not until September 1985 during a visit to Moruroa that Mitterrand, in order to show French determination to stay in the region,

announced the establishment of the Council of the South Pacific. 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.[9]

There would seem to be several reasons for the delay in the establishment of the Council. 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 responsibility for the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior*.

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 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.[10] The Council also announced that fifty 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, with the aim of developing ties with the independent South Pacific Island nations that were critical of French policies in the region.[11] The first such project, the construction of a wood-burning power plant in the Cook Island was approved in January 1986.[12]

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 Mitterrand 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 Bernard Pons as Minister for Overseas Departments and Territories and the government's new plan for the future status of New Caledonia, called the Pons Plan, was widely perceived as favouring 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.[13] As we saw in the preceding chapter it was this perception that was largely responsible for the decision of the Forum to move for the re-inscription of New Caledonia in the list of non-independent countries at the United Nations.

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 his intention to keep New Caledonia French.[14] 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 the 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 Secretary 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.[15] This fact together with his ability to speak Tahitian, a language comprehensible to speakers of most other Polynesian tongues, 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.[16]

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.[17]

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 accepted, force in the development of the region.[18] Nevertheless, Flosse's brief concerning France's policies in the South Pacific Territories specifically excluded New Caledonia.[19]

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.[20] 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. It just had to explain them better. Once the French policies concerning New Caledonia and nuclear testing had been properly explained the Islanders would see that their fears were 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.[21] In order see that these tasks were being adequately attended to, regular meetings of French mission heads, high commissioners and ministers were held to map out future political, economic and military strategies in the region. One such meeting took place in Noumea in 1987 from 15-17 May under the chairmanship of Gaston Flosse. At that meeting Flosse announced the setting up of a fund of about US$6 million for the 1988 aid programme.[22] Another meeting was held in Noumea in March of the following year. It was attended by 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.[23] For the first time 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.[24] 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. In April 1987 Flosse hosted a visit by a group of Catholic Church leaders from the South Pacific. In July the same year 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.[25]

For his visits Flosse often made use of French naval vessels and aircraft in 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. The patrol boats *Railleuse* and *Gracieuse* called at Fiji in October 1987. Two months later the *Gracieuse* toured the Cooks, Tonga and both Samoas 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.[26] The French escort sloop *Balny* visited Kiribati, Tuvalu, Fiji, Tonga and the Cook Islands in January and February 1988. During her voyage she delivered solar energy equipment, racing canoes and training gear for canoe racing.[27]

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. In September 1987 the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of the Cook Islands visited Paris to sign a financial agreement worth 50 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.[28] The socialist initiative of 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 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. Flosse proudly claimed that French aid was equal to that of the USA and second only to that of Australia.[29]

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. When 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 per cent with the first payments to be deferred for six years.[30] 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.

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 fifteen 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, insisting that priority should be given to those programmes which would have a rapid impact on the development of countries in the South Pacific and whose implementation would involve international organisations, particularly the South Pacific Commission. The uppermost aim of the researchers, he declared, should be the promotion of France.[31]

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 for 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.[32] The meeting reviewed the eighteen 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 FF in French credits in areas such as agronomy, oceanography, geology and raw materials, resources and the environment, renewable energy, health, the social sciences and teledetection.[33] 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.[34]

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 technical, economic, social and cultural advancement for the country concerned.[35] 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.[36] 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.[37] 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.[38]

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.[39] 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.[40] According to a French spokesperson, the exercise was simply designed to familiarise the two crews with each other's operational procedures and to foster friendly relations between the two navies. It is difficult to deny, however, the importance of such an exercise for a regime which 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.[41] 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 $A16 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.[42]

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.[43] 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.[44]

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 described as inconsistent the policies of certain South Pacific states which, he said, had 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.[45] 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.[46]

The Flosse Initiatives: an Evaluation

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 from Papua New Guinea.[47] Papua New Guinea continued its attacks on French policy on both New Caledonia and nuclear testing at Moruroa at the United Nations. During the United Nations debate on re-inscription in 1986 the Papua New Guinea Ambassador to the United Nations compared the situation in New Caledonia to that in Namibia.[48] Convinced that there was a need to go beyond re-inscription, Papua New Guinea began to look at additional means of 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.[49]

In August 1987 Jacob 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.[50] 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 also by students and trade unionists as well at the refusal of France to modify its policies in the light of both world opinion as expressed by the vote in favour of re-inscription at the United Nations and the opinion of the Forum countries.[51] 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.[52]

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. He 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 was forced out leaving behind a mess that could destabilise the whole region. Papua New Guinea and the other Melanesian states, he declared, 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.'[53] One possible diplomatic option under consideration was the formal recognition of the *FLNKS* as the provisional government of New Caledonia.[54]

Following the overwhelming vote against independence in the September referendum and the equally massive boycott by Kanaks, there were, however, suggestions 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.[55] 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.[56] 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.[57]

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 it 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.[58] French aid to Vanuatu fell from 66 million FF on 1986 to 52 million FF in 1987.[59] 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.[60]

In the lead up to the national elections in Vanuatu, Prime Minister Lini accused France of funding the Union of Moderate Parties, the French-speaking opposition party, and expelled the French Ambassador.[61] When France announced that it would retaliate by cutting its aid to Vanuatu, Lini asked it to withdraw two more diplomats.[62] France responded by ordering a $1 million reduction in its aid and the withdrawal of thirty of its nationals working on technical assistance programmes.[63] Yet the realisation that the loss of French aid would be detrimental to living standards in the country and could therefore have repercussions on domestic politics forced the Government to adopt a more conciliatory attitude. In his opening address to Parliament President Sokomanu expressed concern at the loss of French aid and urged the Government to enter into dialogue with the French government to normalise their relations.[64]

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.

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.[65] Following the resignation of five of his coalition cabinet ministers Kenilorea himself was forced to resign on 17 November.[66]

His successor and former Deputy Prime Minister 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.[67] 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.[68] There can be little doubt, then, that the Flosse initiatives were unsuccessful in improving relations between the Melanesian states and France. There would appear to be a strong correlation between the state of France's relations with these countries and those between the French government and the *FLNKS*. As relations between the French government and the *FLNKS* deteriorated as a result of the Pons Plan, so did those between the French government and the independent Melanesian states.

Flosse's initiatives are generally thought to have yielded more favourable results in Fiji, Polynesia and even Micronesia.[69] 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.[70] Yet it can also be argued that this relationship between France and the Cook Islands had existed before the Flosse initiatives and was in fact a consequence of the close family and cultural ties that existed between French Polynesia and the Cook Islands.[71] 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.[72] 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.[73] 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.[74] 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.[75] There was a further scandal over the

allocation of the houses that Flosse had promised after Cyclone Sally.[76] Moreover, the fact that the Cook Islands had applied to be a party to the Lomé convention and could therefore benefit from French support of its application might be a further reason for its relative silence over the events in New Caledonia in April and May of 1988.[77]

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.[78] 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. In August 1987 the Decolonisation Committee had adopted a resolution presented by Fiji reaffirming the right of the indigenous people of New Caledonia, the Kanaks, to self determination.[79] 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.[80]

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 rarely stated. It is said to support the French presence in the Pacific.[81] 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.[82] There was also very little criticism from Tonga of the decision by France to proceed with the referendum in New Caledonia.[83]

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 still had some doubts as to its appropriateness when he declared that the Forum had played into French hands.[84] 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'.[85]

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.[86] 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.[87] 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.[88]

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. The Western Samoan Prime Minister, as Chairman of the Forum, called for a boycott of the South Pacific Games in Noumea.[89] In his address to the UN General Assembly, the Prime Minister declared the referendum result to be invalid and criticised French efforts to produce a result that favoured a continuation of French rule.[90] The Western Samoan representative at the United Nations condemned the French tests and called on France to conduct them in France.[91]

Significantly, the leader of the opposition, Tofilau Eti 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 assist it in its campaign for re-election.[92] 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.'[93]

On the whole, then, the Flosse initiatives would seem to have been much less successful than he claimed.[94] French aid sometimes seemed

tainted by corruption and scandal. Many of its beneficiaries declared that as developing countries they needed all the aid that they could get.[95] 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.[96] 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.[97]

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*.[98] On the divisive question of the franchise for the act of self determination they agreed that only those who could demonstrate long term residence in and commitment to New Caledonia should be included and that the rights of all inhabitants be guaranteed, with special recognition of Kanak rights.[99] Ministers considered that the current French approach had serious shortcomings and did not meet accepted principles and practices of the United Nations. They reaffirmed their view that independence for New Caledonia was inevitable.

The 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 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.[100]

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.[101] 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.'[102]

Playing on the concern of some Forum members over the likely consequences for the stability of the region if the situation in Fiji should deteriorate, Flosse maintained that a 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.[103] 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.[104] 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.[105]

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'.[106]

The issue of Libyan ties with the 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 fifty ni-Vanuatu were to be sent to Libya for para-military training.[107] 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.[108] In March 1987 a Libyan delegation visited Port Vila to discuss the opening of a 'people's bureau' there and economic aid.[109] The controversy reached a climax when in response to reports that Australia intended to make relations between the Island countries and Libya an important issue at the Apia Forum, Vanuatu's Prime Minister Lini warned that the Forum had no mandate to interfere in the domestic affairs of its member states and if that were to happen then it would signal the end of the Forum.[110] He also accused both the Australian and New Zealand governments and the media in those two countries of misinformation in a deliberate attempt to isolate and destabilise Vanuatu by using his country's relations as an issue.

Although the other Melanesian states had earlier indicated that they shared Australia's concern over Libyan influence in the South Pacific, at the 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'.[111] 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.[112] On the eve of the 1987 Forum meeting Lini declared that the most serious threat to regional security in the South Pacific was posed by French colonialism and militarisation of New Caledonia as well as neo-colonialism perpetrated by Australia and New Zealand. Whereas Australia and New Zealand both had ready reaction forces which could invade Vanuatu or any South Pacific Island state at any time Libya had no such force existing in the region and was therefore not a threat. The Prime Minister of Western Samoa, as Chairman of the Forum, criticised Australia for overreacting on the issue of Libya.[113]

Whereas the storm over links with Libya mainly affected relations between Australia and New Zealand and the Melanesian states, moves to form 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 and the next two years were to see a considerable increase in the number of meetings and consultations at ministerial level. 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 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.

At a meeting in Honiara in May 1987 the Foreign Ministers of Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea called on France to invite the UN to create a special committee to assist the independence issue in New Caledonia.[114] They discussed economic cooperation, security surveillance and the concept of a single regional organisation. They also agreed to explore the possibility of setting up a House of Melanesia in both Brussels and New York to represent the interests of the three countries. A few weeks later the Prime Ministers of the three Melanesian countries met in Rabaul. They reaffirmed their support for 'the just struggle of the Melanesian people to attain their independence, without preconditions under constitutional arrangements acceptable to the Melanesian Kanaks'.[115] They rejected the planned referendum and in particular the criteria for voting which they said would only increase tension both in New Caledonia and the region.

A further meeting of the three Foreign Ministers of the Melanesian Spearhead Group took place in Honiara in September following the referendum on independence in New Caledonia. The Foreign Ministers reaffirmed their rejection of the referendum and its outcome and called for international cooperation 'in bringing an immediate end to deliberate French neo-colonial policies which are seriously threatening the peace and security in the region'.[116] They suggested as one of the options that could be adopted in the future the formalisation of relations with the *FLNKS* at a government to government level.

On the 14 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.[117] In their joint statement they recognised the Forum as paramount regional organisation and declared that the formalisation of relations between members of the Spearhead Group was not intended to be divisive.[118] This and 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.[119]

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 promote 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.[120] 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.[121] 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.[122]

The period from the victory of the centre-right coalition in France in 1986 to its defeat in 1988 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 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 VP 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.

Endnotes

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, Duke University, 1976, pp.132-3.

2 Statistics provided by the French Embassy in Canberra.

3 *PIM*, June 1975, pp.2-3.

4 *PIM*, January 1979, p.27.

5 *PIM*, September 1980, pp.27-8.

6 *PIM*, July 1982, p.5.

7 *PIM*, September 1984, pp.65-6.

8 *PIM*, September 1984, pp.65-6

9 *Islands Business*, April 1986, p.27.

10 *PIM*, April 1986, p.17

11 *PIM*, April 1986, p.17; *Islands Business*, April 1986, p.27.

12 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 1 February 1986, p.10.

13 *Islands Business*, May 1986, p.23; for details of the key measures contained in the Pons Plan see Chapter Five.

14 *Islands Business*, November 1986, p.12.

15 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.0, October 1986, p.1.

16 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.

17 *La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat chargé du Pacifique Sud*, No.6, August 1987, p.2.

18 *La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat chargé du Pacifique Sud*, No.6, August 1987, pp.1-2; *Islands Business*, October 1986, p.30.

19 *Islands Business*, May 1986, p.23.

20 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.4, May 1987, p.1.

21 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.4, May 1987, p.3; *A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.0, October 1986, p.3.

22 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.4, May 1987, p.3.

23 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 5 March 1988.

24 *Islands Business*, December 1987, p.17.

25 *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 August 1987.

26 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.8, January 1988, p.11.

27 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.8, January 1988, p.10.

28 *La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud*, No.7, November 1987, pp.4-5.

29 *A Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.0, October 1986, p.3.

30 *Islands Business*, February 1987, p.34.

31 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.0, October 1986, pp.2, 5, 6.

32 The major French research institutes in the South Pacific are *ORSTOM*, *IFREMER*, *CNRS*, *CIRAD*, *CEA*, *BRGM*, Pasteur Institute, Malarde Institute.

33 *La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud*, No.6, August 1987, p.4.

34 *Islands Business*, April 1987, p.19.

35 *La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud*, No.5, June 1987, p.5.

36 *La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud*, No.5, p.6.

37 *La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud*, No.5, p.7.

38 *La lettre du Secrétaire d'Etat charge du Pacifique Sud*, No.7, November 1987, p.3.

39 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 April 1989, p.38.

40 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 8 October 1987.

41 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 23 October 1987.

42 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 15 January 1988; Stephen Henningham, *France and the South Pacific: Prospects into the 1990s*, Discussion Paper No.2, 1988-89, Legislative Research Service, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra, p.42.

43 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 6 April 1988.

44 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 2 May 1988.

45 *Islands Business*, July 1987, p.50.

46 *Islands Business*, July 1987, p.50.

47 *Post Courier*, 27 February 1987, p.6.

48 *PIM*, December 1986, p.16.

49 *Islands Business*, February 1987, p.41.

50 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 24 August 1987.

51 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 25 August 1987.

52 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 11 and 21 September 1987.

53 *Papua New Guinea Foreign Affairs Recorder*, September 1987, p.12.

54 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 9 September 1987.

55 Fraser, *Pacific Report*, Vol.2, No.12, 6 July 1989, p.2.

56 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 15 September 1987.

57 *Post Courier*, 10 September 1987, p.3.

58 *PIM*, December 1986, p.8.

59 Gabriel and Kermel, *Les sentiers de l'espoir*, La Brèche-PEC, Paris, 1988, Footnote 23, p.124.

60 Gabriel and Kermel, Footnote 23, p.124.

61 *Islands Business*, November 1987, p.13; *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 1 October 1987; *Vanuatu Weekly*, 10 October 1987, p.8.

62 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 23 October 1987; *Vanuatu Weekly*, 14 November 1987, p.7.

63 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 10 November 1987.

64 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 2 April 1988, p.1.

65 Alebua on becoming Prime Minister deferred yet again accreditation formalities.

66 *Islands Business*, December 1986, p.34.

67 *Solomon Star*, 12 December 1986, p.4.

68 The Solomon Islands government cancelled the landing rights of the plane that was to take its delegation to the Games: *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 3 December 1987.

69 See Stephen Henningham, *France and the South Pacific: Prospects into the 1990s*, *Discussion Paper No.2*, 1988-89, Legislative Research Service, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra, pp.37, 45.

70 *Cook Islands News*, 31 August 1987, p.1.

71 *Islands Business*, November 1986, p.14; February 1987, p.35. See also David Stone, 'The Awesome Glow in the Sky: The Cook Islands and the French Tests', *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol.2, 1967, p.158.

72 *PIM*, May 1982, p.48; *PIM*, July 1984, p.7.

73 *PIM*, July 1984, p.7.

74 *PIM*, September 1985, p.30.

75 *Cook Islands News*, 4 July 1987, p.11 and 29 July 1987, p.16.

76 *Cook Islands News*, 29 February 1988, pp.1, 6, 7.

77 *Cook Islands News*, 30 March 1988, p.1.

78 Henningham, p.43.

79 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 22 August 1987, p.7.

80 *Islands Business*, November 1988, p.12.

81 *Submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade: Reference Australia and the South Pacific*, Vol.IX, March 1988, p.S02102.

82 *La lettre du Secrétaire chargé du Pacifique Sud*, No.6, August 1987, p.3.

83 Ed Rampell, 'Behind the celebrations', *PIM*, September 1988, p.36.

84 *Islands Business*, September 1986, p.20.

85 *PIM*, September 1988, pp.36-8.

86 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.6, August 1987, p.3.

87 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.7, November 1987, p.5.

88 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 19 December 1987.

89 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 17 September 1987.

90 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 10 October 1987.

91 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 15 October 1987.

92 *PIM*, September 1988, p.47.

93 Interview with Alesana, *Islands Business*, November 1988, p.14.

94 See his speech to French parliament in *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.8 January 1988, p.2.

95 Helen Fraser, 'Interview with Iremia Tabai', *Islands Business*, January 1988, p.12.

96 Fraser, 'Interview with Iremia Tabai'.

97 Fraser, 'Interview with Iremia Tabai'; *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 19 December 1987.

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.

98 *Post Courier*, 5 March 1987, p.2; *Islands Business*, May 1987, p.9.

99 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 14 April 1987, p.11.

100 Communique of the 18th South Pacific Forum held in Apia 29-30 May 1987.

101 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.

102 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.4, May 1987, p.3; No.5, June 1987, p.8.

103 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 27 May 1987.

104 *Islands Business*, November 1986, p.13.

105 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 3 June 1987.

106 *Islands Business*, April 1987, p.19; see also Wingti's speech earlier in this chapter.

107 David Hegarty, 'South Pacific Security Issues: An Australian Perspective', *Working Paper No.147*, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, ANU, Canberra, 1987, p.11. 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.

108 *Islands Business*, May 1987, p.7.

109 *Islands Business*, June 1987, p.28.

110 *Islands Business*, June 1987, p.25; *Vanuatu Weekly*, 9 May 1987, p.1.

111 *Post Courier*, 21 May 1987, p.2.

112 *Radio Australia Transcripts*, 27 May 1987.

113 *Post Courier*, 8 May 1987, p.7.

114 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 18 April 1987, p.9.

115 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 23 May 1987, p.9.

116 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 19 September 1987, p.8.

117 *Islands Business*, April 1988, p.26.

118 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 19 March 1988, p.9.

119 *Islands Business*, February 1988, p.38; *PIM*, September 1988, p.49.

120 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.6, August 1987, p.3.

121 *Letter from the Minister for the South Pacific*, No.7, November 1987, p.5.

122 *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.

Chapter Seven

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. At a convention held in February 1988 the *FLNKS* had decided to boycott the regional elections which had been scheduled by the Chirac government to coincide with the French presidential elections in April.[1] The boycott, or 'muscled mobilisation' as Tjibaou called it, was intended to make the Pons Plan unworkable and to force the French government to engage in genuine negotiations with the *FLNKS* over a timetable for decolonisation.[2] As part of the generalised campaign to disrupt the elections a group of French gendarmes on Ouvea Island were taken hostage. Despite the willingness of the *FLNKS* to negotiate the release of the hostages, a military assault was ordered on the cave where they were being held, resulting in the death of nineteen Kanaks and two of the French military.[3] The decision to use force to free the hostages, coming as it did only three days prior to the crucial second round of the presidential elections, was seen by many as a cynical attempt by Prime Minister and presidential candidate Jacques Chirac to boost his chances of being elected.[4]

The dramatic events at Ouvea and the military operation mounted by France to end the siege brought sharp criticism from countries which until then had remained silent. Fiji's 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.[5]

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 Mitterrand 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. This chapter examines the new South Pacific policies of the socialist government and the effect that these and other French initiatives in the region have had on the attitudes of the South Pacific states, both collectively and individually, towards France.

The Forum Welcomes the New French Government's Initiatives

Divisions among Forum members over the issue of New Caledonia again came to the fore over a letter to be sent on behalf of the Forum congratulating President Mitterrand and at the same time stressing their concern at the situation in New Caledonia.[6] The Melanesian member countries, with the tragic events still fresh in their memory, were initially less well-disposed towards the new French government. Papua New Guinea wanted to see a stronger message given to France on New Caledonia while Vanuatu felt that there was nothing to congratulate France for. Earlier Solomon Islands Prime Minister Ezekiel Alebua had called on the Forum to set up a special committee which would have special status for dealing directly with both the United Nations and the French government on New Caledonia.[7]

Yet by July pronouncements by the French government and negotiations between it and both the *FLNKS* and *RPCR* on a new approach to the problem of New Caledonia had reassured the independent Melanesian countries. The new French Minister for Overseas Departments and Territories Olivier Stirn declared that the first priority must be to end the 'colonial situation' in New Caledonia and that the Pons statute of autonomy should be scrapped.[8] The special July meeting of Forum Foreign Ministers that had been called in response to the tragic events at Ouvea to review the Forum position on New Caledonia before the 10 August session of the United Nations Decolonisation Committee was cancelled at the request of Fiji and Tonga who considered it premature and unnecessary.[9]

The announcement of the Rocard Plan and the signing of the Matignon Accords on 26 June 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, including the members of the Melanesian Spearhead Group.[10] Vanuatu sent notes to the French President and Prime Minister congratulating them on the progress achieved on the status of New Caledonia.[11] Forum members were also reassured by the French government's decision not to oppose the

resolution on re-inscription at the 10 August session of the United Nations Decolonisation Committee. Consequently for the first time in seven years New Caledonia was not a major issue at the annual Forum meeting. The final communique of the 1988 Nuku'alofa Forum declared that the Forum was encouraged by the new spirit of constructive dialogue in its relations with France.[12] It expressed support for the Matignon accord and urged all parties to work for its success. Even Vanuatu's Prime Minister, Walter 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.[13]

At the 1989 Forum meeting in Kiribati New Caledonia was again only a minor agenda item.[14] Moreover, given that the major agenda item at the Forum was drift-net fishing the announcement by France just prior to the meeting of the Forum countries that it would join with Australia to seek global measures against drift-net fishing in the South Pacific could only have made Forum members more favourably disposed towards it.[15] The Forum urged the United Nations Decolonisation Committee and General Assembly to continue the consensus approach begun the previous year in its dealings with the New Caledonia issue. Nevertheless, the Forum reminded France that New Caledonia was not the only problem affecting its relations with the region. The issue of French nuclear testing was also raised and France was again called upon by the Forum to cease nuclear testing immediately.

The election of a socialist government in France was also followed by a gradual improvement in relations between France and Vanuatu. Although still concerned about the situation in New Caledonia, Lini became more understanding of the French position. At the 1988 Forum he told a press conference that he was not satisfied with the Accords because he felt the timetable was too long.[16] 'I believe New Caledonia should be independent tomorrow, that in reality New Caledonia is ready for independence today.' At the 1989 Forum meeting held in July in Kiribati Lini called on Forum members and the French government not to turn their backs on the issue of independence for New Caledonia.[17] However, his attitude to the ten year period provided for in the Matignon Accord also seemed to have changed. He said that although the period was long he understood that France needed those years to train the Kanak people.

The Government of Vanuatu also took steps to improve its diplomatic relations with France. This move was perhaps the consequence of political developments within Vanuatu itself as well as developments in New Caledonia. One reason for the move may have been the fear of the internal economic and political consequences that might arise if French

aid was not restored, particularly in light of the decision of Barak Sope and other members of the VP to form a new party and to work closely with the French-speaking opposition party UMP. The move to improve relations with France was foreshadowed by the Foreign Affairs Minister of Vanuatu, Donald Kalpokas, in an interview with Helen Fraser in July 1988.[18] Kalpokas declared that his Government had already informed the new government in Paris that it was ready to talk. He explained that France had a role in the Pacific 'as an equal dialogue partner, rather than a paternalistic one—buying support from the Polynesians'. The request by Vanuatu in March 1989 for a French helicopter to assess the damage that had been caused by yet another cyclone and the French decision to accede to that request were evidence of the desire on both sides to improve relations between the two countries.[19]

In November 1989 Kalpokas went to Paris to discuss the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between France and Vanuatu and the re-appointment of a French ambassador to Vila.[20] Both countries agreed to upgrade progressively their diplomatic relations. Kalpokas assured Prime Minister Rocard that the French-speaking ni-Vanuatu community was treated on an equal footing with the English-speaking community and expressed his Government's wish that France maintain its cooperation in Vanuatu. Both parties believed that activities facilitating the strengthening of mutually beneficial ties between Vanuatu and New Caledonia should be specially favoured. In February 1990 as a first step towards upgrading diplomatic relations with Vanuatu the French government appointed a *chargé d'affaires* to its embassy in Vila.[21]

Yet despite its efforts to improve its relations with France Vanuatu has kept the issue of New Caledonia before the world community. The Belgrade Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in September 1989 reaffirmed its strong support for an early transition to an independent New Caledonia and urged the parties involved to continue their dialogue and to continue to refrain from acts of violence.[22] At the 44th General Assembly of the UN in October 1989 the representatives of Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands welcomed the positive measures taken by the French government in New Caledonia.[23] They were, however, far less impressed by the French nuclear testing programme and called on the French government to cease that programme and all other activities which were harmful to the resources and livelihood of the people of the South Pacific region.

The Socialist's New South Pacific Policy: a Break With the Past?

At the time of writing (mid-1990) the 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. He also lost his seat in the National Assembly in the elections that followed Mitterrand's re-election as President. He faced court charges of corruption, interference, abuse of power and complicity for his use of public works equipment and personnel to carry out development and improvement on two of his properties.[24]

Yet the Socialists were to honour the agreements signed by Flosse and to maintain France's efforts to improve its image and its relations with the states of the South Pacific. France has lent the Cook Islands NZ$13.5 million for a solar power project in the Northern Islands and the upgrading of Rarotonga's power and water supplies.[25] The Cook Islands Parliament has also recently amended the country's Banking Act to allow the French bank Caisse Centrale to operate in Rarotonga.[26] This will give the Cook Islands access to loans from this development bank which has the backing of the French government. In Papua New Guinea France has agreed to fund programmes set up by the Copra Research Institute to improve local copra farming systems.[27] The French government has also expressed interest in sponsoring students from Papua New Guinea to study overseas.

France has continued to focus its attention on Fiji and is now Fiji's largest single aid donor.[28] The extensive aid package consented to by the previous French government has been maintained, as has France's willingness to provide humanitarian aid and emergency assistance. In September 1988 the trade mission at the French Embassy in Suva began feasibility studies on the setting up of large-scale French consortia in Fiji.[29] Significantly the mission has been upgraded to the status of a Trade Commission with the aim of promoting contacts between Fiji businessmen and their counterparts in New Caledonia, French Polynesia and France.[30] France also funded the training of two Fiji army officers to fly French-made Le Rabelais helicopters.[31] The Fijian Army took delivery from France of a Rabelais helicopter and more than fifty Renault trucks and agreed to buy a $F6 million Dauphin helicopter.[32] There were even reports that France was considering funding a naval base in Fiji.[33] These

were dismissed by French Prime Minister Rocard during a visit to Fiji in 1989.

Aware of accusations that France was trying to gain support in the English-speaking South Pacific by taking advantage of Fiji's estranged relations with Australia and New Zealand, Rocard denied that Fiji had received any military aid from France and declared that France sought 'friendly and trustful relations with all the countries of the Pacific without passing any judgement on the internal affairs of any of them and without providing military aid anywhere'.[34] During a visit to Fiji in September 1989, Rocard attended the ceremony at which Sitiveni Rabuka, leader of the 1987 coups, was made a Commander of the Legion of Honour. Rabuka was awarded the honour for his rescue under fire of a French soldier during his period of service with the United Nations peacekeeping force in Lebanon.[35] In April 1990 Major General Rabuka announced that France would build, equip, man and manage a $US7.7 million maintenance workshop in Suva for the Fiji military.[36]

The French Ambassador to the Pacific, Philippe Baude, has also dismissed charges that France was buying off Fiji, the Cook Islands, Western Samoa and Tonga.[37] By diversifying both the types of aid and its destinations France, he maintained, was rectifying the anomalous situation that existed before 1985 when French aid to South Pacific countries went almost entirely to Vanuatu. However, Dr Bavadra, the Fijian Prime Minister who had been deposed by Rabuka, was unconvinced. He accused the Fiji regime of failing to support the indigenous peoples of New Caledonia and French Polynesia because Rabuka 'had been bought off by the Pacific's most hated colonial regime, the French'.[38]

The South Pacific Council that had been established under the previous socialist administration has been re-activated.[39] During a visit to the region in February 1989, 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.[40] She also said the new French government would encourage links between the French University of the South Pacific and Australian universities. French Education Minister Lionel Jospin had previously stated that University's success would be determined by its capacity to play a major scientific role in the region and that the university had to be able attract non-French-speaking students.[41]

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.[42] Yet as Fraser has pointed out the approach fails to address two important issues. Firstly, it does not mention French nuclear testing. Secondly, it does not explain how the territories could qualify for full regional relations and representation in regional bodies such as the Forum without being independent entities.

In fact, the emphasis seems to be very much on economic rather than political integration. During a recent visit to the region French Prime Minister Rocard described as absurd the fact that the economies of the French Pacific Territories should be completely tied to a country 22,000 kilometres away.[43] He called on the French Territories to begin cooperating with other Island countries in the areas of tourism, energy, extension services, and tropical agriculture and other research. In line with this new policy it has been announced that products from some South Pacific countries will be exempt from import restrictions in New Caledonia.[44] Previously only products from the EEC, Lomé Convention countries and Africa had been exempt. Yet it could also be argued that it is just as absurd that the foreign policies of the French Territories are dictated by a country on the other side of the world.

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. They continue to assert that as a Pacific nation France is entitled to use its territory in the Pacific to test its nuclear weapons. Their policy, like that of their predecessors, is based on the desire that France retain its status as a world power, a status which they see as requiring nuclear testing sites and overseas possessions. The 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.

Interest in Regional Sub-groupings and the Issue of Libyan Influence Wanes

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.[45] 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'.[46] Significantly, a summit of Polynesian countries and peoples called by the King of Tonga in 1989 to discuss the formation of a Polynesian Economic Community attracted only a New Zealand Maori representative and the Fiji Minister for Education Filipe Bole.[47] It would appear that both Western Samoa and the Cook Islands feel that there is no need for such a grouping as they believe that Polynesian interests are well served by the South Pacific Forum. Cook Islands Prime Minister Geoffrey Henry declared that there were already too many regional organisations and that his country would only support an organisation that could promote trade.[48]

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. The Solomon Islands Opposition's foreign affairs spokesperson, Dennis Lulei described the Spearhead Group as having 'a blunt spear'.[49] He asserted that the Group had achieved nothing for its three member countries and questioned the cost of membership to the Solomon Islands. Another member of the Solomon Island Parliament, alluding to the fact that not all Solomon Islanders were Melanesian, called for 'Melanesian' to be dropped from the title on the grounds that it discriminated against other racial communities within the Spearhead Group. Michael Somare, Foreign Minister in the new Papua New Guinea government of Namaliu, has made quite clear his opposition—for reasons similar to those advanced by Alesana—to the continuation of the Melanesian Spearhead Group. The region, he said, should not be divided along racial lines.[50] 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.[51] Significantly, there was no Melanesian caucus as in previous years either before or during the 1988 Tonga Forum. Another reason for this loss of momentum was the severe political crisis in Vanuatu in the latter half of 1988 and Papua New Guinea's preoccupation with the Bougainville crisis throughout 1989.[52]

The number of meetings of the Melanesian Spearhead Group has been considerably reduced, though New Caledonia continues to be an important agenda item. When the Prime Ministers of Papua New Guinea,

Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands finally met in January 1989, it was their first summit since the beginning of 1988. Following a briefing on the Rocard Plan by the President of the *FLNKS*, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, who attended the meeting as an observer, the three leaders expressed their concern about the situation in New Caledonia.[53] At their next summit in Honiara in March 1990 they were again briefed on developments in New Caledonia, this time by the new leader of the *UC*, François Burck.[54] The Group noted the steps taken by France to prepare New Caledonia for independence yet expressed concern that these were not fully in accordance with the UN principles and practices. They criticised France for its lack of action on the independence issue and accused it of delaying the independence process. The three Heads of Government accepted the *FLNKS* as a full member of the Spearhead Group and agreed to seek observer status for the *FLNKS* in the 1990 Forum in Vila.[55]

The Libyan threat has also ceased to be a major concern. The issue was revived briefly in 1988 when Australian Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, accused Libya of involvement in the trouble that had broken out in Vila over Lini's decision to close the Vila Urban Land Corporation. Hawke is reported as saying that his decision to assist the Lini government by providing riot gear was influenced by Libyan activity in the South Pacific.[56] His allegations brought denials from the protagonists, Lini and Sope, and were dismissed by Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister Paias Wingti. Wingti declared that he was not concerned about Libyan influence in the region which he considered minimal. In an interview with Helen Fraser David Kalpokas, Vanuatu's Foreign Minister, declared that 'the main connection with Libya was through Sope, as Secretary-General of the VP, and through his business consultancy on real estate'.[57] On the basis of these remarks it would seem logical to assume that as Sope was no longer part of the Government there could be no further question of Libyan influence on the Government and that the 'Libyan threat' was no longer an issue in regional politics.

Some Fundamental Problems Remain

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 scientific reports about the risks of radioactive leaks and the South Pacific Island states continue to voice their opposition to these tests.[58] 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.[59] During a five-nation tour of the South Pacific French Prime Minister Michel Rocard declared that France had no choice but to continue its testing programme because the 'only possibility for peace is for people to be scared stiff of war'.[60] France has even recommissioned a second nuclear testing site in French Polynesia on Fangataufa atoll, about 40 kilometres form Moruroa atoll.[61] Such a step, they claim, is necessary to give the testing programme greater flexibility. It also reflects the necessity to shift larger tests from Moruroa because of the damage that has been done to the atoll's substructure.

The issue of nuclear testing has assumed greater importance in the internal politics of French Polynesia and become a source of tension between the French government and the Government of the Territory. In 1988 the head of the French Polynesian government, Alexandre Léontieff, called on France to send a team of medical and nuclear experts to study the effects of nuclear testing on people living in the vicinity of Moruroa and Fangataufa.[62] Léontieff criticised the French policy of keeping secret scientific studies of the impact that the tests had on the environment and on public health. He called for such studies to be made public. Jacqui Drollet, Minister for Health in the French Polynesian government, called on the French military to substantiate their claim that French nuclear testing has no links to cancer.[63] They could do this, he said, by opening the medical files that they have kept on workers at the testing sites since testing began twenty-five years ago.

There is also the risk of conflict between the French government and the government of French Polynesia over the degree of autonomy the Territorial government should have. The French government has reinforced the autonomy of the Territorial government, transferring to it responsibility for direct foreign investment and giving it powers over the exploitation of natural resources both on land and in the surrounding waters.[64] Yet despite this, France has made it quite clear that internal autonomy in French Polynesia has its limits. Commenting on a forthcoming round table on the nuclear testing issue in the Territory between the French government, the Territorial government, church, union and employer groups French Prime Minister Michel Rocard declared that it did not have any power to end testing.[65] He also ruled out any referendum on the issue in the Territory because French defence policy was decided by the French Republic as a whole, not by regions, departments or towns. A similar point was made by President Mitterrand concerning foreign policy during a visit to the Territory. Although he

encouraged closer relations between the Territory and other countries in the South Pacific he stressed that it was not a question of the Territory developing a separate foreign policy from that of the French Republic. Territory President Léontieff has declared, however, that the Territory could only become an important relay for French action in the South Pacific if it was a full partner to the other countries and territories of the region.[66] It is clear that France would like to encourage greater economic integration of the Territory in the region, partly in the hope that this may reduce the extent to which the local economy is subsidised by the French state. However, greater economic integration can only increase the demand for greater political integration and hence for greater autonomy from France.

As French Polynesia integrates more into the South Pacific and France even further into the EEC, the divergence of interests, both political and economic, between the two entities within a unitary republic can only increase. Already French Polynesian politicians are concerned by the implications of the creation of a single market that will allow goods, money and people to move freely between EEC member countries after 1992.[67] They fear that as part of France, French Polynesia could be flooded by EEC citizens who would take jobs and business opportunities from local people.

Furthermore, it is still not certain that a lasting solution to the problem of New Caledonia has been found. Indeed, as the tragic killing of Tjibaou and Yeweine in May 1989 has shown, divisions exist within the independence movement itself over the Matignon Accords. The peace in New Caledonia is an uneasy one and very much dependent on how the territory evolves in the future. Nidoish Naisseline, one of the signatories of the Matignon Accords and leader of the small New Caledonian pro-independence party, the Kanak Socialist Liberation, recently declared that despite the Accords little had changed.[68] According to Naisseline, the *RPCR* (a major anti-independence party) 'still controls the administration, the 400 Kanak public servants who were to be trained under the accords has been modified to 400 New Caledonians, the powers of the Provinces to trade and have relations with the South Pacific have become dependent on French approval ... '. He also declared that if France succeeded in having New Caledonia removed from United Nations Decolonisation Committee list there would be no other alternative but to take up arms. Before his death, Tjibaou had already criticised the lack of progress and emphasised that the peace plan might not last five years.[69] François Burck, who replaced Tjibaou as President of the *Union Calédonienne*, also expressed doubts as to the durability of the Accords. He felt that the

Accords had brought more advantages for the anti-independence forces than for the *FLNKS* and admitted that 'a moment will come when we'll be forced to say that this is not independence'.[70] He also warned that the *FLNKS* would not accept the partition of New Caledonia since the Southern Province although controlled by the anti-independence *RPCR* has the largest Kanak population.

Moreover, the accords are no guarantee that a majority of electors will vote for independence in the 1998 referendum. Although the task of the *FLNKS* has been made easier by the fact that voting in the referendum will be restricted to those who can show in 1998 that they have fulfilled the residential qualification continuously for at least ten years and who in 1988 were either eligible to vote or children who will be of voting age at the time of the referendum, projections of the composition of the electorate in 1998 based on current population trends seem to indicate that the *FLNKS* will still not have the numbers. The *FLNKS* will therefore have to win over sizeable portions of other constituencies who have been opposed to independence in the past. What happens if they fail to do so or if in doing so they alienate their own supporters remains to be seen.

There have also been warnings about the risk of a social explosion in the Territory. Bernard Grasset, the High Commissioner for New Caledonia, told the Territorial Congress that the problems of urban poverty and homelessness had to be addressed if civil peace was to be maintained.[71] The success of the Matignon Accords and the harmonious evolution of the Territory, he maintained, were dependent on ensuring that everyone benefited from the current economic growth. Thus the situation in New Caledonia could deteriorate quite rapidly into one of violent confrontation and the Forum would then again have the problem of New Caledonia high on its agenda.

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 1998 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 France's 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.

Endnotes

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40 *Financial Review*, 16 February 1989, p.8.

41 Fraser, *Pacific Report*, No.19, 8 December 1988, p.6.

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46 *PIM*, September 1988, p.49.

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48 *Islands Business*, October 1989, p.30; *Islands Busines,s* October 1989, p.30.

49 Fraser, *Pacific Report*, No.8, 21 July 1988, p.6.

50 Fraser, Pacific Report, No.9, 21 July 1988, p.3.

51 'What's happened to the Melanesian Spearhead Group', *Niugini Nius*, 2 November 1988, p.6.

52 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 14 January 1989, p.6.

53 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 28 January 1989, pp.1, 8.

54 *Vanuatu Weekly*, 16 March 1990, p.7. Following the death of Tjibaou in May 1989, the leadership of the *FLNKS* was vacant until March 1990 when Paul Neaoutyine was elected president.

55 It is doubtful, however, that the Forum would grant the *FLNKS* observer status. Such status has already been requested at previous Forum meetings and although the 1987 Forum did recognise the *FLNKS* as the representative of the Kanak people, the Kanak organisation does not satisfy the guidelines that were set down at the 1986 Suva Forum.

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CONCLUSION

This monograph has shown that the French presence in the South Pacific has been a major determining factor of inter-state relations in that region. In the earlier period, covered in Chapter Three, 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 and the concomitant refusal to allow the discussion of political issues such as French nuclear testing at South Pacific Conferences were shown to have been instrumental in the formation of the South Pacific Forum. Island hostility to France and its policies in the South Pacific was an important impetus for regional co-operation, resulting as it did in the move by the independent Island states away from a type of regional organisation that had been originally conceived to serve the needs of the colonial powers to one which permitted the discussion of political issues of regional significance. It acted therefore as an important catalyst for regional unity at a time when the newly independent states might have questioned the relevance of regional co-operation as it had been constructed by the colonial powers.

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. Chapter Five 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 co-ordinate 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 a Polynesian Community. Although in part a reaction to the formation of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, these moves, documented in Chapter Six, 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 of New Caledonia at the United Nations in particular.

Chapters Five and Six also showed how the French presence in the South Pacific had 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.

In Chapter Seven we saw how since the return to power of the Socialists in 1988 and the subsequent signing of the Matignon Accords relations between France and the independent South Pacific states have been characterised by a new spirit of co-operation. Tensions in New Caledonia have subsided. The Forum states, be they Polynesian, Melanesian or Micronesian, have welcomed France's new political initiatives in New Caledonia and it has ceased to dominate the political agenda of the annual Forum Heads of Government meetings. The Libyan presence in the region is no longer an issue in intra-regional politics and interest in sub-regional groupings has ebbed. 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 many of the problems associated with the French presence in the South Pacific remain. It is still not clear whether the Matignon Accords will allow a peaceful resolution of the conflict in New Caledonia or provide only a temporary respite, while both sides regather their strength for an even more violent civil war. There is also the risk of conflict between France and French Polynesia over the course which greater integration of the French Territories in the South Pacific region should take. Compounding this are the fears of people in the Territories concerning the creation of a single market in 1992 and in particular the free circulation of goods, capital and people that

it entails. They fear an influx of non-French EEC citizens who in principle would be entitled after 1992 to live anywhere in France—and France's South Pacific territories are part of France—without a visa. They also fear that the tariff policies of the EEC after 1992 will undermine their efforts to increase their trade with their South Pacific neighbours.

The French presence in the South Pacific, then, has not only been a major determinant of inter-state relations in the region it has also been a major cause, if not the major cause, of instability. The question arises why France should be so determined to maintain its presence in the region in its present form when that presence was having such a destabilising effect in a region that had previously been the preserve of the Western powers. In Chapter Two 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 Canada, with the famous cry of '*Vive le Québec libre*' of General De Gaulle, and with the total disrespect that it showed for the sovereignty of New Zealand when it sunk the *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland harbour.

The conflict between France and the independent Island states of the South Pacific is a contest between two diametrically opposed perceptions of world order, 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 acknowledged position of arrogance, certain things such as nuclear testing 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-à-vis* their national security and their role in world affairs.

In the present rapidly evolving global political environment it is difficult to predict how the far-reaching transformation that is now under way in Europe will affect both France's national security policy and its perception of itself as a middle-sized world power. It is possible that, as France surrenders more and more of its sovereignty to the European Community, it could become less preoccupied with the maintenance of its image as a world power. Because the European Community in terms of both economic and military capacity is a world power France may no longer need the remnants of its Empire to give it the status of a medium-sized world power. It is also possible 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. Indeed, as East-West tensions diminish and the priority shifts from military security to economic competitiveness, the French government is likely to come under increasing pressure to reduce defence expenditure. French Prime Minister Michel Rocard, under pressure to redress the social inequalities in his country, has already stated that the new European environment ought to result in less money being spent on defence. France may become less willing to devote valuable resources to the modernisation of its nuclear weapons and as such less convinced of the necessity to test in the South Pacific and less committed to maintaining its presence in that part of the world.

On the other hand, current developments in both Western and Eastern Europe could strengthen France's resolve to modernise its nuclear arsenal and its commitment to continue testing in the South Pacific. Increasingly, leading figures within the French military and defence establishments are urging the European Economic Community to adopt what they call a system of common security. The basis that they propose for the system, however, bears a close resemblance to that of the current French national defence strategy: bilateral and multilateral co-operation between the existing defence forces of EEC member states within existing organisations such as the Western European Union, with perhaps the establishment of multinational brigades similar to the recently formed Franco-German Brigade; and an independent nuclear deterrent. Without such an independent integrated defence capability to accompany its economic and

political might, Western Europe, they argue, will remain an incomplete power and as such its role in world affairs will be diminished. Many predict that Western Europe will be forced to assume responsibility for its own nuclear defence. With the Cold War now over the American government, under pressure from voters to cut the defence budget, will withdraw its troops from Western Europe, thereby destroying any remaining credibility that its nuclear guarantee of Western Europe might have had. In his preface to the 150th issue of the French Defence Ministry's journal *Armées d'aujourd'hui*, an issue devoted to the subject of European defence, French Defence Minister Pierre Chévènement has stated that the doctrine of an independent nuclear deterrent is even more appropriate for the inherently less stable and more complex multipolar world environment of the period that is now dawning than it was for the period of global confrontation between the USSR and the USA that is now coming to a close. He sees the nuclear deterrents of France and the United Kingdom as providing the basis for an EEC nuclear umbrella. Ideally such a deterrent in order to be completely independent should have its own independent testing site and not have to rely on the testing facilities of another nuclear power. The French nuclear testing facilities in French Polynesia could be used by a future European Nuclear Weapons Programme just as the French rocket launching centre in French Guyana is now used by the European Space Programme. The French commitment to remaining in the South Pacific would be considerably strengthened.

Whether it is one of the above scenarios or some other that eventuates does not alter the fact that crucial decisions concerning the South Pacific will continue to be made on the other side of the globe. The conflict between two perceptions of world order remains. France still asserts the right of a 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.

COOPERATION AVEC LES ETATS DU PACIFIQUE SUD

Montant des Crédits Accordés

1) Action bilatérale 1986/87

Crédits mis en place en 1986

- Vanuatu	64,7 millions de F
- Micro Etats	18,5 millions de F
dont Fidji	5,3 millions de F
Cook	6,9 millions de F
P.N.G.	1,7 millions de F
- Fonds de coopérations du Pacifique Sud	10 millions de F

Crédits mis en place en 1987

- Vanuatu	28,3 millions de F
- Micro Etats	17,4 millions de F
- Fonds de coopération du Pacifique Sud	29 millions de F
- Fidji (collectif budgétaire de septembre 1987)	30 millions de F

Avril 1988: Signature du protocole financier avec Fidji — 43 millions de F

2) Action multilatérale

a) contribution de la France à la Commission du Pacifique Sud pour 1988 — 7,6 millions de F

b) contribution de la France dans le cadre de Lomé III (aide de la CEE) en 1986 (23, 5% de la contribution totale) — 33 millions de F

Source: French Embassy Canberra.

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This monograph examines the effects that the French presence in the South Pacific has had on relations between France and the Island countries and on relations between the Island countries themselves from 1960 to 1990. It argues that the French presence has not only been a major determinant of inter-state relations in the region but also a major cause, if not the major cause, of instability. It shows how that presence encouraged Libyan involvement in the region and how French policies and initiatives were an important factor in the moves to divide the region into competing Melanesian and Polynesian political groupings, moves that could have impaired both the effectiveness of the South Pacific Forum as a regional organisation and its ability to present a common position on important issues before international bodies such as the United Nations.

The monograph traces the hostility of Island governments to France from its origins both in the confrontations between Island and French delegates in the South Pacific Commission and in the early opposition to French nuclear testing in the 1960s through to the resentment that arose out of French obstruction of the transition to independence in what is now Vanuatu in the 1970s and the campaign to re-inscribe New Caledonia on the list of non-self-governing territories with United Nations in the 1980s. It also analyses the strength of the French commitment to remaining in the region and the recent attempts by France to change its image in the region.

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