

## CHAPTER IV

### ROLE OF THE SUPER AND MAJOR POWERS

So far economic problems of the region were examined and it was found that those problems emanated from the weak traditional economic structure left by the colonial past. Now it is time to examine the factors that have influenced and continue to influence the political and security structure of the region. Three major features seem to have dominated the Southwest Pacific's historical past. The first was the extensive involvement by extra-regional major powers which sought to influence, if not dominate, parts of the region. The second was the incessant attempts by the states in the region to assert their independence from these powers, at the same time soliciting their strategic security umbrella to ensure an equilibrium vital to their sovereign existence. The third feature was the desire by the states in the region to establish their influence over their neighbours or what could be termed as the quest for intra-regional leadership.

#### The Early Western Impact

Europeans were active in the Southwest Pacific since the late 18th century. Their Penetration into the region produced disorders from which stemmed the politics of the time. The prime political question was who was responsible for the maintenance of public peace between white and natives, natives and natives, and whites and whites. The region mostly experienced the impact of the west at two cultural levels: the culture exemplified by deserters from ships, survivors of wrecks or attacks and runaway convicts, sandalwood, food and pearl-shell gatherers, sealers and whalers, visiting traders and planters on the one hand; and the culture exemplified by Christian missionaries on the other.<sup>1</sup> The main task before the deserters and survivors of wrecks was to insure their continued survival, which meant adoption by a tribe or a native group. The most fortunate were adopted by chiefs. Survival depended on the usefulness of the white to the natives. To be useful the whiteman would conform to the local mores and folk ways. A white of this period in Fiji aspired to have one hundred children; he however, could reach only upto nineties.<sup>2</sup> Later the white settlers introduced a peculiar process of creating wants only to be satisfied from the western sources. This way they began the practice of dealing unscrupulously with the natives.

<sup>1</sup> C.H. Grattan, The Southwest Pacific to 1900: A Modern History (Michigan, 1963), p.45.

<sup>2</sup> E K Fisk, Political Economy of Independent Fiji (Canberra, 1970), p.37.

First they violated every law of fair trading and manipulated prices and later, upon getting a foothold, summarily punished them for their audacity to match equally with whites.

Of all the outside influences on the Southwest Pacific in this period none was more massive in its effects than the missionary.<sup>3</sup> Wherever missionaries took hold, strongest efforts were made to transform native society by plan, not by inadvertence as above and in the process to assimilate it to the West. A conspicuous element of the missionary program was the formal conversion of the king to Christianity, thus guaranteeing that the laws promulgated by the king would conform to the missionary idea of a proper social order and that the people in fear of the king and desirous of following his example would flock to the church.<sup>4</sup> This contact with missionaries had an ever-increasing impact on the wants of the natives only to be satisfied from the European sources. The missionaries encouraged visits from traders, whalers aiming to trade for food. Thus began the penetration of islands by outsiders. Under the theory of 'native sovereignty' the declaration of Pacific island countries as no man's land in 1817 was ostensibly to show that the responsibility for maintaining law and order was with the natives, otherwise for all practical purposes islanders for their survival depended on European missionaries.<sup>5</sup>

'Native Sovereignty' however, gave missionaries a basis on which to build native governments which became theocracies. 'Gunboat Diplomacy' provided permanence and continuity to national representation by sending residents, commercial agents and consuls. The development of this system, loose as it was, was a clear evidence that the nations conceived themselves to have interests in the islands worth protecting and advancing. Whether they would proceed to the length of assuming sovereignty over island group depended, however, on other factors than the mere decision to use diplomatic agents. The

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<sup>3</sup> Aarne A. Koskinen, Missionary Influence as a Political Factor in the Pacific Islands, (Helsinki, 1953), pp.19-20.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p.27. For details of role of religion in South Pacific see M.S. Butinova, Q roli religii i traditsiyi sovremennoy Melanezii [On the Role of religion and Traditions in Contemporary Melanesia] SE, 1978, no.6.

<sup>5</sup> M.S. Butinova, Missionerstvo i Kolonializm v Okeanii [Missionary Work and Colonialism in Oceania], (Leningrad:SP, 1975), p.24.

Americans often had large economic interests in various groups and were not interested in acquiring sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> The British with substantial economic and also important religious interests, not to mention the wish to acquire new overseas outlets for settlement, eventually led the way in taking sovereignty in the Southwest Pacific<sup>7</sup>

### **Emergence of Major Powers (Britain, France, Germany and USA)**

The predominant power in the area, however, was Britain. There was no threat to its supremacy. But with the end of the nineteenth century and start of the twentieth British imperial power showed signs of decline. America led the way after the British decline giving shape to the new alliances in the region. However, the content, that is, the western influence, remained the same. The American penetration of the islands was of much the same pattern as the British. It was rather more aggressive commercially, especially, in whaling in which the American interest surpassed that of the British. It was whaling that really gave the United States an interest in this remote part of the world.<sup>8</sup> They were commercially active in the Pacific since 1784. Their primary interest was to keep open the channels of trade and the opportunities to exploit natural resources. Otherwise, South of the equator official American Policy remained as one of the lowest priority.<sup>9</sup>

French, in the Southwest Pacific, played a role which in no way was less assertive than the British or the Americans, rather it provided the necessary impetus in furthering western interests in the area. French took sovereignty over the Marquesas but only a limited protectorate over the Society island (Tahiti) in April 1768.<sup>10</sup> In Melanesia, French took control

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<sup>6</sup> Grattan, n.1, p.252.

<sup>7</sup> W.P. Morrell, Britain in the Pacific Islands (Oxford, 1960), Chapter II.

<sup>8</sup> Donald D. Johnson, "The United States: The Big Umbrella", in Ron Crocombe and Ahmed Ali, Foreign Forces in Pacific Politics vol.IV, (USP, Suva, 1983), p.68.

<sup>9</sup> R.A. Herr, "Jimmy Carter and American Foreign Policy in the Pacific Islands", Australian Outlook XXXII, (August 1978), pp.224-26.

<sup>10</sup> Stephan Henningham, France and the South Pacific : Problems and Prospects, Working Paper no. 62, Research School of Pacific Studies, ANU, (Canberra, 1989), p.3.

of the New Caledonia in 1853.<sup>11</sup> The French, with smaller accumulated economic interests than either the Americans or the British, but exploiting a religious interest, were more motivated by the spirit of nationalistic competition with the British on the one hand and hopes of future economic growth on the other and followed the British example.<sup>12</sup>

The Germans, comparatively late-comers arrived as traders but soon bought land and established plantations. At first, private enterprises only, they became territorial imperialists when Bismark was induced to change his mind about colonies. From traders in Hawaii in 1845 they soon spread activities elsewhere in the Southwest Pacific - namely Samoa, New Guinea and Solomon islands.<sup>13</sup> In Samoa the German interest, early conceded to be the most substantial in material terms, was in trading, landholding and land exploitation. It was the Germans who revolutionised the coconut-oil industry in the late 1860's by introducing the practice of sun-drying the meat of the coconut to produce copra. The copra was bagged and shipped to Europe where the oil was extracted and used in soap and candle making and the residue made into cake for feeding the cattle. As Germans were active in Samoa, Australia once again felt concerned and cautioned the British. British authorities, however, again showed no interest. But Germans resolved the question of New Guinea in a manner that outraged the Australians. From the early 1870's Bismark's policy had been to support and protect German overseas traders but not to seek overseas territorial possessions. The treaty of 1879 with Samoa was in this tradition. In New Guinea Germans were in a very strong position as island traders. They were highly organized. So when British authorities redefined their position in New Guinea on the insistence of Australians and decided to assume a protectorate over the unclaimed coasts of New Guinea, the Germans objected. They hinted that they would move towards the French position if the British did not curb their intentions in New Guinea. Thus, the British agreed to confine themselves to the south coast.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> R.J. May and Hank Nelson (ed.), Melanesia Beyond Diversity, vol.I, ANU, (Canberra, 1982), p.169.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>13</sup> Harold Brookfield, Colonialism, Development and Independence: The Case of the Melanesian Islands in the South Pacific (Cambridge, 1972), p.29.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.31.

The only important island territory where the British were successful in assuming sovereignty was in Fiji. The effective cause of taking over of Fiji by the British was the establishment of plantations in Fiji by colonial British, American and other adventurers. Fiji first attracted their attention in the 1860's and there was something of a rush to Fiji in 1870-71.<sup>15</sup> Of the classic three - land, labour and capital - the white intruders in Fiji expected the Fijians to supply the first two cheaply and in abundance, while capital investment was to be held to minimum. Land did not give any problem to them because it was given to them without much of a difficulty by the chiefs as they had but a limited understanding of what was involved in transferring land to men who thought they were acquiring indisputable freehold rights.<sup>16</sup> So the land situation did not go out of hands in Fiji but with regard to labour, the situation was different. It got out of hand to the point where it was adjudged a major scandal. Fiji became involved in the labour trade scandal because the Fijians resisted recruitment for the plantation work.

A common justification of the "trade" was that it "civilised" the recruits. The British authorities also tried to sell the idea that it favoured the Fijian when Gordon as early as 1875 thought of bringing Indian labour.<sup>17</sup> The Indian indentured labour trade was a British substitute for the slavery they had abolished in 1833. It was nearly 50 years old by 1879 when it was adopted in Fiji and about a third of a million Indians were in that year working in such British colonies as Mauritius, British Guyana the West Indies, Natal and Malaya.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Michael C. Howard and Simone Durutalo, The Political Economy of the South Pacific: To 1945 Monograph Series, no.26. Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, James Cook University, (Queensland, 1987), pp.138-9.

<sup>16</sup> John Overton, Land and Differentiation in Rural Fiji Pacific Research Monograph no.19, NCDS, ANU, (Canberra, 1989), p.21.

<sup>17</sup> Ralph R. Premdas, "Fiji: Communal Conflict and the First Military Coup d'etat", in Bob Hering (ed.), Focus upon the Southwest Pacific, Centre for South East Asian Studies, James Cook University, Occasional Paper No.23 (Queensland, 1987), p.124.

<sup>18</sup> A. G. Mayer, Indians in Fiji (London, 1981), p.8.

The labour trade beyond doubt was a major facet in the western impact on the Melanesian society in the nineteenth century, but any effort to make out that it had a creative influence on the natives or native societies is doomed to failure. Since it took individuals out of the context of their society, breaking up patterns of family life, labour and warfare, it contributed to the disintegration of native life.<sup>19</sup> It was a crude method of economic and political advancement.

### Colonial Policies

Colonial policy is a natural projection of metropolitan attitudes into a colonial situation. For example, the British colonial traditions limit themselves to what is called "association" while French colonial policy existed within a tradition of assimilation.<sup>20</sup> Approaches to colonial problems are broadly determined by metropolitan values, attitudes and traditions, and any great change in policy is dependent upon change in the metropolitan power. Thus, to say that the British colonial policy is superior to French and both inferior to American, is futile because such a judgment would blame the British for being British and the French for being French. It must be, therefore, accepted that each of the colonial powers has exported its own attitudes and institutions into the colonies.

Each of the powers envisaged some form of political advancement for the people under their rule. Political advancement is not used to mean political independence as that would depend on broad colonial policy. Since all the powers committed themselves to the development of local self-government, it is in this sense that the 'political advancement' is used. In Fiji, the Fijians were isolated within their own 'communal system', living in their villages under their chiefs, and being thus separated from the general government

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<sup>19</sup> I.L. Andreev and D.D. Tumarkin, The Traditional Communal Structures and Some Problems of the Socio-Economic Development of the Pacific Islands Peoples (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), pp.21-22.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion on British and French Colonial Policy see J.M. Ward, British Policy in the South Pacific (1786-1893), (Sydney, 1948), especially chapter 2; and S.H. Roberts, The History of French Colonial Policy 1870-1925, (London, Cass., 1929), chap.4 & 5.

of the colony. The Fijian administration was primarily an organization for local not central government.<sup>21</sup> Fiji has a plural society in which the Fijians are both a minority and economically the weakest group.<sup>22</sup> The British, whether or not they used the techniques of 'direct' or 'indirect' rule, have always preserved a separation between indigenous people and themselves which one might call 'apartheid'. In Australia and New Zealand too, the missionaries and traders exercised their influences by way of local chiefs, keeping their identity as separate. French, however, have followed a practice of assimilation which has reproduced the features of the centralized government in France. Tahiti has no plural society in the Fijian sense but one assimilated to French culture and the same is the case in New Caledonia which is largely united in the absence of any traditional bonds.<sup>23</sup> The social distinctions are largely French. Perhaps that may be one reason why it is getting increasingly difficult for Kanaks to achieve self-determination even today when days of colonial era are long over.

The Americans who have not accepted themselves to be colonial power and therefore, have never evolved or admitted to evolving a theory of colonial rule, have proceeded on an ad hoc basis, to reproduce the equivalent of a federal structure balancing central and local interests. But few would question that basic motives of post-war colonial policy differed from those of pre-war policy in Southwest Pacific. There was a steady shift in emphasis towards indigenous cash production. Welfare and advancement were not merely rhetoric.<sup>24</sup> Their achievement became the main purpose of the enormous increases in public sector, metropolitan spending in Fiji as well as in Papua New Guinea. Similarly, post-war colonial emphasis on exports has retarded the growth of internal marketing, has guided the evolution of the communications and central place network, and has created a mentality of dependence on remote and

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<sup>21</sup> Robert T Robertson And Akosita Tamanisau, Fiji :Shattered Coups (Sydney,1988), p.12.

<sup>22</sup> The government of Fiji claims that Fijians are no longer in minority. Indigenous Fijian now outnumber Fiji's Indian population by about 14500 comprising 48.4 per cent while Indians are down to 46.4 per cent. See Bureau of Statistics, Suva, Population Estimates November 1989, p.2.

<sup>23</sup> May and Nelson, n.11, p.531.

<sup>24</sup> Brookfield, n.13, p.106.

powerful buyers.<sup>25</sup> During this period a policy of state intervention was also resorted to in some sectors of the economy while others were left to market forces. Colonial policy was more concerned with obtaining a total increase in national income than with obtaining a proper distribution of participation and benefits. This was due to concentration on exports. Further, expansion of welfare far ahead of capacity to pay has told on finances which has been the central concern of Southwest Pacific economies' developmental programs and eventually, which has led to intensification of the condition of economic dependence even after political independence.

### **The United States Strategic and Security Policies**

The western powers led by the United States have considered the area an exclusive sphere of influence which because of its isolation, loyalty and stability, could be ignored militarily. This remained the position after the Second World War by which time the United States had gained control of much of the Pacific having fought a bitter war with Japan in 1945. The US was determined to see the area under its effective control. The foreign and defense policies of the United States in the region, since then have had two-pronged approach.<sup>26</sup> The first approach was to ensure that the countries remain a part of the western world, politically and economically and just as important, remain friendly to the United States. The second approach was to show massive military strength to deter any would-be aggressor from encroaching on American 'territory'. This was a policy of strategic denial.<sup>27</sup> Beyond this no interest was shown in the Southwest Pacific. A major reason for indifference has been the ANZUS pact of 1951 which worked to minimise military interest in the region in two ways. First, it alleviated Australian anxiety over the islands to its north by giving it the protection of a great and powerful friend. Second, it removed American concern

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> John C Dorrance, "United States Security Interests in the Pacific Islands", World Review, 23(1), April 1984, pp.6-7.

<sup>27</sup> Malcolm McIntosh, Arms Across the Pacific :Security and Trade Issues Across the Pacific (London,1988), p.97.

... the islands south of the equator by vesting defense responsibility for these islands in its two Australasian allies.<sup>28</sup>

## ANZUS Treaty

ANZUS treaty came to shoulder much of the responsibility US expected it to fulfill in the Pacific area. The kind of security threats faced by the Southwest Pacific countries are of a different order than those existing in western Europe. The transition from colonialism to independence or self-government has been without bloodshed and revolution, democratic institutions have flourished and respect for human rights is without parallel elsewhere in the third world.<sup>29</sup>

American neglect of the area was natural. The non-US territories and colonies were administered by NATO or ANZUS allies. There were no threats - internal or external - to vaguely defined American interests. Moreover, the military attack on any state within the region by an external power would automatically represent direct challenge to the vital interests of the ANZUS partners. In various ANZUS Council meetings, it was pointed out that to all practical purposes, the whole of the Southwest Pacific is 'umbrallaed' by ANZUS. ANZUS partners saw a relationship between regional security, economic development and regional cooperation.<sup>30</sup> The Southwest Pacific island states thus derive the security benefits without the corollary obligations of the ANZUS treaty. The security of the three ANZUS partners requires freedom of movement through Southwest Pacific with respect to their own immediate defense and in connection

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<sup>28</sup> There has been a subsequent reappraisal of the US involvement in the region, See United States Senate, Emerging Pacific Island Community Hearing before the sub-committee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 31 July 1978, (Washington, 1978). Also see N. Fedulova, "US Imperial Course in the Asian Pacific Region", International Affairs (12), December 1985, pp.108-9.

<sup>29</sup> Brookfield, n.13, pp.172-174.

<sup>30</sup> Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, Twenty Fifth ANZUS Council Meeting Communique, News Release No.D16, 4 August 1976, p.2. Also see Kim Beazley, "ANZUS: Regional Defence Implications", Australian Foreign Affairs Record 56, May 1985, p.397.

with any threat in Indian Ocean or the Southwest Pacific.<sup>31</sup> As in the North Pacific, this interest is best served by the absence of bases from which hostile forces can operate against allied ships and aircraft. However, in the Southwest Pacific, American bases are not required. Nevertheless, it was definitely expected that allied ships and aircraft be able to refuel and replenish within the area and conduct surveillance of hostile submarines operating in the Southwest Pacific.<sup>32</sup> The US takes the view that Australia's and New Zealand's close relationships and particular interests in the Southwest Pacific region - including defence co-operation - suggest that these two countries play the lead role in that area. There are some twenty American military facilities in Australia, three of which are strategically vital to the US strategic nuclear defence capability. They are Pine Gap, Nurrungar and Northwest Cape. Northwest Cape, to the North of Perth in western Australia is a submarine communications station. It provides the United States with communications with submarines serving in the Indian and Western Pacific Oceans. Pine Gap provides a ground base for intelligence satellites involved in early warning signals intelligence and photographic and electronic intelligence.<sup>33</sup> Nurrungar in South Australia tracks the numerous American satellites involved in early warning of a nuclear attack on the American homeland. The fundamental shared national interest of Pacific island states and of the US, Australia and New Zealand is freedom from military aggression or pressure and the ability to focus resources on national needs. To the extent that there is generally a shared perception of common or compatible security interests, the defense interests of the US are well served.<sup>34</sup>

However, over the past twenty years advances in military technology and changes in world economic order have largely eliminated the need to base regional security on alliance structure. Perhaps this was also the direct result of an important difference which the US had in its alliance structure

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<sup>31</sup> Beazley, n.30, p.398.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Samuel and F P Serong, "The Troubled Waters of ANZUS", Strategic Review, vol.14, winter 1986, pp.39-40.

<sup>33</sup> Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, Threats to Australila's Security - Their Nature and Probability (Canberra, 1981), pp.16-17.

<sup>34</sup> For details see Desmond Ball, A Base for Debate: the US Satellite Station at Nurrungar, (Sydney, 1987) and Pine Gap: Australia and the US Geostationary Signals Intelligence Program (Sydney, 1988), pp.32, 74-76, 86-88, 91 and 95.

eastward across the Atlantic and westward and southward across the Pacific. This difference was that the Europeans managed to organise themselves early into a single alliance NATO, to maintain an equal dialogue with Washington. This is, however, not true with alliance structure in Asia-Pacific, much less in Southwest Pacific. The essential feature of alliance structure is a set of bilateral relationships between Washington and other state capitals. Even the trilateral arrangement ANZUS is now replaced by a sort of bilateral arrangement as the New Zealand's membership remains suspended due to its anti-nuclear policies.<sup>35</sup> The original difference from NATO was undoubtedly inevitable, since in 1951 when the Pacific alliance structure was put together (in a period dominated by the Korean war and the Japan's peace treaty) nothing else would have been possible. Countries concerned did not have enough in common, either in the way of shared culture and institutions or in the way of assumed joint strategic interests to make a multilateral arrangement feasible. So in effect, the US extended its security umbrella to Japan, to South Korea, to the Philippines, to Australia, and New Zealand, and to assorted Pacific islands, severally and on varying terms rather than jointly and on the same terms as had been the case in Europe.<sup>36</sup> A shaky multilateral annexe was added to this essentially bilateral set of structure by SEATO in 1954 covering Thailand and Indo-China states.<sup>37</sup> But that organisation came to a bruising end in the upheavals of 1975 and the only effective remaining element of the theoretically still valid Manila treaty is the US bilateral connection with Thailand.

However, important changes are challenging the old order and affecting the security of the United States and its allies in the region. The United States entered the era of regional diplomatic and political change with one major asset: an enormous reservoir of goodwill from the Pacific war. However, generational change, regional perceptions of continuing US insensitivity and neglect, US responses to important regional issues have eroded its image in the region.<sup>38</sup> The reason has been, among many others, a perception and

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Mack, "Crisis in the Other Alliance : ANZUS in the 1980s", World Policy Journal, 3 Summer 1986, p.448.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.451.

<sup>37</sup> Parimal Kumar Das, Troubled Region : Issues of Peace and Development in Southeast Asia , (New Delhi,1987), p.15.

<sup>38</sup> J.C. Dorrance, Strategic Co-operation and Competition in the Pacific Islands: An American Assessment, Working Paper No.203, SDSC, ANU, (Canberra, 1990), p.14.

associated resentment of American disinterest in the welfare of the people in the region evidenced by low levels of development assistance. In nearly all years prior to 1988 US development assistance (\$4-6mn annually) was less than 2 per cent of total assistance flows to independent states in the region.<sup>39</sup> Provision of most US assistance through regional organizations and private voluntary groups, rather than on a bilateral basis, was resented as a slight to island states sovereignty. However, recently there has been recognition by the United States of this problem, with a change in development assistance strategies for the year 1988. Approximately \$100mn in development assistance to the Southwest Pacific is projected for five years ending 1994. \$18.7bn was provided to the Southwest Pacific in 1988, a three-fold increase over the previous year. Unlike in the past most of this assistance will be on bilateral rather than regional basis.<sup>40</sup>

A major damaging issue until the recent past was conflict over fishing rights. For many island states the only significant resource is tuna in their surrounding. American refusal to recognize island states jurisdiction over tuna in these zones resulted in piracy of that resource by American tuna boats, and island states seizure of the latter.<sup>41</sup> The US refused to become the signatory of the UNCLOS Convention 1982 as it felt that its fishing concerns were bound by the Magnussen Fisheries Conservation and Management Act, 1976, and amended in 1983. The US tuna fishing industry contended that the Magnussen Act exempts tuna from claims of a 200-miles EEZ because it is a highly migratory fish, and under the Law of Sea Agreement migratory fish are excluded from the 200-mile EEZ of signatories. The resulting US aid and trade sanctions drove US regional relationship to an all time low. The issue was resolved by a five-year agreement beginning January 1987, with the member states of the South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency providing for licensing of American tuna fleets, catch zones and quotas, and payment of \$12mn annually in fees and development assistance grants.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, pp.14-15. Twenty-Fifth ANZUS Council Meeting in 1976 noted "to give greater priority to the South Pacific in their development assistance program", See Council Communique, n.30, p.2.

<sup>40</sup> Dorrance, n.38, p.15.

<sup>41</sup> R.A. Herr, "South Pacific Islands Question US friendship", *FEER*, 16 June 1986, pp.26-27.

<sup>42</sup> See *Wall Street Journal*, 23 October 1986.

But the damage was done which was compounded by the US decision not to adhere to the protocols of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty. The changes which have been most notable during the recent years have been the recent impact of anti-nuclear sentiments, the trend towards greater self-reliant defence policies and the penetration of other powers into the region. The anti-nuclear sentiment has resulted in the suspension of the defence co-operation between the United States and its ally New Zealand and produced the world's third nuclear free zone in the South Pacific. The trend towards greater self-reliant defence policies of Australia has put national and regional priorities ahead of traditional co-operation with the big power, the US.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Role of USSR, China, France and Japan**

External powers such as the USSR, China, France and Japan have shown new political, as well as, economic interests in penetrating the Southwest Pacific region, thus providing new alternatives for the small island states which have had numerous disputes with the United States recently.<sup>44</sup> The now independent but relatively poor or underdeveloped states have been willing to undertake commercial relations with the Soviets. At the same time it is clearly unwise of the allies to antagonise them over fishery exploitation or fail to provide relatively modest amount of economic aid to win their gratitude and co-operation. On the other hand, the Soviets have engaged in normal diplomatic and commercial activities there. While the Soviet Union's record of dealing with other countries in the area of deep-sea fishing is far from perfect, it has shown much greater willingness than countries such as the United States to establish and abide by bilateral and international arrangements.<sup>45</sup> It is the largest maritime nation to have signed

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<sup>43</sup> Text of Executive Summary of Dibb Review of Australia's Defense Capabilities, Australian Foreign Affairs Records June 1986, p.494.

<sup>44</sup> Muriel Brookfield and R Gerard Ward (ed.), New Directions in the South Pacific : A Message for Australia Report on a workshop, Canberra, June 1986, published by the Australian National University, Canberra, 1988, pp.8-9.

<sup>45</sup> See Michael Howard, "Myth of Soviet Menace in the South Pacific", Economic and Political Weekly, vol.xxi, no.7, February 15, 1986, p.309.

the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It has an agreement with the New Zealand on fisheries.<sup>46</sup>

At present the Soviet South Pacific activities have been mainly fishing and oceanographic research.<sup>47</sup> The Soviet Union has the world's largest fishing fleet. Its fishing boats, merchant ships and passenger liners traverse the region but trade is small.<sup>48</sup> The USSR takes about 1 per cent of its total catch in the South Pacific. Most of it is taken within New Zealand's 200 miles zone.<sup>49</sup> The Soviets have also offered joint fishing ventures and development aid but little has been taken up. Warship visits are rare. Soviet military interests are limited to keeping an eye on American activities. They are concerned with American submarines carrying nuclear armed missiles that are capable of reaching targets in the Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup>

The Soviet policy towards the Pacific island countries was clearly formulated in the speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andre Gromyko, at the 33rd session of the UN General Assembly on 26 September 1978. He said, "Oceania is very far from us, but we wish to maintain normal and where possible friendly relations with the countries of that area as well. Here too we regard with sympathy the aspirations of the peoples to gain independence and to free themselves from foreign tutelage, in both the literal and figurative meaning of the word".<sup>51</sup> The USSR's trade with the Pacific islands is not of a considerable scope

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<sup>46</sup> Agreement on Fisheries between the Government of NZ and the Government of USSR and Exchange of letters Appendix to the Journal of House of Representative (Wellington, 1978).

<sup>47</sup> Paul Dibb, Soviet Strategy Towards Australia, New Zealand, Oceania, Working Paper, No.90, SDSC, ANU, (Canberra, 1983), p.25.

<sup>48</sup> For USSR's trade with Australia and New Zealand, see Table 24 in Appendix I.

<sup>49</sup> The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, Yearbook of Fisheries Statistics and Catches and Landing vol.58, (Rome, 1984), pp.306 and 348.

<sup>50</sup> See Izvestiya, 2 December 1983, p.4.

<sup>51</sup> D.D. Tumarkin, "USSR: The Unknown Northern Neighbour", in R.G. Crocombe and A.Ali, n.8, p.145.

as yet and is being done through third countries despite the fact that it is a major supplier of various machinery, industrial and agricultural equipment, chemical, consumer and other goods to the developing countries in exchange for the items of their traditional exports. It may be mentioned that among the goods, the USSR buys from the world market are copra, coffee, cocoa and other tropical raw materials widely exported by the Pacific island countries.<sup>52</sup> Scholars, cultural workers and public at large in the USSR display their great interests, both in the traditional culture of the Pacific island people and in the new literatures and creative arts that have developed in the countries of that region.<sup>53</sup>

The USSR maintains diplomatic relations with Fiji (from January 1974), Tonga (from October 1975), Papua New Guinea (from May 1976) and Western Samoa (from July 1976) and has officially stated that it is ready to establish such relations with every other independent Pacific island states. There are no Soviet embassies in the area at present, but the Soviet Ambassador to Australia represents the USSR also to Fiji and his Soviet counterpart in New Zealand does the same for Tonga and Western Samoa.

Moscow's policy towards the region aims at lessening military tensions in the region through a Pacific conference of all the countries concerned through arms control. At the same time it also envisages disarmament for development through the reduction of military outlays and expansion of development aid. The exclusion of the Soviets from Pacific economic co-operation was breached by the invitation of the non-governmental Pacific Economic Co-operation Conference organisation to Soviet representatives to attend the Vancouver meeting in 1986.<sup>54</sup> American opposition was unable to dissuade the Canadian National Committee to keep them out.

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<sup>52</sup> See Vneshnyaya Torgovlya SSR (Foreign Trade Statistical Yearbooks), 1922-81, (Moscow, 1982), pp.24-25.

<sup>53</sup> D.D. Tumarkin, "Main Trends in the USSR in the Ethnographic Study of Pacific Island Peoples, 1961-86, with a selected Bibliography", Pacific Studies, vol.II, No.2, March 1988, p.103.

<sup>54</sup> McIntosh, n.27, p.97.

The first Soviet Foreign Minister to visit Australia, Eduard Shevardnadze, said in Canberra in March 1987 that Moscow had "no intention of penetration of the region, no bad aims and no hidden intentions".<sup>55</sup> It was only interested in commercial and diplomatic relations. Relations could expand in trade, economic co-operation, tourism, sporting exchanges and so on. Foreign Minister Hayden welcomed the Soviet Minister with a speech strongly affirming the Australian alliance with the United States to prevent any attempt to encourage differences with Washington. But he noted at a Press Conference in Manila in 1988 that according to Western intelligence estimates, Soviet naval activity in the Pacific had halved over the past year. Moreover, the USSR had also been 'punctilious' in restricting its South Pacific activities to commercial operations. Therefore, by not losing "a sense of vigilance", Australia had failed to see "any evidence of any surge let alone threat of Soviet activity".<sup>56</sup>

The fishing issue is, in fact, important to the militarisation of the Pacific because it is through fish that the Pacific is being turned into the area of superpower confrontation. The Soviet Union has taken advantage of the United States complacency and offered payment for fishing rights denied to South Pacific islanders by the American Tuna Association (ATA).<sup>57</sup> The ATA accounts for 35 per cent of the tuna caught in the Pacific but until recently was unwilling to enter into agreement with island states to pay for the right to fish in their waters. When some of the island countries entered into an agreement with the Soviet Union on fishing rights, it created anxiety among the United States and its allies. They claimed that these agreements posed a very serious threat to the whole of Pacific. Despite the fact that countries such as New Zealand and the United States have negotiated fishing rights with the Soviet Union, they are anxious to prevent other nations in the Pacific doing the same.<sup>58</sup> Former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser said that Soviet military penetration 'will start as a fish processing facility. But that will have some refuelling facilities, which will require repair facilities and in turn, an airfield. Then it is a base.'<sup>59</sup> Fraser also compared what

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<sup>55</sup> Hamish McDonald, "Moscow's 'Nice Guy', Shevardnadze, Shows Hayden a Glimpse of Glasnost", FEER, 12 March 1987, p.15.

<sup>56</sup> Otago Daily Times 15 April 1988.

<sup>57</sup> McIntosh, n.27, p.120.

<sup>58</sup> Dibb, n.47, p.28.

<sup>59</sup> International Herald Tribune, 10 September 1986.

The missile tests of 19 and 21 May 1980 were not enough to negate the more positive steps China has taken in the region. Yet, if China continues to perfect and test ICBMs over ocean swells, China will be hard pressed to prove that it does not intend to become a super power itself. In all fairness Chinese acknowledge the concerns of Pacific countries over the tests and stressed that only a carrier rocket had been fired and no warheads were involved. But this was not well received by the island nations. Tuvalu was outraged. Solomon islands was disappointed and concerned and even Papua New Guinea which had just granted the Chinese permission to open an embassy was offended. However, urge to have economic and technical assistance from China overcame all this furore.

China appears happy to see a continuing US presence in the area. While the Soviets have continually blasted the negotiations to end US trusteeship and been most agitated about the outcome, China has restrained itself. In marked contrast to the heated anti-imperialists words in the past, China even saves a few kind words for the former German and Japanese metropolitan powers who had been credited with giving aid which to a certain extent contained the infiltration of the Soviet Union.<sup>65</sup> Virtually every move by the Soviet Union to date has been countered by Chinese response. Indeed it could even be argued that the Chinese are secretly eager for military bases to remain in the Pacific.<sup>66</sup> This, however, could be true for colder waters around Korea and Japan. But since the use of one great power to check another would not be liked by emerging nations of the Southwest Pacific, so China has sought to promote a US presence, indirectly, by utilizing America's Australian and New Zealand allies.

Though, Soviet peace initiatives announced by Gorbachev in his Vladivostok speech include the need "to modernize and build in the future a socialist society worthy of the great people" and subsequent efforts to resolve the ongoing border disputes with China, it has not satisfied the Chinese who have continually accused the Soviet support for Vietnam as destabilising for East Asia.<sup>67</sup> From the 1970s, it perceived that the Soviet Union had a global strategy of expansion which included extending their influence into the Indian and Pacific oceans.

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<sup>65</sup> RMRB, 5 July 1980.

<sup>66</sup> Richard A Ericson, "The US view of the Pacific Problem", in Gordon and Rothwell, (eds.) The New Political Economy of the Pacific (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), p.33.

<sup>67</sup> US FBIS, Daily Report Soviet Union ,29 July 1986, pp.R1-R20. See also Soviet News, 30 July 1986.

For France, the region provides a very good opportunity to achieve a very advantageous position in relation to fishing and deep sea minerals, the inland mines (specially in New Caledonia), a region of export for the French industries, and most of all the atomic test area which is the backbone of French world politics. The French colonies in the Pacific are scattered between English speaking countries. In Africa, France demonstrated its ability to form a French speaking bloc. However, in the Pacific, there is no French speaking bloc as such, instead, French speaking population is spread all around even in Australia and New Zealand. There is a danger from the French point of view that local political attitudes will change very quickly as the English speaking islands are almost all independent. In early 1986, Chirac appointed M. Gaston Flosse to the newly created ministerial portfolio of Secretary of State for South Pacific. Flosse was given, in addition to the authority to arrange aid through normal channels, a special discretionary grant, known as the "Flosse Fund" of about US \$4 mn.<sup>71</sup> France makes its presence more intensely felt, specially in French Polynesia and New Caledonia, the major nickel producer. The Independence of Vanuatu was only a partial exception. Although the role of France in the Pacific was seriously affected by nuclear testing, the change in policy this field has made it possible to surmount the difficulties. Nevertheless, it is officially stressed that the role of France in the area is to maintain a balance. Jacques Chirac during his visit to French Polynesia in July 1978 said:

"If France were no longer present, the Pacific, and in particular, the South Pacific would be like a vast American-Japanese lake. Our role in this region is one of maintaining equilibrium. It is no concern of ours to dispute the place held on the strategic level and on the economic level by the United States, Japan and Australia. Our concern is to contribute the wealth of our culture and a reflection of our conception of the world and of international relations. As a counterpart, the Pacific territories are for France one of the irreplaceable elements of its diversity and its dimension".<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Government of France, Rapport De Finances 1988, pp.24-26, Pacific Islands Monthly, no.3, March 1987, pp.1 and 5.

<sup>72</sup> Unofficial Translation, Published in Nouvelles de Tahiti 20 July 1978.

Some critical voices in France point out that the French policies are short sighted and that France will only be able to maintain a position in the Pacific by quick decolonization. But the stronger opinion is still in favour of French presence in the Pacific, being afraid perhaps that soon after independence France will be forced out by anti-nuclear sentiments in Australia and New Zealand. The main political aim at the moment is to keep the dependencies in the region and to maximize gains through language, culture, economy and constitutional collection, which could enable France to build up a 'French Pacific' region like the French African group.<sup>73</sup>

Until now Japan's awareness of Pacific Basin states has not been very full and even aid has consisted primarily of technical assistance. One reason for the lack of historical interest in the area is that except for the Solomon islands, Japan did not extend war reparations to the region.<sup>74</sup> Another factor has been the nature of Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) itself, which has historically emphasized large-scale industrial and commercial projects. This type of aid did not conform with the economic interests of the Basin, and these countries would have difficulty absorbing large capital projects. In large part most of the Japanese aid to the Pacific has been friendly, which is of little political or economic significance to Japan. Japan was also reluctant to play a major role since the countries in the region, particularly Fiji and PNG were regarded as coming under Australia's purview. In 1984, Japanese aid levels to Pacific nations reached \$18.48 million or roughly 1 per cent of the entire aid budget.<sup>75</sup> In 1986, Japan gave some US \$24.1mn aid to the Pacific islands, the largest amounts to Fiji (US \$8mn), and PNG (US \$4mn).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Pierre Chaussan, "La France dans le Pacifique", Defense Nationale, July 1978, p.72.

<sup>74</sup> Isami Takeda, "New Factors in Japan's ODA Policy: Implications for Australia-Japan Relations", Conference Paper presented at AJRC-JARC Research Project on Australia-Japan Relations: Towards the 21st century, ANU, (Canberra, 18-19 August 1986), pp.5-6.

<sup>75</sup> APIC, Japan's ODA 1986 Annual Report, pp.122-25.

<sup>76</sup> FEER, 30 October 1986, p.24.

was criticised by the Soviets as "promoting realization of the United States strategic plans for Asian and Pacific regions."<sup>81</sup> The concept of "strategic aid" openly endorsed by Kuranari was evaluated by the Soviet Union as an added support by Japan to Western hegemony in the Southwest Pacific, as well as, a political and economic move to enhance its own global and regional influence.

### **Australia and New Zealand: The Southwest Pacific Powers**

Of late, Australia and New Zealand have shown considerable interest in the region - in its politics, as well as, in its security. They recognise that they are the chief beneficiaries of their efforts to promote the security of the region, and so, much of the primary onus for the region is legitimately theirs. As both look to the 1990s, the Southwest Pacific looms much larger in their defense thinking than it was ever before. Both have prepared critical reviews of their policies in the Southwest Pacific which involve now rather more realistic scenarios and contingencies.<sup>82</sup> Although neither is pleased at the increased external awareness of the region, they now consider the political and strategic changes as inevitable and therefore, their assessments have become more sanguine.

For some decades after the Second World War, Australia was widely regarded as oriented towards Southeast Asia. Southwest Pacific island nations, which were under their direct or indirect rule, were left to their destiny. Now it has been recognised that this 'benign neglect' might offer dangerous openings to other powers. It has now been perceived to be to Australia's strategic advantage to secure its trade roots across the Pacific.<sup>83</sup> It has an enduring interest in the security of the long sea and air lines of communication across the Pacific with its major ally, the United States. This renewed obligation will generally follow the

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<sup>81</sup> "Soviets Slam Japan's South Pacific Policy", Japan Times, 16 January 1987, p.3.

<sup>82</sup> See The Defence of Australia (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, March 1987), p.12.; and Defence of New Zealand: Review of Defence Policy 1987 (Wellington: Government Printer, February 1987), p.17.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, Defence of Australia, p.ix.

- too inclined to exaggerate threats; e.g. the Soviet Union and, more recently, France and Japan;
- too impatient and pushy in pursuing security initiatives which some Forum members consider to be beyond their resources; e.g. patrol and boat program.

Even the report of Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Commonwealth of Australia recognised this criticism.<sup>87</sup> However, it states, that “while this criticism may have been valid in the past, there is evidence that Australia is moving to adopt a more sensitive, pro-Pacific stance and seeking to use its influence to attempt to ameliorate US actions”.<sup>88</sup> It has cited as evidence pressure on the US to reach an agreement with the region on tuna fishing, and Australian support of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNFZ), but perhaps it has not taken into consideration the resentment the two issues have evoked in the island countries. The fisheries agreement with Americans which Australia claims to have got for the islands is a source of continued dissatisfaction. The island nations also feel betrayed over the pushing of an idea of SPNFZ treaty. They were attracted by the idea in the hope that an international convention would encourage the French to sieze their nuclear testing. Nothing of that sort took place and not only France but even the close ally US also refused to sign the protocols of the treaty.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, Australia can hardly claim to have adopted pro-Pacific stance.

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<sup>87</sup> Australia Relations with the South Pacific, n.80, p.147.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> For a full discussion on the US position see: US Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone, Hearings and Markup before the Committee on Foreign Affairs and its Sub-Committee on Asian and Pacific Affairs on H.Cons Res. 158 100th Congress, 1st session, June 19 and July 15, 1987. The Bush Administration in 1987 undertook a review of the US position on adherence to the SPNFZ protocols. Although no decisions had been made public, testimony by senior US officials before Congress and Committees in mid-1989 made clear that the 1987 decision is likely to be reaffirmed.

New Zealand strategic planning in recent years has tended to parallel that of Australia, albeit with a Polynesian emphasis. When New Zealand abandoned its forward defense policy in the early 1970s and reduced its involvement in Southeast Asia, sometime elapsed before it began to expand its defense role in the Southwest Pacific. A report of the Defense Committee of enquiry in July 1986 indicated that New Zealand now expects Southwest Pacific to be its primary strategic responsibility for the immediate future.<sup>90</sup> Because of its size and geographic position, New Zealand has been able to project itself as a Southwest Pacific nation more successfully than Australia. It has established extensive diplomatic and economic relations throughout the region, particularly among the Polynesian nations. The Labour government of the mid-70s created a Pacific Affairs Co-ordinating Committee (PACC), comprising Government officials and facilitating communication between the various government and helping initiate projects to fill gaps in the necessary range of activities. It is a great pity that suggestions from inside and outside the civil service to include representatives of Pacific Island Community Organizations have not been heeded. It is also a pity that it took half a decade for the government to find minimal resources to support the efforts of the Pacific Islands Advisory Council (PIAC), to undertake the self-help settlement project. Government should make sure that the program of Pacific Island Council is given regular financial support.<sup>91</sup>

New Zealand has significant percentage of islanders because of the liberalised immigration policy. However, in the area of strategic and defense relations New Zealand's policy so far, looks more credible and sound. The 1987 defense review is different from previous ones. The previous defense reviews had been written with someone else's requirement in mind. First, it had the United Kingdom's interest and later, the interests of the United States were predominant. Major threats to New Zealand are difficult to discern and the value of the ANZUS is questionable against the more probable low level threats. While some do see value in the ANZUS, they are not prepared to stay in the alliance at the cost of abandoning the anti-nuclear ship policy. White Paper reiterated

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<sup>90</sup> Defence and Security: What New Zealanders Want Report of the Defense Committee of Enquiry, July 1986, Government of New Zealand,(Wellington, 1986), p.45.

<sup>91</sup> Pacific Island Advisory Council, Budget Statement, (Wellington, 1980), pp.7-8.

the commitment to the ANZUS obligations, but 'in conventional terms' only.<sup>92</sup> New Zealand's commitment to play its own part in the regional security is reflective of its identity with the people of the region. As has already been mentioned, New Zealand is identified (whether it is because of substantial representation of Maori's or liberalised immigration policy) with the Pacific people. It is here that the difference with Australia lies. This is also the rationale behind New Zealand's non-nuclear policy.<sup>93</sup> Australia unlike New Zealand has interests and concerns stretching far beyond the Southwest Pacific. But it has not done sufficient to instill confidence among the Pacific islanders about their genuine fears regarding nuclear tests. New Zealand's efforts in this direction are commendable.

Nevertheless, it is the economic security, rather than military, which is of prime concern to the island nations and to which David Hegarty and Peter Polomka refer as small 's' security rather than big 'S' of the military kind.<sup>94</sup> From the point of view of the countries in the region there is 'new thinking' taking shape which is suspicious of regionalism promoted under the Australian and Western influence in recent decades.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Defense of New Zealand: Review of Defense Policy 1987 (Wellington, Feb. 1987), p.17.

<sup>93</sup> John Handerson, "New Zealand's Non-nuclear Policy, Regional Approach to Security", in Hegarty and Polomka, n.86, p.60.

<sup>94</sup> David Hegarty and Peter Polomka, n.86, p.4.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p.2.