CHAPTER III
AUSTRALIA AND SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM:
POLITICAL COOPERATION
CHAPTER III
AUSTRALIA AND SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM:
POLITICAL COOPERATION

In global terms, Australia is only a middle power but in the South Pacific, its role and influence is substantial. This creates considerable responsibility for Australia to use that influence wisely and, at the same time, to respect the independence, identity and aspirations of the island countries in the region. Australia is more interested in the South Pacific because of her strategic, political and economic interests. Therefore, Australia maintains a cooperative relationship with its South Pacific neighbours, at two levels—firstly, at a bilateral level with individual countries, and secondly, at a multilateral level directly through the South Pacific Forum.

It might not be wrong to say that successive Australian governments due to their economic and military strength, for many years adopted a benign, paternalistic attitude towards the region. And events since the early 1980s have forced a reappraisal of its policy towards a region that many people consider "Pacific no more".¹

The images are embedded in a fortnight salvationist message that describes a region in danger of "falling off the map".² It warns as an approaching "Doomsday" or "nightmare" unless Pacific Islanders remake themselves. Such a remaking, it is asserted will require sacrifice: a change in cultural practice, and taking of hard decisions. With this, not only the nightmare can be avoided through the right action, dreams also can be realised.


The 'doomsdayism' depict of the South Pacific is that, as a region it is failing to become the part of the Pacific Century. In the dramatic imagery associated with this conception, the South Pacific is the "hole in the Asia-Pacific doughnut" or "the eye in the Asia-Pacific Cyclone". It draws attention to what is seen as a series of grim trends, a history of failure in developments as measured by growth in gross domestic product; soaring populations; unsustainable exploitation of resources, the marginalisation of island economies in the changing global trading order and a "fatal farewell" by old and powerful aid donors following the end of the cold war. It asserts that the Forum countries are on a path to a future nightmare of overcrowding, poverty, mass unemployment, serious environmental degradation, and a decline in health standards.

The Australians never considered themselves as the outside powers in the South Pacific region. In the early 1990s, it might have been expected that the Pacific Islands region would fall off the Australian policy makers' map. This seemed plausible given Canberra's preoccupation with Asia. Instead, the Australian decision makers embarked on an ambitious campaign to radically transform the regional economic order. They look at the South Pacific from very close eye and consider it as a part of Australia. This move was also strongly advocated at the organisational level to place Pacific in the limelight and to remove the past stereotype approaches. In order to have a proper perspective, it would be necessary to analyse the Australian policy of the past.

---

3 ibid.
The Island of South Pacific started figuring more prominently in Australian foreign policy planning in the years 1971-75 than in any period since World War II.

It was the time, the law of sea convention discussions began to assume considerable prominence and the concept of exclusive economic zones (EEZs) was evolving. This led to the drawing up of a map for the South Pacific region. Australians considered that it was a most striking transformation because this was something that was going to change not only the resources and sovereignty map of the South Pacific but was going to influence its political and strategic set up.

Another event that occurred during that time was that the erstwhile Soviet Union started to take an interest in the South Pacific. This factor led to the emergence of cold war rivalry in this part of the globe. But, the United States (US) had an edge over the Soviet Union due to their alliance with the Australia and New Zealand. But, the Soviet entry primarily increased the responsibility of Australia to take more active and meaningful role in the South Pacific for its own and western powers’ interest.

The political independence of the tiny island countries has inevitably resulted in an increased tendency by others to attend to their problems somewhat more than in the past to the South Pacific. For example, in addition to new preferences and interests by Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia, there was an interest on the part of the Soviet Union, Libya and Cuba. But, the opportunities of these countries in the region had been limited, mainly because of the pro-western orientation of the island countries.

---

6 ibid, p.292.
7 AFAR, Vol.56,No.8,p.291.
These small South Pacific Island countries are not densely populated. Their population ranges from a few thousand up to few millions in the case of Fiji. But their geographical location gives them political, economic and strategic importance for beyond their intrinsic size. There are also places that appeal strongly to the Australians and New Zealanders. That led Australia to join the indigenous South Pacific Forum, established in 1971 and maintains a special relationship, i.e., relationship of equal in the South Pacific Forum.

Other factors which led Australia to look into the South Pacific matters are: nuclear issues and anti-nuclear movement in the South Pacific, environment and security problems, the independence movement in New Caledonia, and fisheries related issues. Therefore, the Australian government shares the concern of its South Pacific colleagues at an individual as well as Forum level with regard to the developments which creates uncertainty in the region which, in turn, complicate the prospects of regional stability.

Therefore, since the early 1980s, the Australian government share solidarity with all the FICs with the desire to live in peace and prosperity, free from outside interference and maintain a comfortable living with self-reliant economy.

It is against this background of solid and constructive commitment on matters of practical and concrete interests to island countries that Australia developed excellent state of relations with its South Pacific neighbours. Australia's complex web of international relations and its focus on FICs forced Australia to take a firm policy decision. This has resulted in the policy of "constructive commitment", enunciated by senator Gareth Evans in 1988. Gordon Bilney, "Australia’s Relations with the Pacific – Challenge and Change", Address to the Foreign Correspondents Association (Sydney), 15 June, 1994, p.2.
which promoted regional stability through economic development and the encouragement of shared perceptions of strategic and security interests. It involves the promotion of close, confident and broad-based bilateral relations between Australia and all South Pacific countries and the promotion of effective regional cooperation between Australia and all South Pacific countries.  

Australia, in the due course of time, started assisting the Pacific Islands affairs by focussing on bilateral relations and the needs of individual countries rather than attempting to collectively assess the general needs of a region which is fundamentally diverse. It has created a different department for Pacific Islands affairs and given the task to a Junior Minister on Pacific affairs to handle the issues promptly. The proposal that Australia should appoint a Minister for Pacific Affairs traced back to a recommendation made in a major report by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1989.  

Gordon Bilney, the Chairman at the Committee said "this region was really too important to lump in with everything else and thus, recommended that there be a ministry to look specifically at the concerns of island countries of the pacific and to ensure that those had a high place in Australia's overall relations with the world".

Also behind the suggestion was a desire not to be caught surprised and flat-footed as Australia was at the time of the 1987 coups in Fiji. Since then it has continued to have minor difficulties in its relations with the island nations. Relations with Vanuatu, for instance, are still shaky after Port Vila's expulsion of an Australian diplomat in 1992. In Honiara, a belief that Australia is not doing enough to press PNG to stop its soldiers based on Bougainville for making incursions across the border into Solomon Islands, has soured diplomatic links

---

9 ibid.


11 ibid.
with the FIC. The other issues that the FIC are still skeptical are nuclear issues and fear of nuclear damage of one sort or another. Secondly, to manage and take advantage of one major resource of the region, namely, fish, and thirdly, to rescue the region from being extinct due to Greenhouse Effect and environment pollution.

Australian government admits that there needs to be more attention to the region and stresses his desire for co-operation and partnership with island countries. Towards this endeavour, Gordon Bilney was appointed as the minister-in-charge of the Pacific affairs. Despite being a junior minister, Bilney was adamant that his ministry will have a central role in Australia's increasing focus on its own region. Bilney remarked that "it will heighten the (Pacific Islands') status", and will work towards integrating it with the Asia Pacific region. Because Bilney was of the view that the Pacific "is a very important part of Australia's concerns".  

The FICs were convinced that Bilney's appointment is likely to lead to better communication. Further, a greater priority would be placed on island affairs. While Foreign Minister Gareth Evans maintains his interest in the region has become increasingly absorbed in international initiatives such as the peace process in Cambodia. He is likely to find that more of his time is being taken up by his new job as the leader of government business in the Senate.

Bilney, who in his previous ministerial post of Defence Science and Personnel earned a reputation as a hardworking and well-liked minister, has made it clear that his emphasis from the beginning will be on listening to island leaders. "The first thing I want to do", said Bilney, "is to make direct contact with my

---

counterparts in the countries of the region and learn first-hand from them how we can better co-operate to achieve the shared objectives.9

Gordon Bilney sees most of Australia's difficulties in the region as only "hitches" in otherwise good relations. While that is probably true, there is one problem that was being underestimated i.e., the spill over effects from the crisis on PNG's troubled island of Bougainville. In the past years the PNG Defence Force on Bougainville has been at its most provocative. In one incident soldiers penetrated 30 kilometers into Solomon islands territory and responded to a challenge from Solomon's police with grenades and machine gun fire. In another they made an abortive attempt to annex the island of Oema on the Solomons side of the border claiming they needed it to resettle Bougainvilleans from their 'care centres'.

While Gordon Bilney expressed "considerable concern" over the incidents, his insistence on sticking to the Australian dogma that "Bougainville is an internal matter for PNG" is beginning to wear a bit thin. Not only were all the petrol boats used to mount the latest incidents supplied by Australia, but at some point there must be a purely humanitarian responsibility to the ordinary people of Bougainville.

While Bougainville has not yet secured a place in the world spotlight the combination of increasingly high level international concern and continued provocation by PNG soldiers on the Solomon's broader could easily change that. Gordon Bilney is also responsible for Australia's development cooperation. At the top of his agenda is the ambitious plan to transform all Australia's budget aid

---

13 ibid.
to PNG into program aid by the year 2001.\textsuperscript{14} At the moment most of Australia's $300 million in development aid goes directly into consolidated revenue.

Programme aid, which will mean direct support for various PNG government departments and initiatives was designed to involve more supervision and a big increase in the number of Australians working in PNG. In many cases those Australians will be on high salaries, and like many of their expatriate colleagues, will live away from the grassroots in compounds around Port Moresby. Australia also rejected the assumption that the new programme aid could cause resentment among Papua New Guineans and felt this will work towards providing better economic support to the Pacific Islanders.

Other major basic issues of the SPF which also gained the Australians consent ranged over many topics - from the global political issues of nuclear disarmament, nuclear-testing and dumping of nuclear waste to decolonisation of New Caledonia and to matters of functional - cooperation among the member countries including trade, shipping and fisheries. Nuclear matters and New Caledonia Issue were the two political issues that dominated the Forum since more than a decade.

Australia, on its approach towards the FIC presented its guideline in the 15th Forum meet which took place in Tuvalu in 1984 and its policies were also accepted by the FIC. The major thrust of policies were:

(a) the South Pacific countries should be free to live in peace and independence and to run their own affairs in accordance with the wishes and traditions of their people;

\textsuperscript{14} ibid.
(b) the South Pacific countries should enjoy peaceful social and economic development which will be freed from the threat of environmental pollution;

(c) the South Pacific countries should acknowledge existing international treaties, organisations and regional arrangements, such as the Charter of the United Nations, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Law of the Sea Convention, which contribute to their objectives;

(d) there should be no use, testing or stationing of nuclear explosive devices in the South Pacific;

(e) no South Pacific country would develop or manufacture, or receive from others, or acquire or test any nuclear explosive device; and

(f) nuclear activities of the South Pacific countries should be made in accordance with applicable international principles and treaties, notably the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty and take into account the regional arrangements.\(^{15}\)

In addition to those principles listed above, Australia proposed and the Forum agreed that South Pacific countries retain their unqualified sovereign rights to decide for themselves their security arrangements and such questions as the access to their ports and airfields by vessels and aircraft by other countries. There is also strong concern - which Australia shares - to ensure that the South Pacific nuclear free zone should respect international legal obligations in relation to transit and overflight of the high seas.\(^{16}\) Similar provisions for transit and port

\(^{15}\) *AFAR*, Vol. 54, No. 9, September, 1987, p. 843.

\(^{16}\) *AFAR*, Vol. 54, No. 11, November 1987.
visits exist in the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which provides for a nuclear weapons free zone in the Latin American region. All of this means that the obligations which exists under international law, and under treaties such as ANZUS, should not be affected in any way by the nuclear free zone proposal accepted by the Forum.

South Pacific: Defence Initiatives

The islands of the South Pacific have always been regarded as fundamental to Australia's strategic equations. As long ago as the middle of the last century, Australian leaders recognised that events in the islands to the north and east could have a decisive effect on its security. The Australian government, since that time was concerned to explore and develop the opportunities for defence cooperation with its island neighbours. It intends to give them the same priority as has been given to the nations of South East Asia over the last four decades. Naturally, the specific nature of its defence cooperation with the South Pacific region requires careful adjustment to the needs and wishes of the countries themselves.

In this region, Australia's longest-standing defence relationship is with PNG. With its geographical position, its relative size and proximity both to Australia and to Indonesia, PNG plays as an important factor in Australia's security considerations. In order to maintain its commitment towards the Pacific region, the Australian government decided upon a number of initiatives to help protect and extend the strategic interests that it share with the island neighbours. These initiatives include:

(a) moves to help island countries to upgrade their national maritime surveillance systems by provision of patrol boats, naval advisory assistance and training;

(b) deployment of 'Royal Australian Air Force' long-range maritime patrol aircraft to the region;
(c) to increase numbers of Royal Australian Navy ship deployments to the island countries; and
(d) defence cooperation activities providing technical support to island defence and security forces.\(^\text{17}\)

The closer defence relations between Australia and the island countries now being forged always complements with its older established defence links with other countries of the region including those which are the partners in the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) and with PNG. Its activities in the South Pacific were being developed in close consultation with its allies, i.e., the United States and New Zealand, both of which are also giving increased priority to their defence contacts with the South Pacific region. Australia also shares with the peoples and governments of the island countries a common commitment to democratic ideals and principles, and a desire for continuation of the regional peace and stability that is necessary for economic development and growing prosperity.

Over recent years, however, there have been far-reaching changes in the region. With the exception of the French territories and American Samoa, all of the island countries have moved from their former dependent colonial status to full independence or to self-government in free association with the former administering state. Now the South Pacific region has begun to attract increasing international attention. These processes are inevitable and reflect the growing international self-confidence and self-reliance of the island states.

Australia recognizes that these changes have made its regional strategic environment more complex. They carry the potential risk that disputes between the major powers, and influences that could be harmful to its long-term strategic

\(^{17}\text{AFAR, Vol.54, No.2, February 1987, p.73.}\)
interests, may be reflected in the region. In these circumstances, the Australian Government sought to encourage the island countries to develop common views, attitudes and approaches to international issues, including strategic and defence issues. Australia is doing this not as a major power seeking to impose its views on small and less powerful nations, but rather as a friend, counselor and equal partner in its regional approach to these issues through dialogue, discussion and subsequent consensus, in what the islanders themselves call the 'Pacific Way'.

Till date, for Australia, the South Pacific is an area of special interests. Although it is playing the leadership role on each and every issue but it is doing through assistance and constructive advice, rather than through assuming the role of pious lecturer or adamant leader.

The Australian policies, activities and attitudes have also raised a number of questions. On the one hand, critics accuse it of playing the regional policemen while on the other front, it is accused of turning a blind eye to human rights in pursuit of its own economic and strategic interests. Australia's increasing influence in the Pacific region has raised questions on its role as the regional policeman or spy with vested interests.

The critics in Australia see their country's increasing military activities in the region as a desire to gain international prestige as well as the sign of a "maladjusted adolescence" marked in, paranoia and arrogance.

Both Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans and former Defence Minister Kim Beazley strongly rejected any pretensions to a regional policeman role. However, it cannot be denied Australia is arming itself to the teeth and is playing an increasing military role in the region. Australia's 1992-93 defence

---

budget was estimated at $ 9885 million up $ 523 million or 5.6 percent more over last year's allocation. The military budget constituted nine per cent of the total Federal outlay for the year. In the past decade, Australia's defence outlay has more than doubled from $4054 million in 1981/82 - although it has remained at around 9.8 percent of the total budget. In the next decade Australia intends to spend something like $ 25 billion on new defence capital equipment.

Today, Australia has a highly modern defence force with sophisticated weaponry and a long range strike capability that is likely to cause some disquiet among its neighbours. Critics maintain, that, its long range capability encompasses the Indonesian Archipelago from Java eastward, including PNG and New Caledonia.

Under its "defence indepth" strategic policy", Australia aims for an independent long range sea and air strike capability, highly mobile ground force, and joint communications and intelligence operation with the United States. In addition, it has an intricate and highly sophisticated system of intelligence and surveillance network that prompted one critic to remark the government was developing an extraordinary ability to spy into the military, political, economic and personal affairs of Asia-Pacific states and people.

The question that arises is against whom or why is Australia arming itself? Australia's growing militarism must indeed be viewed with alarm by Pacific people because there is the very real danger that its heightened military perceptions could force small island states to concentrate their limited resources more than is necessary on building up their own military strength.

Hence it is interesting to note that both Australia and New Zealand showed what appeared to be rather unseemly haste in restoring defence ties with Fiji which was severed after the 1987 coups. Australia is now talking of reinforcing
military equipment for the Fiji Military Forces, stepping up training links and facilities for the army.

Already Australia's defence policy ropes in the Forum island states into a network of maritime surveillance using patrol boats which is believed to be very expensive to maintain and run. Australia's regional strategy is based on a 1987 Defence White Paper. It was reinforced by Australia's strategic planning in 1990s. Another 1989 paper, divided the region in two zones: (a) the zone of direct military interest which includes Indonesia, PNG, New Zealand and the nearby islands of the South West Pacific; and (b) the zone of primary strategic interest which encompasses the Eastern Indian Ocean and the rest of South East Asian and South West Pacific.  

Critics see this as both presumptions and provocative as well as impossible to effectively defend, encompassing as it does some 10 per cent of the earth's surface.

Nonetheless, Australia draws up the delineated areas into its strategic network through a system of defence treaties and alliances, joint military exercises and training schedules, and a maritime surveillance program which includes the Pacific patrol boat project.

Australia's defence budget is constantly increasing. Its defence cooperation budget in the South Pacific in 1990-91 was set at $23.5 million, up $4.5 million from $19 million in 1989/90. At a cost of $14 million last year, the Pacific Patrol Boat Scheme provided the first 15 boats to the region. Amongst the boats, four were distributed to PNG, three to Tonga, two to the Federated States of

\[19\] ibid.
Micronesia and one each to Vanuatu, Western Samoa, the Cook Islands, Solomon Islands and the Marshall Islands.

After the restoration of defence links with Fiji, three patrol boats are assigned to Fiji along with Tuvalu and Kiribati who will get one each. Subsequently Fiji received first patrol boat will be available in May 1994 and the other two in 1995. The boats are designed for maritime surveillance and enforcement in addition to search and rescue activities and as police roles, which Australia see a major security threats to the Pacific nations.

In his book, "Australia's Foreign Relations in the 1990s", co-authored with Bruce Grant, Evans admitted that the South Pacific region does not have any threats from major-power competition. The pressures on the FIC are of a different kind - illegal fishing, customs evasion, drug trafficking, commercial violations, financial speculation and potentially some gun-running and terrorism. For these activities, for which the patrol boat project is perhaps ideal but hardly a build-up of military equipment and know-how.

Australia's military stance - both internal defence programs and regional activities - is coming under vigorous criticism since last couple of years from academics, peace activists, defence personnel and politicians at home. But, critic's say ... the partnership between Australia and the nations of the South Pacific in particular, is being replaced by an arrangement which is dominated by Canberra and is structured primarily to protect Australian interests.

They feel the Australian Defence Minister Kim Beazley's decision on defence of the Vanuatu issue provides some interesting insights into Australian

---

20 ibid.
thinking. The issue was Vanuatu requested help from Australia when the Vila disorders broke out. At Father Lini's request it helped to re-stock the Vanuatu police supply of riot control gear at very short notice. Later Father Lini also asked whether it would be willing to send personnel to help maintain civil order if the situation required, and the Prime Minister indicated that Australia would be prepared to consider that.

Refuting the charges Beazley said, the decision was based on a simple set of principles, and not for any vested interest of Australia. It decided to back the request because -(a) "It had been asked for help by the head of a legitimate and effective government of a close neighbour. That government had reasons for concern because if the situation deteriorates, it could have led to a threat to the constitutional processes of the government; (b) the help that was sought by Vanuatu can easily be provided because it is operationally feasible; (c) beyond the obligation to help its neighbours, Australia had a direct interest of its own - in the safety of Australian residents and visitors to Vanuatu at that time; and (d) it assessed that Australian help would reduce the chances of further violence and bloodshed".

Again, Beazley said similar criteria would also be applied to any future requests for security assistance in the South Pacific. But the view that the country has a legitimate right to intervene when Australian lives are threatened, has come under strong criticism. Says political researcher Richard Bolt, in the Australian Militarism, "many forms of political instability in the south-west Pacific states could be said to pose a threat to Australian lives, given the widespread presence of Australian tourists and workers in the region.

21 ibid.
22 ibid. p.37.
23 ibid.
Therefore Beazley has established an almost open-ended pretext to intervene, (Grenada-style), in the affairs of regional neighbours. This compromises the sovereignty of PNG and the small island states, even if the threat is never actually carried out; they are on Australian concerns about promoting peace and stability in the region, and of keeping hostile interests out of the region is therefore understandable. But in pursuit of its own strategic and economic interests, it must not overlook the needs of the South Pacific peoples - the need for social and economic development using scant resources that cannot be frittered away in pursuit of military aggrandizement.  

**Political Patterns of the South Pacific Region**

The foundation ideas of the Forum included notions about the political culture that should prevail in regional decision-making. These can be distilled to three maxims: decisions should be arrived at through 'consensus' rather than voting; the process should be conducted among those who can make decisions for their countries, the head of government; and they should be conducted in an ambience of informality and with a minimum background bureaucracy and organization. Significantly, the Forum's establishment was not formalized by international agreement and no secretariat was created. The Fiji's premier, Ratu Mara's assertion in a speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 1970 that there was a "Pacific Way" of doing business was an idea shared by the founder's of the Forum.

---


Political Patterns

In the Forum's first decade of extensive decolonisation not only doubled the number of participants in regional negotiations but also gradually introduced new interests, priorities and identities. Whereas the founding Pacific Island members were focused geographically in the Central Pacific, subsequent political change brought first the west, and then the north, into regional negotiations. Culturally, the early activists were mainly Polynesian and it could be seen as an expression of a Polynesian identity for sub-regional affiliations. Later, along with the Polynesian countries - Niue and Tuvalu, the decolonization of the 1970s also introduced Melanesian participants - PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The only Micronesian countries that were involved were Kiribati and Nauru.

The effects of these new sources of identity and difference were particularly noticeable because they came at a time when regional politics for the first time, focused on such questions as: the form that regional schemes should take, where regional organizations should be located, who should fill the key positions in the regional bureaucracy, and what formula should be employed to determine the scale of contributions to regional institutions. The politics of regional organization had moved beyond the stage where it could generally be characterized in terms of a divide between some colonial powers (particularly France), on the one hand, and the island states on the other, and beyond the stage where the Pacific Island leaders were unified merely on the issue that dominated their initial agenda, that of achieving self-determination in the regional structures. The principal objective of regional cooperation by the mid-1970s was economic development. Diplomatic influence on political issues and voice against the French nuclear testing, took second place. The SPF employed collective diplomacy as a strategy to maintain the pace of development, most notably in relation to developing the terms of the economic relationship between the European Community and the island states, its emphasis was on integration of the
regional economy. This approach, which involved major implications for national sovereignty, quickly revealed the political 'fault lines' that would dominate the next stage of international cooperation.

The most important element of difference was that of cultural identity, or perhaps more accurately the use of ethnic labels to represent a broader set of identities around such elements as ideology and resource interests. In particular, the idea of 'Melanesia' and 'Polynesia', and to a lesser extent 'Micronesia', as sub-regional entities, is one that began to emerge in the context of regional negotiations in the first decade of the Forum's existence. Like 'the South Pacific' itself, these creations of the European world began to take on political meaning only in relation to the international politics of the region. It was the emergence of 'Melanesia' as a political grouping from the mid-1970s that began the move to sub-regionalism. Before this, the Polynesian countries did not need to talk up their identity in terms of 'Polynesian-ness' because they were the independent Pacific.

Melanesian sub-regional identity was stimulated by the independence of PNG (1975) and Solomon Islands (1978), and by their support for independence struggles of Melanesian peoples in Vanuatu and New Caledonia in the late 1970s. The Melanesian countries introduced new priorities, and a new style in regional negotiations. They placed even greater emphasis on self-determination as an organising principle than the founding members had done. This influenced their more radical views on such matters as the continuing French colonial presence and the proposal to include 'distant-water fishing nations' in the new organization that was to be established to control their fishing activities. The Melanesian political style was also perceived as more direct and uncompromising, and, in Polynesian terms, perhaps even rude.

---

26 ibid.
Pointing up the elasticity of the concept of 'Melanesia', the Polynesian countries saw Fiji as being part of a Melanesian faction at this time, despite its closer cultural affinity with Polynesia. And certainly the Fiji Premier Ratu Mara did work closely with the Melanesia states. The uncompromising position of the Melanesian states on regional self-determination accorded with Ratu Mara's long-standing commitment to that principle. They therefore came out on the same side on issues such as restricting membership of the Forum to sovereign states, supporting regional schemes designed to control damaging activities by outside powers, and opposing French colonialism.

The other basis for identity among participating states that developed within regional politics during the 1970s was that of relative size, whether measured in terms of population, economic strength, or land area. In the early years of the SPF, Fiji was the dominant force in regional negotiations. The smaller states saw Fiji as benefiting more than its due from regional schemes because of its central location, economic strength and level of development. The entry into regional politics of the much larger PNG in mid-decade did not dilute the resentment felt against Fiji's dominance. Fiji and PNG worked closely together until the end of the 1970s and were seen as jointly constituting 'the powerful' in regional politics. Although there was a sense in which this division in regional politics could be said to have moved from 'Fiji versus the rest' to 'Fiji and PNG versus the rest. Not only that, the rest of the FIC's is also not united over the regional issues. These smaller states also divided into 'the small' and 'the very small' in relation to some issues.

These political differences were moderated by a shared experience of British political and social institutions - whether under Australian, New Zealand or British colonial rule - to the point where the SPF in its first decade was dubbed
the 'Commonwealth Club'. There were no participants from the French or American Pacific at this stage because of the lack of decolonisation by those powers. These new states also embraced similar developmental models despite some rhetorical differences. And there were none of the border or irredentist disputes common to new states in Africa and Asia. The early participants were therefore able to conduct their negotiations without the complications of major ideological difference and without the spill over tensions of serious conflict between countries in the region. Differences were usually restricted to the regional issues at hand.

The inclusion of Australia and New Zealand as direct participants formed an obvious basis for political division if anyone wished to mobilize it. They were ex-colonial powers, with Western cultures, and the main economic players in the independent islands region, participating in an organisation that has just come out of the colonial bondage.

However, these differences between Australia and New Zealand and the island countries did not become politically important on regional negotiations in the early years of the SPF. But from 1976 the basis was laid for a much more fundamental division between the island countries and Australia and New Zealand. Following a change to Conservative governments in Canberra and Wellington, and sparked by reports of Soviet offers of economic assistance to Tonga in 1976 in return for port access for its fishing fleet, Australia and New Zealand began to view the region through Cold War lenses. This affected the significance they attached to regional cooperation, the objectives they pursued through their involvement, and the positions they took on regional issues. Conceptually, they began to link regional organization, regional security and regional development. They began to see regional organization and regional development as serving

---

regional security - defined in Cold War terms as the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the islands area, and known as the 'strategic denial' doctrine. They also began to see themselves as the leaders of 'the New South Pacific' after the withdrawal of the foreign powers from the Pacific territories, and as representing Western interests in this part of the world.

The relatively simple regional political system of the 1970s gave way to a much more complex matrix of relationships in 1980s - one which began to attract, for the first time since the Second World War, the interest of the world's largest powers, and which also involved, as influential participants, international agencies, non-government organizations, and the burgeoning bureaucracy of the regional institutions themselves. France, the United States, Britain, Japan and China began to view the outcomes of SPF deliberations as holding implications for their grand strategies. The SPF came increasingly to be seen as the site where the governing norms and principles of a regional order, as a prevailing pattern of state practice, were being determined. It became the focus of efforts to influence the content to be given to such concepts as regional development.

This was partly because there was a significant conceptual shift, on the part of Forum member states, concerning the form that regional cooperation should take. In place of the idea of economic integration, there gradually grew a commitment to regional schemes that did not involve a sacrifice of sovereignty, that would in fact promote national interests rather than subsume them in a regional interest, and a preference for regional action aimed at influencing the terms of the relationship between the regional and the outside world rather than promoting an integrated regional economy. Particularly from the mid-1980s it was seen as a new phase of international cooperation dominated by the idea of collective diplomacy. The new collective diplomacy became focused not only on

---

those areas that had been of particular concern in the 1970s - improving terms of trade and market access, and opposing nuclear testing - but also in new areas of interest to island leaders: environmental protection, resource management and decolonisation.

A significant outcome of this activity was the establishment of a series of regional legal regimes that sought to institutionalize and regulate understandings reached in these areas. These include the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (signed at Rarotonga, 1985), the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region (signed in Noumea, 1986) and the Convention for the Prohibition of Fishing with Long Driftnets in the South Pacific (Wellington, 1989). Many of these regimes began to challenge seriously major interests of larger powers: France on nuclear testing and colonial policy, the United States on security issues and Law of the Sea questions, and Japan on nuclear waste dumping and gillnet fishing. From mid-eighties, these states consequently began to attempt to influence the outcomes of the regional institutions. This new interest was heightened by a perception on the part of governments in Washington, Paris, London and Tokyo, that Australia and New Zealand were no longer adequately representing their interests in the area and were in fact acting against them on certain key issues.

Sub-regional identification, based on ethnicity and size, also gained further importance in the regional politics of the 1980s. Melanesian leaders formalized their alliance within regional politics with the creation of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) in 1986 and their signing, in March 1988, of Agreed Principles for Co-operation. Its member were PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu and from 1990, the Front de Liberation Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS), the independentists of New Caledonia. Significantly, the MSG did not

include Fiji that declined an invitation to join. The Group's rallying point was the anti-colonial cause in New Caledonia, although the solidarity of its members was reinforced by their shared resource interests and their more radical position on nuclear questions. The MSG barely survived the serious border tensions between two of its members, Solomon Islands and PNG, in 1990/91, and the change in Vanuatu in 1991 to a francophone government opposed to Kanak independence in New Caledonia. The high point of its influence on regional politics had clearly passed by the early 1990s.

The strength of Melanesia as an organized faction within the SPF from the mid-1980s spurred talk of the formation of a 'Polynesian Community'. Promoted by Gaston Flosse, the President of French Polynesia and French Secretary of State for the South Pacific from 1986, the proposal was clearly linked to French government concerns about the influence of the MSG on issues affecting its interests in the region. Flosse found some support for his ideas in Tonga, and in opposition circles in Western Samoa and the Cook Islands, but the proposal was strongly opposed by Western Samoa's Prime Minister, Tofilau Eti. Although the King of Tonga gave the idea new life by promoting a Polynesian cultural community, the notion of a formalized political counterweight to the Melanesian bloc within the Forum had disappeared by the end of 1988. This was principally due to the decline of the New Caledonia issue after the signing of the Matignon accords which brought political cooperation between the French Government, the New Caledonia loyalists and the FLNKS.

While the Polynesian identity was never formalized, it was nevertheless discernible in relation to such issues as nuclear questions, decolonisation and staffing of the regional institutions, the Micronesian identity had not yet had the same appeal in regional politics. Despite the addition of the Federated States of

---

30 "Why we are Uniting ?, The Melanesian Bloc View", Islands' Business(Suva), April 1988, pp. 28-29.
Micronesia and the Marshall Islands to the SPF membership in 1990, they did not discernible combine with Nauru and Kiribati, the existing Micronesian members. There was, however, increasingly a tendency to recognize such an identity in the practice of sharing out key regional positions among Micronesia, Polynesians and Melanesians.

The smaller states also strengthened their identity as a grouping with in regional politics during the 1980s. In 1985, according to report of its Committee on Small Island States, the Forum recognised that such states form a special category.

In the Pacific Way, the smallest and most vulnerable members of the family deserve special attention. The Forum therefore recognizes that special emphasis on meeting the needs of the Smaller Island Countries should be given through support of their national development strategies and through preferential treatment in regional programmes.

The SPF recognized four of its members as falling within the Smaller Island Countries (SIC) category: the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Niue and Tuvalu. It subsequently established a ‘Smaller Island Countries Funding Facility’ (SICFF), administered by SPEC, and in 1990 revived the Committee on Small Island States (CSIS). Following a meeting of heads of the government in the Cook Islands in November 1991 this identity was formalized in the creation of the grouping of CSIS, comprising the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue and Tuvalu in 1992. The outcome of the first summit meeting of the CSIS leaders suggested that the grouping intended a fairly radical departure from existing regional arrangements. For example, the establishment of their own regional development bank, joint negotiations with Distant-Water Fishing Nations (DWFNs) and international shipping companies over access to their EEZs, and entry into a Consortium for international investment. Even if the particular proposals for collaboration fail to
eventuate, the CSIS did manage to achieve recognition of the SPF and South Pacific Organisations Co-ordination Committee (SPOCC) as constituting a special category for the purposes of regional programme.31

The institutional framework in which regional negotiations took place became much more complicated from the late 1980s. After a decade of dispute concerning the desirability of rationalizing a decentralised institutional network into a Single Regional Organization (SRO), which was promoted by various PNG governments, the protagonists settled on a compromise of closer cooperation under the umbrella of SPOCC in 1988. This satisfied the independent states because it increased the SPF's power: three of the six agencies within SPOCC were part of the Forum network and the Forum Secretariat became the Secretariat of the new SPOCC. In this sense the SPF became the hub of the new network. And it satisfied those such as the territorial administrations, and France and the United States, who saw SPC membership as legitimating their participation in South Pacific regional affairs and who feared that they might not have a seat at the table if there was only to be one regional organization. None the less, bickering between the SPC and the SPF over who should have control over what regional programme, as an established ritual of regional politics, continued as before.

By 1990 there were well over three hundred full-time staff in the principal regional organisations is, the SPF. The commitment of resources required from each island state was substantial. The SPF meeting alone took two weeks of the time of key officials. Many of the same officials would then meet for an average of two to three weeks a year in SPC conferences. Add to this FFA, PIDP, SPREP, USP, PFL and SOPAC commitments, and the meetings of the Regional Security Committee, the Regional Trade Committee, and the Committee on Small

31 "The last thing we need is yet another regional Organisation", Islands' Business, October 1989, p. 4.
Island States, and key officials in economic and foreign policy areas are spending a great deal of time on regional business. The burgeoning regional bureaucracy also provides evidence of a continuing commitment to South Pacific cooperation by metropolitan states, and particularly Australia and New Zealand. Given the relatively meager resources available to the island states any new institutional initiatives or additional programmes have had to be substantially funded by metropolitan countries and international agencies. This is in addition to funding the bulk of the running costs and capital costs of the existing organizations. As well as indicating a political commitment, this financial dependence creates a potential for conflict. It provides an important backdrop to an understanding of the politics of regional negotiations.

Throughout the first two decades of the SPF's existence, regional politics has focused on three inter related areas. First, was the initiative towards regional cooperation, programmes and activities. Second, the content to be given to prevailing regional norms shaping state practice, concerning matters such as regional security, development and sovereignty. Third, the struggles over the spoils and symbolism of regional organization, particularly in regard to the form regional institutions should take, their membership, sitting and the filling of their key positions.

Regional Political Order and Australia

The Pacific Island States are the most remote margin of the marginalised in the world politics - microstate in political, economic and geographical terms. During the post-cold war period, when complexities is the order of the day over the issue of multipolarism or bipolarism, the FIC are the most suffered states in the world politics.
Towards the late nineteenth century, the South Pacific settled into an imperial order, made up of British, French, German, and American colonies. At the end of each world war, the regional map adjusted to reflect changes at the centre. In 1918, and subsequently the German Pacific fell under Japanese, British, Australian and New Zealand rule; in 1945, Japanese Micronesia came under American control. For the societies which changed hands, the impact affected important matters such as economic organisation, forced migration, labour, customs, religion, education, language and welfare. The parameters governing actions and ideas within the Pacific societies were more directly derived from the changed fortunes of the great powers.

In the early years of the Cold War, parts of the South Pacific were linked directly to the grand strategies of Western powers. The remoteness of some atolls and the strategic location of others made attractive sites for nuclear weapons testing and deployment, and the completeness of imperial control made this easy to achieve. For the first time, the United States initiated testing atomic bombs over Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands in 1946. Two years later it began testing at Enewetak, where the first hydrogen bomb was exploded in 1952. Atmospheric testing continued at these sites until 1958 when the United States moved its testing site to Johnston Atoll, an American island situated in the South of the Hawaii. In 1957, Britain moved its nuclear testing program from Australia to Christmas Island, and was joined there by the United States four years later, until both programs moved to the Nevada desert after the sign of Partial Test-Ban Treaty in 1963. In the same year, France also established its Centre d'Experiments du Pacifique and conducted 41 atmospheric tests at Mururoa Atoll before 1974. Another island, Guam was made as a launching point for B 52 attacks on Vietnam, and a base for nuclear-armed B-52s until 1990, while Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands became (and remains) the main testing site for American ballistic missiles. Despite the signing of the Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and international criticism against the nuclear testing programmes, France
conducted another nuclear test in Mururoa Atoll in 1995. The France government’s decision to hold nuclear test received heavy criticism from regional as well as international agencies and outside countries. The present status is, although France has ratified the NWFZ treaty, it has not stopped its nuclear programmes that have created suspicion in the minds of the Pacific Islanders about the France’s intention.

For particular individuals and societies in the French and American territories, this involvement was disastrous. Chamoro people in Guam and Tinian, and Marshall Islanders in Kwajalein, Bikini and Enewetak were forced off their land. Bikini Islanders and Enewetak people suffered the effects of radioactivity associated with American tests. And the more important fact is that it is being predicted that Marshall Islands will vanish from the world map by 2025, because sea level is rising due to radioactivity. All people in the region potentially suffer from the fallout of the 163 atmospheric tests conducted in the region before 1975. Moreover, the strategic interests of the United States and France severely constrained the self-determination efforts of islanders.

But are these experiences to be seen as part of the Pacific Island experience of a Cold War international order or of a continuing imperial order? While the Cold War may have influenced the intensity of testing, it is likely that Britain, France and the United States would have been involved in the Pacific territories whether or not there was an ideological competition between East and West, and whether the world was 'bipolar' or 'multipolar'. It could be argued, then, that this experience is more accurately to be regarded as reflecting a continuing imperial order. In the short term, the 1939-45 War had done little to alter the fact that Pacific island societies remained appendages of large powers. The establishment of the SPC in 1947 had confirmed regional power structure comprising France, Britain, the United States, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand. While regional cooperation among these administering states was
promoted, political control and economic links continued to follow colonial lines - between island capital and distant metropole.

The Pacific Island societies were not directly affected by nuclear involvement, but that does not mean that there was little influence of the Cold War. In fact developments within these British, Australian and New Zealand territories reflected a quite different theme in Western 'world order' thinking on the principle of self-determination. The decision to slowly move these territories towards self-government demonstrates that Cold War thinking could be overridden by other normative principles. A policy dictated solely by Cold War considerations would have left the Pacific Islands under direct political control.

For the first 30 years or so of the Cold War, the regional order was determined by the imperial order established in the late nineteenth century. With colonial sovereignty fixed, South Pacific societies were a strategic backwater, out of bounds to great power rivalry. The gradual emergence of independent Island states after 1962 did little to change this imperial order. Economic patterns followed previous colonial ties, and foreign policy initiatives were low on the island states agenda. It was only around the mid-1970s, a significant portion of the region had been decolonised and more independent foreign policies had begun to be asserted.

Contending Perspectives on Cold War Order

In 1975, Cold War assumptions came to the region. The Australian government attempted to scuttle a proposal from New Zealand, and subsequently the South Pacific Forum, to promote a nuclear-free zone in the South Pacific. Although this episode expressed many elements of Cold War thinking, the

Whittam Labour government's action was a one-off policy response rather than the product of a thought-through framework. Such a framework was, however, developed in the following year by the newly elected conservative governments in Canberra and Wellington. They detected increasing Soviet Union involvement in the South Pacific. The Soviet Union reported offer to provide economic assistance to Tonga in exchange for access to the Soviet fishing fleet, along with the establishment in 1976 of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa in 1976.

The central premise of this new framework was that a desirable regional order would ensure no Soviet involvement of any kind. And no developments that could be interpreted as inviting such involvement - an approach later known as 'stability' within a state and regional security was implicit in this approach. So, too, was a link between security and development; since economically fragile societies were assumed more susceptible to Soviet entanglements, economic assistance, and even trade and investment, came to be seen as instruments serving regional security. The conceptual link between regional identity and regional security presumed that the identity encouraged through regional organisation would help to exclude 'illegitimate' players from decision-making, and that regional organisations would be a vehicle for a regional consensus around the desired objective of security.33

Canberra and Wellington promoted two organising principles of state behaviour as part of this preferred order. The first was that these smaller states should not exercise their full sovereign rights. They should deny themselves from any kind of relationship with the Soviet Union common in 'the West' (including embassies, trade links, visits to Moscow) and from joining associations common elsewhere among post-colonial states (membership of the Non-Aligned

33 Herr,n.29, p. 21.
Movement). Furthermore, they should curb domestic developments that could be seen as providing openings to the Soviet Union. The second organising principle was that Australia and New Zealand should act as 'gatekeepers' on behalf of the Western interests. There was, then, an attempt to establish a pecking order of states: Australia and New Zealand acting as middlemen between the United States and the Island States.

Up to 1982, the preferred regional order of Australia and New Zealand largely became the regional order accepted and acted upon by other states. The operating principles appeared to be accepted and: Australia and New Zealand’s leadership was also encouraged by Washington and readily accepted in the region. The Pacific Island states did accept limitations on their sovereignty over dealings with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the SPF also accepted the policy of strategic denial. This issue also played a key role in the change of government in Canberra (1983) and Wellington (1984). The new Labour governments introduced anti-nuclear and self-determination objectives into their notion of a desirable regional order, objectives they saw as consistent with regional security defined in Cold War terms. For example, Australia justified its opposition to France's nuclear testing and its colonial policy in New Caledonia in terms of damage to Western interests. New Zealand, going further, argued that its anti-nuclear policy was consistent with the aims of the ANZUS alliance and with New Zealand's efforts to counter Soviet influence in the region.

The promotion of this new view of regional order was strongly opposed by Washington, Paris and London. They saw the French presence as serving Western interests, and Australia and New Zealand's efforts to oppose France while promoting a nuclear-free zone as inimical to those interests, indeed encouraging Soviet involvement. One of Washington's operating principles of a desired regional order - the idea of Australia and New Zealand as 'managers' - now seemed in tatters. From the mid-1980s, for the first time since 1945, the United
States and France instituted their own policies towards the region through which they promoted different views of what constituted a desirable pro-West regional order. The United States also asked Japan to undertake some burden-sharing in this new direct involvement, resulting in the Kuranari Doctrine of 1987 and the establishment of a substantial economic assistance program. (These two contending interpretations of regional order - three, if we include the differences between the Australian and New Zealand conceptions - nevertheless came together on the issue of 'strategic denial'). All were alarmed by what they saw as the first serious breaches of that policy: the fisheries access agreements between the Soviet Union and Kiribati (1985) and Vanuatu (1987), and the links between Vanuatu and Libya. If anything, the Labour governments pressed the policy harder than their predecessors and began to apply it more to developments within states.

The Western powers were strongly influenced in their approach to these matters by the Grenada crisis of October 1983. That prompted new thinking about micro states as a special category in international relations with a particular security 'personality'. This new thinking began from the assumptions already established in the development literature that such states were particularly vulnerable, dependent and resourceless. These economic characteristics were linked to an assumed security characteristic: a lack of resources to deal with even minor security threats. Consequently, instability flowing from this situation could significantly affect regional security defined in Cold War terms. This 'small is dangerous' diagnosis not only heightened Western interest in South Pacific security, but also reinforced the importance accorded to regional organisation and economic development, and encouraged the tendency to link internal with regional security.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{34} ibid.
Challenges to Forum Members during the Cold War Order

Various versions of Cold War regional order did not go unchallenged by the Island states or groups. First, they contested the concept of 'regional security' promoted as the objective of such an order. Encouraged to discuss the issue at Commonwealth Colloquium in Wellington in 1984, the Island leaders made it clear that, if pressed, they would define regional security quite differently, with East-West concerns well down the list, and economic security and protection of sovereignty near the top. So defined, the United States was seen as the 'enemy' because of the poaching of the islands' main shared resource, the Skipjack tuna, by American fishermen. Their continued assertion, throughout the mid-1980s, was that economic security was the name of the game. The Soviet Union was playing by the rules while the United States was not. This resulted in a significant concession from the United States: an agreement to pay for access to tuna fishing grounds which went against the general principles that the United States had been pressing on the jurisdictional rights over highly migratory species of fish.

Second, they confronted the relatively longstanding operating principles of the Australian and New Zealand approach to regional order, particularly their role as managers. More conservative Island states criticised them for moving outside the anti-Soviet regional order they had themselves constructed, while more radical states condemned Australia in particular for not going for enough on the anti-nuclear and anti-colonial questions, and for being too tied into an order dictated solely by East-West rivalry. The Australian government was also criticised for its paternalistic diplomatic style, particularly over the issue of Libyan involvement. This resistance grew strongly after the Fiji coups in 1987, for whether or not they agreed with the military takeover, Island leaders rallied around the right of Fiji to

---

sort out its own house. They, therefore, opposed any kind of move by Australia and New Zealand to exert pressure.

The Island states also began to question the second class citizenship assigned to them in the regional order. Against strong opposition from Canberra and Wellington, first Kiribati in 1985, and then Vanuatu in 1987, asserted the right to have a fisheries access agreement with the Soviet Union. Since both Australia and New Zealand had extensive commercial dealings with the Soviet Union, there was general resentment in the region of the denial of that same right to Island states. Non-government groups throughout the Pacific - church people, trade Unionists, students, women's groups, independence movements, and anti-nuclear groups - also resisted the various brands of Cold War regional order. They were organised within states and across the region in various alliances - Pacific Trade Union Forum, Pacific Women's Association, Pacific Conference of Churches, and the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement. Their vision of an appropriate regional order was one which was non-nuclear, non-aligned, self-determining, non-militarist and participatory. At the state level, their positions were variously represented by many of the policies of the Lini government in Vanuatu until 1987, the Fiji Labour government of 1987 and the New Zealand Labour government. Significant social movements within Australia and New Zealand, including large sections of their governing Labour parties also supported these positions.

Thus in the mid-1980s, at least four contending views of regional order has emerged. First, the powerful Western countries (the United States, France, Britain and Japan) shared with the Conservative Parties in Australia and New Zealand. Second, promoted by the Labour governments in Australia and New Zealand leaving aside nuclear issues. Third, representing the shared concerns of the tiny Island governments with a more self-determined order that might limit infringements of their sovereignty and allow 'legitimate' Soviet involvement in the
region. Finally, the vision was constituted by various non-government groups. Much of the contest between these ideas was conducted in the regional organisations and was reflected in decisions about institutional structure, finance, membership, policy outcomes, and competition over key regional positions.

The outcome demonstrated that the Island states did have significant sources of power. The Australian and New Zealand governments also made important shifts to accommodate the challenge from the region. For example, to gain credibility for its 1987 expectation that Vanuatu should allow the establishment of a Libyan People's Bureau, the Australian government bowed to Island opinion that Australia should close the Bureau on its soil. Upon taking office the following year, the Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans (1989) frankly acknowledged that Australia would have to depart from its established policy approach which regarded a role of 'agent' for Western interests and advocated 'partnership' instead. Australia and New Zealand also shifted their view of regional security to accord with broader notions emanating from the region. While still holding Cold War concerns uppermost, Island country's concern with economic security had to be acknowledged if the damage caused by the breaching of "strategic denial" were to be contained. The US adopted this view after being persuaded that failure to concede might cause Island states to "go to the Soviets". Australia also diluted its notion of 'strategic denial' when its Foreign Minister Bill Hayden announced in 1987 that Australia would welcome 'constructive engagement' in the South Pacific by the Soviet Union.

Contemporaneously, important elements of the Australia - New Zealand vision of regional order prevailed over the view propounded by Washington, Paris and London. The establishment of the nuclear-free zone graphically illustrated this, and the successful campaign to have New Caledonia returned to the purview of the United Nation's De-colonisation Committee is also a matter in the regional agenda. The pull, then, was towards conceptions of regional order promoted by
the seemingly less powerful states, but not towards the vision promoted by non-
governmental groups; their view did not have a major influence. An internal rift
within the Vanua'aku Pati in 1987 further circumscribed it, as did the forced
removal by the military of Bavadra's coalition government in Fiji in the same year.

For the South Pacific environment, the Cold War was not the life or death
experience common to so many Third World societies. It influenced the way in
which regional security was conceptualised and also foster regional identity—a
form of pan-nationalism-in opposition to it. While initially affecting only relations
among states, it increasingly affected social and political forces within them. This
was most noticeable within the dependent territories—particularly in Palau and
New Caledonia - whether Cold War imperatives were used to justify opposition to
move for self-determination. Strategic motives influenced economic assistance
policies in particular, but they cast less influence over trade, and even less in
investment. But, by and large, the important economic decisions respond to quite
different global processes beyond the direct control of the powerful Western
states with their visions of a desired regional order.

The South Pacific experience, then, suggested a very different view of the
Cold War international order. That perspective correctly points to the importance
of the global political military order rather than the Cold War order, but goes too
far in seeing this as determinative. Although the Cold War thinking did begin to
dominate in the construction of the referred regional order of larger states but it
was refracted by a number of forces. There were competing claims over what
constituted a pro-Western regional order. Local political forces increasingly
mounted an effective challenge to its expectations and ideals and other global
processes also influenced the social order of the region, both within and between
states. The relative, rather than absolute, significance of a Cold War global order
for the South Pacific in the post-1945 period suggests that the end of the Cold
War is not the watershed claimed for its 'what next' debate.
Regional Politics Since Early 1990s

An examination of the actual changes to the structure, ideas and agenda of regional order further support this conclusion after the end of the Cold War. The contrary position, incorporating the view that the end of the Cold War acts as a watershed both for the regional security order and the regional economic order, the latter largely being seen as derivative from the former, is represented in the 'marginalisation' thesis. It is therefore important to begin with a refutation of its claims. Put forward as a shared assumption of the main debate concerning the likely impact of the end of the Cold War on the Third World, it has also quickly become the conventional wisdom on the particular fate of the South Pacific.

Briefly stated, this argument assumes that political attention and economic assistance was drawn to the South Pacific by the perception of vulnerability to Soviet threat and because actions taken within the region threatened Western global interests. It then proposes that the end of East-West rivalry means a loss of politico-strategic interest by larger states in peripheral regions such as the South Pacific; and furthermore, scarce of aid and investment funds will be diverted to the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. This leads to the conclusion that the end of the Cold War means less bargaining power and more stringent economic times for the South Pacific. In some analyses this marginalisation process is aggravated by the strong possibility of the Island states being frozen out of markets by the development of trading blocs, and in particular by the development of economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

The marginalisation thesis is strongest where it states the obvious. Where clearly is a significant lowering of strategic interest in the South Pacific from the Cold War high water mark of the mid-1980s, but beyond this its claims are not persuasive. It underestimates agendas unrelated to 'the global balance' that were
marked by anti-Soviet justifications for regional involvement. The only declining involvement was Soviet Union; their tuna fleet carted in the late-1980s, and their only embassy - in Port Moresby- closed in 1992. Other larger powers retained sufficient interest to maintain but not to expand their range of involvement. The diplomatic marginalisation that has occurred has not yet led to economic marginalisation. If anything, total aid to the region is increasing.

The United States' approach to the South Pacific since the end of the Cold War has to be seen against the backdrop of its overall South Pacific policy. The American policy towards the South Pacific has been institutionalised as a result of Washington's disenchantment with Australia and New Zealand's representation of its interests during the Cold War and by increasing demands from Island capitals to deal directly with Washington rather than through middlemen in Canberra and Wellington. The post-Cold War policy is even more wide ranging, with economic assistance remaining at levels reached during the height of Washington's Cold War concerns. This seemingly counter cyclical development began with the regional initiatives announced at former President George Bush's November 1990 summit with Pacific Island leaders. While some of these initiatives could be seen as expressing the momentum of Cold War policies, the more recent initiatives are unambiguously in post-Cold War context. In May 1992 the Forum Island states signed a new fisheries agreement with Washington which will guarantee payment of $US 180 million over ten years. And in late 1992, the inaugural meeting of the Joint Commercial Commission, tasked with promoting private sector investment in the region, was held.
Australian Co-operation in the Post-Cold War Era

In the late 1980s, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, the South Pacific co-operation has given new emphasis to a broad range of issues including environment, making beyond the single issue approach of earlier years. The agenda has now broadened to include issues associated with the development decisions of the Pacific Island States, not least in the acceptance of the concept of 'sustainable development' as a regional norm.\footnote{Bilney, n.8 p.14.}

Symptomatic to this new emphasis was the establishment of a regional environmental agency, the South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP), in 1991. While a small unit of the same name had already been in existence within the SPC Secretariat, it did not have the resources or independence to carry out the new roles that was expected. An early priority of the SPREP, has been the pressing for a collective South Pacific position in the meetings which led to the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio in 1992, and in the negotiations on a framework convention on climate change, an issue of particular concern to the low-lying Pacific Islands.

Regional Security Issue

In the post cold-war era, the debate is still continuing on the notion of regional security. While Australia and New Zealand had understood to acknowledge their broader agenda during the cold war, they had partly done so to obtain island support for the west's objective. In the late-1980s and particularly since the Yalta conference of 1991, where the US President George Bush and his Soviet counterpart Gorbachev declared that "cold war is over", the regional security agenda is being pursued in its own right with increased vigour.
This is reflected in a series of new initiatives through the regional institutions. Some of them are as follows: reinvigoration of the SPREP; the reactivation of the SPF's Regional Security Committee; the commissioning of a major study on regional law enforcement; and meeting of police chiefs and law officials to discuss regional strategies on drug trafficking and corporate crime.

The conception of regional security promoted by Pacific Island States also includes the defense of state sovereignty. This includes the strongly held view that internal security matters are the preserve of the state and should not be on any regional agenda. This was made a central normative principle after 1985. The island states reasserted this principle firmly but gently when Australia and New Zealand sought to involve themselves in exerting pressure on internal developments in Fiji in 1987. And since 1989, in relation to the worst security issue in the region, - Bougainville stalemate - involving the loss of hundreds of lives, the South Pacific States (including Australia) have resisted pressure from supporters of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) to make it regional business. Even the incursion of the PNG military into Solomon Islands territory and the killing of its citizens became a subject of discussion and affected the regional cooperation.

While such principles were promoted as part of the preferred regional order of the Australia government from since 1987. Australia had expressed their strong positions in relations to the Fiji coups and the resulting regimes and adopted a real political position by the early 1990s. Gradually, it is trying to re-establish its relation with Fiji.

The Island leaders concern is not Australia alone. It had initially gone too far in their attempt to influence outcomes in Fiji and sparked a region-wide assertiveness against western liberal values and structures including the freedom of the press and west minister model. Australia's experience of this backlash not
only moderated their position on Fiji, it also helped to explain their subsequent approach to the much more serious issue of Bougainville. Ironically, Australia has now been accused by another SPF member, Solomon Islands, for its position on human rights abuses by the PNG military forces.

The negotiations concerning regional security have been of a different kind in South Pacific. While they have involved strong differences between the island region and outside powers, as was the case with environmental issues, they have also created divisions within the islands community. Furthermore, they have focused not only on particular policies but on the question of what concept should prevail. It has been as much a conflict over the ideas that should inform state practice in the region as about whether this or that regional programme should be supported. It is also a notoriously slippery concept that encompasses anything from economic development to military threat to environmental safety.

The idea of 'regional security', for the first time, emerged in 1976 as part of Canberra and Wellington's new Cold War approach to the region. This approach, centred on exclusion of the Soviet Union - and hence dubbed 'strategic denial' - was reliant on the creation of a regional consensus through the Forum. It was not publicly challenged until the newly independent Vanuatu openly flouted its dictates by joining the Non-Aligned Movement and talking about even-handedness. This Cold War interpretation of regional security was given new impetus from the mid-1980s when Western powers began to see the region as vulnerable to Soviet entreaties. But there were also divisions within the Western group about what would constitute a pro-Western regional order. For Australia and New Zealand, such a notion would be served by opposing French colonial and nuclear activity, whereas French involvement was seen as being in service of Western interests by Washington, Paris and London. Each of these interpretations of regional security included political stability within states as part of its definition. Any instability within a state was seen as affecting regional
vulnerability. Hence the internal developments and foreign policies of states were seen as relevant to regional deliberations.

From 1984 when the FIC leaders first met formally to discuss regional security, it was evident that, while many shared the concerns about the Soviet Union, they nevertheless found the Western conception of regional security to be too narrowly focused. They generally preferred a conceptualization that took into account their concerns with defending their sovereignty, resources and environment. Their preferred strategies were to deal with these security needs on the grounds of regional cooperation and bilateral assistance and consultation. They preferred ad hoc responses to situations as they arose rather than having a treaty, a standing peacekeeping force or other collective security arrangement. There was a reluctance to encourage involvement in each other's internal affairs by the establishment of any regional security structure such as had been established in the Eastern Caribbean. Meeting in 1984 under Commonwealth auspices, they had the Grenada experience firmly in mind. These themes were again emphasized by Pacific Island participants in a workshop on regional security held in Canberra in 1989 and considered it as vital and necessary.

The Pacific leaders also did not like the second-class citizenship given to Island states in the 'strategic denial' formula. Why were Island states to be denied diplomatic, economic and cultural contact with the Soviet Union when the Western powers, including Australia and New Zealand, enjoyed these links? In 1985 Kiribati entered a fisheries agreement with the Soviet Union. Vanuatu followed suit in 1986. There was also some resentment felt at attempts by Australia in 1987 to bring pressure to bear on Vanuatu's proposed links with Libya. By 1988 it had become clear to the Australian Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, that Australia's past approaches to regional security were no longer workable. Recognizing the effective challenges to existing Australian assumptions posed by the concerted actions of the Island leaders, Evans announced a
conceptual shift in policy to a doctrine of 'constructive commitment' in 1988, emphasizing on 'partnership' rather than working as an agent for Western vested interests, or for that matter, Australian hegemonic aspirations.

But there were also different positions within the Island Countries that became evident when particular policies were debated. Chief among these was the proposal for a SPNFZ. The nuclear free zone proposal put before the Pacific leaders at the 1983, 1984 and 1985 Forum meets, and considered by their officials in five meetings in 1984-85, represented the view of regional security which was held in Canberra and Wellington. It was an attempt to go as far as possible with banning nuclear weapons involvement. It was aimed at influencing French nuclear testing and possible future weapons involvement of any nuclear power. It explicitly and pointedly did not seek to ban port visits or passage on the high seas of nuclear-armed vessels. Such a position was, however, not preferred by the FIC that made no concessions to Cold War concerns. Others like the Polynesian states and Fiji - would probably have preferred that no zone be initiated. They took seriously the concerns of Washington, Paris and London that such a zone, however limited, was antithetical to Western interests. In the event, and with some reluctance, each group was prepared to move to the middle ground. The SPNFZ treaty (the Treaty of Rarotonga) was signed at the 1985 Forum.

Although 'regional security' remained on the agenda after the end of the Cold War, it was a very different conception from the one that prevailed in earlier years. It no longer emphasized regional collaboration to exclude the influence of a potentially undesirable state, which had been a dominant notion during the Cold War. Nor did it include the discussion or resolution of security problems within particular states that were perceived as threatening regional order, which had become part of the conception prevalent in Canberra and Wellington. Significantly, there was no attempt to raise Bougainville as a regional security issue in the way Australia, New Zealand and other Forum members earlier sought.
Other issues like the raise of the 1987 Fiji coups, to link some groups of Vanuatu with Libyan terrorists, and the dismantled Soviet fishing agreements with Vanuatu and Kiribati. The conception of regional security which is placed under the Forum’s Regional Security Committee, received member countries’ support. Still there are issues on which member states differ. Wherever may be, the real threats to the security of the South Pacific are environment, economy, organised crime and drug trafficking. The Forum as well as Australia is working consensually to tackle these problems.

This chapter specifically intends to discuss two major political issues that are not only creating tension within the Forum members but also creating uneasiness for Australia. These two issues are Bougainville Imbroglio and post-coup political order in Fiji.

I. Bougainville Imbroglio

Outside the Pacific, few people have heard of Bougainville, PNG’s troubled province. Many more came to know about the province, when it became a matter of discussion in the agenda of the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva in August 1992. The sub-commission on the prevention of discrimination and protection of minorities for the first time adopted a resolution that called on PNG to restore freedom of movement to the inhabitants of Bougainville in the interests of protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also asked the special rapporteur on the study of treaties between states and indigenous people to include it in the report in case agreements materialised between the PNG and indigenous people.

The Bougainville issue has created a serious gulf between two FIC's. Both Solomon Islands and PNG are blaming each other on the human tragedy created by the civil strike by the Bougainville Republican Army (BRA).

The SPF, reacting on the issue, has already established South Pacific Peace-keeping Force for Bougainville (SPPKF). Consistent with the Charter of United Nations (UN), the SPPKF for Bougainville was formed to assist in the peace process. This was established in response to formal requests from the Government of PNG.

The 28 Forum Meet of 1997 also endorsed the recent efforts made by the Government of PNG in restoring peace to the island and expressed its readiness to assist PNG whenever possible in its efforts to bring about a lasting and durable peace to Bougainville province. On the other side, the Australia is also playing a crucial role in diffusing the problems related to the Bougainville. It is providing maximum aid for the functioning of the SPPKF for Bougainville. Criticising the human rights violation, Australian government is "developing regional forums and training programmes to use negotiation and mediation skills to resolve the conflict".

The Issue

Traditionally and culturally Bougainville is part of the Solomon Islands and is situated in the north Solomon Islands (according to the old map). It is only

39 ibid.
40 Communiqué of South Pacific Forum, 28th Forum Meet, Rarotonga, August 1997.
boundaries drawn by colonialists in recent times that have made it a part of PNG. This has created a rift amongst the two states and led to the secessionist demand by the people of the province of Bougainville.42

The Interim Government of the Independence Demand Group claims that they represent the majority of the people and they want to break from PNG whereas PNG authorities say two thirds of the Bougainvilleans want to remain with them.43 Mike Forster, Bougainville's United Nations representative suggested that people should be allowed to decide for themselves. He opined that self-determination is necessary, so that people can decide what they want.44

But the PNG government is not ready to give up the Bougainville Province. It has already imposed a blockade on Bougainville by stopping supplies of food and medicine reaching them. Reacting to this the self-styled interim government of Bougainville feels thousands of people have died due to a lack of medicine and accuses the PNG security forces of terrorising and killing innocent people.45 On the other hand, PNG officials feel armed forces are only concerned with the BRA. It says the BRA is territorising the Bougainvilleans.

The Solomon Islands government has issued its strongest statement in the long-run Bougainville civil strife in September 1992 and even contemplating to give recognition to the BRA and the self-styled Republic of Bougainville.46 The Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Solomon Mamaloni said "many Solomon Island leaders and people are now questioning the sincerity of both PNG and

43 ibid., p.24
44 ibid.
45 ibid.
Australia. He criticised Australia because he felt Australia is supplying the lethal weapons to the PNG Forces for killing the civilian populations of Bougainville and Solomon Islanders.

Despite doubts on the Australians role, Mamaloni revealed that Solomon Islands had already been made to the Australian government to send its troops to Solomon Islands to protect the border and ensure that PNG troops did not cross into Solomon Islands territories. The Solomon Island government demanded that the PNG government should take some necessary steps on humanitarian ground and requested Australia to pressurize it. The demands are:

(a) immediately give assurance of the safety and return of Beiaruru, who was abducted, to komalae village; (b) give an expression of regret and excuses to the people and government of Solomon Islands; (c) make payment of an indemnity in favour of the families of the deceased; and (d) bring those involved in this criminal act of justice.

However, on September 12 1992, PNG defence forces entry into the Solomon Islands border, killing two unarmed civilians, abducting another and injuring a three-year old kid, the incident further strained the deteriorating relations between the two countries. The raid by PNG soldiers has also led the questioning of the genuineness of the Australian High Commission in Honiara and created suspicion in the minds of the Solomon Islands’ government. Subsequently, the Solomon Islands government denied Australia for a visit of the Royal Australian Navy ship "Bendigo" into her territories.

---

47 ibid.
48 ibid, p. 6.
49 ibid.
50 ibid, p. 7.
Questions were raised in the Australian Parliament over the charges that are laid against. In answer to the questions, Australia's Foreign Affairs Minister, Senator Gareth Evans, said the High Commission in Honiara and its officers had at all times carried out with meticulous care of Australian government's policy of support for Solomon Islands sovereignty. He further said that the Australian government had offered assistance to the Solomon Islands government to build a permanent base in the western province for the border activities of its police but not received any formal approval from the Solomon Islands government.

On the issue of Australia government's supply of arms, ammunition and helicopters to PNG who in turn use this against civilians on Bougainville. The Australian Prime Minister, Paul Keating said that he was very much concerned about the secessionist movement on Bougainville but it is not feasible on its part to interfere because SPF regarded it as an internal problem for PNG. However he hoped that there would be quicker dialogue between the PNG and Solomon Islands to resolve the crisis amicably.

Because of its decision not to interfere in the problem, the SPF has been constantly criticised by outside countries, the UN Human Rights Commission, the Amnesty International, the Solomon Islands and many other tiny island countries. The critics felt that, if it is not a big issue, why has the conflict dragged on for such a long period. If it is such a minority of the island's 160,000 people who are against PNG, how come the PNG forces had to flee the island and resorts to attacks by helicopter? They are critical about the SPF's inability to look into the basic humanitarian issues related to the Bougainville crisis wherein PNG has stopped basic supplies to the civilians. Even in 23rd Forum meet at Honiara in 1992, the Solomon Islands Minister for police and justice, Albert Laore, made calls before the Forum meeting for Bougainville to be on the agenda in order to

51 ibid.
find a lasting peace for the whole of the South Pacific region. But, till date, the 16 Forum countries did not think it worth bringing the issue into the Forum's agenda.

After prolonged crisis on the Bougainville, the FIC decided to form a legal arrangement on the issue in 1994. It was embodied in a Regional Status of Forces Agreement. The signatories to the agreement were PNG, Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Zealand and Australia. The agreement was concerned with the status of elements of the Defence Forces of those countries deployed in the North Solomons province of PNG as part of the SPPKF. It was established to guarantee ceasefire between the PNG and the representatives of the BRA, the body known as the "Bougainville Interim Government".

The overall purpose of the SPPKF was "to establish a secure and neutral environment," to facilitate further peace interaction to sign Bougainville peace accord. It was also aimed at getting logistical, training and financial support from the Australia and New Zealand. The Government of Solomon Island also assigned to provide various forms of assistance, including facilities for members of the SPPKF. The SPPKF is still putting its whole effort to sign peace accord as earliest as possible and it has also already called on everyone in Bougainville, whatever their allegiance might be, to cooperate in the peace process by doing whatever they can to ensure a neutral and secure atmosphere.

The United Nations has also shown its keenness in resolving the issue. The UNs mission in PNG has already established an office in Bougainville to monitor

---

52 ibid.
54 ibid.
55 ibid.
the implementation of its restoration and reconstruction programme for the island. The government of PNG also accepted the activities proposed by the Interagency Mission for the reconstruction and restoration in Bougainville.

Even before, the issue was discussed in the agenda of the UN Human Rights Commission in 1992, the sub-committee on the prevention of discrimination and protection of minorities adopted a resolution for free movements of Bougainvilleans and to stop human rights violations. The Bougainville trouble still continues to be a major constrain in the politics of South Pacific region and the functioning of the SPF.

Australia's Role in the Bougainville Imbroglio

Australia is also quite concerned over this issue, but it is not a problem that Australia can resolve amicably. Though Bougainville is an internal issue which can only be resolved by PNG itself, but the stability and unity of PNG are inevitably of direct concern to Australia given the important strategic and commercial interests that it has in that country.

Australia, to resolve the crisis organized a conference on September 1992 in Canberra which brought together Bougainvilleans - both pro and anti-secessionist - who shared an intense experience of suffering. All participants including Australia expressed the need for peace and continuing dialogue among all the parties to the dispute.

Australia, although while remaining outside, plays a vital role in resolving long-standing Bougainville crisis. The 28th Forum Meet, which took place in

Canberra in 1997 appreciated the Australian role and assistance towards the peace process and its humanitarian aid and military help to resolve the crisis.

In the end, it is pertinent to say that, Australia is the leader of the South Pacific region and a substitute power in South Pacific Forum. Thus, it should be the duty of the Australian government to come out with a peace proposal to resolve the Bougainville amicably.

II. Fiji after the Coup of 1987

The Fiji problem started on 14 May, 1987, when Sitiveni Rabuka of the Royal Fiji Military Force (RFMF) overthrew the democratically elected one-month old coalition government in a military coup. The coup brought to an end to the seventeen years of parliamentary democracy, peaceful co-existence, political stability and economic prosperity. Again, four months later on 25 September, a second coup drove the country into a deepening crisis. At midnight on 6 October, Rabuka declared Fiji a republic and in December, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was reinstalled as Prime Minister, and the former Governor General, Sir Penaia Ganilau was declared as the President.57

The overthrow of the democratic government of Bavadra not only shattered the political system that it preserves after the colonial rule but it also destroyed Fijian economy. That was because of the varied regional as well as international response to the coups. Although most of the South Pacific Forum countries did not want to poke their nose, considering it as an internal affair but Pacific Islanders did disagreed with the method of the coup but sympathised its objectives.

When Rabuka declared Fiji a republic in October 1987, Tonga became the first nation to recognize the new republic. But Australia and New Zealand responded to the imbroglio by

suspending all aid programmes to Fiji. Ironically, one of the reasons that Rabuka gave for ousting the coalition was that, it would take Fiji away from her traditional allies such as Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom. However, in 1987 Bob Hawke, the Australian premier, was more reserved in his condemnation as his conservative politics differed with Bavadra's proclaimed nuclear-free non-alignment foreign policy. The Commonwealth, also suspended Fiji's membership. Many outside countries including the USA, the response on the coup was very ambiguous but French condemned the coup vehemently along with India, principally on the grounds of the coup's racist character.

With its relation becoming strained with the traditional allies such as Australia and New Zealand, the new government started looking for the new friends and aimed at developing new trade and diplomatic links. The France, a major actor in the South Pacific took the opportunity and supplied military co-operation to the Fiji.

Contrary to the commitment to Fiji's ostracism, on 31 January 1988, the Australian officials arrived in Suva for talks on the resumption of Australian aid which had been suspended after the coup. The annual budget of Australia in August 1988 increased aid to Fiji by nearly 70 per cent, almost $22 million.

But, the bilateral relationship again strained, when the interim government of Fiji did not allow the Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans to meet Dr. Bavadra during his visit to attend South Pacific Forum meet. However, this issue became normal, when Ratu Mara met Prime Minister Hawke at the South Pacific Forum summit it was decided that Senator Evan's visit would take place, he visited in October 1988. During that time the international community including Australia's active role to support Dr. Bavadra's to restore parliamentary democracy gradually cooled down and the international community started readjusting to the new regime.

\[58 \textit{ibid., p. 51.}\]
\[59 \textit{ibid., p. 68.}\]
But till that time, Australia was not in a mood for reconciliation with the military regime of Fiji. This issue came to limelight once again in October 1990. The Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, Gareth Evans told the United Nations that Fiji's racially weighted post-coup constitution would build "new and far-reaching racially discriminatory principles into the Fijian political system".60

This statement in the World Forum angered Fiji leaders. In an interview shortly afterwards, Ratu Mara accused Evans of opposing improved relations between Australia and Fiji and highlighted the differences made by Hawke and Evans, saying their views on Fiji "appeared quite divergent".61

Differences also arose over comments made by Hawke after his Forum meeting with Ratu Sir Kamisese. The Australian Prime Minister had, for the first time, publicly urged the ousted Coalition party in Fiji to abandon their boycott of elections. He also made it clear that Australia's relations with Fiji would be reviewed in the light of the continuing progress back to constitutional rule and the extent to which the military forces exercised influence over the government.

Hawke's statements were the most conciliatory since the 1987 coups and appeared to mark a subtle, but significant, change in Australia's repeated position that it would not normalise relations until Fiji had a constitution "broadly acceptable to all communities".62 When the new constitution had been promulgated, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara wanted to see the issue removed from the international stage.

Within Australia, however, there was still strong pressure on the government not to modify its stand. Justice Michael Kirby, one of Australia's most senior and respected judge

61 ibid.
62 Garrett, n.60, p. 9.
while condemning the post-coup constitution said that the government will not be answerable to the governed (ethnic Indian or Fijian). And the document that was provided remained a means by which Fiji could be ruled in perpetuity by a small group of chiefs and their associates. 53

Opposition to indigenous rights did not prompt Judge Kirby’s comments. On the contrary, it is considered that he is a man who has spoken out in favour of special measures to assist indigenous people. Rather his comments were based on a desire to see harmony in Fiji and on the belief that if the rights of one, or a number of groups, are severely curtailed, the seeds for future unrest and instability will have been sown.

Along with the Australian media, Amnesty International tries to report the twists and turns of Fiji politics. It is also distressed by the charges of sedition laid against seven ethnic Indians alleged to be involved in a symbolic burning of the new constitution, and had said if the protestors or the three journalists, charged in a related incident with malicious publication, are convicted, they will be regarded as prisoners of conscience. Many Australians also found it simply absurd that people taking part in a peaceful protest could face such severe charges.

Within the ruling Labour Party, feeling was also very strong. A nationwide appeal to Labour Party branches and trade unions, for Fiji's ousted Coalition, was paid back by overwhelming contributions from trade unions by six times more than what they had been asked. Despite Hawke's comments in Port Vila South Pacific Forum meet in 1990, the accommodation hoped for by Ratu Sir Kamisese had not been eventuated. Evans and the Foreign Affairs Department insisted that there had never been any inconsistencies between comments made by Hawke and his Foreign Minister. Merely, that there has been a slightly different emphasis on the same unchanged seven-point policy statement. If anything, Ratu Sir Kamisese's reaction coming as it did at the same time as the kidnapping and sedition charges is only likely to harden the Australian government's decision - at least in the short term.

63 Ibid.
Evans has made it clear that he believes Fiji cannot expect to be immune to criticism. In New Zealand he went further and stressed Australia's duty to take a stand in favour of human rights. "You can't go around making pronouncements about South Africa and China ... and then sit on your hands, when you have a very difficult human rights situation in your own region", he said.64

But despite his tough response, Evans was also facing pressure to take the pragmatic road and, if not restore normal relations, at least ease back on his criticism. That pressure was continuously coming, not just from businesspeople and some diplomats, but increasingly from the Liberal-National Party Opposition which was now edging ahead of the government in opinion polls for the first time during that period. Whatever the political complexion of the government in Canberra, however, it was facing a dilemma over its stand over Fiji. No politically party had backed the restoration of full relations and all agree that the constitution severely discriminates against Indo-Fijians and against indigenous Fijians living in the urban areas. Essentially, the difference between the parties was one of style rather than content.

Considering the Australian government's loud and long condemnation, not only of the racially inspired coups but of the post-coup constitution, the warmth with which former coup leader Major General Sitiveni Rabuka has been welcomed as Prime Minister is quite a surprise.

A lot of things have changed since the early 1990. The Australian government has shown its eagerness to open up its relationship with Fiji once again. Prime Minister Rabuka is emphasising his new moderate, consultative approach that values "consensus solutions" to Fiji's problem.

Rabuka felt that there would be no going back on his promises to safeguard the heritage of indigenous. He also wanted to bring change in the post-coup voting system which,

---

64 *ibid.*
rigidly divides the races and has encouraged communal thinking. But the biggest change in General Rabuka since 1987 has been in his attitude to the Fiji Labour Party one of the main victims of his coups. The Labour Party won 13 of the 27 seats allocated to Fiji Indians. In return for Labour support for his bid for the Prime Ministership, General Rabuka promised to review the constitution and land tenure arrangements for Indian cane farmers, and further scrap the Value Added Tax and revoke controversial labour decrees.

While that deal with Labour turned out to be the source of many of Prime Minister Rabuka's problems. It not only, cuts across the policy of both his own party and his main coalition partner, the General Voters Party, but also acted as a major source of his strength. The Labour deal not only gave the Prime Minister credibility on the racial question, but by opening the door to a more consensual style of politics, has the potential to break down that confrontational industrial relations climate which developed under the interim government.

It's a step that has won instant recognition in Australia. The Australia's Prime Minister Keating said Rabuka's "statement that he has agreed to consider a review of the constitution" and was encouraged by his commitment to develop an environment for dialogue, compromise and agreement 65. Among Australian business leaders, too, General Rabuka's appointment has been greeted with optimism. Australia is by far the biggest investor in Fiji with total investment conservatively estimated at more than $700 million. Despite the hesitancy of many Australian investors to put their money into Fiji before the outcome of the election was known, the fact that the former coup leader was elected Prime Minister has not bothered them.

One large investor summed it up for many when he said, "thank goodness, Fiji has finally got a democratically elected government". For Australian business it has been the election that has been by far the biggest hurdle. The two points in Prime Minister Rabuka's agreement with Labour which have most frightened Fiji business, the promise to scrap the Value Added Tax and revoke the labour decrees, have had little impact in Australia.

---

In the post-election euphoria the same big investor confided that many of his colleagues had "thought the Labour Decrees too draconian". Even the VAT, which has become a sacred cow among many sections of business in Fiji (mainly because reductions in import duty predicated on the VAT have already been made), was described by one Australian business leader as "not a life and death issue".

The untried nature of this new government may mean investors take slightly longer to feel satisfied about its stability but there is already a sense of optimism about the future. That optimism is based not only on the new Prime Minister's insistence on his more mature and measured approach to government but on the talent and track record of his new cabinet.

Prime Minister Keating praised General Rabuka's cabinet as "experienced and moderate". Again, he reiterated in the Parliament that Fiji was an "important partner of Australia in the South Pacific and Australia do look forward to developing a constructive and positive relationship with them and of course wish their new government well in its deliberations in managing the affairs and prospects of the Fijian people".

While those who have kept up with Fiji politics, have backed away from their past reservations and feel comfortable about the present government despite some remaining differences, the same cannot necessarily be said about the vast bulk of Australians, many of whom might eventually visit Fiji as tourists.

With few Australian journalists allowed into Fiji over the last decade and little reporting have made of the changing political climate, many ordinary Australians still carry around the images of the coups in their heads.

66 ibid.
During Rabuka's visit to Australia in September 1992 many peace and trade packages were signed. The visit marked a renewed bilateral relationship between the two South Pacific neighbouring nation which Rabuka reckoned had never been enjoyed before. It also marked a complete turn-around by the Australian government since the 1987 military coups, after which the Hawke government suspended all defence and trade ties with Fiji.

Rabuka said "I feel that the most important aspect of the visit is that we have come to a realisation that the strengthening of bilateral relationship between Fiji and Australia will augur well for regional stability and further regional co-operation as equal partners in the region."67 The results of the talks, and media review of the visit in general, surprised many who would rather remain sceptical about the capabilities of the army officer-cum-prime minister. When Rabuka left for Canberra, he said, he had no shopping list and going with an "open mind".

Rabuka timed his visit well with an announcement that government was putting in motion a constitutional review process. It was an announcement many, in particular Keating, longed to hear. It obviously cleared a hurdle in attempts to restore relations.

If that was not enough, Rabuka, in what political observers thought was an apparent move to appease Canberra further, announced his government was dismantling Fiji National Petroleum Company (FINAPECO). The establishment of FINAPECO would have greatly affected operations in Fiji of the three major oil suppliers viz Mobil, British Petroleum and Shell. All of these companies are owned by the Australians.

During his talk with the Australian Foreign Minister Senator Gareth Evans, Rabuka stated his government's case clearly and without any reservations. On the constitutional review, Rabuka assured the Australian government that his government was committed to seeing it carried out and explained the whole mechanism of the review ... that the commission approved by (His Excellency) the President will be made up of nominees from both sides of

---

67 Samisoni Kakaivalu, "Rabuka Wins Over Australia", P/M, October 1992, p. 10
the House. That's one concept. The other is a parliamentary committee to get MPs involved in it. He believed that the commission from outside parliament might be the way to look at it.

Rabuka gave Keating the same assurance at a luncheon later. He also told Keating that Fiji would continue to regard Australia as a close friend, despite attempts by the Interim Government to look elsewhere for allies. "Previous governments in Fiji have sometimes taken the view that it should re-direct its foreign policy and trade initiatives away from traditional partners (Australia and New Zealand) in order to avoid dependency and also as a reaction against political differences of opinion".

But his government holds a different view however, Fiji decided that while it should sensibly continue to seek new markets and alliances for Fiji elsewhere in the world, it also should at the same time build upon and consolidate its relations with the traditional trading and regional neighbours.

Again he said," While its political views may have at times differed, but Fiji is nevertheless, geo-graphically and economically inextricably bound together". In return, Keating assured his guest that relationship between the two countries had been renewed on a basis of equality and respect. He added. "In the years ahead, it will be strengthened in such areas as trade, development assistance and defence.

In the resumption of the defence co-operation programme Rabuka told that Australia would resubmit aerial maritime surveillance. The Australian navy continued to visit Fiji where they assist in the training of the young Fiji naval squadron. Keating also agreed that Fiji be re-included in the patrol boat programme and that has been allowed in 1995. It means the Fiji naval squadron would soon get the three patrol boats promised to them just before the 1987 coups.

Senior Fijian army officers have been given places at the Joint Services Staff College in Canberra, and new National Defence College was opened in 1995. On trade, Rabuka was
conveyed that Australia would review the conditions of SPARTECA with a view to allowing more exports into the Australian market. And, presently, Australia’s relationship with Fiji is improving in rhetorics and contents. And, overall, the Australia’s interaction on the political front is growing and gaining in texture. The Forum countries, realising this, have showed their interest to cooperate with Australia to resolve long-standing political issues.