THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC: NEW VISIONS AND VOICES

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FOREWORD

The framework of international relations in the Asia-Pacific region has been largely transformed over the years bridging the Vietnam conflict and the end of the Cold War. Many aspects of this transformation have been widely recognized and analyzed—including the changing roles of the superpowers in the region and the rise of regional powers (particularly Japan, China, India) and organizations (e.g., the Association of Southeast Asian Nations—ASEAN). However, the processes of change have also affected the international relations of a corner of the region that has long been regarded as so tranquil and stable that it has attracted far less attention from scholars and government analysts alike. This is the Southwest Pacific, the so-called ANZUS Lake of the early Cold War years.

In this monograph, Research Associate Richard Baker presents a summary overview of the major changes that have occurred in the foreign relations of this subregion, and the forces that have driven these changes—some of which are linked with broader global trends and some of which relate to more specific or localized developments. The analysis deals with two groupings of countries, Australia and New Zealand on the one hand, nations with advanced economies and European origins; and the Pacific Islands on the other hand, mostly small, new, and economically developing states. He argues that over the past two decades both groups have developed more independent, self-confident conceptions of their interests and place in the region. They have also widened the range of their relationships, with other regional states as well as with world powers.

Mr. Baker gives particular emphasis to the role of regionalism in the foreign relations of the Pacific Islands. Faced with severe resource constraints, the islands have joined together to create a variety of regional mechanisms and institutions which now play important and multifaceted roles in the islands’ relations with each other and the wider international community.

Finally, Baker comments that the broadening of the international orientations of the states of the Southwest Pacific has mostly supplemented rather than supplanted the close relationships of these states with former colonial powers and historic allies. Nevertheless, the region’s foreign relations are no longer so dominated by a small number of traditional, “special” relationships, and this transformation presents new challenges to the traditional partners as well as to the regional states themselves.

We hope that this paper will aid public understanding of the changing international relations of the Southwest Pacific.

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INTRODUCTION

The Southwest Pacific, often called Oceania, is a vast but imprecisely delimited maritime region covering more than 15 percent of the earth's surface. It encompasses Australia, New Zealand, and the myriad islands scattered in a broad arc through the western and southern portions of the Pacific Ocean. This polyglot collection includes the oldest and most firmly established democracies in the Asia-Pacific region and some of the newest, smallest, and most fragile entities. For this reason it is useful to distinguish between Australia and New Zealand—economically advanced, largely European-populated states—and the island entities, all of which had been placed in some form of dependent status prior to the 1960s and all of which are developing economies.

The Southwest Pacific has long been of only secondary interest in Asia-Pacific international relations. It was among the last areas of the region to be explored and divided up in the colonial era; in many cases the motivation driving the colonial powers was simply to deny control to competitors. Following a brief period in the limelight during World War II, when Australia and New Zealand served as allied bastions and the islands became battlegrounds and stepping stones in the Pacific War, the area reverted to its accustomed peripheral status. The main changes were mostly in packaging. Pax Americana succeeded Pax Britannica. The United States elevated the concept of denial to formal doctrine and established a unique Strategic Trust under the UN system to implement this policy in the formerly

* Illustrative of the definitional difficulties of this region, most of the Micronesian islands (from Palau in the west and the Marianas in the north to Kiribati in the east) lie north of the equator and are not in a strict geographic sense part of the South Pacific; yet they are very much a part of the broad Pacific island community and thus are included in the Southwest Pacific region as discussed in this paper.
Japanese-controlled Micronesian islands. The South Pacific Commission was founded in 1947 by the metropolitan states for consultation on socioeconomic and technical matters relating to the island region, and the ANZUS treaty of 1951 provided for security cooperation among the three wartime allies, creating an institutional framework to maintain Western influence in the placid "ANZUS Lake" of the Southwest Pacific. This basic pattern was sustained for nearly three decades.

In the 1970s and 1980s, however, two separate processes combined to change significantly the profile and content of the international relations of this area. First, Australia and New Zealand substantially redefined their international roles, positions, and networks of relationships. Second, many newly independent or self-governing island states emerged and began to establish their own international identities and means of dealing with the outside world. As a result, the international relations of the Southwest Pacific are now far more active and fluid than in the earlier postwar period.

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND: REDEFINING INTERNATIONAL ROLES

Australia and New Zealand had very little international personality of their own prior to World War II. They considered themselves integral parts of the British Empire and identified their international interests with those of Britain, sending their men to fight in Britain's far-off conflicts. Australia maintained no embassies of its own prior to 1940, and New Zealand waited until 1947 to ratify the 1931 Statute of Westminster granting it formal independence.

When World War II spread to the Pacific, and it became apparent that Britain was no longer able to provide a protective umbrella, Australia turned to the United States for defense against Japan, bringing New Zealand with it into the wartime alliance. Following the war Australia and New Zealand continued security cooperation with Britain—for example, helping fight the Malayan communist insurgency—and Britain also remained their primary economic partner. However, both Australia and New Zealand realized that only the United States could handle major threats in the Pacific, whether from a rearmed Japan (as they feared in the early postwar years) or the Sino-Soviet bloc. Thus, both placed high priority on ensuring a continued American commitment to their defense, an objective realized in the ANZUS treaty.

For Australia and New Zealand, ANZUS was a logical extension and reinforcement of their previous relationship with Britain and the mind-set of that relationship—the desire to ensure that a "great and powerful friend" would provide protection against the perceived menace of the hordes (yellow, brown, or Red) of Asia. An integral aspect of this alliance approach
to security was the policy of forward defense—enemies were best met as far away as possible. Accordingly Australia and New Zealand almost reflexively sent their forces to fight beside those of the United States in Korea and then again in Vietnam.

By 1970, however, a series of developments were raising increasingly serious questions in Australia and New Zealand about the adequacy of their alliance-based approach.

- Britain's withdrawal from "East of Suez" and entry into the European Common Market signaled both the end of meaningful security cooperation with the United Kingdom and the loss of assured access to the British market.
- The debacle in Vietnam and the 1969 Guam Doctrine advising U.S. allies to look first to their own resources brought the value and reliability of U.S. protection into question.
- Economic dynamism in Japan and growth elsewhere in Asia gave increased importance and potential to economic links in the region.
- Changing ethnic composition and consciousness (as signified in the abandonment in the late 1960s of the "White Australia" immigration policy) was reducing insecurity in both countries toward their Asia-Pacific neighborhood.

The response to these changes in their environment led over time to a fundamental reappraisal and recasting of the foreign and security policies of both countries.

**Australia: Activist Middle Power**

For Australia the Vietnam experience was the most traumatic of these developments. It triggered nationwide turmoil and debate and eventually led to the widespread conclusion that Australia should look first to its own national interests rather than entrust those interests to the policy decisions of allies. The watershed was the election in 1972 of the first Australian Labor Party government in 23 years, pledged to the immediate end of all Australian involvement in Vietnam. The increased emphasis on independent Australian interests and policymaking was maintained by the conservative Liberal-National Party coalition government of 1975-1983 and further elaborated and codified by the Labor government under Prime Minister Robert Hawke that succeeded it.

The key to the new international outlook is the acceptance by the national leadership of Australia's destiny as an Asia-Pacific state and of Australia's status as a "middle power" able to exercise some, though limited, influence on the international scene. The extent of the change is best seen in the contrast with the prevalent Australian self-image of the earlier
period—as a European transplant in a hostile Asian environment powerless to protect itself on its own.

The logic of the new approach is clear. If great and powerful friends are unable or unwilling to help you, you need to be as self-reliant as possible. If you have some but not great power, your priorities must be decided carefully and then pursued with all the energy and skill you can muster. And, particularly in the security field, you are likely to be most directly affected by, and most able to influence, conditions in your immediate vicinity.

The recognition of the importance of the region and of Australia's independent interests and capabilities has set the substance and the style of current Australian foreign and security policies.

- Defense policy reviews under the Hawke government in 1983 and 1986-87 elaborated a national policy that could be termed “self-reliance within alliance.” The reviews reaffirmed the fundamental importance of the U.S. alliance for global deterrence and as a source of supplies and information for Australia's forces. However, “forward defense” and involvement in distant conflicts were rejected as an appropriate basis for Australian defense planning, which was focused instead on building an independent capability for action in an area of “direct military interest” that stretches from the Indonesian archipelago to the Pacific Islands. More recent elaborations of security policy for the post-Cold War era have made clear that the Australian government sees a continuing need in the region for robust security capabilities, and that there will be no near-term “peace dividend” from Australia's defense budget. The Hawke government's rapid decision to contribute ships and teams of specialized personnel to the U.S.-led coalition forces in the 1990-91 Persian Gulf war—clearly outside Australia's immediate region—was justified not in terms of the U.S. alliance or broader “Western” interests but on the basis of Australia’s own national interest in upholding the principles of the UN charter and the defense of small states against external threats.

- Australia is intensively involved with its Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asian neighbors. It maintains defense cooperation with New Zealand under ANZUS on a bilateral basis (following the break between the United States and New Zealand) and the two Southwest Pacific countries are moving toward economic integration under the Closer Economic Relations (CER) agreements. Australia is a leader of the South Pacific Forum regional organization; it provides preferential access for island products; and a third of Australia's economic assistance funds as well as substantial security assistance (including an ambitious program supplying naval patrol boats) go to the islands.
Australia also tries to play the role of "intelligent interpreter" of events in the island region to outside powers such as the United States and Japan. In Southeast Asia, Australia participates in the annual consultations between ASEAN and the major donor states, and is a member of the Five Power Defense Arrangements (FPDA) under which Australia and New Zealand join with the United Kingdom in supporting the defense of Malaysia and Singapore. Australian regional diplomatic initiatives include the successful negotiation of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone treaty in 1983-86, and the proposal for a UN-supervised interim government in Cambodia that was endorsed by the five Security Council permanent members in January 1990.

- Australia's economic and trade ties with Asia are growing rapidly. Japan is now Australia's largest trading partner, and both the current government and its predecessor have given high priority to developing economic relations with China, seeing China as a major future economic partner. Australia has been in the forefront of efforts to organize closer regional economic cooperation; an Australian initiative led to the first intergovernmental meeting on Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation in Canberra in November 1989.

- Australia has been a prolific source of other diplomatic initiatives. In 1986 it organized the "Cairns Group" of non-subsidizing agricultural exporters to press for liberalization of agricultural trade in the Uruguay Round of GATT international trade negotiations. The current Labor government has played an active role in arms control, promoting a comprehensive test ban, the UN nuclear-freeze proposal, and improved verification systems. Australia also organized an international consultative group on controlling precursors to chemical weapons, and a regional conference in 1989 on chemical warfare. Under the previous Fraser Liberal-National government, Australia was a leader in Commonwealth efforts to negotiate a settlement in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe; the present government has been similarly involved in working for Namibian independence and an end to apartheid in South Africa. Australia was the principal sponsor of a proposal for a total ban on mining in Antarctica.

Finally, it is worth noting that there have been a number of significant defense-policy differences between the present Australian Labor government and its American ally, particularly on questions related to nuclear weapons (test bans, new U.S. missile programs, the Strategic Defense Initiative). On most of these issues Australian policy reflects strong popular antinuclear attitudes. As in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, widespread antinuclear sentiment is in turn closely linked to the historical experience of this region with U.S., British, and French nuclear testing.
New Zealand: Toward Aotearoa

New Zealand has undergone a transformation similar to that of Australia in self-image and external outlook. Over the last few years New Zealand has, perhaps unintentionally, taken the process farther than its larger neighbor. Antinuclear sentiment has played a pivotal role in this evolution of New Zealand’s international relations. It was at the center of the contretemps between the Lange Labour government, elected in 1984, and the United States over port access for nuclear-powered or armed vessels. That dispute led to the U.S. suspension in 1985 of defense cooperation and in 1986 of its security commitment to New Zealand.

The differences between the policy directions taken by New Zealand and Australia are due primarily to differences in the size and circumstances of the two. There is, firstly, a fundamental difference in scale: a country of 3 million people on two islands has a very different range of interests and capabilities from a country of 17 million occupying a continent. Geographic location also gives them significantly different orientations. New Zealand is buffered by Australia from mainland and insular Asia, and identifies more readily with the Polynesian-South Pacific region from which its own politically resurgent Maori people come as well as more recent Polynesian migrants, particularly from the Cook Islands and Western Samoa.

New Zealand’s greater physical isolation and lesser sense of vulnerability to Asian developments help explain why New Zealand never embraced the wartime or postwar U.S. alliance with the same intensity as Australia. Another factor was that New Zealanders sustained a sense of identity with the United Kingdom as “home” longer than did the more heterogeneous Australian society. In recent years, French nuclear testing and American nuclear ships have appeared to many New Zealanders as posing more immediate dangers to their region than any threat of external invasion.

Other factors contributed to the 1985–86 split with the United States, including chance. Antinuclearism has a very broad political appeal in New Zealand, both to the left and to the moral ethos of much of the traditional, more conservative mainstream. Continued French nuclear testing, seemingly impervious to popular sentiment in the Pacific, aroused both moral outrage and nationalist feelings. The United States was tarred with the same brush, as a country that defended French testing and also conducted nuclear tests and forced its own nuclear ships into New Zealand ports. But neither the New Zealand public nor the Labour Party were anti-ANZUS per se. Economic conditions and issues, not nuclear policy, dominated the 1984 election that brought Labour with its antinuclear platform into office; under slightly different circumstances a United States–New Zealand breach might well have been averted.

Subsequent to the break with the United States, the Labour government formulated a new national defense policy based primarily on interests
in the Pacific island region and continuing close cooperation with Australia. Whereas Australia's new defense policy is explicitly premised on continued alliance with the United States, the New Zealand government perforce defined a defense policy not requiring a U.S. tie. A 1987 defense policy review stressed the minimal threat environment and outlined a security policy based on a limited defense force, cooperation with Australia, important interests in the South Pacific, membership but no permanent troop contribution to the FPDA with Malaysia and Singapore, and support for UN peacekeeping as New Zealand's way of contributing to broader international security.

In the election of October 1990, again dominated by economic and domestic issues, the conservative National Party was returned to office in a landslide. However, National did not challenge the main lines of Labour's defense policy, differing only in placing greater emphasis on the need to maintain a credible defense capability and to reestablish defense cooperation with the United States (and Britain). Until March 1990, National had been committed to a revision of the port-access legislation (although National did not question the highly popular antinuclear policy, and it was not clear that an acceptable compromise could be worked out with the United States). The political discomfort of this position for National was demonstrated when, in March, National leader Jim Bolger responded to a U.S. decision to resume high-level meetings with the Labour government by dropping the pledge to revise the port-access policy.

While focusing its security policy closer to home, New Zealand has continued to pursue a much broader range of economic ties. The program of dramatic economic deregulation and structural reform launched under the Lange government aims at significantly increasing New Zealand's international economic competitiveness. It is pursuing closer economic relations and free trade with Australia under CER. As with Australia, Japan is New Zealand's number-one trade partner, and New Zealand too is pursuing trade links with China. It is a member of the South Pacific Forum, a dialogue partner of ASEAN, and a participant in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation process. New Zealand is cooperating closely as well as others to achieve broader liberalization of international trade in the current Uruguay Round of the GATT.

New Zealand is also active on many other international issues, but concentrates on those with a regional focus. These include global warming (which could drown a number of the low-lying island states), drift-net fishing, and various nuclear issues including a comprehensive test ban.

Some New Zealanders have put forward a more cohesive and dramatic vision of a new international identity for their country. Social historian Jock Phillips describes this as "Aotearoa and moral exemplar." Aotearoa, the Maori name for the country, evokes New Zealand's Polynesian heritage,
and the moral exemplar concept continues the strong utopian-reformist tradition in European New Zealand’s domestic political history. The twin vision accords the Maori community a substantial place in the country’s core identity, thus promising domestic social harmony, and also offers New Zealand a meaningful international role as a moral leader on such issues as nuclear defense—a feasible and comfortable role for a small, isolated country to play.

Although this conception accorded with major elements of its policies, the Labour government never embraced such a sweeping formulation. When Geoffrey Palmer succeeded David Lange as Labour Party leader and prime minister in August 1989, one of his first major actions was to order a review of all aspects of New Zealand’s relations with and policies toward the South Pacific. The report, completed in May 1990, rejected what it termed “romantic notions” of an identity between the Pacific Islands and New Zealand, whose economic interests, in particular, extend well beyond the island region. However, it did argue strongly for greater government attention and assistance to the islands, and specifically proposed that New Zealand play an active role in pushing for the formation of a more institutionalized “Pacific island community.” Labour took no action on this proposal, and the National government dismissed it as “philosophical,” stressing that New Zealand retains global interests and is not “only” a South Pacific nation. The South Pacific focus thus remains a matter of emphasis, not exclusivity.

**Dissonant Elements**

The articulation of these new visions has not been an easy process for either country. Major dilemmas remain, and full consensus has yet to be reached.

First, there are partisan differences over security and foreign policy. In Australia the conservative opposition parties still support the basic concept of forward defense for Australia, and give greater importance than Labor to active cooperation with the United States in the event of conflict elsewhere in the region. The philosophy and declaratory policies of a conservative Australian government (if not the actual levels of defense spending) would be quite different in some respects from those of Labor.

At the other end of the political spectrum, the regional defense role and robust force structure developed by former (1984–1990) Labor Defense Minister Kim Beazley have led to criticism from the left (within as well as outside the Labor Party) that Australia is becoming a “militarist” and interventionist state. The left is not in a position to impose its policy views on the government, but a Labor government is always sensitive to criticism from this quarter.

As previously noted, in New Zealand there are similar differences of emphasis and rhetoric between the conservative National Party and the
democratic socialist Labour Party. National places greater emphasis on New Zealand’s continuing global interests and relationships, and on the importance of military capability. The practical impact of these differences on specific policy decisions (as well as the relatively narrow range of the debate) was demonstrated in the Persian Gulf crisis. Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the Labour government declined to contribute forces to the anti-Iraq coalition unless the coalition was under UN auspices. When the Security Council authorized the use of force against Iraq in November, the newly elected National government immediately contributed military transport aircraft and medical teams to the coalition forces. Labour did not oppose this action but called for an unconditional pledge that no combat forces would be sent, a pledge the government refused to make.

The New Zealand Labour Party itself split over defense policy in March 1990. The left wing strongly opposed a costly program to build a new series of frigates in a cooperative venture with Australia, and advocates major reductions in the defense budget generally in favor of a more “non-military” approach to defense. As in Australia the far left cannot dictate Labour Party policy, but the New Zealand left is more influential than that in Australia—the breakaway left-wing New Labour Party took 5 percent of the vote in the 1990 election, enough to have denied Labour victory had the election been close—so the majority at least must take the left’s views seriously.

The question of how the two states relate to their populous and dynamic Asian neighbors is also not yet fully answered. Major debates continue in both countries over immigration, cultural policy, foreign investment, and related issues. Most Australians wish to retain cultural links with Europe as well as the ANZUS ties and emphatically do not want Australia to become an Asian country in the cultural sense. Asian immigration to Australia remains a sensitive and volatile issue, as demonstrated in several rounds of heated public debate since Asian immigration began increasing significantly in the 1980s. Japanese investment, particularly in residential property, has similarly aroused local resistance.

In New Zealand the emerging vision of New Zealand as Aotearoa is still not shared by many—perhaps even most—in the Pakeha (European) community who retain a more European orientation. As acknowledged in the 1990 South Pacific policy review, there is some tension between the claims of a Pacific cultural identity and the demands of New Zealand’s international, OECD-oriented economic and trade interests. The questions of how Maori interests are to be represented in the domestic political structure, and what compensation is due the Maori for land and rights previously taken by the Pakeha, are extremely complex, emotive, and still far from resolution. New Zealand’s relations with the other South Pacific coun-
tries are also complicated by competition for economic position and government support between the Maori and Pacific island immigrant communities in New Zealand.

There are problematic elements as well in the increasingly closer relationship between New Zealand and Australia. Although moves toward closer economic cooperation under the CER agreement are broadly supported in both countries, the possibility that this process may lead to eventual integration with Australia—even full economic integration such as through a common currency—quickly touches deep nationalist feelings and sparks opposition in New Zealand. And yet the course that has been set seems to lead inexorably in this direction.

Finally, the ambivalence of Australia and New Zealand toward their region is reciprocated in the region's view of them. The Asian regional group in the United Nations would prefer that the two continue to belong to the "Western European and Others" group, if only out of reluctance to further dilute their share of appointments and rotating chairmanships in the UN system. The ASEAN states are happy to deal with Australia and New Zealand as "dialogue partners" along with the other donor states, but react more stiffly to interventions in regional questions such as Australia's early efforts to involve itself in negotiating the Cambodian conflict. Similarly, frequent Australian advocacy of human-rights causes in the region tends to identify it in regional eyes as another Western state asserting moral superiority, and yet no Australian government would forgo raising human-rights issues just for the sake of acceptance in the regional club. Even in the South Pacific, where Australia and New Zealand are charter members of the South Pacific Forum, they are donor, not recipient states, in but not truly "of" the Pacific.

THE PACIFIC ISLANDS: SECURING SOVEREIGNTY

The island groups of the central and southern Pacific contain a widely diverse set of entities. There are three major ethnic subdivisions—Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia—and countless local languages and cultural divisions. There are at least 21 different political entities among the islands (see table), more than are found in all the rest of the East Asia-Pacific region.

The islands were the last major geographic region to experience decolonization, and the process is not yet complete. Of the 21 entities, 13 are now independent or self-governing, of which 10 have only achieved that status since 1970. Four of this group have a hybrid political status unique to the Southwest Pacific—"free association" with a metropolitan state. A Freely Associated State (FAS) exercises local self-government while the metropolitan state is responsible for defense and (to differing degrees)
foreign relations, as well as for financial support. Varying forms of this status are in place linking the Cook Islands and Niue with New Zealand and the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) with the United States. Of the remaining dependencies, two are likely to change status in the 1990s, Palau and New Caledonia. Palau has negotiated a Compact of Free Association with the United States, but in seven referendums has been unable to reconcile the terms of the compact with the nuclear-free provisions of its own constitution. In New Caledonia, pressure for self-determination by the indigenous Kanak population led to serious unrest in the 1980s and ultimately to an agreement setting up three interim local governments and a referendum on political status to be held in 1999.

Despite different individual circumstances and attributes, most island states face the common challenges of ensuring their viability and security, adapting inherited political and economic models, and gaining international recognition, as well as developing means of dealing with the international system to their advantage.

**Vulnerabilities**

For all the islands, moves toward political independence presented the overriding problem of how they were to secure and exercise their sovereignty. There are no obvious external military threats to the island region. Some states, such as Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, have had to deal with regional secessionist movements that threatened their basic national integrity. Papua New Guinea also has had security problems along its rugged land border with Indonesia due to activity in the border area by an anti-Indonesian Papuan insurgent movement leading to occasional cross-border raids by Indonesian forces. For most island leaders, however, the issues of sovereignty and security have been framed largely in economic and social terms.

On these considerations the islands are, for the most part, extremely vulnerable. Except for Papua New Guinea, all are physically small. In addition, many are extremely remote and isolated from the outside world and each other. Most are poor in natural resources (the major exceptions being Papua New Guinea, with mineral and other wealth; Nauru, with perhaps one more decade of lucrative phosphate exports; and New Caledonia, with nickel); several have very large and potentially rich Exclusive Economic Zones in the surrounding seas but lack the ability to exploit or adequately patrol these areas on their own.

The cash economies of most island entities depend on aid, remittances from emigrants, and limited commodity exports—in the most extreme cases only coconuts. Small populations have meant small and largely undeveloped human-resource bases. Fourteen of the twenty-one entities have popu-
lations under 100,000; five are under 10,000. Most have a similarly narrow base for commercial activities and a limited capacity to absorb external assistance. Despite small populations in absolute terms, several island states nevertheless are also seriously overpopulated for their minuscule land areas. Population pressures and generational change, when added to the other elements, create a growing potential for domestic instability.

The island leaders' consciousness of these vulnerabilities has had an important influence on how they view and approach their relations with the outside world—what they want from it and how they deal with it.

**External Interest**

For most of the Pacific Islands, prior to the last two decades their modern experience of external relations had been largely limited to contacts with the colonial powers plus some interaction with each other, especially following the establishment of the South Pacific Commission by the metropolitan states in 1947. Along with self-government and independence has also come rapidly increasing outside interest in the islands. Almost the full gamut of international actors are involved, from great powers to confidence men.

As island states gained independence the Soviet Union moved quickly to establish contact. Nonresident diplomatic relations in the mid-1970s were followed by overtures for research and fishing agreements, which ultimately led to a one-year fishing agreement with Kiribati in 1985 and another with Vanuatu in 1987. Soviet activity increased following Gorbachev's 1986 Vladivostok speech declaring greater Soviet interest in the Asia-Pacific region. The first resident Soviet embassy in the islands opened in Papua New Guinea in March 1990. Nevertheless, Soviet efforts in the islands were conducted on a relatively limited and low-cost basis, and at least for the near-term future the Russian government, which inherited the Soviet diplomatic network in 1991, will undoubtedly pursue an even more low-key approach. Libya made a brief foray into the region in 1986–87, primarily consisting of contacts with Kanak separatist groups in New Caledonia and the establishment of relations with Vanuatu.

Soviet and Libyan involvement prompted a general increase in attention from the Western powers. Australia, the largest aid donor to the island states at about $300 million per year (of which over 80 percent goes to Australia's former colony Papua New Guinea), increased its assistance to the other island states between 1984 and 1987 by nearly 40 percent, from $40 to $56 million per year. New Zealand increased its total assistance to the islands in these years by a similar percentage, from approximately $50 million to just under $70 million. The United Kingdom arrested a long decline in its assistance to the islands. The United States, long generous with its own island territories, increased its economic assistance to the South
Pacific states from $3 million in 1986 to $8.7 million in 1988, plus $10 million annually over five years for a regional fishing agreement concluded in 1987 (which removed a major bone of contention between the United States and the islands). France also increased spending for the independent island states and began to encourage greater contact between its Pacific island territories and the other island entities.

Japan, which had long-standing trade and fishing interests in the region, greatly expanded its diplomatic and assistance activities in the islands starting in 1987, in keeping with the general expansion of its regional and international role. Japanese assistance grew from virtually nothing in the late 1970s to over $90 million in 1988, with further growth projected; if present and former dependencies are excluded, Japan is now the largest aid donor to the islands.

Taiwan and the People's Republic of China brought their worldwide competition for diplomatic recognition and influence to the islands in the early 1970s. Many other players have also entered the region—South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, India, Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and Vietnam, each in pursuit of its own interests.

Defensive and Assertive Strategies
Island leaders have adopted a variety of strategies to protect and advance their own interests in their expanding range of contacts with the outside world. The island entities are generally comfortable in their continuing relationships with the metropolitan countries, and the island societies remain basically conservative, traditional, religious, and oriented toward Western values. Many have, in fact, chosen to retain dependency relationships of one form or another as the most effective way to meet the requirements of viability and security.

Inevitably there are exceptions and qualifications. Vanuatu, whose colonial experience under a chaotic and divisive British-French "condominium" was the least conducive to admiration of Western systems, joined the Non-Aligned Movement and has at times courted ties with radical forces such as Libya and the PLO. In New Caledonia and French Polynesia active pro-independence movements among the indigenous populations have created uncertainty concerning the future political evolution of those French territories and their relationship with France.

Free-association status offers smaller island entities the self-government advantages of independence coupled with the economic and security advantages of a continuing tie with a metropolitan power. However, whether the free-association option will be politically viable and internationally accepted over the long run remains to be seen. The limited experience to date has been generally positive. All four of the present freely associated island states are members in their own right of the South Pa-
cific Forum, and all but Niue host resident diplomatic missions from other states and conduct much of their own international relations. However, some problems have emerged. The Cook Islands and Niue have clashed from time to time with the New Zealand government over the degree of local latitude over foreign affairs and constitutional changes. In Palau serious conflicts in priorities between the Palauan community and the United States over the nuclear issue have imbued the entire free-association process with an air of extortion—another instance in which the legacy of nuclear testing has complicated the political configuration and agenda of the South­west Pacific.

Regardless of the generally strong relationships between the islands and the metropolitan states, most of the independent and self-governing island states want to expand their range of international contacts. The larger states—PNG, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and, to a degree, Western Samoa and Vanuatu—have the personnel and resource levels to develop an extensive range of individual international relationships. All five took up United Nations membership, and Vanuatu also joined the Non-Aligned Movement. All maintain bilateral diplomatic relations with many other regional and extra-regional states, including Russia, as well as the United States and other Western countries.

Some island states are concerned that they are perceived in some sense as proprietary dependencies of their former or continuing metropolitan countries. To remove this impediment Papua New Guinea formally negotiated guidelines for its relations with Australia that clearly delimit that relationship. The freely associated Micronesian governments have actively sought membership in the South Pacific Forum and diplomatic recognition by other states in order to gain wider acceptance of their independent juridical status.

The island states have been able to profit from the increasing outside interest and rivalries in the region: the Western powers vs. the Soviet Union, China vs. Taiwan, Japanese and French desire for greater participation and better relations, and other issues. Thus far the islanders have proven quite adept at turning these external interests to their own advantage while avoiding serious political or security costs. Kiribati, for example, received $1 million from the Soviets for a one-year fishing agreement at a time when British aid was declining and American commercial fishing payments had stopped, but then did not renew the agreement when the Soviets proved unwilling to meet Kiribati’s terms.

Regionalism

Regional cooperation has been a key instrument in the Pacific island-states’ efforts to secure their sovereignty. It provides multiple benefits to the island states, serving as a mechanism for managing their relations with each
Regionalism has taken a variety of forms. The South Pacific Commission, formed as an instrument of the colonial powers, was the first regional institution and provided a forum in which indigenous leaders from the islands came to know one another before they achieved political independence. The South Pacific Forum, now the principal regional institution in the islands, was established in 1971 by the independent island states to overcome the metropolitan states' prohibition on discussing political issues within the Commission. The nine fully independent states, the four freely associated states, plus Australia and New Zealand, are members. A multilateral trade arrangement with Australia and New Zealand (known by its acronym SPARTECA) gives island products preferential access to those markets. Special purpose regional organizations cover a range of fields and functions from shipping to fisheries to environmental conservation.

In international relations the regional framework has served several purposes. It has been a channel for expanding general dialogue with external powers. Using a format developed by the neighboring states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Pacific Forum invited representatives of the major donor states to meetings following the annual Forum summit gatherings starting in 1989. The island leaders use these sessions to convey their views on current regional political questions as well as the assistance programs and other activities of the donor countries in the region. The 1989 Forum meeting also directed that the Forum Secretariat explore the possibility of establishing a closer interregional relationship between the Forum states and their ASEAN neighbors, another context in which a collective approach enhances the position of the island states.

Regional institutions have also provided a valuable mechanism for collective negotiations with outside powers. The Forum Fisheries Agency has coordinated negotiation of multilateral agreements regulating foreign fishing in the island states' Exclusive Economic Zones, most notably the 1987 agreement with the United States and ongoing negotiations with Japan. Another regional organization screens and coordinates international offshore research and prospecting in the region.

Finally, regional institutions have been useful to the island states as a means of advancing specific international policy interests. One major objective has been the legitimation and international acceptance of island political entities and forms. The Forum has accepted the four freely associated states as full members, and through its Non-Aligned Movement and UN members has sponsored resolutions acknowledging the existence and legitimacy of these states in the international system. The Forum has also been used to press for self-determination in the region; it played a
major role in the effort to gain reinscription of New Caledonia on the UN list of non-self-governing territories in 1986 and in mobilizing subsequent UN support for the self-determination process in New Caledonia. Other Forum initiatives have advanced island interests in the protection of their territory and resources: the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, and initiatives on the greenhouse effect and drift-net fishing.

Thus the island states have discovered that cooperation and common institutions can be a powerful instrument for advancing their collective interests. Regional forums will almost certainly continue to be a primary channel for the smaller island entities’ relations with the international community.

Open Questions

It is clear that the Pacific Islands are still in the very early stages of developing both their own place in the international order and operating techniques that are congenial and effective. Their liabilities as international actors are obvious, but they have displayed considerable imagination in mobilizing and employing the assets they do have to good advantage.

The recent dramatic changes in the global political environment have both positive and negative implications for the islands. On the one hand, the end of superpower confrontation reduces the pressures and risks as the islands expand their networks of international relationships. On the negative side, insofar as perceptions of a Soviet threat were one of the forces driving Western donor nations to pay attention to the islands, this argument is now likely to be weakened and the islands may once more be accorded a lower profile and priority in the competition for resources.

Global changes, however, will not in themselves resolve the problems of economic, political, and social adaptation that remain the major challenges confronting the islands. The islands’ vulnerabilities and sources of internal instability will persist and in many cases deepen in the next decade. The burdens on island leadership will be formidable.

Regional institutions and networks should continue to be an important resource and tool for the individual island states throughout this period of transition. However, as elsewhere in the world, regionalism in the Southwest Pacific also faces a number of challenges and problems. Pacific regional cooperation is subject to the countercurrents of individual members’ self-interest, competing nationalisms and leadership aspirations, small state–large state conflicts, and the existence of subregional groupings within the larger community of island states.

One noteworthy development has been the establishment of the “Melanesian Spearhead” subgroup, consisting of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and, as of March 1990, the Kanak movement
from New Caledonia. There are concerns that the existence of such a cau-
cus group could threaten the informal, consensus-oriented approach of
the Forum, and that it might stimulate the formation of other blocs. The
formation of a counterpart grouping of Polynesian states has been moot-
ed on several occasions, although nothing has yet come of these proposals,
and as of mid-1992 fractures had appeared in the Spearhead group due
to tensions between Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The for-
mation in early 1992 of a caucus group of the five smallest island states
(Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, and Tuvalu) demonstrated the con-
tinuing differences of interests between the smaller and larger islands.

Whereas some see regionalism as a promising agent of assertiveness
and change, others may well feel constrained by the current institutional
framework and procedures, which tend to reflect traditional political and
social forces. For example, the Forum did not condemn the 1987 coups
in Fiji despite the undemocratic nature of the actions, because most Fo-
rum members were sympathetic to the position of the indigenous Fijian
population in whose name the coups were carried out. The processes of
generational and attitudinal change within the island societies will also
be reflected in new pressures and issues in the regional institutions.

Regional bodies also face the same basic constraints as the island states
themselves, including limits of personnel and organizational capacity. A
key case in point is the question of how the islands are to manage their
relations with broader regional institutions. The Forum secretary-general
was designated as the islands’ representative at the first Asia-Pacific Eco-
nomic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Canberra in 1989. This places
difficult demands on the secretary-general who, unlike national representa-
tives, must represent the many island interests in this larger forum and
report back to the individual sovereign governments. The regional approach
thus does not offer a simple panacea for the problems of small states.

CONCLUSION: INTO THE MAINSTREAM

The changes and trends in the international relations of the Southwest Pa-
cific illustrate the growing diversity in the region at the same time as there
is growing interdependence. At least among the independent states of the
region, there is a continuing movement away from major reliance on rela-
tionships with one or a small group of Western states. Within this general
trend there is also a clear tendency on the part of both groups toward
stronger and more intense relationships with other Asia-Pacific states and
organizations.

However, these trends do not signify a rejection of former links. The
new relationships in almost all instances are additional to historic ties be-
tween the countries of the region and Western nations. The traditional part-
ners continue to play a prominent role in the region through a broad range of interrelationships between other Western countries and Australia and New Zealand; growing ties, including assistance, to the independent island states; and integral relationships with the freely associated states and the remaining dependencies.

The expanding international relationships present new challenges and risks, as well as new opportunities, for all the states of the region and for their traditional external partners. The smaller states, in particular, face complicated choices as they attempt to match the new range of opportunities with their own needs, resource levels, and priorities. Both external friends and regional institutions can play important and supportive—but ultimately not the determining—roles in this process.
REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Constitutional Status</th>
<th>Population 1990 (000)</th>
<th>Land Area (km²)</th>
<th>Population Density (per km²)</th>
<th>Sea Area (000 km²)</th>
<th>GDP per Capita (US$000)</th>
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Note: For simplicity, some Pacific Islands have not been listed in this table. These include the Japanese Bonin Islands; Easter Island, administered by Chile; the Hawaiian Islands, a state of the United States; Norfolk Island, a small Australian territory; Pitcain Island, a dependency of Britain; and numerous other very small islands and reefs.

a. Tonga was never a colony, but from 1900 until 1970 a Treaty of Friendship and Protection entrusted its foreign affairs to the United Kingdom.

b. Figures are GNP per capita.