

Sovereignty and Independence in the Contemporary Pacific

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Political status in the contemporary Pacific Islands takes several forms: Guam is officially an "organized unincorporated territory" seeking to become a "commonwealth" of the United States; American Samoa is a "US unorganized unincorporated territory"; the Northern Mariana Islands are a US commonwealth that, by many people's reckoning, is still part of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands; Tonga is an independent kingdom; Tokelau is New Zealand territory; the Cook Islands are a self-governing state in free association with New Zealand; Wallis and Futuna are an overseas territory of France; Kiribati is an independent republic; and so on.

The variety of constitutional arrangements that define political status in the Pacific Islands may be reduced, in essence, to two main forms: those that permit sovereignty and those that do not. Further, there are two principal forms of nonsovereignty: effective incorporation by a metropolitan state and semi-autonomy. Although countries in the last category, the "freely associated" states, have sometimes been said to possess sovereignty, they do not. The question is why some states in the Pacific Islands have been fully decolonized and permitted the prerogatives of sovereignty, while others have remained in various positions of constitutional dependence on metropolitan powers.

A full explanation must encompass the particularities of historical evolution in different parts of the Pacific Islands. However, an important reason is that different Pacific territories have been of different strategic value to external states; further, external states have differed in their capacity to protect their strategic interests by means of direct, constitutional links. Generally, the greater the strategic value of an island territory, the less likely that territory has been to proceed to sovereign status. The map of

Pacific Islands sovereignty has been drawn largely according to the strategic needs of external states. But Papua New Guinea, strategically important to Australia yet fully independent, is an obvious exception. Even so, the strategic needs of external states still play a large role in determining the development of both sovereign and nonsovereign entities in the Pacific.

It is first necessary to distinguish between those Pacific Islands polities with sovereignty and those without. I employ the term *sovereignty* in the sense suggested by Alan James, as meaning constitutional independence, a supremacy deriving from an absence of constitutional ties to another state. The focus of this definition is on the purely constitutional situation, leaving aside the question of political independence; it is an attribute that a state may be said either to have or to not have. By this definition, there can be no degrees of sovereignty (James 1986, 24–25). Chapter 1 of the Tuvalu constitution declares, “Tuvalu shall be a sovereign democratic state,” and part 1 of the constitution of Western Samoa says that “the Independent State of Western Samoa . . . shall be free and sovereign” (Levine 1983, 9–10). These statements proclaim the sovereignty of those states, the constitutional position that has obtained since the British and New Zealand flags were lowered in those colonial territories. They are claims to an independent international legal capacity.

DEPENDENT TERRITORIES AND PARTS OF OTHER SOVEREIGN STATES

Clearly, the French overseas territories in the Pacific—New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna—do not enjoy sovereignty, which rests instead with France. Nor is change likely soon. In New Caledonia the agreement of August 1988 between independence and loyalist forces—the Front de Libération Nationale Kanake et Socialiste (FLNKS) and the Rassemblement Pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR)—provides for a breathing space of ten years until the next referendum on the future political status of the territory; the outcome of that referendum is uncertain. In French Polynesia the idea of an independent Maohi state has not captured the imagination even of a majority of the Polynesians, many of whom believe that their livelihoods would disappear without massive subsidization of the economy from Paris. And in Wallis and Futuna the people (who number 12,500) have so far shown no inclination

to break their constitutional connection with France, which underwrites a higher standard of living than would be possible as an independent state.

Hawai'i is a state of the United States, American Samoa an unincorporated territory, and the Northern Marianas a commonwealth. Guam, still a territory, is moving toward commonwealth status. Midway, Wake, Johnston Atoll, Howland Island, and Baker Island, together with the American Line Islands—Kingman Reef, Palmyra Atoll, and Jarvis Island—are all administered by agencies of the US government. In a variety of ways, all of these islands are bits and pieces of America in the Pacific, constitutionally tied to the United States, just as Easter Island, administered as part of Valparaiso Province, is tied to Chile, Pitcairn Islands to Britain, Tokelau to New Zealand, and Norfolk Island to Australia. None of these territories enjoys sovereignty; all, in one way or another, are effectively incorporated in a metropolitan state.

FREELY ASSOCIATED STATES

Sovereignty is also precluded by the political status of free association, even though that allows for a large measure of self-government. Consider the case of New Zealand and its freely associated states, the Cook Islands and Niue. The crucial section of the Cook Islands Constitution Act of 1964, a piece of New Zealand legislation, provides that "nothing in this Act or in the Constitution shall affect the responsibilities of Her Majesty the Queen in right of New Zealand for the external affairs and defence of the Cook Islands, those responsibilities to be discharged after consultation by the Prime Minister of New Zealand with the Premier of the Cook Islands" (Aikman 1982, 87).

A similar constitutional relationship exists between Niue and New Zealand, and was approved by Niue voters in a United Nations-observed referendum on 3 September 1974 (Clark 1980, 59). New Zealand has interpreted free association as meaning something short of sovereign independence but far less restrictive than territorial status, pointing out in 1979 that "the exercise by the New Zealand Government of any responsibilities in foreign affairs or defence must be preceded by full consultation with the Cook Islands. These responsibilities are more in the nature of obligations on New Zealand's part rather than rights of supervision or control" (Clark 1988, 20). The Cook Islands was not admitted to the benefits of the Lomé II Convention, governing trade between the European Community and

the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States, when it sought membership in 1979. The reason given by the European Community was that the Cook Islands did not enjoy the status of an independent state "and is not acknowledged by the United Nations as an independent state or acceptable as a Member of the United Nations" (Aikman 1982, 93). Yet as a full member—one of the founding members—of the South Pacific Forum, which admits self-governing as well as sovereign states, the Cook Islands is a party to regional agreements such as the 1979 Convention on the South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency and SPARTECA, the South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement of 1980, and has signed a maritime-boundary-delimitation treaty with the United States. In its own right, it has signed and ratified the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty of 1985. Lacking sovereignty, which is the passport to unchallengeable participation in the international system, the Cook Islands must depend for its capacity to enter international legal arrangements on the willingness of other parties to interact with it, and must consult New Zealand about such arrangements beforehand.

What is striking about the free association which the Cooks and Niue have with New Zealand is that they may terminate the relationship unilaterally by simply amending their own constitutions (Clark 1988, 17; Quentin-Baxter 1982, 119). They are at liberty to leave. Free association for them can be seen as genuinely free, a step on the way to sovereign independence if that is what the Cook Islanders and the Niueans should ever want.

Free association for the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), however, specifically prevents a full and final decolonization by binding those states to the former administering authority in perpetuity. Separate mutual security pacts, which accompany the Compact of Free Association between the United States and each of these states, place an obligation on the United States to defend the Marshalls and the Federated States forever, and permit it to foreclose access to the military forces of third countries forever (USH-CFA 1985).

Section 443 of the compact permits a freely associated state to withdraw from free association if by a plebiscite it gains a majority vote in favor of termination. No doubt James D. Berg, the director of the Office of Freely Associated State Affairs, had this section in mind when he claimed early in 1988 that there are "provisions for each of the states unilaterally to terminate its relationship with the United States in favor of full independence"

(Berg 1988, 2). What he failed to point out was that the subsidiary agreements regarding sections 321 and 323 of the compact, the sections that deal with US military facilities and operating rights in the Marshalls and the Federated States, create a right of permanent strategic denial in the area by the United States armed forces. Such a right can hardly be reconciled with "full independence" or with the "sovereign" status that Berg said is the goal of free association. The effect of the subsidiary agreements is that the Marshalls and the Federated States may withdraw from the benefits but not from the costs and obligations created by their political settlement with the United States.

It has been argued that the relationship with the United States created by the compact "does not involve any continuing constitutional link" because "everything done within an associated State" is the product of voluntary agreement (Quentin-Baxter 1982, 120). The crucial word here, however, is "within." The Marshall Islands cannot terminate the application of strategic denial by a constitutional amendment. In this sense I assert the existence of a constitutional link between the United States and Micronesia.

In the case of the draft compact with Belau, still not in effect, section 453(a) provides that strategic denial "remains in effect for a period of fifty years and thereafter until terminated or otherwise amended by mutual consent." In other words, the United States possesses a veto over any change to its permanent monopoly over military access to Belau. Far from being "not unlike the relationship of the Cook Islands and Niue with New Zealand," as Berg claimed (1988, 2) free association in Micronesia is quite unlike it on the vital issue of bringing security obligations to an end.

The United Nations approved the Cook Islands' free association with New Zealand in 1965 and the Niue arrangement in 1974. A form of UN approval has also been obtained for free association in Micronesia, but the precise status of the Micronesian states in international law is still far from clear. The question is: what has happened to the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands? Does it now exist only in the form of Belau, which has not yet reached agreement with its former administering authority over the terms of free association? Or does the Trust Territory also encompass the Northern Marianas, the FSM, and the Marshalls, despite their having assumed new political statuses?

The problem goes back to the question of how a strategic trusteeship is terminated. Of the eleven trusteeship territories established under UN

supervision after World War II, only one, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, was "strategic." The agreements covering the other ten were terminated by an approving vote of the UN General Assembly. But article 83 of the UN Charter clearly provides that the Security Council alone shall have the authority to terminate a trusteeship over a strategic area: "All functions of the United Nations relating to strategic areas, including the approval of the terms of the trusteeship agreements and of their alteration or amendment, shall be exercised by the Security Council."

Compare this provision of the UN Charter with the words of President Reagan in a proclamation of 3 November 1986: "the Trusteeship Agreement for the Pacific Islands is no longer in effect as of October 21, 1986, with respect to the Republic of the Marshall Islands, as of November 3, 1986, with respect to the Federated States of Micronesia, and as of November 3, 1986, with respect to the Northern Mariana Islands" (USFR 1986). President Reagan also described the Marshalls and the FSM as "sovereign, self-governing nations in free association with the United States" (UNTC 1987*b*). Without Security Council approval, and in a purely unilateral act, the United States government determined that the trusteeship agreement was no longer in effect for three of the four Micronesian entities. Quite apart from the issue of Security Council approval, the claim by an administering authority that the trusteeship is at an end in three parts of a territory while it remains in force in a fourth is unique and unprecedented in the history of decolonizing trusteeships: it is as if, in 1962, New Zealand had declared Savai'i decolonized but not Upolu, or Australia in 1975 had said that it considered all of New Guinea to be no longer under the trusteeship except for New Britain or the north Solomons. And to say that the Marshalls and the Federated States are "sovereign . . . nations" is to stretch beyond usefulness the meaning of the word *sovereign*. They are self-governing states, certainly, but they lack sovereignty.

To confuse matters further, the United States changed its position within a few months. In an exchange between Soviet and American representatives to the UN Trusteeship Council in May 1987, the US representative said she believed "the Trusteeship Agreement remains in force" and undertook that "all actions the United States has taken, is taking and will take are and will continue to be consistent and in accord with the [UN] Charter and the Trusteeship Agreement" (UNTC 1987*a*, 41,46). For years the Reagan administration promised that it would seek Security Council approval for terminating the trusteeship in Micronesia. But since 1986 it

has been circumventing the Security Council by relying on a Trusteeship Council resolution as the international legal basis for its actions. In May 1986, at the fifty-third session of the Trusteeship Council, the United States succeeded in gaining the support of France and the United Kingdom, against the negative vote of the Soviet Union, for a resolution that put what might be called a second-class stamp of UN approval on the new political status of free association in Micronesia. The Trusteeship Council noted that the Micronesian peoples had "freely exercised their right to self-determination in plebiscites observed by visiting missions of the Trusteeship Council" and had chosen either free association or, in the case of the Northern Mariana Islands, commonwealth status. It requested that the United States "agree on a date not later than 30 September 1986 for the full entry into force of the Compact of Free Association and the Commonwealth Covenant" (UNTC 1986, 14).

As it happened, the timetable was not quite met, and because of continuing conflict over Belau's nuclear-free constitution, the Compact of Free Association was not enacted for that territory. But the essence of the American victory remained: the Trusteeship Council, responsible for overseeing the actions of the administering authority, endorsed American plans for the future of Micronesia. The American Embassy in Canberra, for example, was able to reassure Australians in November 1987 that the United States and three of the four Micronesian territories had "proceeded to implement the new arrangements, *as requested by the United Nations Trusteeship Council in May 1986*" (US Embassy 1987, 2, my emphasis). What the embassy neglected to say was that the Trusteeship Council resolution also included the statement that it was "conscious of the responsibility of the Security Council in respect of strategic areas as set out in Article 83, paragraph 1, of the [UN] Charter" (UNTC 1986, 14-15). That responsibility is to approve any changes in trusteeship arrangements, including their termination. Thus the Trusteeship Council itself accepts that the Security Council should have the final say over trusteeship in Micronesia.

The United States fears a Soviet veto of its termination of the Micronesian trusteeship. Because the Security Council consists of five permanent and eleven rotating members, a successful resolution requires nine affirmative votes and no veto. Gaining a majority in favor of termination would not be difficult, but the vote of the Soviet Union is crucial, and there has been long debate within the US Executive Branch about how to avoid

defeat because of it. The president's personal representative for Micronesian status negotiations, Fred M. Zeder II, said in 1986 that America's goal in the Security Council is to "prevent any nation, or bloc of nations, from disrupting the termination of the Trusteeship Agreement and denying the peoples of the Trust Territory their freely chosen political status desires" (USCS 1986, 83). At that time Zeder also foreshadowed an unorthodox solution to the problem, although he conceded that sooner or later the matter would have to go to the Security Council. There is, he said,

no precise procedure set forth in the Trusteeship Agreement, nor is there any precedent, for termination of a strategic trust. Of the eleven trusteeships created after World War II this is the only one with "strategic" implications. Therefore we will assume the prerogative of adopting a procedure which is consistent with accepted international practice and best suited to the accomplishment of our objectives. (ibid)

Whatever Zeder meant by this, the United States has indeed decolonized its trusteeship territory in a way "best suited to the accomplishment of [its] objectives." For the moment Washington appears to have settled for saying one thing and doing another: proclaiming American adherence to the UN Charter and acceptance that the trusteeship agreement remains in force, while treating the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia as territories whose international legal status has irrevocably changed. The delay in settling the political status of Belau, which all agree is still under the trusteeship, has enabled the US government to avoid a final choice between terminating the entire trust unilaterally and risking a rebuff in the Security Council.

The precise legal status of the Micronesian states is of more than merely academic interest. It affects the legal right of certain Marshallese to sue the US government and, in the long run, the international acceptability of these new island countries. At the Apia meeting of the South Pacific Forum in 1987 the prime ministers of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu at first wanted to confine the Marshalls and the Federated States to observer status rather than admit them to full membership before the UN had properly approved the termination of the trusteeship (*Washington Pacific Report*, 1 June 1987). Before 1987 the Forum had admitted to membership only those states that were incontestably decolonized in one way or another. Although the hesitations of the Melanesian bloc at Apia subsided, they may foreshadow continuing doubts as to the

legal capacity of the Micronesian states to participate in international affairs.

Such doubts are of concern to Micronesian leaders. As President John Haglelgam of the Federated States said during his official visit to Australia in October 1988, "Palau's problem has a direct influence over the FSM and RMI because there are some members of the United Nations who say the trusteeship was not really properly terminated. If Palau, hypothetically speaking, had been in the same relationship with the US as the Marshalls and FSM, we could together approach the UN and demand a complete termination" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 Oct 1988).

SOVEREIGN STATES

The South Pacific island states whose sovereignty is not in question are the rest: Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Western Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Nauru. In recent years the leaders of these states have not hesitated to demonstrate their sovereign capacity to deal with other states.

In 1985 the Republic of Kiribati signed a fisheries access agreement that allowed a Soviet fishing company to operate sixteen purse seiners and longliners in Kiribati waters for a year in return for A\$2.4 million (US\$1.5 million) in access fees. It was not renewed in 1986. The agreement was greeted with dismay in the United States and Australia, where politicians claimed that the I-Kiribati would not be experienced or canny enough to prevent the Russians from using their fishing vessels as bridgeheads in extending Soviet influence into the central Pacific. Few of the foreign critics remembered that, under article 3 of its Treaty of Friendship with the United States, Kiribati was already obliged to deny shore-based facilities in the Line and Phoenix groups to other powers, and that in any case it had no intention of permitting the Soviets a shore base in the Gilberts. Subsequent events showed President Ieremia Tabai to have been correct in insisting that the agreement was commercial in character. Why else would the Russians have halved their fishing fees offer in 1986? The benefits that flowed to Kiribati are clear: fishing fees that represented about a quarter of the government's annual budget; experience in dealing with an unfamiliar foreign country; and additional political leverage in the multilateral negotiations that led to the fisheries access treaty between the United States and member countries of the Forum Fisheries Agency (Neemia 1986).

Vanuatu signed a one-year fisheries agreement with the Soviet Union in January 1987, permitting eight Soviet fishing vessels to fish in Vanuatu's exclusive economic zone, but excluding them from its territorial waters. Although Soviet vessels could refuel at designated ports, they were not permitted on-shore facilities. The agreement was not renewed in 1988. Like Nauru, Vanuatu has established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, but it is unique among South Pacific states in belonging to the Non-Aligned Movement (Hegarty 1988, 5).

As E. P. Wolfers has pointed out, Papua New Guinea is now making use of its sovereign independence to move closer to ASEAN, and participates in some ASEAN committees: "Papua New Guinea political leaders and public servants have . . . begun to test the orientation towards the South Pacific embodied in previous policies. They are coming to terms, in thought and action, with their interests in South-East Asia" (Wolfers 1988, 28). An old colonial idea from German times—that Papua New Guinea is as much a Southeast Asian as a Pacific country—is finding new expression after thirteen years of political independence. At the same time Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu are consolidating the Melanesian Spearhead group, a subregional bloc of Melanesian states, which they believe will further their common interests. The three states signed a set of Agreed Principles of Cooperation in March 1988. Both of these developments are examples of what Wolfers called "the practical realisation of formal independence" in the Pacific Islands (*ibid.*, 3).

An alternative interpretation of recent events in the Pacific is that they demonstrate the vulnerability of sovereign microstates to the blandishments of unwelcome forces in the region. By this view, the actions of states such as Kiribati and Vanuatu, while they may be a legitimate exercise of sovereignty, are also "a source of strategic threat to Western security interests" (Herr 1988, 189) and encourage superpower rivalry. Microstate sovereignty is seen as a problem for the West rather than an opportunity for the island states.

EXTERNAL STRATEGIC REQUIREMENTS AND PACIFIC CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The interests of the United States in the South Pacific have been essentially strategic ever since American forces fought their way west from the Gilbert Islands to Belau and Okinawa in the Second World War. Five of America's seven defense agreements are in the Asia-Pacific region: the

bilateral treaties with Japan, Korea, and the Philippines; the Manila Pact which includes Thailand; and the ANZUS Treaty, now suspended between the United States and New Zealand but still maintained as a bilateral defense alliance with Australia. American ships, aircraft, and forces in Hawai'i and Guam directly serve those defense agreements, and are part of a larger commitment of forces to the Republic of Korea, Japan, and the Philippines. The us Air Force is presently upgrading facilities at Tinian in the Northern Marianas.

Historically, different parts of the us Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands fitted into this strategic scheme as sites for exploding nuclear bombs, testing ICBMs, and training Chinese anticommunist forces. Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands remains a missile-testing center today and is being used for the development of the Strategic Defense Initiative. Under the proposed fifty-year compact with Belau, the us armed forces will have the option of full use of Airai Airport, Ngeaur (Angaur) Airport, Malakal Harbor, and a large area of the main island of Babeldaob for military training in tropical conditions. The strategic importance of American Micronesia in a war with the Soviet Union has been explained by John C. Dorrance, a State Department specialist in Pacific affairs:

Micronesia and Guam have strategic value in still another sense. In peacetime they lie to the south of major sea and air lanes across the North Pacific. However, in any Pacific war scenario involving the Soviets, U.S. lines of communication would shift to the south and run through or near Micronesia; ships and aircraft would attempt to move beyond the range of Soviet attack aircraft operating out of bases in the Kuril Islands and on the Soviet Asian mainland. For this reason, but also because of the threat that would be posed to Hawaii and to areas south of the equator, a primary U.S. objective in the political status negotiations with the Micronesian governments has been an arrangement that assures no adversary of the United States or of its allies would have access to these islands for military purposes. (Dorrance 1986, 8)

For reasons of strategy the us government never seriously offered Micronesians the option of sovereign independence followed by postindependence aid. The realistic alternative for the Micronesians was to bargain for what they could get by selling the only things they had to sell—their strategic and military value to the United States and, in the process, their sovereignty. The Compacts of Free Association with the Marshalls, the Federated States, and Belau enshrine those bargains.

France's interests in the Pacific Islands are likewise primarily strategic,

because they are intimately linked to the modernization of French nuclear forces. The Pacific territories, the French believe, also offer a future option on possible economic returns that might flow from exploitation of seabed minerals in the vast exclusive economic zones that surround French Pacific possessions. By virtue of its presence in French Polynesia and New Caledonia, France can maintain a navy with commands that span the globe and include the Pacific as well as the Atlantic and Indian oceans and the Mediterranean. In the French view, the Pacific presence helps to confer international prestige on the French Republic. But it is the nuclear test center at Moruroa, Fangataufa, and Hao atolls, under the protection of the commander of French Pacific forces based in Papeete, that attracts massive metropolitan subsidies for French Polynesia and contributes to the desire by successive French governments to prevent or delay the decolonization of New Caledonia. The emergence of a sovereign state of Kanaky would, at the very least, complicate the domestic politics of nuclear testing in French Polynesia.

Nuclear modernization is at the heart of French military planning and involves a notable increase in the number and capability of French nuclear weapons. Currently, for example, France's six nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines carry a total of 256 nuclear warheads; by 1992, that number will grow to 496. And in 1994 the first of a new (SNLE-NG) class of nuclear submarines will enter service, taking the total number of submarine warheads to 592. The nuclear submarine command, *La Force Océanique Stratégique*, holds special prestige within the French Navy. France intends to maintain its aircraft-carrier capability, and a nuclear-powered Charles-de-Gaulle-class carrier is on order. It will carry about forty aircraft, which will be armed with nuclear air-to-surface missiles. The two French aircraft carriers in service are also nuclear-capable (Handler and Arkin 1988, 28–29).

Regular naval and air patrols by the French armed forces already cover a greater area of the globe than those of any other nation except the superpowers. By the mid-1990s, when many of its new nuclear weapons will have been deployed, France will undoubtedly rank as the third military power in the world after the United States and the Soviet Union. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that France should wish to maintain sovereignty over the Pacific territory where nuclear tests are conducted.

If lack of sovereignty in Micronesia and French Polynesia can be

ascribed to the strategic needs of the Americans and the French, how is the complete decolonization, at least in formal terms, of the former Pacific territories of the United Kingdom and Australia to be interpreted? The assumption behind this question is that the colonizing powers in the Pacific Islands had a choice about whether or not to fully decolonize their territories. Pacific Islands nationalism was weak; by African standards, it hardly existed. Except for Papua New Guinea, all the territories were small, with populations under 650,000.

British withdrawal from the Pacific Islands has a straightforward explanation. Britain decided in the 1960s, for economic reasons, not to maintain a colonial and defense presence east of Suez except for a lingering responsibility under the Five Power Defence Agreement and in connection with the Crown Colony of Hong Kong (Millar 1978, 245). The sovereign independence of Fiji (1970), Tonga (1970), Solomon Islands (1978), Tuvalu (1978), Kiribati (1979), and Vanuatu (1980) followed as a natural consequence. Only one colony, Pitcairn Islands, is left. Although the United Kingdom remains a member of the South Pacific Commission and an important donor of aid to the Pacific (US\$20.2 million in 1985; ADFA 1987, 69), it can hardly be said to have a strategic stake in the Pacific. The occasional visit by the Royal Navy is a residue of past interests rather than an indicator of present claims.

The case of Australia is far more significant. In a 1987 submission to a parliamentary inquiry into Australia's relations with the South Pacific, the Department of Foreign Affairs in Canberra officially identified "Australia's interests in the South Pacific [as] primarily security related and political in nature." Within the South Pacific the department saw Australia's security interests as being strongest in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and New Caledonia, with Vanuatu and Fiji "also of substantial security interest." Australia needed to protect "the sea and air lines of communication" and facilitate "the deployment of United States defence force units into the region through the maintenance of freedom of passage through the high seas and access to regional ports for US and other Western naval vessels." Australia also needed to limit the presence in the region of "governments with strategic interests, or value systems, which conflict with our own" and to promote among South Pacific states "a consensus on security related matters aligned with the security interests of Australia and its allies" (ADFA 1987, 7). Although Australia seeks to defend its investment in South Pacific banking, shipping, tourism, and retailing, and while it

professes humanitarian concern for the Islanders, the principal preoccupation of the Australian government is strategic. The Department of Defence in Canberra, acknowledging that the "South Pacific forms part of Australia's region of primary strategic interest," has explained clearly why Australia gives aid:

Australian development assistance policies support strategic and defence policy objectives in the region. . . . Where aspirations can be assisted and economic development supported, the ensuing political stability is an important strategic asset. Such considerations are of particular relevance in the South Pacific where strategic considerations are heavily influenced by the economic security of the island countries. (ADD 1987, 2,7)

Australia's aid agency has reiterated the point that the Australian "aid relationship with the countries of the South Pacific . . . is inseparable from Australia's foreign policy priorities and reflects them" (ADAB 1987, 2).

If the strategic requirements of external states are so closely connected to nonsovereignty in the South Pacific, how is it that Australia granted full independence to Papua New Guinea and respects the sovereignty of another eight island states, three of which (Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Nauru) are among the smallest sovereign nations in the world? The argument so far would appear to require that Papua New Guinea at least have some form of free association with its former colonial authority. And what is the rationale of New Zealand, which granted full independence to Western Samoa but maintains free association with the Cook Islands and Niue?

Australia was not in a position to determine what form decolonization would take in territories other than its own (Nauru and Papua New Guinea). The coming of sovereign independence to Western Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu, the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Vanuatu lay outside its control. Australia has sought to exert influence after independence by becoming the largest aid donor to the South Pacific. It has always been the largest source of aid to Papua New Guinea, and as an aid donor to the rest of the South Pacific it overtook New Zealand in 1978 and the United Kingdom in 1982. All the independent states of the South Pacific receive more aid from Australia than from any other source, with the single exception of Kiribati. And Australian aid to the Cook Islands and Niue comes second only to development assistance from New Zealand (ADAB 1987, 4).

The Australians are no less keen than the Americans and the French to

keep the island states pro-Western, but for historical reasons they lack the option of direct, formal intervention and must rely instead on persuasion backed by the powerful argument of aid. As the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs put it, "Australia seeks to promote its political/security interests through persuasion—through political and diplomatic exchanges in association with our aid, trade, defence co-operation and other programs designed to promote economic development as well as confidence in Australia as a concerned, reliable partner" (ADFA 1987, 1).

Australia has diplomatic relations with all independent South Pacific states and resident representation in all except tiny Tuvalu. Its aid sustains such major regional institutions as the Forum Secretariat (formerly the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation), the Committee for the Coordination of Off-Shore Prospecting in the South Pacific, and the Forum Fisheries Agency. No other aid donor gives as much to regional organizations (ADAB 1987, 92).

Decolonization of the Australian territories occurred at a time when the winds of change in favor of complete independence blew more strongly than they do now. An additional complication for Australia was that Nauru and New Guinea were trusteeship territories under United Nations supervision. The United Nations was pressing Australia for action. No one could argue that an independent Nauru, all twenty-one square kilometers of it, represented a strategic loss to Australia, and because of its phosphate, Nauru has never required aid. Recent attempts by the Nauru government to claim compensation from Australia for the worked-out phosphate lands have not met with success. As far as Papua New Guinea was concerned, the question in the minds of decision-makers in Canberra by 1970 was not whether the territory would gain sovereign independence but when and how. In 1968 Australia still had not ruled out the possibility of seventh statehood or free association for Papua New Guinea; in 1969 Prime Minister John Gorton made it clear that complete independence was the goal of the Australian government (Griffin, Nelson, and Firth 1979, 142, 161).

The difference between Australia and New Zealand as decolonizers lay in their tolerance toward Pacific Islander immigration. Ideas about associating Papua, if not New Guinea, with Australia all foundered on objections to granting Papuans genuine Australian citizenship or even access to the Australian mainland. For Australia, any kind of "free association" with Papua or Papua New Guinea would have entailed free entry of the

people of those territories, just as the Cook Islanders and Niueans have been permitted free entry to New Zealand. Most Niueans and a majority of Cook Islanders have now left their island homes and live in New Zealand. When Australia was making final decisions about the future political status of its Melanesian territories, racial discrimination in its migration policy was only just being dismantled. Not until 1973 did the Whitlam Labor government fully remove such discrimination. As the revival of the race and migration debate in 1988 has shown, all Australian governments face electoral pressure on this issue (Palfreman 1980, 99). The idea that Australia is a white country, or ought to be, dies hard.

The political price Australia would have had to pay for safeguarding its strategic interests in Papua New Guinea in a direct way, as the United States has done in Micronesia, was too high for any government to contemplate, especially given the size of Papua New Guinea's population in relation to Australia's. In this respect the liberal instincts of a generation of Australian decolonizers in the Department of External Territories and the administration at Konedobu in Port Moresby accorded nicely not only with United Nations opinion, but also with the race fears of the Australian populace. Australia could present itself to the world as a decent decolonizer while preventing any significant immigration from the Melanesian territories it had ruled for most of the century. Whereas New Zealand opted for statutory responsibility for the external affairs and defense of the Cook Islands and Niue (rarely exercised but available if necessary) and permitted the people of those states to remain New Zealand citizens, Australia granted Papua New Guinea independence and, in theory at least, deprived about one million Papuans of Australian citizenship as residents of an Australian territory. To ensure that the new state did not fall apart, it then embarked on a program of massive subsidization—A\$4.3 billion (about US\$3.6 billion at current values) between 1975 and 1986 and still amounting to more than 80 percent of all the aid Papua New Guinea receives (ADAB 1987, 7).

In purely economic terms, as measured by Western criteria, sovereignty has come to Pacific Islanders at a price. The standard of living, in cash terms, is higher in those Pacific islands associated with the United States and France. In Micronesia the nature of the deal is plain for all to see, although the governments of the Federated States and the Marshall Islands may be spending compact money in ways that will necessitate another, less favorable, deal in fifteen years' time. The aim of the compact

—to finance a transition to relative economic independence—is unlikely to be realized, given the previous experience of Micronesian leaders with money from Washington and the political claims on them to translate the compact into immediate consumption (Hezel 1988).

In the French territories the benefits flow according to an unspoken bargain that is nevertheless underpinned by the same strategic logic: the security of France is at stake, and the French government should therefore subsidize the Pacific territories at a level likely to dim the ardor of those who favor complete independence. Under the peace plan for New Caledonia approved by 80 percent of those voters who participated in the national referendum of November 1988, development funds will flow to the Kanak regions of the territory, and the consequence might well be a weakening of the FLNKS during the decade before the scheduled final decision on political status. That, at least, will likely be the hope of RPCR supporters in New Caledonia.

THE ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Economic prospects in the independent Pacific are less encouraging. Australia's aid agency concluded that the standard of living in the majority of South Pacific states has been declining in recent years, and that, despite greatly increased aid since 1976, "this aid is not achieving its objective of self-reliance to the degree that it could—or should" (ADAB 1987, 20). If economic stagnation were to continue for the next fifteen years, the Solomon Islands would join Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Western Samoa in the category of least developed countries, and Fiji's standard of living would decline. That assessment was reached before the Fiji coups of 1987, which have already damaged the Fijian economy and promise to do so further. The agency's identification of Fiji as the one example of a "self-sufficiency" model among South Pacific economies is no longer accurate, leaving the region bereft of any such model. Although the agency held out hope that, as "Melanesian growth models," the economies of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu might eventually survive without aid, such an outcome depended on what were called "appropriate policies." For the "subsistence affluence" countries of Western Samoa and Tonga, and for the "microstates" of Kiribati and Tuvalu, permanent aid seemed likely (ADAB 1987, 24–25).

On a per capita basis, the South Pacific states are the most aid-depen-

dent in the world. The material expectations of their people are related not to the land and its resources, as in precolonial times, but to the cash standard of living enjoyed by their neighbors in the "strategic value" economies and to the experiences of emigrants who have had access to the labor markets of New Zealand, Australia, Hawai'i, and California. The survival of most South Pacific governments depends on their ability to deliver goods and services at a rate not too far below that of the late colonial period. Without aid, that delivery would become impossible.

CONCLUSION

All of the sovereign South Pacific states, together with the two freely associated states that may unilaterally acquire sovereignty, were formerly British, Australian, or New Zealand territories. The only significant colonies left in the Pacific are those of France, and the freely associated states which may not unilaterally acquire sovereignty are tied to the United States. At first glance, the pattern would seem to be explained simply by different national traditions of decolonization. The British Commonwealth approach was to favor full independence or to allow for it in the future, whereas the American and French preference has been to limit or block it. By this interpretation, the British, the Australians, and the New Zealanders are good international citizens in an age of decolonization, and the Americans and the French are either bad or hypocritical.

Such an analysis is simple-minded. A better explanation comes from considering the strategic interests of the external powers and their capacity to defend those interests in the face of international criticism. By this view, the United States and France, the first and third military powers in the world, possess what they regard as vital strategic interests in the Pacific Islands—not least because they are nuclear weapons states—and they are powerful enough to ignore international criticism. If necessary, the Bush administration will probably terminate the strategic trusteeship in Micronesia without bothering to gain the approval of the United Nations Security Council as the United Nations Charter requires; and it will talk, as the Reagan administration did, of the "sovereign" status enjoyed by the freely associated states. By their determination to continue nuclear testing in French Polynesia despite more than twenty years of protest, the French have demonstrated that they, too, are strong enough to ignore international opinion. As the Chirac years, 1986 to 1988, showed,

there can be no certainty that successive French governments will keep open the option of independence for New Caledonia.

Britain granted independence in the Pacific Islands because it was a spent force there. Australia had strategic interests in the region, but could not determine the course of decolonization except in its own territories; as a smaller player on the world scene, Australia was in any case more susceptible to international opinion in favor of independence. For Australia, independence in most of the South Pacific has been an accomplished fact that it has had to deal with by informal rather than formal means; the attractions of a formal link with Papua New Guinea were outweighed by the fear of Melanesian immigration. New Zealand, an even smaller player, went to great lengths to ensure that its decolonization of Western Samoa, the Cook Islands, and Niue met with United Nations approval and conformed with the requirements of UN General Assembly Resolution 1514(XV) of 1960 on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples. A greater contrast to the French attitude to that resolution is hard to imagine.

For economic reasons, the sovereignty of sovereign states has delivered less complete independence than might have been expected. The islands' economies are weak; the Islanders' expectations are high. Judging by recent events, the Islanders' best hope seems to lie in mild flirtations with non-Western powers, which have the effect of encouraging a rush of Western assistance. The fisheries access agreement between the United States and members of the Forum Fisheries Agency was reached in a political atmosphere of this kind; similar motives lie behind new aid initiatives being undertaken by the Takeshita government in Japan; and Australia's new minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senator Gareth Evans, took the unprecedented step of making his first overseas visit to the South Pacific rather than Japan, the United States, or Southeast Asia. The "new instability" has provoked a new concern.

Playing off West against East has its limitations as a path to independent development, however. A major aid donor such as Australia is always in a strong position to exert influence over island states and, because of its strategic interests, has a powerful motive to do so. The potential loss of an Australian aid package, for example, was almost certainly decisive in persuading Fiji to suspend its draconian internal security decree in November 1988. Just as nonsovereign states in the Pacific face obvious constraints on their independence, so do sovereign states. For

sovereignty to be translated into a greater measure of genuine political independence—however such independence might be interpreted by islands governments—sovereign states would have to drastically reduce their reliance on aid. As things stand in the South Pacific, that seems unlikely to happen.

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