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Negotiating regional security in the Cold War¹

In the first two decades of postcolonial regional politics, the normative contest over ‘regional self-determination’ was joined by an equally significant, and intersecting, contest over ‘regional security’. The idea of regional security, as applied to the South Pacific, emerged in 1976 when Australia and New Zealand began to interpret regional events through a Cold War lens and to see the promotion of regionalism, and a particular notion of regional security, as vital to their own security interests, and to those of the West more broadly. After the Grenada crisis in 1983 and the ANZUS crisis of 1984–85 (as discussed later), and in the context of heightened Cold War rivalry in the broader Pacific in the 1980s, Australia and New Zealand were joined by the United States, the United Kingdom and France in attempting to influence how Pacific states should behave in their foreign policies and within their states, if political instability was not to affect Western interests, as they saw them.

This attempt to impose a Cold War regional security order on the Pacific island region or, more accurately, to impose several competing notions of a Cold War order, was a highly significant move at several levels. First, it introduced the idea of regional security as an explicit notion, and one that reinforced the idea that the region was indeed a political community or entity that sat alongside the state in determining outcomes in these

1 Parts of this chapter were first published in ‘At the Margin: The South Pacific and changing world order’, in R. Leaver and J.L. Richardson (eds), *Charting the Post-Cold War Order*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993, pp. 224–42.

societies. Second, it introduced 'regional security' as a site of political contest over questions such as security for whom? Security from what? How should the region be secured? Third, it placed regionalism at the centre of its proposed solutions to the regional security 'problem'. Fourth, because of the way this approach envisaged the regional governance of security—as a hierarchical and hegemonic structure—it challenged the basic legitimating principle of indigenous regionalism. It attacked the principle of regional self-determination and the principle of sovereign equality that was wrapped up in it. It proposed instead that some states should have more rights and responsibilities than others in the regional society of states. Fifth, it raised the stakes involved in regional governance. And finally, it impacted on regional development because of the assumption that there was a strong connection between regional security and regional development. Economists in aid agencies and international organisations still pursued a separate developmental logic; for security analysts and politicians, however, regional development was to be seen as in service of regional security.

The attempt by the ANZUS members, and the United Kingdom and France, to promote various forms of a Cold War regional order in the Pacific, involving hierarchical and hegemonic forms of regional governance, provoked a strong response from Pacific island state leadership and regional civil society organisations. It is important to note, however, that like the Western countries, the Pacific island states were divided among themselves on their preferred conception of regional security and how it should be promoted. This challenges the idea of there being a simple global/local contestation over impositions by global actors. It was also a policy contest in which the participants had not just different notions of regional security; they actually saw the other party's nominated security *solution* as a security *threat*, antithetical to their own security interests. The stakes could therefore not have been higher in this contest over regional security governance.

At the centre of this political contest over the regional governance of security from the mid 1970s was the nuclear question. The region had been significantly involved in the nuclear aspects of the Cold War since the 1940s, providing nuclear testing sites for the United States, the United Kingdom and France. This nuclear involvement became a *regional* issue for Pacific island leaders in the 1960s when it became their unifying 'regional self-determination' issue. In the 1970s, Australia and New Zealand joined the postcolonial states and the emerging regional civil society groups in

opposing French testing in the Pacific. In the 1980s, the nuclear question became tied to the question of regional security in a dramatic way. From 1984, the contest over regional security began to focus on the issue of a nuclear weapons-free zone. The Western positions were complicated by New Zealand's antinuclear policy and the ensuing ANZUS crisis, as well as by the differing conceptualisations and interests of Australia, on the one hand, and France, the United Kingdom and the United States, on the other. The Pacific camp was also divided once the issues moved beyond French nuclear testing. A split developed between Polynesian states and Fiji, on the one hand, and Melanesian states and regional civil society, on the other.

'Nuclear playground'

From the early years of the Cold War, parts of the South Pacific were linked directly to the grand strategies of Western powers in very significant ways. The remoteness of some atolls and the strategic location of others made them attractive sites for nuclear weapons testing and deployment, and imperial control made this easy to achieve. The United States began testing atomic bombs over Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands—part of the American-administered Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands—in 1946. Two years later, it began testing at Enewetak Atoll, where the first hydrogen bomb was exploded in 1952. Atmospheric testing continued at these sites until 1958, when the United States moved its testing site to Johnston Atoll, an American island south of Hawai'i. In 1957, Britain moved its nuclear testing program from Australia to Christmas Island (Kiritimati) in its Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony. The United States joined the United Kingdom in testing at Christmas Island five years later. Both the British and American programs moved to the Nevada desert after the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty. In the same year, France established its Centre d'expérimentation du Pacifique and conducted 41 atmospheric tests at Moruroa Atoll in French Polynesia before 1974. Meanwhile, the American territory of Guam provided a base for nuclear-armed B52s until 1990, while Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands became the main testing site for American antiballistic missiles from 1964.²

2 I examine this nuclear involvement in greater detail in Greg Fry, *A Nuclear-Free Zone for the Southwest Pacific: Prospects and Significance*, Working Paper No. 75, Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University, 1983, pp. 11–20.

For particular individuals and societies in the French and American territories, this involvement was disastrous. Chamoro people in Guam and Tinian, and Marshall Islanders in Kwajalein, Bikini and Enewetak, were forced off their land. Bikini and Enewetak people, as well as Christmas Islanders and French Polynesians, suffered the effects of radioactivity associated with the American, British and French tests. All people in the Pacific region potentially suffer from the fallout of the 163 atmospheric tests conducted in the region before 1975. Moreover, the strategic interests of the United States and France severely constrained the self-determination efforts of islanders in these territories.³

Aptly dubbed 'the nuclear playground' by prominent Pacific historian Stewart Firth, this nuclear involvement in the Pacific was part of a continuing imperial order.⁴ While the Cold War may have influenced the intensity of testing, it is likely the United Kingdom, France and the United States would have been involved in this way in their Pacific territories whether or not there was an ideological competition between East and West and whether the world was 'bipolar' or 'multipolar'. World War II had done little to alter the fact that Pacific island societies remained appendages of large powers. For Pacific island societies not directly affected by nuclear involvement, there was little to suggest any influence of the Cold War. In fact, developments within these British, Australian and New Zealand territories reflected a quite different theme in Western 'world order' thinking: the principle of self-determination. The decision to slowly move these territories towards self-government demonstrates that Cold War thinking could be overridden by other normative principles. A policy dictated solely by Cold War considerations would have left the Pacific islands under direct political control rather than opening them to the possibility of Soviet influence.

For the first 30 years or so of the Cold War, then, the regional order was the legacy of an imperial order established in the late nineteenth century. With colonial sovereignty fixed, South Pacific societies were a strategic backwater, out of bounds to great power rivalry. The gradual emergence of independent island states after 1962 did little to change this imperial

3 The impact of this nuclear involvement on Pacific islanders and their societies is documented in Robert C. Kiste, *The Bikinians: A Study in Forced Migration*, Menlo Park, CA: Cummings Publishing Co., 1974; Stewart Firth, *Nuclear Playground*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987; and Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, 2nd edn, Melbourne: Penguin, 1986.

4 Firth, *Nuclear Playground*.

order. Economic patterns followed previous colonial ties and foreign policy initiatives were few. It was only when a significant portion of the region had been decolonised and more independent foreign policies had begun to be asserted that a post-imperial order could be said to have taken shape. This is the point at which the nuclear issue became ‘regionalised’; it is also the point at which it became part of a new notion of ‘regional security’ built on Cold War assumptions.

The creation of the idea of ‘regional security’

The idea of ‘regional security’, as applied to the Pacific island region, emerged with a change to conservative governments in both Canberra and Wellington in late 1975. The new governments began to view the region through a Cold War lens. Although the Cold War had been under way for three decades, and had dramatically impacted on parts of the region, this was the first time since World War II that the area as a whole was seen as a security region. The conservative Australian and New Zealand governments worked together to develop a new regional security framework. This affected the significance they attached to regional cooperation, the objectives they pursued through their involvement in regional cooperation and the positions they took on regional issues. Conceptually, they began to link regional organisation, regional security and regional development. They began to see regional organisation and regional development as serving regional security—defined in Cold War terms as the exclusion of Soviet influence from the Pacific island region. They also began to see themselves as the leaders of the ‘new South Pacific’, as the United Kingdom withdrew from its territories, and as representing Western interests in this part of the world.

In promoting this new policy framework aimed at securing the region as a whole, Australia and New Zealand were driven by their concern about the possibility of Soviet influence on the new Pacific states following a reported offer in July 1976 of economic assistance to Tonga in exchange for access for the Soviet fishing fleet. They viewed this report against the backdrop of newly established diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa, and more generally against the unsettling new involvement of other powerful international actors in what they had begun to see as an ‘ANZUS lake’ in the quiet postcolonial

years of the early 1970s.⁵ They viewed with some concern—although not with the alarm reserved for the Soviet Union—the new economic and diplomatic involvement of China, Taiwan and Japan in the island states south of the equator. In his speech to the SPF immediately after Soviet ambassador Oleg Selyaninov's visit to the Kingdom of Tonga, Australia's representative, Senator Robert Cotton, gave a clear indication of the Australian Government's prime concern:

Australia was ... concerned about the increasing Soviet involvement in the South Pacific and where it might lead. The Soviet Union was bound to seek to exploit any features of the situation to its own advantage ... it was important to study Soviet activities with great seriousness, and to be on guard against any developments which might not be in the interests of individual countries or of the region as a whole. The development of large on-shore facilities by the USSR to serve its fishing fleets could open the way for unwelcome longer-term developments.⁶

The Australian Government viewed regionalism not only as the key to establishing a shared notion of regional security that accorded with its own security interests. It also clarified the central role that it accorded to regional cooperation as a way of promoting this concept and the crucial connection it saw between regional security and development. Again, in Senator Cotton's words:

This [the new external awareness of the region] we feel enhances the need for more intensive cooperation on a regional basis in the South Pacific and emphasises the importance of the existing regional organisations such as the South Pacific Forum, SPEC and the SPC. Australia will continue its efforts to support and strengthen these organisations and to make them as responsive as possible to the needs of the countries of the region.⁷

5 Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, 'The South Pacific', p. 21; 'Roubles for Tonga from Russia with Love', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, August 1976: 14–15; and Russell Skelton, 'Soviet Turns Eyes to South Pacific Areas', *The Age*, [Melbourne], 14 July 1976.

6 'A Thundercloud but No Storm over the Forum', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, September 1976: 13.

7 *ibid.*

A few months after the Soviet offer to Tonga, Australia quadrupled its aid to the South Pacific countries.⁸ In 1977, it also increased its diplomatic network and began negotiations for a nonreciprocal, oneway regional free-trade agreement.

At the August 1976 ANZUS Council meeting, New Zealand joined Australia in an attempt to persuade the United States to take a more active role in the Pacific island region south of the equator to counter Soviet influence.⁹ This subject reportedly dominated council discussions. The US Deputy Secretary of State, Charles Robinson, later admitted that, as a result of the meeting, he was 'more sensitive' to the need for increased economic assistance to the South Pacific states. In reference to the Soviet moves in the region, he is reported as having said that 'the seriousness of the threat is one of potential, and hopefully it can be contained in a co-operative way'.¹⁰ Illustrating the importance the ANZUS partners attached to the relationship between regional security, regional economic development and regional cooperation, the official communiqué from the meeting 'reaffirmed'

the importance which it attached to the security of the region and in this connection emphasised the contribution to be made by steady and sustained economic progress. The Council noted the intention of Australia and New Zealand to give greater priority to the South Pacific in their development assistance programs. It also welcomed the growing sense of regionalism among the countries of the South Pacific, as exemplified by the South Pacific Forum and the South Pacific Commission.¹¹

The 1977 ANZUS Council meeting echoed these sentiments. It welcomed the 'continuing growth of regional institutions in the South Pacific, and their contribution to the welfare of countries in the region' and promised that these countries 'could expect continued support from the ANZUS

8 'Speech by the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs on the Australian South Pacific Aid Program to the Meeting of the South Pacific Forum in Suva on 12 October, 1976', *Australian Foreign Affairs Record*, October 1976: 556-7.

9 'US Urged to "Watch Pacific"', *The Canberra Times*, 4 August 1976: 9; and 'Red Sails in the South Seas?', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 August 1976: 10.

10 Brian Toohey, 'What Russians? Its Economics that Matter', *Australian Financial Review*, 5 August 1976; and Russell Skelton, 'ANZUS to Step Up Aid: Council Acts on Soviet Pacific Move', *The Age*, [Melbourne], 5 August 1976: 3.

11 Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, *Twenty-Fifth ANZUS Council Meeting Communiqué*, News Release No. D16, 4 August 1976, Canberra: Australian Government, p. 12.

partners on a bilateral and regional basis'.¹² Australia's policy approach, in particular, continued along these lines into the early 1980s, further encouraged by global developments in the Cold War. At the beginning of 1980, prime minister Malcolm Fraser made a direct connection between the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and his government's further doubling of economic assistance to the South Pacific, saying that Australia's duty on behalf of the West was to ensure that the South Pacific was free of Soviet influence.¹³

The central premise of this new security framing of the region was that a desirable regional order would ensure no Soviet involvement of any kind and no developments that could be interpreted as inviting such involvement—an approach later known as 'strategic denial'.¹⁴ This approach drew a conceptual link between 'stability' within a state and *regional* security. It also posited a link between security and development; since economically fragile societies were assumed to be more susceptible to Soviet entanglements. Economic assistance, and even trade and investment, came to be seen as instruments serving regional security. The conceptual link between regional identity and regional security presumed that the identity encouraged through regional organisation would help exclude 'illegitimate' players from decision-making and that regional organisations would be a vehicle for a regional consensus around the desired objective of security.

Canberra and Wellington promoted two organising principles of state behaviour as part of this preferred regional security order. The first was that these smaller states should not exercise their full sovereign rights. They should deny themselves forms of relationship with the Soviet Union common in the West, including embassies, trade links, visits to Moscow and forms of association common elsewhere among postcolonial states, such as membership of the Non-Aligned Movement. Furthermore, they should curb domestic developments that could be seen as providing openings to the Soviet Union. The second organising principle was that Australia and New Zealand should act as 'gatekeepers' on behalf of the

12 'ANZUS Council Communiqué', *Australian Foreign Affairs Record*, August 1977: 412.

13 Malcolm Fraser, 'Afghanistan: Australia's Assessment and Response', Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet News Release, Canberra, 19 February 1980, p. 18.

14 R.A. Herr, 'Regionalism, Strategic Denial and South Pacific Security', *Journal of Pacific History*, 21(4), 1986: 170–82.

West. There was, then, an attempt to establish a pecking order of states within the regional society of states: Australia and New Zealand would act as middlemen between the United States and the island states.

Until 1982, this preferred regional order of Australia and New Zealand largely became *the* regional order accepted and acted on by other Pacific island states. The operating principles appeared to be supported: Australian and New Zealand leadership was encouraged by Washington, and Pacific island states seemed to accept limitations on their sovereignty over dealings with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the SPF seemed to accept the policy of strategic denial.

There were, however, two prominent issues that provoked concern in Australian policy circles because of their perceived potential to breach this pro-Western regional security community. One was Vanuatu's nonaligned posture, its government's talk of promoting Melanesian socialism and its establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba and Vietnam. Seen from Canberra, Vanuatu looked to be the weak link in the strategic denial policy it was attempting to build with New Zealand. The Australian Government's other concern was the Soviet offer to undertake hydrographic research in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands waters in 1980. This prompted Australia, at the 1981 SPF meeting, to strongly support a move by Solomon Islands' prime minister, Peter Kenilorea, to forge a regional consensus around the desirability of rejecting all Soviet offers of assistance and to organise a counteroffer by the United States, Australia and New Zealand.¹⁵

It is difficult to prove whether the strategic denial policy was successful in its own terms and to what extent it denied political agency on the part of the island states. Certainly, no Pacific island government accepted Soviet offers of assistance. Nor did they permit a Soviet embassy on their soil (by contrast, they allowed the establishment of Chinese embassies). But whether this was a result of the strategic denial policy is arguable. By the early 1980s, Pacific island leaders had considerable experience in gaining the attention of Western nations by letting it be known that Soviet offers of assistance were on the table. Further, it is evident that they had their own reservations about Soviet involvement, whether on ideological or religious grounds or on the practical grounds that their own sovereignty could be

15 Russell Skelton, 'Thirteen Pacific Nations Agree to Reject Soviet Aid Offers', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 August 1981.

threatened by the possible superpower rivalry that might follow a decision to allow a Soviet presence. While Australian influence may have made a difference on the question of Vanuatu and Solomon Islands accepting the Soviet Union's hydrographic research offer, there is no evidence in the public domain to support prime minister Fraser's claim that during his administration he was able to persuade three Pacific island countries 'to stick with us and New Zealand rather than with the Soviets'.¹⁶

Cold War thinking and regional strategic denial in the 1980s

The new Labor/Labour governments in Canberra, in 1983, and Wellington, in 1984, promoted the regional strategic denial policy with even greater vigour than their conservative predecessors. The Australian Labor Government's commitment to the strategic denial policy framework was soon evident in its response to supposed Soviet and Libyan involvement in the region. Canberra greeted with dismay the negotiation, and signing, of the Kiribati–Soviet fisheries access agreement in 1985. It saw it as the first breach of the Pacific consensus around strategic denial. The dangers thought to flow from this commercial agreement—despite Australia and New Zealand themselves having such an agreement with the Soviet Union—were those dictated by the logic of strategic denial: it had to be assumed that the Soviets had motives other than fisheries access and this would be the 'thin edge of the wedge', perhaps ultimately leading to widespread economic involvement, the according of legitimacy to a Soviet regional economic presence, a shift to Soviet political influence and perhaps a military base. The Soviet Union's subsequent negotiation, in 1987, of a fisheries access agreement with Vanuatu, with provision for future negotiations concerning landing rights for Aeroflot, was seen as vindicating the correctness of this logic.¹⁷

16 Warren Mirrill and Peter Samuel, 'Soviets May Soon Have Pacific Base, Says Fraser', *The Australian*, 24 April 1985: 3.

17 See, for example, Ean Higgins, 'Pacific Islands Warned About Soviet Threat', *Australian Financial Review*, 4 April 1985: 14; Peter Hastings, 'Aust. Concern as Soviets Offer Vanuatu \$2m Deal', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 December 1986: 1; 'Hayden Warns of Soviet Infiltration through Fishing Deals', *The Canberra Times*, 14 December 1986: 1.

The strategic denial framework also guided Australia's interpretation of the link between Libya and some key political figures in Vanuatu and New Caledonia in late 1986 and early 1987. Australian policy circles were concerned that such links would expand and, in particular, that a Libyan Peoples' Bureau would be established in Port Vila. They interpreted any involvement by Libya as illegitimate and destabilising. While Canberra's policymakers did not necessarily embrace the thesis that Libya was a surrogate for the Soviet Union, the Australian response nevertheless had a Cold War feel to it.¹⁸ The Australian foreign minister Bill Hayden took the issue very seriously, to the point where he thought it necessary to take a special trip to New Zealand to persuade prime minister David Lange of the need to take some regional action on the matter. An Australian envoy put the case for regional strategic denial of Libyan involvement to the other South Pacific leaders. This Australian diplomacy had a mixed reception. Australia's case was strengthened once it had closed its own Libyan Peoples' Bureau, thus stemming the charge of applying double standards. Papua New Guinea and New Zealand were reportedly sceptical about Australia's concerns.¹⁹ Others were concerned about the precedent of trying to use the SPF as a watchdog over matters that should be the preserve of sovereign states.

While prime minister Walter Lini's subsequent decision not to allow a Libyan Peoples' Bureau to be established in Port Vila seemed to indicate a successful outcome for Australian diplomacy, it is more likely that his decision related to power struggles within his government and within the ruling Vanua'aku Pati. The expulsion of the Libyan-linked Front Uni de Libération Kanak from the FLNKS in New Caledonia can, on the other hand, be seen as a move influenced by Australia's regional diplomacy because the FLNKS leadership saw the Libyan link as a disadvantage in their dealings with the SPF region, and particularly with Australia.

The intensity of the Australian response to Soviet and Libyan involvement can be explained in part by the fact that these developments were viewed against the backdrop of the ANZUS crisis.²⁰ This created the perception in Canberra of a region signalling vulnerability to the Soviet Union.

18 The Libyan involvement in the South Pacific, and the Australian Government's response to it, is examined in David Hegarty, *Libya and the South Pacific*, Working Paper No. 127, Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University, 1987.

19 *ibid.*, p. 13.

20 See John Ravenhill, 'Political Turbulence in the South Pacific', in John Ravenhill, ed., *No Longer an American Lake?*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989: 1-40.

Just as importantly, the ANZUS crisis attracted serious global attention to the region for the first time since World War II. The United States was now looking over Australia's shoulder, no longer confident that it could 'subcontract' its interests in this area to Canberra. As seen from Washington, the combination of a Soviet link with Kiribati, the breakup of the ANZUS Treaty and an antinuclear New Zealand suggested regional vulnerability with implications for its global alliance system.²¹ The rising direct interest of larger powers, and particularly the United States and Japan, but also France, the United Kingdom and China, put pressure on the Australian Government to increase its efforts to give leadership to the regional strategic denial policy. Larger countries were losing faith in Australia's ability to lead the region and Australian policymakers were sensing this. They were intent on proving their continuing credentials as the reliable agent of Western interests in the Pacific island region.

From 1983, the question of South Pacific regional security moved significantly up the agenda of the world's most important powers. The issues of how Pacific regional security was defined, how Pacific island states oriented their foreign policies and how internal political developments in these countries might impact on international relations came to be seen as vital questions in metropolitan capitals. There were a number of related developments contributing to this heightened interest and the new era in regional security governance to which it led. As we have seen, a crucial element was the change in government in Canberra in 1983, followed by Wellington in 1984, and the uncertainty this created about whether these new governments were adequately representing vital Western interests as interpreted in Paris, Washington and London. These metropolitan countries now saw it as imperative to attempt to directly influence the way regional security was governed in the Pacific island region if the West's global nuclear posture within the Cold War was not to be weakened. For France, the problem was the growing regional opposition to its continued nuclear testing, which it regarded as the top priority for its national security. For the United States and the United Kingdom, the concern was not only that a proposed nuclear weapons-free zone would possibly affect the movement of their navies, but also that the symbolism of this move would further encourage the antinuclear movement in Europe at a crucial time.

21 Henry S. Albinski, 'American Perspectives and Policy Options on ANZUS', in Ravenhill, *No Longer an American Lake?*, pp. 200–2.

This heightened interest on the part of the world's largest powers also has to be viewed against broader global developments in the Cold War: the emergence of an assertive Reagan doctrine, concerns about Soviet naval activity in the Pacific following the opening of Cam Ranh Bay naval base in Vietnam and the rising influence of antinuclear movements in Europe and Japan. It also needs to be seen in the context of the new security thinking in Western capitals following the Grenada security crisis of 1983, which suggested that small state instability could have significant repercussions for Western interests.

'Small is dangerous'

The Grenada crisis of September 1983 sparked a new awareness in Western circles of the vulnerability of very small states to political instability, the potential of such national instability to impact on regional and even global security and the importance of promoting appropriate security governance arrangements at the regional level. It prompted new thinking about microstates as a special category in international relations with a particular security 'personality'.²² This new thinking built on the assumptions already established in the development literature that such states were particularly vulnerable, dependent and without resources.²³ These economic characteristics were linked to an assumed security characteristic: a lack of resources to deal with even minor security threats. Consequently, instability flowing from this situation could significantly affect regional security as defined in Cold War terms. This 'small is dangerous' diagnosis not only heightened Western interest in South Pacific security; it also reinforced the importance accorded to regional organisation and economic development and encouraged the tendency to link *national* security with *regional* security.

The promotion of a strategic denial strategy was reflected in the rise of an academic industry concerned with analysing regional security, including 'domestic instability', in the South Pacific. It began in 1985 as an offshoot of the studies of the rift in ANZUS caused by New Zealand's antinuclear

22 See, for example, George H. Quester, 'Trouble in the Islands: Defending the Micro-States', *International Security*, 8(2), 1983: 160-75; Sheila Harden, ed., *Small is Dangerous: Micro States in a Macro World*, Report from the David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies, London: Frances Pinter, 1985.

23 See, for example, Commonwealth Consultative Group on the Special Needs of Small States, *Vulnerability: Small States in the Global Society*, Report of a Commonwealth Consultative Group, London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1985.

decision. Attracting mainly Australian, New Zealand and US defence community scholars, the studies revolved around a series of conferences financed by governments and think tanks.²⁴ They evinced a common preoccupation with the ‘Soviet threat’, ‘instability’ and ways of limiting damage caused to Western regional interests by the ANZUS crisis and Soviet fishing deals. While some contributions to this literature were reflective and cautious, most were alarmist and partial. Most were *not* concerned with South Pacific security for itself, but only as it might threaten Western interests. If there was a fine line between government and academic agendas, it was difficult to discern. Rather than being disinterested studies of contending visions of regional order, they became part of the effort to promote particular Western conceptions of Pacific regional order.

New directions in Australian–New Zealand regional security thinking

While they held to strategic denial and its organising principles, the new Australian and New Zealand governments also introduced antinuclear and self-determination objectives into their framing of a desirable regional order—objectives they saw as consistent with regional security defined in Cold War terms. For example, Australia justified its opposition to France’s nuclear testing and its opposition to French colonial policy in New Caledonia in terms of its potential damage to Western interests by their encouragement of the radicalisation of Pacific social movements. New Zealand argued that its new national antinuclear policy was consistent with the aims of the ANZUS alliance and that it did not affect New Zealand’s efforts to counter Soviet influence in the region. France, the United Kingdom and the United States did not share these perspectives on a preferred regional Cold War order. They saw the Australian–New

24 See, for example, Dennis L. Bark and Owen Harries, eds, *The Red Orchestra: Instruments of Soviet Policy in the Southwest Pacific*, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1989, based on a conference organised by the Hoover Institution in Washington, DC, in March 1987; Leon M. Slawewski, *The United States and the South Pacific: A Conference Report—Apia, Western Samoa, November, 1988*, San Francisco: Asia Foundation Center for Asian Pacific Affairs, 1989; Henry S. Albinski, Robert C. Kiste, Richard Herr, Ross Babbage, and Ian McLean, *The South Pacific: Political, Economic and Military Trends*, Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1990; and the Pacific Forum (Honolulu) Seminar on Strategic Imperatives and Western Responses in the South and Southwest Pacific, Sydney, February 1986.

Zealand conception as not only wrongheaded, but also dangerous and threatening to Western interests. This was particularly the case in relation to Australia's promotion of a regional nuclear-free zone.

The South Pacific nuclear-free zone initiative

The Australian Labor Government was elected to office in 1983 with a commitment to continue with the ANZUS security treaty with the United States as the cornerstone of its security *and* to establish a nuclear-free zone in the South Pacific. It sought to balance these two seemingly contradictory commitments by proposing a partial nuclear weapons-free zone. To reflect the majority view in the Labor Party and the electorate, the Australian proposal had to leave out of the regional initiative any prohibition on US nuclear activity that would have been seen by Washington or the Australian electorate as constituting the dismantling of the security pact with the United States.

The Australian proposal, which was put before the 1983 SPF meeting, therefore added up to a prohibition on the presence of nuclear weapons and on their manufacture or testing anywhere within the territories of South Pacific states up to the 12-mile sea limit. However, there was one very significant qualification to this general prohibition. The treaty specifically allowed each state to make an exception for nuclear weapons that may be aboard ships that were visiting its ports or navigating its territorial sea or archipelagic waters and for weapons that may be aboard aircraft that were visiting its airfields or transiting its airspace.²⁵

The debate on this vision for a regional nuclear weapons-free zone developed in a highly charged context. From mid 1984, the New Zealand Government announced a ban on visits to its ports by nuclear-armed or nuclear-powered ships. The New Zealand Government's subsequent enforcement of the ban against US naval ships that would not confirm or deny whether they were carrying nuclear weapons provoked a strong response from Washington. The United States cut defence ties with New Zealand and ANZUS was effectively put in abeyance. For the United States, then, any talk of a regional nuclear-free zone was viewed with

25 *South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty*, 1985, available from: fas.org/nuke/control/spnfz/text/spnfz.htm, art. 5(2).

concern and US Secretary of State, George Shultz, cautioned against it.²⁶ It was viewed as not only encouraging antinuclear feeling in the Pacific, but also as feeding into the global antinuclear movement. There was concern about its symbolic power.

On the other side, as we have seen, various Pacific governments and the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific movement had a long history of promoting a more ambitious regional nuclear-free zone. The most prominent of these earlier proposals was that of the New Zealand Government in 1974, and on that occasion the Australian Government had worked against the proposal because of concerns that it would affect the United States' ability to fulfil its security obligations under the ANZUS Treaty. As we have seen, opposition to French nuclear testing had provided a unified Pacific position on regional self-determination since the late 1960s. There had also been a history of some individual governments adopting more ambitious antinuclear positions such as banning visits by nuclear ships.

By 1984, there was agreement in principle by most Pacific island states to proceed with the Hawke Government's compromise proposal. In 1985, eight SPF members signed the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (known as the Treaty of Rarotonga). The change of government in New Zealand in 1984 assisted with the rapid move from proposal to treaty. The Lange Government wanted a quick and substantial result, whereas there were indications that Australia was more interested in having a negotiation process in place than achieving an end result. France, the United States, the United Kingdom and the Australian opposition parties thought the Treaty of Rarotonga threatened the West's global interests as well as their own individual strategic interests. Some Pacific island governments, and particularly Vanuatu, together with the Australian peace movement and the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific movement, thought it represented a sellout of the nuclear-free policy to Australia's commitment to the US global alliance. With Vanuatu wanting a comprehensive zone and Tonga wanting no zone at all for fear of offending France and the United States, the Treaty of Rarotonga represented a compromise position for Pacific island states as well.²⁷

26 Milton Cockburn and Amanda Buckley, 'Pacific Treaty Has US Worried', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August 1985: 9; and Michelle Grattan, 'Hawke Courts Kudos for N-Free Treaty', *The Age*, [Melbourne], 7 August 1985: 1.

27 See Paul Malone, 'Reservations on N-Free Zone', *The Canberra Times*, 3 August 1985: 9; Milton Cockburn, 'Nearly Ready for a Nuclear-Free Pacific', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 August 1985: 1; and 'Nuclear Ships Row on Boil at ASEAN', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 July 1985: 1.

The reinscription campaign

The other controversial commitment in the Australian–New Zealand vision of regional security was that of promoting self-determination for New Caledonia. Australia's policy was cautious between the 1984 election boycott by the Independence Front and the election of French prime minister Chirac in 1986. It used its influence to moderate the more radical position of the Melanesian countries at the SPF, arguing that the French Government should be given time to implement reform. At the same time, the Australian Government indicated its support for decolonisation of the territory. In taking this position, it pleased neither Paris, which thought it was intervening in its affairs, nor Port Moresby, Port Vila or Honiara, which thought Australia was protecting France. After 1986, feeling that the more progressive policies of the French socialists had been reversed by the Chirac Government, Australia strongly supported the MSG's push for reinscription of New Caledonia on the list of territories overseen by the UN Special Committee on Decolonization (the Committee of 24). Australia played an important role in lobbying at the United Nations, which led to a vote in favour of the SPF's position and against that of France.²⁸

Contending Western conceptions of regional order

Washington, London and Paris strongly opposed the promotion of this new view of regional order by Canberra and Wellington, with its emphasis on anticolonial and antinuclear principles. The United States and the United Kingdom shared a view that the Australian Labor Government's approach affected their global strategic interests. They saw a contradiction between Australia's anti-Soviet position, on the one hand, and its promotion of a nuclear-free zone and its attack on French nuclear testing and the French colonial presence, on the other. As seen by these governments, such policies created opportunities for the Soviet Union in the South Pacific. They signalled a further breakdown of Western solidarity following closely from the ANZUS crisis. French control of French Polynesia and New Caledonia, in particular, and the consequent

28 Helen Fraser, *New Caledonia: Anti-Colonialism in a Pacific Territory*, Canberra: Peace Research Centre, The Australian National University, 1988, pp. 37–9.

French naval presence in the South Pacific were seen as advantageous for Western interests. It was thought that France's departure would create a vacuum into which leftist regimes (with links to socialist states) could step. The United States and the United Kingdom also saw Australia's continued attack on French nuclear testing as an attack on the Western nuclear deterrent within the global Cold War. As fellow Western nuclear powers, they quietly supported France's testing program at Moruroa.²⁹ One of Washington's operating principles of a desired regional order—the idea of Australia and New Zealand as 'managers'—now seemed in tatters. Canberra's concept of a desirable regional security order also brought it in direct conflict with the French Government. This culminated in a verbal slinging match between the prime ministers of each country and a banning, by France, of ministerial exchanges with Australia.³⁰

This disagreement with Australian policy led to the United States and France developing, for the first time, a policy towards the region outside their Pacific island territories.³¹ They used this to promote a different view of what constituted a desirable pro-West regional order.³² The United States also asked Japan to undertake some burden sharing in this new direct involvement. This resulted in the Kuranari Doctrine of 1987 and the establishment of a substantial Japanese economic assistance program to the Pacific island states.³³

29 For a different American perspective, downplaying the Soviet threat and emphasising the damage to Western interests caused by French nuclear and colonial involvement, see Robert C. Kiste and R.A. Herr, *The Potential for Soviet Penetration of the South Pacific Islands: An Assessment*, Consultants' Report to the United States State Department, December 1984.

30 Henningham, *France and the South Pacific*, pp. 226–7.

31 For details of the new French policy towards the region, see Bates, *The South Pacific Island Countries and France*, Ch. 6; and Stephen Henningham, 'Keeping the Tricolor Flying: The French Pacific into the 1990s', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 1(1–2), 1989: 97–132, at pp. 113–22.

32 This dominant American perspective was at variance with advice put to the US State Department in a 1984 consultants' report prepared by two prominent Pacific island specialists, who downplayed the Soviet threat and emphasised French nuclear and colonial involvement as damaging to Western interests. For an abridged version of that report, see Kiste and Herr, *The Potential for Soviet Penetration of the South Pacific Islands*; for details of the new French policy, see Bates, *The South Pacific Island Countries and France*, Ch. 6; and Henningham, 'Keeping the Tricolor Flying'.

33 See Isami Takeda, 'New Factors in Japan's ODA Policy: Implications for Australia–Japan Relations', Mimeo, Canberra: Australia–Japan Research Centre, The Australia National University, August 1986; and Tadashi Kuranari, 'Working Towards the Pacific Future Community', Address, Suva, 14 January 1987.

Pacific challenges to Cold War conceptions of regional security

These various Western versions of Cold War regional order did not go unchallenged by the Pacific island states. First, they contested the concept of regional security promoted as the objective of such an order. The Pacific voice was strong and assertive at the Commonwealth-organised South Pacific Colloquium on the Special Needs of Small States held in Wellington in August 1984.³⁴ The colloquium was specifically designed to elicit Pacific island state opinion on regional security as part of a broader Commonwealth study of the special security needs of small states following the Grenada crisis. The Wellington colloquium became the arena for the first explicit debate about the definition of regional security in the Pacific context and, more specifically, a consideration of such questions as: What is regional security? What are the key security threats to the region? What are the appropriate strategies for dealing with them? What should be the role of regional organisations in responding to them?

The deliberations revealed some surprising conclusions. The Pacific leaders generally held a very different view of regional security than that assumed and promoted by Australia, New Zealand and the wider Western international community. They saw security in economic rather than strategic terms. They did not share the preoccupation with superpower rivalry uppermost in such conceptions: 'they do not perceive any imminent threat or military intervention or interference by a power from either within or outside the region.' Most surprising of all, they concluded that the activities that threatened or potentially threatened their security came from 'countries which already have a presence within the region and with which relations are, or should be, friendly'. They gave examples of the testing of nuclear weapons, the threat of pollution from dumping of nuclear waste, 'relative economic deprivation', 'incursions into EEZs [exclusive economic zones] by foreign fishing vessels' and restraints imposed on the foreign policies of associated states. They emphasised

34 'Concluding Statement', Unpublished summary of the South Pacific Colloquium on the Special Needs of Small States, Victoria University of Wellington, 13–14 August 1984; and personal observations of the author, who was a participant in the colloquium.

the importance of continued regional cooperation through the SPF to deal with these issues and downplayed the need for military security arrangements for intervention in Pacific island states.³⁵

The Pacific island leaders made it clear that, if pressed, they would define regional security quite differently, with East–West concerns well down the list and economic security and protection of sovereignty near the top. So defined, the United States was seen as the ‘enemy’ because of the poaching of the islands’ main shared resource, the skipjack tuna, by American vessels. The continued assertion by Pacific island leaders through the mid 1980s that economic security was the name of the game, and that the Soviet Union was playing by the rules while the United States was not, resulted in a significant concession from the United States: an agreement to pay for access to tuna fishing grounds, which went against the general principles the United States had been pressing on the jurisdictional rights over highly migratory species of fish.³⁶

In a second challenge, in the years following the Wellington colloquium, the Pacific leaders confronted the relatively longstanding operating principles of the Australian and New Zealand approach to regional order, particularly their self-appointed role as regional managers. More conservative Pacific island states criticised Australia and New Zealand for moving outside the anti-Soviet regional order they had themselves constructed, while more radical states condemned Australia in particular for not going far enough on the antinuclear and anticolonial questions, and for being too tied into an order dictated solely by East–West rivalry. The Australian Government was also criticised for its paternalistic diplomatic style, particularly over the issue of Libyan involvement. This resistance grew strongly after the Fiji coups in 1987 because, whether or not they agreed with the military takeover, Pacific island leaders rallied around the right of Fiji to put its own house in order; they therefore opposed moves by Australia and New Zealand to exert pressure through the SPF.³⁷

35 *ibid.*

36 *ibid.*; and personal observations of the author, who was a participant in the colloquium.

37 Roderic Alley, ‘The 1987 Military Coups in Fiji: The Regional Implications’, *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2(1), 1990: 37–58, at pp. 41–2; Eric Shibuya, ‘The Problems and Potential of the Pacific Islands Forum’, in Jim Rolfe, ed., *The Asia-Pacific: A Region in Transition*, Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004, pp. 102–15.

The Pacific island states also began to question the second-class citizenship assigned to them in the regional security order. Against strong opposition from Canberra and Wellington, first Kiribati, in 1985, and then Vanuatu, in 1987, asserted the right to have a fisheries access agreement with the Soviet Union. Since both Australia and New Zealand had extensive commercial dealings with the Soviet Union, there was general resentment in the region of the denial of that same right to Pacific island states.

NGOs throughout the Pacific—churchpeople, trade unionists, students, women's groups, independence movements and antinuclear groups—also resisted the various brands of Cold War regional order promoted by Australia and New Zealand, and by France, the United Kingdom and the United States. They were organised transnationally across the region in various alliances: the Pacific Trade Union Forum, the Pacific Women's Association, the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific movement. Their vision of an appropriate regional order was one that was nonnuclear, nonaligned, self-determining, nonmilitarist and participatory. At the state level, their positions were variously represented by many of the policies of the Lini Government in Vanuatu until 1987, the Fiji Labour Government of 1987 and the New Zealand Labour Government. Significant social movements within Australia and New Zealand, including a large section of the governing Labor/Labour parties, also supported these positions.

Conclusion

In the mid 1980s, there were, then, at least four contending normative visions of regional security. One was defined in terms of the global concerns of powerful Western countries—the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Japan—and shared by the conservative parties in Australia and New Zealand. It emphasised strategic denial of the Soviet Union and its allies, a continued French presence in the Pacific and opposition to nuclear-free policies. A second vision, promoted by the Labor/Labour governments in Australia and New Zealand (but with important differences between them on nuclear issues), embraced strategic denial alongside a commitment to countering French nuclear testing and the French colonial presence. A third position represented the shared concerns of Pacific island governments with a more self-determined regional order that might limit infringements of their sovereignty and allow 'legitimate'

Soviet involvement in the region. A fourth vision, emphasising a nuclear-free and economically independent region, was promoted by various NGOs. As we have seen, much of the contest between these contending visions was conducted in the regional organisations and was reflected in decisions about institutional structure, finance, membership, policy outcomes and competition over key regional positions.

The outcome demonstrated that the Pacific island states did have significant sources of power. The Australian and New Zealand governments felt compelled to make important shifts to accommodate the challenge from the region. For example, to gain credibility for its 1987 expectation that Vanuatu should not allow the establishment of a Libyan Peoples' Bureau, the Australian Government bowed to Pacific island state opinion that Australia should close the Libyan bureau on its own soil. In 1988, Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans frankly acknowledged that Australia would have to depart from its established policy approach; he regarded a role of 'agent' for Western interests as no longer workable and advocated 'partnership' instead.³⁸ Australia and New Zealand also shifted their view of regional security to accord with broader notions emanating from the region. While still holding Cold War concerns uppermost, they had to acknowledge the Pacific island states' concerns with economic security if the damage caused by the breaching of strategic denial were to be contained. The United States also adopted this view after being persuaded that failure to concede might cause Pacific island states to 'go to the Soviets'. Australia also diluted its notion of strategic denial when foreign minister Hayden announced in 1987 that Australia would now welcome 'constructive engagement' in the South Pacific by the Soviet Union.³⁹

At the same time, important elements of the Canberra/Wellington vision of regional security prevailed over that propounded by Washington, Paris and London. The establishment of the nuclear-free zone graphically illustrated this, as did the successful campaign to have New Caledonia returned to the purview of the UN Special Committee on Decolonization.

38 Gareth Evans, 'Australia in the South Pacific', Address to the Foreign Correspondents' Association, Sydney, 23 September 1988, pp. 9–10. For further elaboration on these points, see Greg Fry, "Constructive Commitment" with the South Pacific: Monroe Doctrine or New "Partnership"?, in Greg Fry, ed., *Australia's Regional Security*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991, pp. 120–37.

39 David Hegarty, *South Pacific Security Issues: An Australian Perspective*, Working Paper No. 147, Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University, December 1987, p. 1.

The pull, then, was towards conceptions of regional security promoted by the seemingly less powerful states, but not reaching as far as the vision promoted by NGOs. An internal rift within the Vanua`aku Pati in 1987, and the forced removal by the military of Timoci Bavadra's Coalition Government in Fiji in the same year, removed the two Pacific island governments that most shared the regional security vision of the civil society groups.

The Cold War regional security lens was so dominant in Western framings of the Pacific island region from the mid 1970s to the late 1980s that, with its ending, it was difficult for outside powers to continue to imagine the existence of a Pacific island region at all. The idea of region-building had become so attached to the securing of Oceania for Western interests in a global struggle that the end of the Cold War made Western interests question their motives for being involved in region-building. It was as if the idea of region and the imperative to build a stronger regional political community only made sense in the context of existential threat. This was particularly the case in Australia and New Zealand, where there had been a big investment in academic and policy circles in securing the island region according to their own strategic denial vision with its implications for the structure of regional governance.

In Canberra and Wellington, a sense of purpose in Pacific region-building was restored only with the rise of a commitment to establishing a regional economic order based on neoliberal principles from 1994. An economic framing of the islands was now to take over from a security framing for the next two decades. Before we examine this attempt to build a regional economic order on neoliberal principles, we first need to explore the last key strand of the contest over region-building in the 1970s and 1980s—that of the attempt to impose a framing of the regional governance of development on 'modernisation' principles.

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