2. France manages independence demands and nuclear testing 1945–1990s

The immediate postwar period saw growing demands for autonomy in the colonies and initially, signs of responsiveness in France. In the wave of postwar change, as its wartime allies shaped new international structures with the United Nations (UN) at its core, France acknowledged the need for more equality and evolution in the administration of its colonies. De Gaulle resigned in January 1946 because of differences over parliamentary powers in the new constitution, leading to a period of instability in French leadership. Steps to encourage more self-government and even independence for the colonies, particularly the African colonies, were initiated by the Fourth and Fifth Republics in the 1946 and 1958 constitutions. These steps were subsequently rolled back by successive statutory measures, to serve French national interests, in a pattern that was to characterise future treatment of the South Pacific overseas territories.

At a conference in Brazzaville (the Congo) in 1944, provision was made for more decentralised administration of the colonies and representation in bodies redrafting the French constitution. The conference called for local elected assemblies and representation of the overseas territories in the Paris parliament. The aim, however, was to contain nationalist aspirations and keep the colonies with France.

Some Melanesians and Polynesians (war veterans, pastors, customary chiefs) were accorded the right to vote in 1945. In 1945 and 1946 the French government decreed further rights for their overseas residents, including French citizenship, but not the universal right to vote. While the 1946 constitution affirmed that all residents of overseas territories were French citizens, it was only in 1951 that all French citizens in the colonies obtained the right to vote, and specifically only in 1956, with the Loi Defferre, that all native residents of the overseas territories were entitled to vote.

The 1946 constitution created a French Union and committed France to leading its people to administer themselves and to manage their own affairs democratically, ‘écartant tout système de colonisation fondé sur l’arbitraire’ (‘eschewing arbitrary colonisation’, Preamble). The Établissements français d’Océanie (French Pacific establishments, EFO) and New Caledonia were henceforward able to elect their own député (member of parliament) to the French national assembly and senate in
Paris. The four oldest colonies (Guyana, Réunion, Guadeloupe and Martinique) became ‘departments’ of France while the others, including New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna remained external ‘territories’.

France was not acting in a domestic vacuum. As postwar international structures evolved, the UN was founded in 1945 on a charter specifying the principle of equality of rights and self-determination of peoples (Article 1). It called for states administering non-self-governing territories to develop self-government and transmit technical information to the UN on them (Article 73). But in 1947 France decided unilaterally that it would not transmit to the UN information on New Caledonia and French Polynesia (and others of its colonies), arguing that they had a status similar to the French ‘departments’, but with the implication that they had administrative and political autonomy and were therefore no longer non-self-governing (see Mrugudovic in de Deckker and Faberon 2008, 178). France claimed that only New Hebrides was non-self-governing; it has resolutely maintained this position to the present, although it quietly began to report on New Caledonia from 2004 (see section on UN ‘reinscription’ below).

The 1956 Defferre loi cadre (framework law) aimed at more engagement by the outre-mer (Overseas France) peoples in their own administration (Law No 56-619 of 23 June 1956, Article 1). At the time, the French State was grappling with major challenges, particularly in Indochina and Algeria, and its own government was unstable. By 1954 France had withdrawn from Indochina. The Fourth Republic had seen 21 changes of government in 12 years. Echoing the interplay between developments in the overseas colonies and domestic politics in France, which obtained during the 19th century, mishandling of the rebellion in Algeria contributed largely to the demise of the Fourth Republic (see Dunmore 1997, 245; Ziller and Faberon 2007, 21; Bély 2001, 119), and de Gaulle again formed a government.

De Gaulle’s Fifth Republic introduced a new constitution that enshrined the principle of free determination of its peoples and the possibility of new institutions for the overseas territories desirous of participating in them, with a view to their ‘democratic evolution’ (Preamble). De Gaulle turned the French Union into a Community, and referendums were held in 1958 throughout the empire on the new French constitution, which de Gaulle made clear was a vote for staying with France (Henningham 1992, 123). In his rhetoric, de Gaulle specified two things, first, that the contemporary world made it necessary to belong to large economic and political federations, and second, that a no vote would mean going it alone, with France not giving ‘further moral or material help’. These are arguments that have been used by French leaders right up to the present. By voting yes, the colonies could choose either integration into France, to continue the status quo, or expanded autonomy as a self-governing member of the French Community, effectively laying the basis for independence. By
1960, all but one of France’s African possessions had taken up the independence option. All three Pacific colonies voted to stay with France, New Caledonia with a vote of 98 per cent, and Wallis and Futuna 95 per cent. French Polynesia returned a far lower vote, 64 per cent, owing to the efforts of independence leader Pouvanaa who was promptly arrested (see French Polynesia below). But, as the years ahead were to show, political evolution was subsequently seen as taking place within an indivisible French Republic.

**Strategic factors**

De Gaulle’s ‘politics of grandeur’ was based on the idea that France, befitting its status as one of the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, would restore its global position as a puissance mondiale moyenne (middle-sized world power), in the wake of the losses of World War II, Indochina and, in 1962, Algeria, not to mention the defeats of World War I and the 1870 Prussian War. Self-reliance was a key ingredient to this policy, based on the force de frappe, or independent French nuclear deterrent. In 1960, France acquired the atomic bomb, and established a testing program in Algeria. After 1962, nuclear testing that had been carried out in Algeria was to take place in the Pacific, at Moruroa and Fangataufa in French Polynesia. It would be essential to maintain the Pacific possessions in the French fold, lest a change in status in one encouraged independence moves in French Polynesia. De Gaulle told New Caledonians when he visited in 1966, ‘You are France australe (France in the south). You have a French role to play in the world’ (in Waddell 2008, 56), before landing in French Polynesia to witness one of the first nuclear tests there.

France’s acquisition of nuclear capability and testing practices were not an isolated act by a pretentious European state in the Pacific. Its nuclear program formed part of a Western schema of similar activity there, by Britain, at Maralinga in Australia, and the United States, at Bikini Atoll in the Gilbert group. In the early days of the Cold War, the international reaction against nuclear testing was slow to gather momentum, but when it took hold criticism of France was strong, particularly in the neighbouring Pacific region, where a general distaste for nuclear testing by Western powers had been evident from as early as 1956 (see South Pacific Forum action below).

Another major international development in the strategic backdrop to France’s changing approaches to autonomy demands in the postwar period was the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS). After years of negotiation, the international community agreed to establish 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), legally increasing dramatically the surface of global sovereignty to individual countries.
For France, as for many other governments still with overseas possessions, this was the most important single stroke for extending national sovereignty since the haphazard declarations of the eighteenth century. Although UNCLOS sets out the framework for, and records, nations’ claims, consistent precise figures about each nation’s rightful EEZ are difficult to establish. But the overall effect for France is clear. The French EEZ, i.e., its sea resources alone, is now the second largest in the world after that of the United States. French territorial sovereignty including all of its departments and territories overseas (DOM TOM), now extended over 40 per cent of the total global maritime zones, or 8 per cent of the surface of the globe, while France’s land area covered only .45 per cent of the globe. Compared to the EEZ of the French metropolitan ‘hexagon’ alone of just 340,290 square kilometres, France’s total EEZ grew to 11.57 million square kilometres (m. sq. km.), of which 7.3 m. sq. km. arose from its Pacific possessions and just under 5 m. sq. km. of that, from French Polynesia alone (Outre-mer tables in Faberon and Ziller 2007, 8). While some French writers have claimed that France derives minimal economic return from its large EEZ (e.g. Leymarie 1985, 4) and it is true that much of the potential remains unknown, control over these resources boosted France’s geopolitical prestige globally, and particularly at a time when it was under attack in the region, both for its handling of Kanak independence claims in New Caledonia, and for its nuclear testing in French Polynesia (see Mrgudovic 2008, 81 et seq).

Moreover, from the 1980s, the Pacific Ocean once again began to be described as the new centre of the world, with writers and thinkers heralding the twenty-first century as the Pacific century. In a sense, this was nothing new. There had been an earlier movement in France in the 1880s led by the Oceanic Lobby Group in Paris (Aldrich 1988). But this time, the new wave of attention to the Pacific was global, and arose from dynamic economic growth in the rapidly industrialising Asian tigers (South East Asia, Hong Kong, South Korea), with China poised in the background — all of these being littoral Pacific states. A European country with a direct stake in the region, even if it was simply in the southern hemisphere of the Pacific, where its Pacific naval presence was based, had a perceived advantageous foothold in an economically significant region (see Lacour 1987, 131). Europe’s exclusion from the newly emerging Asian Pacific Economic Co-operation grouping in the late 1980s to early 1990s, and

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1 Comparisons of EEZs are indicative only of a sovereign power’s control over sea resources beyond its territorial sea. When comparing total land, territorial seas and EEZ areas, France ranks seventh after Russia, the United States, Australia, Canada, China and Brazil. It is worth noting that there is a minute difference between France’s combined EEZ and territorial seas (11.57 million square kilometres (m. sq. km.)) and its EEZ, territorial seas and land (11.7 m. sq. km.) whereas for example with Russia there is a far larger difference (7.5 m. sq. km. to 24.6 m. sq. km.), reflecting the larger land mass of the latter (Wikipedia EEZ accessed 1 July 2009). Thus the relative potential increase in resources by virtue of an EEZ is far greater for France.
British effective withdrawal from the South Pacific in the same period (although it had defined its ‘east of Suez’ policy much earlier), only served to strengthen French tenaciousness there.

**Early postwar regional context**

Within the South Pacific region, postwar France was increasingly working in a regional environment, joining up with the governments of the Netherlands, the United States and the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand to form the South Pacific Commission (known as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community from 1998) (SPC) in 1947, with its headquarters in Noumea. The genesis of the commission was one of consultations amongst those powers responsible for various Pacific islands on the basis of either colonial ties (France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom) or UN mandates (the United States, Australia, New Zealand). After 1964, with the accession of the first independent Pacific island state, Western Samoa (which became independent in 1962), the organisation included independent states, and added a technical assistance role (see Foreign Affairs and Trade 1997; SPC 2007).

France from the beginning saw the SPC as a threat to its authority. Along with the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, France resisted proposals from Australia, New Zealand and the United States for elected delegates, and calls by island leaders from 1965 to have representation in Noumea (Bates 1990, 42). More critically for its own interests, France actively opposed political (as distinct from technical) discussion at SPC meetings. Frustrated by being unable to discuss in the SPC the issues of regional nuclear testing and New Caledonian independence demands, the new island governments formed the South Pacific Forum (SPF) in 1971 (renamed Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in 2000; see Fry 1981; Henningham 1992, 197). The Forum was established specifically as a political forum, and its first political preoccupations targeted French policies (see Forum Communiqué 1971). France was to tread a rocky path with the Forum in the 1970s and 1980s, and bilaterally with some of its members (see New Caledonia and French Polynesia below). But, through it all, France was to retain the SPC headquarters in Noumea and its membership of the SPC, thereby retaining a privileged status and valuable asset when it finally sought to improve its standing in the region in the latter 1980s (see Chapter 3).

**Institutional structures at home**

The management of the colonies in metropolitan France changed little at this time. A ministry for colonies had been established in 1894. Before then, the office of colonies that Richelieu had established in 1710 had handled the overseas
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colonies for almost 200 years, attached to the marine secretariat, later ministry. The 1894 ministry was located at one end of the Louvre, which, Bélorgey (2002, 84) noted, justly reflected the poorly reduced empire after the Napoleonic losses that century. In 1910 it relocated to the hôtel at Rue Oudinot, where it remains today. The ministry was simply divided into economic and political directorates until after World War II.

During the war, both the Vichy and Free French governments had their colonial ministries, each seeing the ‘Overseas France’ as important elements of their power (despite their incapacity to defend them, see Thomas 1998, Chapters 1 and 2). Bélorgey noted the great hopes after the War that the colonial empire would contribute to maintaining France’s global prestige in the wake of the ignominious wartime experience (2002, 85). In 1946 — with the départementalisation of the four ‘old colonies’ — Guyana, Réunion, Martinique and Guadeloupe came under the purview of the interior ministry. After 1958, the departments and the territories were reunited in the ministry of the DOM-TOM (départements et territoires d’outre-mer, or overseas departments and territories) under the prime minister, reflecting their importance as equal but different parts of France. The two remain so to this day, albeit under the simpler nomenclature of ‘Outre-mer’ (Overseas France).

**Autonomy demands in the Pacific collectivities**

It is against this background that demands for increasing autonomy in the New Hebrides, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia emerged in the postwar period. Events in each exerted influence on the others and shaped current challenges.

As for tiny Wallis and Futuna, after it voted in 1959 to stay with France, it became a French Overseas Territory in legislation enacted in 1961 which governs the entity, essentially unchallenged, to this day (Loi No 61-814 of 19 July 1961) (de Deckker 2003a, 66; Faberon and Ziller 2007, 335). The islands’ principal interconnection with the other French entities during this period has been the migration of a substantial part of its labour force to New Caledonia (see Chapter 4).

**New Hebrides becomes Vanuatu**

France did not want to lose its presence in the New Hebrides (‘We’re staying’, said the French Resident in 1969 in Henningham 1992, 31), not least because of the example its loss might provide to its other Pacific entities. An independent Vanuatu represented a loss within the context of France’s grandeur policy and its puissance mondiale moyenne status. But, despite French efforts to resist
decolonisation, because France was sharing power in the New Hebrides with Britain, because Britain was on a path of relinquishing its presence east of Suez and granting independence to its Pacific colonies, and also because of France’s own clumsy handling of demands for independence, the condominium of New Hebrides became the independent state of Vanuatu in July 1980. French interests in the Pacific were again usurped by Britain’s interests, and local indigenous forces.

Again, the old French Catholic v. British Protestant fault line came into play. Calls for independence first came from mainly English-speaking Protestants, while those favouring autonomy of individual islands were primarily French-speaking and Catholic Melanesians. Each was suspicious of the other. As in New Caledonia during the war, the French attributed negative motives to Australia and New Zealand (Coutau-Bégarie 1987, 287; Dornoy-Vurobaravu 1994; Dunmore 1997, 268) and, indeed, Australia briefly considered taking over from Britain in a tutelage role for Vanuatu, but rejected the idea swiftly (personal communication from former senior Australian official, 2009).

The key issues catalysing independence calls were land acquisition by settlers, and European legal systems, the latter challenging local custom. Such differences, together with a cargo cult mentality in a number of small groupings, provided an impetus to phenomena such as Jimmy Stephens’ Nagriamel movement, which propounded independence. Moves made by French planters into cattle ranching in the 1960s, taking up interior land, also heightened differences. Although the numbers of French residents in the New Hebrides were small after the war (in 1949, 900 French citizens compared to 320 British citizens, and 1750 ‘protected French citizens’, mainly Indochinese working on the plantations, Dunmore 1997, 253), France continued to invest extensively in infrastructure to support French planters there. In 1971 Stephens appealed to the UN for independence to be granted within a year. The same year, the former Anglican minister Walter Lini formed the Vanuatu Party. Numerous francophone parties were formed to counter it, one allying itself with Stephens’ group. The French sought to discourage support for independence, using the familiar argument that resource-poor countries would collapse (Henningham 1992, 35). A representative assembly was formed in 1974. The Vanuatu Party won elections in 1975 and 1979, after forming and then disbanding a provisional government in 1977.

France, influenced by New Caledonian lobbyists with interests vested in trade and other links with their French New Hebrides compatriots, had been sympathetic to Stephens. French officials worked behind the scenes with parties opposing the Vanuatu Party before the 1979 elections. French Secretary of State for the Overseas, Paul Dijoud, played a role in securing a quasi-federal arrangement to allow for separate identities, and continued French influence, in Santo and
Tanna. This was probably motivated by the precedent set in the Indian Ocean territory of Mayotte in 1975, which had remained French while the Comoros in the same archipelago had become independent (described in Henningham 1992, 38–42). The victory of the Vanuatu Party was a surprise, especially in French-dominated Santo and Tanna. In response, Stephens’ movement grew into a secessionist rebellion, proclaiming a Republic of Vemarana on Santo in 1979, which the French were suspected of having supported (Dunmore 1997, 269). Only a week before independence, the French Resident told French residents on Santo that France would intervene to protect it and give it special status. Since France vetoed sending a joint Anglo–French police force to restore order in the rebellious islands, the new independent government invited Papua New Guinea to send troops to assist it in dealing with the rebels, which it did — with Australian logistical support — within days.

Stephen Henningham’s account of the 1979 elections leading to full self-government indicates that French policies may have suffered by the short-term rotation of its officials in the New Hebrides, in contrast to British officials who stayed for long periods and could develop deeper knowledge of the forces at play. In Paris, there were differences between the defence ministry and Overseas France department on the one hand, which were pro-settler, and the more pragmatic foreign affairs and political leadership. The bottom line was that the French Government had the power to control the policies of its officials but chose not to do so. A legacy of bitterness remained, despite customary ceremonies of reconciliation.

Vanuatu’s first Prime Minister, Walter Lini, unsurprisingly, pursued anti-French policies. He expelled around 700 French residents including planters, missionaries, officials and security people, most of whom went to New Caledonia where they became ardent anti-independence supporters. Vanuatu joined the British Commonwealth. It supported independence groups in New Caledonia, promoting their cause in the UN, and criticised French nuclear testing at Moruroa. It became one of the founding members of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) in the 1980s, mainly to pursue these objectives. It was only after Lini left the political scene in 1991 that relations with France improved. Although French aid continued during Lini’s tenure (about $A8 million in 1981 or one third of the budget, Henningham 1992, 44), it was controversial and heavy-handed, and centred on French cultural and education projects. France contributed financially to opposition parties on the eve of 1987 elections, resulting in the expulsion of the French ambassador (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 197). And France threatened to withdraw its aid when Vanuatu agreed to host the dissident New Caledonian Kanaky government in 1987 (Mrgudovic 2008, 222–23). By 1990 things had improved to the point where Vanuatu had introduced a virtual diplomatic détente with France. Nonetheless, unease
remains, represented, for example, in Vanuatu’s continuing participation in the MSG; and in its claim, in competition with that of France, to Matthew and Hunter Islands, two islands 300-kilometres east of New Caledonia and south of Vanuatu.

One of the legacies of Vanuatu’s colonial experience, and arguably its experience with the French, was the damaging effect on regional security, with implications for Australia and Western interests broadly. Vanuatu adopted anti-West policies, or, at the most generous interpretation, became skilled in playing off Western interests against those of external Cold War players like the Soviet Union and Libya. It entertained invitations by Libya for scholarships for its students in the 1980s, establishing diplomatic relations in 1987. It was one of only two island states (the other being Kiribati) to sign a fishing contract with the Soviet Union in 1986, and one of only a few states (New Zealand, Palau, Solomon Islands) to ban nuclear ships from visiting its ports. It was one of only two states (Tonga being the other) not to have ratified the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone in 1986–1987. It is difficult to disagree with the judgement of Papua New Guinea’s then Ambassador to the UN, Renagi Lohia, that France’s policies were ‘a direct threat to peace, security and stability in our region and they have serious implications for international peace and security’ (cited in Bates 1990, 109).

The post-colonial experience of Vanuatu illustrated what may be in store for the other French entities seeking independence. Substantially reduced French aid forced Vanuatu to look for donors in new and less desirable places, and the composition of what France did provide, was perceived as political interference and therefore destabilising. Even today, French interlocutors will point to Vanuatu as the inevitable result should France leave its other Pacific entities (Personal communications 2001–2004). Vanuatu’s leaders themselves warned New Caledonia leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou about not pressing too hard for independence, cautioning ‘le risque est l’oubli’ (lest New Caledonia be forgotten), and mirroring de Gaulle’s threats about withdrawing support from colonies voting to leave France (comments by Rollat in Regnault and Fayaud 2008, 57).

The Vanuatu experience hardened France’s attitude to independence demands in New Caledonia and French Polynesia, and its anti ‘Anglo-Saxon’ prejudices. It stiffened French resolve to continue nuclear testing, and their resistance to regional criticism.
New Caledonia: Violent road to compromise and innovation

The story of New Caledonia’s political development from World War II until the 1980s, reveals a pattern of French fitfulness and outright reneging over promised extensions of autonomy and self-government, which contributed substantially to the emotional eruption of protest in the 1980s, and which leaves continuing questions about the full implementation of agreements struck since then (more fully reviewed by Connell 1987, Dornoy-Vurobaravu1994, Henningham 1992, Faberon and Ziller 2007). There were 12 statutory changes from the 1950s to the present (summarised at Appendix 2).

As in Vanuatu, the first political groupings in New Caledonia directly reflected Catholic/Protestant demarcations. In 1946 two groupings were formed, the Catholic Union des Indigènes Calédoniens Amis de la Liberté dans l'Ordre (Union of Indigenous Caledonian Friends of Liberty in Order, UICALO) and the Protestant Association des Indigènes Calédoniens et Loyaltiens Français (Association of Indigenous Caledonians and French Loyalty Islanders, AICLF), which, when forged together by Maurice Lenormand in 1953, became the Union Calédonienne (Caledonian Union, UC), the first political party of New Caledonia, under the banner, ‘two colours, one united people’, and which persists today.

The UC was a remarkable combination of the interests of European and indigenous New Caledonians. Lenormand became the first vice-president, or head, of the small (7 member) Council of Government elected in 1957 in accordance with the Defferre laws (the 1957 Decree of 22 July 1957 implemented the 1956 Loi Defferre for New Caledonia). The 98 per cent support for staying with France in the 1959 referendum showed a certain unity of purpose of the peoples of New Caledonia, which could perhaps be explained by a feeling that their wishes for greater autonomy were in general being met by the French administration at the time. But, while at first the French State was committed to an evolving democratic system for its colonies, it was to rethink this position following local pressures for change from European settlers and residents concerned by the majority representation of the UC in the territorial assembly.

The Jacquinot Law of 21 December 1963 began a series of statutory changes to roll back the powers of the council. It relegated the council to a consultative role only, removed ministers, and increased the powers of the French State. It effectively returned to the status quo ante of 1957 (Bates 1990, 12). The 1969 Billotte Law (3 January), primarily focused on taxation exemptions for the mining industry, was designed to stop control of the mining sector being sought by the local political elite who were being lobbied by a major Canadian-based company, INCO, to allow competition against the French effective monopoly,
2. France manages independence demands and nuclear testing 1945–1990s

Société le Nickel (SLN) (Coutau-Bégarie and Seurin 1986, Chapter 2 and Maclellan 2005d). The law effectively gave the French State, already a major shareholder in SLN, power over any transaction relating to nickel, cobalt and chrome (Guillebaud 1976, 171). It also created communes under the control of the French State.

The nickel boom of 1969–1972 justified France’s desire to hold the purse strings. Production of nickel virtually tripled from 1967 to 1971 and, for a time, some of New Caledonia’s GDP indices outstripped those of metropolitan France (Waddell 2008, 74). The boom meant an influx of experts and service people related to the mining industry from metropolitan France (see Tables 4.1a and 4.2, Chapter 4). This influx of Europeans was not solely due to the nickel boom. Enunciating an overt French policy of encouraging external migration for political reasons, French Prime Minister and former DOM-TOM Minister Pierre Messmer wrote to his DOM-TOM secretary of state on 17 July 1972 that indigenous nationalist claims could only be avoided if residents coming from metropolitan France, or from elsewhere in Overseas France, became the demographic majority (‘À long terme, la revendication nationaliste autochtone ne sera évitée que si les communautés allogènes représentent une masse démographique majoritaire’ in Sanguinetti 1985, 26). From the late 1960s, the Melanesians were no longer the majority population, significantly changing the political complexion of the territory, and doubtless of the UC itself.

By 1969, Nidoish Naisseline of the Loyalty Islands, returning with many of his peers from studies in France with fresh experience of the 1968 student insurrections, formed the mainly Kanak Foulards Rouges (Red Scarves) calling for independence. In 1971, another Kanak, Elie Poigoune, formed the 1878 group, referring to the 1878 Kanak rebellion. This political activity, combined with the end of the nickel boom, meant that a number of Europeans left the territory from the mid 1970s. The UC continued to call for more autonomy, one of its Kanak leaders, Roch Pidjot, submitting proposals to France in 1971, 1975 and 1977. In 1975 Yann Céléné Urégei, having left the UC, formed the Union multiraciale (Multiracial Union) and went to Paris to seek more autonomy. His claims were rejected, and President Giscard d’Estaing declined to meet him. Stung, he transformed his objectives to independence demands, joining the Comité de coordination pour l’indépendance Kanak (Committee for the Coordination of Kanak Independence). Also in 1975, a rising political leader and former Marist priest, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, organised the Melanesia 2000 festival, an event funded by the French State and the local assembly, focused on Melanesian identity and culture which involved representatives from the wider Pacific region. Tjibaou travelled the islands of New Caledonia, consulting clans and unifying support behind the festival celebrating Kanak cultural identity.
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(see Waddell 2008). And, in 1975, the Kanak parties joined to form the Parti de Libération Kanak (Kanak Liberation Party, Palika). Urégei’s party became the Front Uni de Libération Kanak (United Kanak Liberation Front, FULK) in 1977.

While disaffected Kanaks left the UC fold, so did unhappy rightwing Europeans. When in 1977 the UC, now led by prominent Kanak leaders Tjibaou, Eloi Machoro and Yeiwene Yeiwene, began to push for independence, Jacques Lafleur formed the Rassemblement pour la Calédonie (Rally for [New] Caledonia, RPC), which became in 1978 the Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (Rally for [New] Caledonia within the Republic, RPCR). His party won the 1977 territorial elections, and he displaced Pidjot as elected Député in the French early in 1978, a position he retained until 2007. Lafleur’s party, with an anti-independence coalition called the Front National pour une Nouvelle Société Calédonienne (National Front for a New Caledonian Society, FNSC) won the 1979 elections, although the independentists received 35 per cent of the vote (Faberon and Ziller 2007, 351). The RPCR was by no means solely European in complexion. Senior Melanesian loyalists Jean-Pierre Aifa and Dick Ukeiwé respectively became the RPCR government’s president and vice-president.

French Government responses to demands for further autonomy from the moderates, and to growing support amongst Kanaks for independence and assertion of their cultural identity, were not seen as adequate. While the Stirn Statute (28 December 1976) claimed to deliver a path to autonomy, it comprised only small steps, including establishing a vice-president of the governing council and individual responsibilities for its members and withdrawing the right to vote from the French High Commissioner, who nonetheless continued to preside over the council. French actions were seen as manipulation of elections and surveillance of pro-autonomists (Guillebaud 1976, 121). The Dijoud Plan (1978) was focused on land reform, but only with the suspension of any consideration of independence for 10 years. The Loi Dijoud (Law no 79-407, 24 May 1979), which implemented an eligibility threshold of 7.5 per cent of the vote for parties to participate in the territorial assembly, to address the proliferation of small parties, was perceived as a tightening of the central government’s control. These measures were rejected outright in the territory, the multiple Kanak parties forming themselves into the Front Indépendantiste (Independence Front, FI) to evade the Dijoud Plan’s intentions. The FI included the LKS (Libération Kanak Socialiste, Socialist Kanak Liberation), FULK (Front Uni de la Libération Kanak, United Kanak Liberation Front), the UPM (Union Progressiste Mélanésienne, Popular Melanesian Union), and the PSC (Parti Socialiste Calédonie, [New] Caledonian Socialist Party). Its president was Tjibaou.
Les événements — violence erupts

Although there had been some violent incidents and tensions earlier (Naisseline and others were arrested for sedition in the 1970s, and a young Kanak was shot dead by a policeman in December 1975), it was in the early 1980s that violence and confrontation increased in what were referred to as the événements ('events' or 'disturbances').

By 1979 the polarisation of political interests had solidified into two camps, the primarily Kanak independentist group and the mainly European group loyal to France (loyalist), but with some Kanaks and Europeans in each. This has remained the basic dynamic of politics in the region. In 1981 the UC, which in August 1980 had announced it would declare independence on 24 September 1982, asked the French Government to recognise New Caledonia’s right to independence, and the SPF sent a mission to Paris to argue the same cause. Here the role of French domestic politics must once again be recognised: a new socialist government headed by François Mitterrand had boosted the confidence of the pro-independence camp. Mitterrand responded favourably to the UC’s demands, writing that ‘nous demandons que le droit des peuples à disposer d’eux-mêmes … soit effectivement reconnu au peuple Kanak’ ('we ask that the right of peoples to decide for themselves should be recognised for the Kanak people' in Angleviel 2006, 139).

But, on 19 September 1981, the UC Secretary-General Pierre Declercq was killed; it is thought by rightwing extremists, though, somewhat incredibly, the culprit was never found. By June 1982 RPCR’s former partner the FNCS, apparently with active French government backing (Henningham 1992, 72; Angleviel 2006, 140), moved over to join the FI in a new governing council headed by Tjibaou as vice-president (the president being the French High Commissioner). Rightwing demonstrators, disaffected by these arrangements (many Europeans from the FNCS shifted allegiance to the RPCR), turned out onto the streets that year, and assaulted FI and FNCS members in the assembly building. The FI mobilised its supporters and set up roadblocks. Tensions mounted. In early 1983, in separate incidents, a police station was bombarded with rocks by Melanesian youths at Touho; and, at Koindé, Melanesians protesting police action during a demonstration against sawmill pollution, shot at police, killing two gendarmes and wounding six others. In May 1983 a Kanak was killed by a settler at Koindé-Ouipoin after a quarrel, and Palika supporters destroyed a post office, houses and cars in retaliation. Numerous land occupations took place including an extensive one by Machoro in March 1984. Meanwhile the FNCS dissolved, its supporters returning to the RPCR.

In July 1983, representatives of the FI, the RPCR and others participated in a roundtable conference at Nainville-les-Roches in France chaired by DOM-
TOM Secretary of State, Georges Lemoine. This was the first meeting of all three parties (pro-France, pro-independence, and the French State) at the instigation of France and established a precedent of the French State taking at once the roles of arbiter, player, and enforcer of law and order, which persists until the present. It resulted in France’s historic recognition of the Kanaks’ ‘innate and active right to independence’ as well as Kanak agreement to the participation of the whole population of New Caledonia in determining the future — thus laying the seeds of the future Matignon and Noumea Accords. Although the RPCR refused to sign the resulting statement and the FI was obliged to denounce the outcome owing to its non-acceptance by the smaller parties, that the meeting itself took place was a watershed of sorts.

The French followed up the meeting with the Lemoine Statute (Lemoine Law, 6 September 1984) providing for elections in 1984, increased internal autonomy and a five-year transition period for a vote on independence in 1989. Despite the opposition of the territorial assembly, the statute was adopted by the French national assembly. The statute included some novel elements, such as seats for customary representatives, legislative powers and removal of the French High Commissioner from the ministerial council. But neither the pro-France nor independentists accepted it.

The essence of the differences centred on the effects of immigration, with the FI wanting a ‘restricted’ electorate confined to those with long-term connections to the territory, a concern that was to remain at the heart of future negotiations. They calculated that Kanaks formed close to 40 per cent of a general electorate, but outnumbered Europeans in a ‘restricted’ electorate defined by Kanaks and second-generation settlers.

In keeping up the pressure, the FI were also conscious that the election of a conservative French government in 1986 legislative elections would further set back their cause. On 24 September 1984, the anniversary of the 1853 annexation of New Caledonia by France, they transformed themselves into a more militant liberation front, the FLNKS (Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste or Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front), which also included the UC, FULK, and UPM. Until 1986 it included the GFKE or Groupe des Femmes Kanak et Exploitées, Group of Kanak and Exploited Women and, until 1989, the USTKE or Union Syndicale des Travailleurs Kanaks et des Exploités, the Federation of Unions of Kanak and Exploited Workers, a labour union federation. They declared the name of the future independent country would be Kanaky, with a green, red and blue flag overlaid with a flèche faîtière, or traditional hut-top totem finial. Two other, less hardline, pro-independence parties, also offshoots of the UC, remained outside FLNKS, Naisseline’s LKS, and the PFK (Parti Fédéral Kanak, Kanak Federal Party). On the other side, an extremist rightwing party, the Front National (NF, National Front), emerged.
The FLNKS called for a boycott of the 18 November 1984 elections. On that day, Machoro wielded an axe against the ballot box at Canala, and burned the ballot papers, while others burnt town halls and disrupted polling, often violently. This act is commonly viewed as the beginning of the événements. The participation rate in the election was approximately 50 per cent, against the more usual 70 to 80 per cent. For weeks afterwards, militant Melanesians maintained roadblocks, sparking serious clashes, including killings. On 1 December 1984, the FLNKS formed a provisional government with Tjibaou at its head. The French State sent a new High Commissioner, Edgard Pisani, who secured agreement with Tjibaou, on 5 December, to lift the barricades. Later that day, however, at Hienghène in the north, 10 Kanaks were killed in an ambush, including two of Tjibaou’s brothers. Tjibaou, who was expected to have been with the group, had unexpectedly stayed in Noumea. In a measure of his stature and leadership, Tjibaou overcame his personal loss and stuck to the dialogue process, and his agreement to lift the barricades. The assassins, local mixed-race farmers, were later acquitted.

The hastily concocted Pisani Plan (proposed only three days after Pisani’s arrival in the territory on 4 January, elements of the plan were incorporated in the Fabius Pisani Law of 23 August 1985) essentially posited independence in association with France, consistent with Article 88 of the French constitution, an article which had never before been applied, providing for the Republic to conclude agreements with states ‘which desire to associate themselves with it to develop their civilisations’ (Christnacht 2004, 43). The plan provided for a vote within months, by July 1985, by those who were residents of three-years standing, with France retaining ‘regalian’, or core, sovereign responsibilities such as internal and external security in the event of independence. The plan appeared to have drawn on the US compacts-in-association with its Pacific possessions (Armand Hage in de Deckker 2006, 285). Pisani himself admitted that he saw the proposals as a shock tactic to oblige Europeans to understand the need for change (Henningham 1992, 86). The RPCR, while denouncing the plan, agreed to participate in the referendum if there were no change to the franchise, to demonstrate majority opinion against independence. Once again, the effects of immigration were at issue.

The Pisani Plan was the nearest that New Caledonia had come to a vote for independence since 1958. Paradoxically it was offered in the wake of almost intolerable tension and violence, and yet it was precisely these tensions that aborted it. In November, Eloi Machoro’s supporters had attacked some hardline rightwing settlers and killed one of them, Yves Tual. Rightwing demonstrations and riots ensued, only ending on 12 January, when a military police sniper shot dead Machoro and an aide at a farm Machoro had been occupying near La Foa on the west coast. In a fleeting visit in January 1985, Mitterrand declared that
France would maintain its role and strategic presence and would reinforce the military base at Noumea (Leymarie 1985, 1). Sporadic incidents continued in 1985. Pisani left in May 1985, to be succeeded, perhaps aptly in view of the state of the territory, by the former ambassador in Beirut (Faberon and Ziller 2007, 354).

The next proposal, the Fabius Plan (Law of 23 August 1985), was a patch-up, window-dressing effort — against the background of the imminent and expected legislative victory of the conservatives in France in 1986, who would not be expected to implement it — to address the need for the Kanaks to have a measure of democratic control. The Fabius Statute provided for the break-up of New Caledonia into regions, in some of which, notably the north and the Loyalty Islands, the Kanaks would be in the majority and at least could exercise power there. The majority of the pro-France group in Noumea and overall would ensure a continuation of the status quo. This ‘regionalisation’ was a critical principle, which was retained in subsequent negotiations. But the Fabius Law returned executive power to the High Commissioner, tightening the power of the French State. The subsequent regional elections, in September 1985, saw strong participation and the return of Tjibaou in the north, and Lafleur in the south.

**International and regional developments: UN reinscription of New Caledonia as a non-self-governing territory**

The French disposition to broker some kind of compromise at this time was influenced by other developments in the surrounding region and in the UN. France had now become the focus of international attention and regional opprobrium, not only for its policies in New Caledonia but also for its nuclear testing in French Polynesia (see below). Its policies were contrary to the sense of political evolution in the surrounding region at the time, where decolonisation was under way (Western Samoa achieved independence in 1962, Nauru in 1968, Tonga and Fiji in 1970, Papua New Guinea in 1975, and Vanuatu in 1980).

France had persisted in its non-compliance with UN decolonisation principles, ignoring the 1960 UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and its associated Decolonisation Committee (also known as the Committee of 24) (UNGA Resolution 1514 (XV) and Resolution 1541 of 14 December 1960). FLNKS leaders had urged the SPF to support ‘reinscription’ of New Caledonia as a non-self-governing territory with the UN Decolonisation Committee from the late 1970s and early 1980s. New Caledonia was the subject of close SPF attention. As the island states successively gained their own independence, they began to call on the UN for self-determination in
the non-independent states. The FI presented a petition to the Forum in 1979. Although the SPF recorded its regret and concern at France’s nuclear testing in its first communiqué (Forum Communiqué 1971), its first formal reference to decolonisation occurred in 1981, and in 1982 the SPF expressly referred to the need for New Caledonia’s decolonisation (Communiqué 1982).

Melanesian countries neighbouring New Caledonia (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) united to form the MSG expressly to support Kanak independence in New Caledonia in the mid 1980s (including Fiji from 1988). The MSG acted as a ginger group within the SPF. It was Australia who had urged the Forum to exercise restraint on the New Caledonia, in order to give new French proposals a chance to work. Only in 1986, after France hardened its position with Chirac’s reversal of reforms in his Pons I proposals, did Canberra’s stance in the SPF change.

The Kanak independence issue had been gathering external momentum at the time. FLNKS sent 17 Kanaks to Libya, an international terrorist pariah, for training in 1985, sparking concern in Australia and amongst western allies. The Nonaligned Movement admitted the FLNKS as an official observer in 1986. Mounting international opprobrium against France over nuclear testing, particularly the bombing of Greenpeace’s *Rainbow Warrior* (see below) added to the mix.

With Australia’s change of position, in 1986, the SPF unanimously supported reinscription. Tjibaou went to New York to work with South Pacific delegations, culminating in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) affirming the inalienable right of the people of New Caledonia to self-determination in December 1986, and the reinscription of New Caledonia as a non-self-governing territory with the UN Decolonisation Committee (UNGA Resolution 40/41, 2 December 1986). Despite extensive French diplomatic lobbying and expenditure to reduce support, the UNGA reaffirmed this position in 1987 and to this day passes an annual resolution on New Caledonia, without a vote (see UNGA Resolutions Question of New Caledonia, 1987 to present). New Caledonia remains under consideration by the Decolonisation Committee, whose secretariat prepares annual working papers on New Caledonia (see for example A/AC.109/2012/15 Committee for Decolonisation Working Paper on New Caledonia). France declined to fulfill UN obligations to submit an annual report, as the administering authority, until well after the Noumea Accord was signed, from 2004 (see Chapter 4). The committee received submissions regularly from others, mainly various Kanak groups including, most often, FLNKS figure Roch Wamytan.

Despite the Australian government’s restraining role within the SPF, civil society played a major role in mounting international pressure on France, fuelled by antipathy to French nuclear testing in the region. Non-governmental groups
created direct links in New Caledonia and French Polynesia. Throughout the événements, Kanak students trained in Australia and had close contacts with Aboriginal, Church, student and union groups. Powerful unions, including of teachers and dockworkers, supported their case, with the New South Wales Teachers Federation contributing funds to a Kanak radio station in Noumea, Radio Djiido, which had been created by the Matignon Accords. These groups were key constituencies of the then Labor government led by Bob Hawke. Relations with France deteriorated as Hawke introduced a ban on uranium exports in 1985, and then on French ministerial and official visits in 1986 (although he reinstated uranium exports).

In 1987, France expelled John Dauth, Australia’s Consul-General in Noumea. While the French did not give any public\(^2\) or private background reason for the expulsion, they clearly were not happy with Australia’s policies and, in particular, France’s very public defeat on the floor of the UN General Assembly in New York at the hands of the SPF (Personal communication from former senior Australian official, 2009).

### Institutional factors: Cohabitation

Unfolding events were to demonstrate once more the dominating influence of French national domestic politics on its Pacific entities. French national legislative elections took place in March 1986 and, as expected, returned a rightist government under Chirac as prime minister. This was the first period of cohabitation, when the president (then socialist Mitterrand) was of one political complexion, while the government, headed by Chirac, was of the other. This dynamic was to colour the handling of the New Caledonian situation at a critical time (see, especially, Cordonnier 1995b), the more so since it is the president who is responsible for defence and foreign affairs, and the prime minister who oversees the handling of internal policies. During a period when French policy in the South Pacific was constantly under international scrutiny, the effects of cohabitation were not constructive overall and arguably delayed resolution of New Caledonian internal tensions. The nature of the policy-making process, which engaged a broad range of agency interests only inadequately coordinated on a daily basis by the relatively junior Overseas France ministry, complicated these negative effects and led to policy mistakes. Moreover, there was a close relationship between Chirac and Lafleur, leader of the RPCR in New Caledonia, the latter supplying donations to Chirac’s campaign funds and fuelling Chirac’s criticism of Mitterrand’s handling of New Caledonia.

\(^2\) It was put about as an ostensible reason that Dauth had given Australian Government aid to the Kanak Cultural Centre at Hienghiène, which the French construed as interference (Personal comments, O’Leary 2009), an idea which still had currency when the author served as Australian Consul-General as late as 2001–2004.
And so, the new French government once again set about rolling back the provisions of the previous statutes. It created a unified land agency, the ADRAF (Agence de développement rural et d’aménagement foncier — Rural Development and Land Management Agency) which effectively suspended the purchase of settler properties for redistribution and introduced redistribution to all communities, not just Melanesians (Henningham 1992, 100). Similarly, the Kanak Cultural Office was replaced by an organisation that represented all cultures, and Tjibaou was removed as director.

As early as July 1986 the Chirac government introduced the Pons I statute (Law of 17 July 1986) providing for a self-determination vote in 1987 on the basis of only three-years residence in New Caledonia, the latter which was patently unacceptable to the independentists. With a low 59 per cent turnout (compared to historically more normal turnouts of 70–80 per cent) following an FLNKS boycott, the July 1987 referendum unsurprisingly voted 98.3 per cent in favour of staying with France. France pulled out all the stops to secure support, setting up roadblocks to prevent agitators entering Noumea and pro-France rural supporters were bussed in (Personal communication, O’Leary 2009). Chirac flew by Concorde jet to New Caledonia to be there for the electoral victory, staying just three hours before heading back to Paris.

Meanwhile, violence continued, heightened by the acquittal, in October, of those who had killed Tjibaou’s brothers and others at Hienghène. By now, over 6000 French military personnel were in New Caledonia, stationed under a policy of ‘nomadisation’ near tribal villages, ostensibly to aid in rural development (a policy continued to the present), but also enabling close monitoring of Melanesian activists. In early January 1988, a further statute was enacted, Pons II (Law of 22 January 1988). It provided for implied abolition of Melanesians’ special legal status, and a revised regional demarcation more sympathetic to pro-France views. But, although the pro-France group duly won in the newly created western region, and made gains in the other Kanak dominated regions owing to boycotts, this statute was never implemented, as dramatic events at the Gossanah cave intervened.

### Gossanah cave crisis

The first Pons territorial elections were to be held 24 April 1988, the same day as the first round of the French presidential elections, in which conservative Chirac was competing with, and trailing far behind, the incumbent, socialist Mitterrand. On 22 April, the FLNKS attacked a police station at Fayaoué on the island of Ouvéa in the Loyalties group, killing four policemen and taking 27 others hostage at a cave at Gossanah (see Waddell 2008, Chapter 1, also Mathieu Kassovitz’ 2011 movie, L’ordre et la morale, or Rebellion, reviewed by Fisher
On 5 May, just after the first round of the presidential national election and three days before the second round, the French military were ordered to attack the cave and free the hostages. This was done at the price of 21 dead, 19 Kanaks and two French soldiers. Both Chirac and Mitterrand had signed off on the order to attack so as not to be seen as weak on the eve of the second round of the presidential elections (see Legorjus 1990, cited in Angleviel 2006). The predominance of the defence ministry over the Overseas France ministry played a role, as did the apparent absence of consideration for issues of foreign affairs over domestic imperatives.

But the handling of the crisis backfired. Once again, domestic and international opinion focused on New Caledonia. Metropolitan human rights groups SOS-Racisme and the Ligue des droits de l’Homme (Human Rights League) sought an independent enquiry into the way in which the events had been handled.

**Matignon/Oudinot Accords**

In the event, Mitterrand was returned to the presidency (although in New Caledonia, with a very reduced voter turnout of 58.3 per cent, 92.3 per cent voted for Chirac) and appointed socialist Michel Rocard as prime minister. As Rocard himself described it (Colloque 2008 recorded in Regnault and Fayaud 2008, 13), one of his first jobs was to address the New Caledonian problem. This he did by sending a dialogue mission to New Caledonia, headed by DOM-TOM Prefect Christian Blanc, who had been Secretary-General for New Caledonia in 1984–1985; and including not only senior officials but, somewhat creatively, senior representatives of key religious affiliations (Catholic Monsignor Paul Gilberteau; the head of the Protestant Federation of France, pastor Jacques Stewart; and prominent Freemason Roger Leray). Once again, Tjibaou agreed to lead a process of dialogue rather than witness further violence. It is important to recognise here the role in the Kanak cultural context of the *parole*, or word. As elsewhere in Melanesia, the idea of extended discussion and consensus is important in the Kanak culture. And, as in Western culture, the idea of keeping one’s word is of great importance. On the basis of the mission’s consultations, negotiations were initiated at the prime minister’s Matignon office in Paris. They were difficult negotiations with concessions extracted from both sides only at the eleventh hour, late on 25 June, with follow-up over the following three weeks at the Overseas France ministry in the rue Oudinot.

The resultant Matignon/Oudinot Accords, marked by the symbolic handshake between Tjibaou and Lafleur on 25 June 1988, set aside the thorny independence issue for another 10 years, when a vote would be planned for a restricted electorate.

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3 The Accords included the Matignon Accords (a declaration and two texts) agreed on 25–26 June 1988, and the Oudinot Accord addressing legal provisions to be subject to a referendum in November 1988 (Christnacht 2004, 57–58 and *Textes fondamentaux*, New Caledonian Government and congress websites).
confined to those resident in New Caledonia in 1988 and their descendants. Only this restricted electorate would vote in provincial and congressional elections. The parties agreed in the meantime to work for the economic, social and cultural development of the territory, with a buffer one-year rule by Paris through the High Commissioner. Three provinces were created, with particular powers, and from their representatives, a congress was formed for the entire territory. A key underlying principle was to be ‘ré-équilibrage’ or rebalancing of economic benefits — which were hitherto confined mainly to the Europe-dominated and wealthy Noumea — throughout the territory. With nickel as the key economic resource, part of the deal was that Lafleur would sell his shares in the South Pacific Mining Company (Société Minière du Sud Pacifique SMSP) to the Northern Province, with the necessary CFP1.8 billion ($A29.8 million, converted March 2009) financed by the French State. A formula of application of state financial credits to all provinces was devised, and a Kanak training program of 400 cadres, or 400 managers, was initiated.

The State, perceived as having been too allied with the independentists at one stage (Pisani) and the pro-France group at another (Pons), was to take the role of impartial arbiter, a virtually impossible undertaking, especially since executive power was returned to the French High Commissioner. Tjibaou, for his part, saw the inconsistencies in the role of the State, and warned, in a letter to the French Prime Minister at the time that, in the context of restoring sovereignty to the Kanak people, ‘… the State cannot hide behind the role of arbiter. It is not judge but actor’ (cited in Waddell 2008, 176). Issues related to this dual role were to persist.

These undertakings were subject to a national referendum, both for political reasons, to reassure the Kanaks that the French people supported the agreement, but also for technical reasons, since such a referendum was not subject to constitutional council scrutiny, and it was not at all certain that the measures for a restricted electorate were consistent with the French constitution and its notions of indivisibility (see Christnacht 2004, 59). In the event, the national referendum endorsed it by 80 per cent, albeit with a low 37 per cent turnout (Waddell 2008, 181, noted that this was the lowest turnout in any French national referendum since World War II). In New Caledonia, with a 63 per cent turnout, only 57 per cent voted yes, with mainly pro-France Noumea voting 63 per cent against (and 54 per cent choosing not to vote in Ouvea, where the Gossanah events had occurred). Once again domestic French politics came into play, with the RPCR in New Caledonia campaigning for the yes vote, but its national ally, Chirac’s RPR, campaigning for abstention to weaken Mitterand. The pro-France RPCR’s taking of this stance foreshadowed further situations
where local imperatives surmounted metropolitan-based positions, ultimately leading to divisions within the pro-France coalition of interests in the early 2000s.

Ominously for the future, and for France’s credibility with the pro-independence group, the only element not covered by the subsequent ‘referendum law’ was the application of the restricted electorate to the congressional and provincial elections, owing to the apparent constitutional obstacle. Touching as it did on the most sensitive issue for the independentists, the effect of immigration on the electorate, this issue was to resurface, unsurprisingly, 10 years later.

The difficulty in securing the Matignon Accords, and the continued volatility in the territory, were poignantly underlined a year later. In May 1989, attending a traditional ceremony to mark the lifting of the mourning period for those assassinated at Gossanah, Tjibaou and his deputy, Yéwéiné Yéwéiné, were assassinated by extremist militant, Djubély Wéa, who felt Tjibaou had sold out their cause. Wéa was subsequently shot dead and the person charged was subsequently released (uncertainties surrounding the assassination are set out in Wall 2009). The assassinations marked a turning point in New Caledonia’s political development. They represented a stark reminder to the French of the intensity of continued hostility to their policies within the ranks of the Melanesians, many of whom felt that Tjibaou had sold out to pro-France forces. Together with the memory of the violence of the preceding years, the assassinations were a sobering reminder of what was at stake and arguably fortified all sides to implement the Matignon/Oudinot arrangements.

The next 10 years saw concerted growth and development. As envisaged by the French State, the Kanaks became more engaged in government, with their parties dominant in the Northern Province and Loyalty Islands Province following elections in 1989 and 1995; and the pro-France group becoming accustomed to engaging Kanaks politically, nominating senior Kanak pro-France supporters to prominent positions, such as Dick Ukeiwé to the European Député position in June 1988 (French overseas territories could vote for an overseas territory member of the European parliament); and Simon Loueckhote as president of the congress and then, in 1992, as the youngest senator for France. Roads, schools, clinics and hospitals and electricity lines were all established in the interior of Grande Terre and the islands. Land reform was accelerated. The ADRAF distributed 82,000 ha of land between 1989 and 1995, increasing by 36 per cent the land controlled by Melanesians (Angleviel 2006, 222). The 400 cadres program had a more mixed success, training numerous lawyers, some engineers and one pilot, but, as Christnacht admitted, resulting in inadequate numbers of mid-ranking Kanak managers (2004, 61 and see Chapter 4). The French State
provided the bulk of the New Caledonia budget, spending $A470 million in New Caledonia in 1986. There were some limited cultural and economic contacts with Pacific island countries (Christnacht 2004, 61).

But the fragility of the arrangements, in the wake of such tension and bloodshed, was apparent to leaders. Both FLNKS and RPCR leaders were managing the dissatisfaction of extremists who were unhappy with the compromises they had made. On 27 April 1991, in the knowledge that any referendum was likely to result in a no-vote to independence given the demographics (an estimated 65 per cent of voters would have voted against, Angleviel 2006, 226), and that such a result risked re-opening old wounds and a return to violence, RPCR president Lafleur proposed a ‘consensual solution’ in order to head off a 1998 référendum couperet (literally ‘cut-off’ or ‘guillotine-style’ referendum). The UC took up this idea at its congress in 1993, designating such a solution as ‘negotiated independence’. From 1995 onwards, negotiations began with both the RPCR and the UC preparing papers and ideas.

Meanwhile, there were changes at the edges of the two main political groupings. Pro-France supporters grouped in Lafleur’s RPCR, were bookended by the rightwing National Front and a more leftwing party Une Nouvelle-Calédonie pour Tous (A New Caledonia for All, UNCT) formed in 1995 by Didier Leroux. The independentist FLNKS, now headed by Paul Néaoutyine of Palika (not headed by the UC, as when Tjibaou was leader) was riven by internal conflict. The LKS and the USTKE had left, leading to the creation in 1998 of the Fédération des Comités de Coordination des Indépendantistes (Federation of the Independentist Coordination Committees, FCCI), led by longstanding UC or Palika figures Léopold Jorédié, Cono Hamu, Raphaël Mapou, François Bureck and Aymard Bouanaoué. Another party joined FLNKS in 1998, the Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien (Democratic Oceanic Party, RDO), formed in 1994 from the leftwing of the Oceanic Union, mainly representing Wallisians and Futunans, under Aloisio Sako.

**The Noumea Accord**

After a seven-year gestation, and drawing from the blueprint of the Matignon/Oudinot Accords, on 5 May 1998 the Noumea Accord (L’Accord de Nouméa 1998) was signed by representatives of the French State, the RPCR, and the FLNKS. The Accord had been hard-won. Lafleur (Colloque 2008) recalled that on the final day, as deadlines approached, the parties spent 10 hours at a stretch in discussion. It was endorsed by a vote by the people of New Caledonia, on 8 November 1998; 74 per cent of the people voted and, of these, 72 per cent supported the Accord: 87 per cent of voters in the north, 95 per cent in the islands, and 63 per cent in the south (Ziller and Faberon 2008, 369). While
the support in the (pro-France dominated) south was in marked contrast to its rejection of the Matignon Accords, still over a third voted no, and 42 per cent of central Noumea also voted no.

In the background to the exchanges of ideas by the two principal parties over seven years, negotiations had been taking place on the distribution of the benefits of the nickel resource, which the independentists claimed as the préalable minier, or mining ‘prerequisite’. As had been agreed at Matignon, Lafleur had duly sold his SMSP in 1990 to Sofinor (Société d’Économie Mixte de Développement Contrôlée par la Province Nord — Mixed Economy and Development Company of the Northern Province), thus facilitating Kanak access to the mining sector, with SMSP becoming the largest exporter of (raw) nickel in New Caledonia (see Christnacht 2004, 63).

But now the Northern Province wanted to move beyond extraction and export of the raw nickel product, to establish a processing plant with the Canadian company, Falconbridge. To do this, it proposed exchanging one of SMSP’s mining sites with SLN-Eramet, to gain reserves for the Falconbridge project. The French State, itself a major shareholder in Eramet, negotiated the February 1998 Bercy Accord only over strong resistance by Eramet. The Accord allowed for the exchange of the rich Koniambo range to SMSP in return for mining titles formerly purchased from SLN by the Northern Province at Poum, provided that Falconbridge reached certain stages in the establishment of a nickel-processing plant by 2007 (the tortuous negotiations with SLN, amidst strikes and coercion by FLNKS-backed unions and the French State respectively, are set out in Chappell 1999, 383 and 384). The French State compensated SLN for the difference in value between the Koniambo and the Poum massifs (reserves). The Bercy Accord proved an indispensable element of the political negotiation process. While it signalled that greater control of, and return from, resources were an important part of pro-independence Kanak aspirations, it did not, however, mean that the resource issue would replace the continuing objective, that of independence.

The Noumea Accord is an innovative and groundbreaking agreement by all three partners, the French State, the mainly Kanak independentists, and the mainly European pro-France group. At its centre is a further deferral of any vote on independence, this time by 20 years, to a series of three votes between 2014 and 2018, to give more time for economic development and to postpone a potentially painful divisive vote. Its key features include an acknowledgement of the ‘shock’ of colonisation both to the identity of the Kanak people and those who had come either for religious reasons or against their will; a future for all groups within a common destiny; and a continued commitment to economic rebalancing. In a new concept of ‘shared sovereignty’, the French State would transfer all but the central, or régalien, sovereign competencies (defence, foreign affairs, justice,
law and order, and the currency), progressively to local institutions in a defined schedule. New Caledonia is given a special status of ‘pays’ or ‘country’. Again, in an entirely new arrangement to the French republic, the congress is endowed with legislative powers to make ‘lois du pays’ (laws of the country), subject only to French constitutional council review, and managed by a collegial executive elected by the congress on a basis of proportional representation. New Caledonia is empowered to conduct certain relations with regional countries.

Remarkably within the French unitary republic, the Accord recognises a New Caledonian citizenship, built on special definitions of those eligible to vote in the planned 2014–2018 referendum(s) and in territorial (as distinct from French national legislative and presidential) elections, and linked to special employment rights (Article 2). This step addresses Kanak concerns about the effects of immigration, and their core demand for a restricted electorate, which, it will be recalled, had met a constitutional stumbling block in 1988, thereby raising Kanak suspicions about the intent and word of the French State. Then, the ambiguity related to those who could vote in the planned final self-determination referendum. Under the Noumea Accord, whereas all French citizens are eligible to vote in French national legislative and presidential elections, the electorates for local elections and for the ultimate referendum are again especially defined. Those who could vote in local (provincial) elections are essentially those who had been resident for 10 years in 1998 (to reflect those who could have voted in 1988 as provided in the Matignon Accords). But, for the final referendum(s) of 2014–2018, it includes also newcomers, specifically those with 20 years residence by 2014 (i.e. continued residence from 1994, as opposed to residence from 1988 as for the local elections).

While the Accord is a considerable achievement, it is, nonetheless, ultimately an exercise by two parties to secure the acquiescence of the third in postponing the final resolution of fundamental differences. As further analysis will show, its subsequent implementation has revealed ambiguities in its drafting, precisely in those areas of difference, such as provisions restricting the electorate for the local elections.

On 21 March 1999, the Organic Law was gazetted, implementing the provisions of the Noumea Accord, marking a new stage in the statutory evolution of New Caledonia.

**French Polynesia: Strategic pawn**

French Polynesia has differed from New Caledonia in that its population has been more homogeneous, with far fewer long-term European, mainly metropolitan French, nationals, and more intermarriage between Europeans and locals.
Metropolitan French nationals numbered about nine per cent of the population in 1988 (Baudchon and Rallu in Cadéot 2003, 248) and they were relatively new arrivals, numbering around 30,000 in the 1980s as opposed to barely 1000 in the early 1960s, before nuclear testing began in the territory (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 126). The majority of the people were of Polynesian descent (82.7 per cent in 1983 census), including large proportions of mixed race or demis peoples (14.2 per cent), reflecting a far greater degree of marriage between the Europeans and the indigenous peoples than in New Caledonia. Although there was a longstanding Chinese community, many of whom came in the mid nineteenth century as agricultural workers and then became urban business people (4.5 per cent of the population in the 1983 census), there was little immigration from outside France, unlike in New Caledonia.

This homogeneity of Polynesian ancestry underlay more broadly based support for greater autonomy and even independence. It has been the reason why there has been markedly less intercommunal conflict in French Polynesia than in New Caledonia. As Henningham has observed, without the ‘ballast’ of a large European/metropolitan French majority settler population as in New Caledonia, pro-independence pressures could grow rapidly (1992, 160). Therefore the hand of France has been all the firmer.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the main political divisions were between pro-France groups, autonomists, and independentists, with the latter two groups in the ascendant. But, from 1980, all of the principal local parties have sought greater autonomy, the clearest division amongst them being between the pro-independence versus the autonomy-within-France groupings, the latter loosely described as autonomist. Because of the broad base of the shared autonomy goal, even more than in New Caledonia, politics in French Polynesia have consistently been characterised by changes of loyalty, divisions and bench-crossing.

As in New Caledonia, the French State has been a behind-the-scenes player supporting the pro-France groups. But, in French Polynesia, it has acted more overtly with the pro-France autonomist parties, owing to the central place of French Polynesia, until 1996, in maintaining France’s position as a puissance mondiale moyenne (middle-sized world power) by providing the site for France’s testing of nuclear bombs. Since then other motivations have come into play, which will be explored in later chapters. French Polynesian politics, like New Caledonia’s, have also been marked by a succession of statutory change (summarised at Appendix 2).

Unsurprisingly, given the violent resistance to France in the nineteenth century in the EFO, local demands for autonomy and independence increased after World War II. Over 300 French Polynesians served with the Free French forces, 76 of whom died. The old warhorse Pouvanaa (see Chapter 1) wasted no time
after the war, in 1947, in forming the Comité Pouvanaa (Pouvanaa Committee) to assert local Maohi (indigenous Polynesian) economic and cultural claims. Despite his arrest, and acquittal, that year for plotting against the French State, he was enormously popular. He founded the Rassemblement démocratique des populations tahitiennes (Democratic Assembly of the Tahitian Peoples, RDPT), and was elected Député or member of the French parliament in 1949 with 62 per cent of the vote, retaining the seat until 1957.

The 1957 decree (Decree of 22 July 1957) implementing the 1956 Defferre Law (Law of 23 June 1956) introduced new autonomy, but, at the same time, the EFO became more closely associated with France by becoming Polynésie française (French Polynesia). Pouvanaa was elected to the most senior local position, vice-president of the new governing council. His urging of autonomy increasingly became demands for independence, exploiting the dual meaning of the Tahitian word, ti'amara’a, (which means both autonomy and independence), a device to be used by later leaders. With his vocal demands, which included pushes for a tax on business to fund independence, he had alienated many powerful families and businesses, and the French. And his influence led to the relatively reduced support for staying with France in the 1958 September constitutional referendum (as indicated, only 64 per cent agreeing, as opposed to well over 90 per cent in the other Pacific entities), even though French officials were energetically promoting a yes vote, in the knowledge of the planned shift of the nuclear testing program from Algeria to French Polynesia (see Henningham 1992, 125).

On the heels of this vote, in December 1958 France issued new ordinances (Ordonnance No 58-1337 of 23 December 1958), winding back autonomy and reducing local freedoms. Immediately after the referendum, in October 1958, Pouvanaa was arrested, after arson incidents in Papeete were linked with him and his supporters, and weapons were found at his home. This time the French were thorough and he was exiled from Polynesia until 1968, and his party banned in 1963. But he remained popular despite his exile, and was elected as French Sénateur (senator, member of France’s upper house) from 1971 until his death in 1977.

**Nuclear testing begins**

In 1962, the nuclear testing program was transferred from the Western Sahara to the French Polynesian islands of Moruroa and Fangataufa, with a support base on Hao in the Gambier archipelago, and headquarters in Papeete. To safeguard French interests, possession of the testing sites was ceded to the French State in 1964 by the Permanent Commission of the Territorial Government (see Henningham 1992, 164) and, in 1980, these areas were decreed national security zones. Atmospheric tests began in 1966, but were replaced by underground
testing from 1975, after regional and international outcries, and only after a successful case was brought against France by Australia, New Zealand and Fiji in the International Court of Justice. But underground testing continued to 1992, and resumed from 1995 to 1996, despite mounting international opposition.

During the nuclear testing period, there was a massive inflow of funds, technology, jobs and infrastructure, including construction of the international airport at Faaa on Tahiti and airstrips and the Centre d’Expérimentation du Pacifique, (Pacific Experimentation Centre, CEP) on the island of Hao. This rapid social and economic change was as disruptive as it was artificial. Until 1960, the only airstrip was that constructed on Bora Bora during World War II. Papeete did not have an airport before then, although flying boats landed there. As the traditional copra and vanilla markets slumped, and phosphate reserves on the island of Makatea dried up in 1966, the islands became ever more dependent on French inflows. During the 1960s the budget of the army and the CEP increased 50 times (from 1961 to 1966) and the numbers of civil and military functionaries from 400 to 15,000 (1961 to 1968). GNP increased 75 times from 1962 to 1982, and the minimum wage 15 times. Consumption increased but much of what was consumed was imported holus bolus from metropolitan France including energy (99 per cent) and food (85 per cent) (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 124–25).

Dependence on France increased dramatically. Before nuclear testing, French Polynesia did not rely heavily on metropolitan funding, with returns on exports averaging around 90 per cent of the cost of imports in the 1950s. By the early 1960s metropolitan transfers as a percentage of GDP averaged 16.1 per cent, and reached 39 per cent in the 1970s (Henningham 1992, 128). The public sector became the biggest employer with salaries artificially inflated and attracting no income tax. Metropolitan-based officials were posted with very large supplements to their salaries. Taxation was indirect and included import tax. All of this unnaturally elevated the cost of living. The windfalls were fitful, with the CEP employing 10,000 in the 1960s but only 3000 in the 1980s, and CEP contributing 37 per cent to GNP in 1970, but only 19 per cent in 1980.

Migration to Papeete increased substantially and rapidly. In 1951, 48.6 per cent of the population lived on Tahiti, reaching 70 per cent by the 1980s (Henningham 1992, 129–30). By 1995, the population of Tahiti and Moorea had tripled (49,800 in 1952 to 161,000 in 1995, Dunmore 1997, 265). From being mainly a subsistence economy up until 1960, French Polynesia rapidly increased its food imports to the point where 80 per cent of its food needs were imported by the 1980s. The self-employed peasant class rapidly became a worker class.
Pro-France versus pro-autonomy

With Pouvanaa out of the way, political divisions tended to coalesce between those wanting continued dependence on France, and those seeking increased autonomy. Overall, politics continued to be personal. Pouvanaa’s supporters created political parties around their personal support bases. Francis Sanford and Daniel Millaud and their mainly mixed-descent Demis supporters created the Te E’a Api (New Way), and John Teariki and Jean Juventin and their more traditional Protestant Polynesian Maohis, the Te Here Ai’a (Love of Fatherland). The two parties became allies. Later, Émile Vernaudon split from Te E’a Api to form his Te Aia Api (New Fatherland). These autonomist parties joined to form the majority in the territorial assembly in the 1970s. Sanford was elected Député in the French national assembly from 1968 and 1973. Jean Chesneaux and Nic Maclellan note succinctly that, despite their generally autonomist disposition, these political groupings, sometimes allies, sometimes rivals, represented personal interests without a coherent political plan; and splits, defections, unexpected unions and changes of position were their political currency (1992, 131). France played a role in this, mainly by ignoring their political demands, as many French officials believed that autonomist demands were simply a means of squeezing more funding from France (see Aldrich 1993; Regnault 2005a; Henningham 1992, 135). The traditions of rapidly changing alliances and of playing the independence card to extract economic gain, persist until today.

For these local pro-autonomy political groups, the French nuclear testing issue became largely a pawn in the game of political power. Generally, the autonomist parties were critical of French nuclear testing. In 1974 Sanford and Teariki supported anti-test Mitterrand in the presidential campaign, but, in 1981, thought nothing of switching support to Giscard d’Estaing who supported nuclear testing, in return for various development promises (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 131).

In the 1960s the territory became increasingly dependent on France, handing over to the French State responsibilities for posts and telegraphs, secondary and technical education, some public health programs, and aid and development of the outer islands. By the 1980s, France was spending over $A1 billion annually in the territory, twice as much as it was spending in New Caledonia.

Re-emergence of independence demands

Their demands ignored, the autonomist groups occupied the assembly building in June 1976 for almost a year, with no French reaction. Inevitably, pro-independence sentiment re-emerged. Jacqui Drollet formed the Ia Mana Te Nunaa (Power to the People) party in 1975, actively propounding independence.
from 1978, while acknowledging it would take a 10–15 year planning period. Also in 1975, Oscar Temaru formed a more militant pro-independence party, the Front de Libération de la Polynésie (Polynesian Liberation Front, FLP), which became the Tavini Huira’atira no Te Ao Maohi (Serviteur du Peuple or Polynesian People’s Servant) in 1982. It argued for immediate transition to independence, and immediate cessation of the nuclear tests. A range of smaller independentist groupings were formed in the 1970s and 1980s.

It was not until the late 1970s that France responded to the sharper calls for autonomy. A 1977 statute (Law No 77-772 of 12 July 1977), described as an autonomy management statute, was passed recognizing financial and administrative autonomy in the territory, restoring the governing council presided over by the High Commissioner, and reinstating a vice-president elected by the territorial assembly. The vice-president and the governing council had collegial control over specified portfolios and, while the High Commissioner had executive power, in practice he refrained from attending every council meeting. Sanford was elected vice-president and served from 1977 to 1982. But the changes were slight and fell short of the 1957 Loi Defferre provisions. In time Sanford began to demand further transfers of executive power from the French High Commissioner. At this point Gaston Flosse, who had led conservative, pro-France opinion, decided to change his position to favour autonomy.

**Autonomy within France v. independence**

From 1958 Flosse had been active in the Gaullist Union Tahitienne-Union pour la Nouvelle République (Tahitian Union — Union for the New Republic, UT–UNR), leading its 1971 iteration the Union Tahitienne — Union pour la Défense de la République (Tahitian Union — Union for the Defence of the Republic, UT-UDR) and leading the successor party, the Tahoeraa Huira’atira or People’s Assembly, which he set up in May 1977. A gifted politician with an eye to the main chance, both for himself as much as French Polynesia, and stalwart of the French republic, Flosse began as a relatively poor *Demi* from Mangareva in the Gambiers. His skill in both Tahitian and French enabled him to relate easily to both worlds.

Until 1980 he and the conservative Gaullists staunchly favoured the nuclear testing program and its economic benefits, and opposed greater autonomy as inevitably leading to independence. But, by 1980, Flosse decided to support autonomy, doubtless recognising broad support for it, and hoping to head off independence. The switch paid off. His Tahoeraa won the 1982 elections, and he became vice-president. He was to stay at the head of the executive in various forms until 2004, except between 1987 and 1991. In 1986 Chirac appointed
Flosse the first French State secretary for the South Pacific, in which position he served until 1988. He was elected Député in the European parliament in 1984; to the French assembly in 1986; and as Sénateur from 1998.

The harnessing of the pro-autonomy sentiment from the broad Polynesian base saw a resurgence of interest in Polynesian and Tahitian cultural identity, reflected in the establishment of museums (Musée de Tahiti et des Îles, the Polynesian Centre for Human Sciences) and use of Tahitian language in schools from 1980 onwards. The new Internal Autonomy Statute of 1984 (Law No 84-820 of 6 September 1984) reflected these changes, allowing the use of Tahitian along with French as an official language, and the flying of the Tahitian flag alongside the French tricolore. The statute also considerably expanded self-government. While the French State retained responsibility for broad ‘sovereign’ matters such as foreign relations, defence, immigration, currency, public order, and economic areas, there were shared responsibilities and the territory was able to conduct some regional affairs. The statute established a local president of the territory, a position won by Flosse, which he held to 1987, when his party lost in the 1988 elections, but regained in 1991. The cultural symbols in the statute were tangible rewards for local support for the statute, in contrast to the New Caledonian nationalist opposition to a similar statute there. The symbolic autonomy changes also reflected the greater strategic significance of French Polynesia to France as a testing site at the time. It was around this time that Flosse began to speak of a ‘free association’ status for French Polynesia along the lines of the Cook Islands’ relationship with New Zealand.

In 1986 Flosse’s Tahoeraa won the assembly elections outright, the first time a single party had done so since Pouvanaa’s win in 1957. His party benefited from the electoral system’s heavier weighting to the less populous outer islands, whose voters are more conservative and pro-France. This French manipulation of the system was a precursor to similar systemic change in the early 2000s.

At this time, international and especially regional pressure was reaching boiling point, at France’s handling of the deteriorating situation in New Caledonia, and especially its bombing of Greenpeace’s Rainbow Warrior, protesting against nuclear tests, in New Zealand (see Rainbow Warrior affair below). Chirac’s appointment of Flosse as secretary of state for South Pacific affairs was part of a French regional diplomatic offensive (see Chapter 3). It meant that Flosse would be increasingly absent from Papeete. Already, his style and political decisions had alienated many supporters. He was authoritarian, and granted favours and

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4 Under the Cook Islands arrangement, the Cook Islands has an independent international identity, full local self-government, and the right to proceed to full independence should it wish to do so, with New Zealand undertaking aid and defence commitments. Cook Islanders retain New Zealand citizenship and full immigration rights into New Zealand but control immigration by mainland New Zealanders. Cook Islands do not have a seat in the UN. See Henningham 1992, 161.
contracts to cronies while failing to address social problems and tensions in a timely way. The incompatibility of his national ministerial responsibilities with those of his presidency of the territory led him to relinquish the latter in January 1987. His absences from the territory and differences with key industry players led to a dockers’ dispute erupting into a major riot in October 1987, which saw several businesses in Papeete damaged and looted.

**Autonomy and independence alliance**

In the end, defections from Flosse’s party led to his loss of government and support for Alexandre Léontieff, a pro-France leader, heading a loose coalition of parties. This group was primarily united by their dislike of Flosse and included Tahoeraa dissidents (Te Tiarama), the Here Ai’a centre-left party and Ia Mana moderate leftwing, pro-independence party. This was not the last time such a disparate group would be gathered for electoral convenience, reflecting, as Sémir Al Wardi described it, ‘political nomadism’ where ideological distinctions took second place to securing resources for constituents by shifting alliances (Al Wardi 2009, 198). The coalition held together until the end of 1990. In achieving this, Léontieff had to tread a careful path promoting autonomist demands within France, advocating an advanced form of internal autonomy within the French republic, with all the advantages of independence without the disadvantages (La Dépêche de Tahiti, 10 June 1989).

The most important issue for autonomists remained French Polynesia’s dependence on French funding arising from the nuclear testing site. Whereas formal opposition to nuclear testing was confined mainly to the Tavini and the Ia Mana, which in 1986 together only attracted around 15 per cent of the vote, general concern about testing was more widespread, but always tempered with concern that funding by France not be jeopardised. The Léontieff-led government encouraged long-term planning by France to prepare for when testing was wound down. The French State continued to pursue its strategic interests without regard for local sensitivities within French Polynesia or more widely in the region, with Mitterrand at one point, in late 1987, visiting the test sites via Hao and returning to France without even touching down in Papeete.

To answer some of the local concerns, France legislated amendments to the 1984 statute in July 1990 (Law No 90-612 of 12 July 1990). These granted to the territory further limited controls over foreign investment, the budget, exploration and exploitation of seabed, marine and subterranean resources, and set up a consultative committee over immigration. Local Conseils d’Archipels (island councils) were set up in the key island groups, Flosse’s power base. Dissatisfaction continued, with unions organising disruptive and violent protests against rising fuel prices in July 1991.
Nuclear testing and beyond

Finally, in the face of world and regional criticism for its nuclear testing in the Pacific (see following section), Mitterrand imposed a moratorium in 1992. The decision immediately led to an economic slump. Mitterrand began consultations with French Polynesian leaders on the future without the economic boost of the nuclear testing apparatus. These talks led to the 1993 Pact for Progress, and the 1994 Economic and Social Development law for French Polynesia, with a development contract signed in May 1994, extended by another signed in October 2000 (Faberon and Ziller 2007, 316). Essentially, the French underwrote extensive ongoing financial support well beyond any cessation of the tests as compensation.

Much of the goodwill accrued in this process was eroded by Chirac’s decision, when he was elected president, to resume nuclear testing in 1995. Protests resurged, leading to riots and burning of the international airport and numerous shops and offices. The territory’s one remaining economic asset, tourism, suffered as a result. When he revised his decision, in 1996, ended the testing program and closing the CEP, Chirac promised just under 1 billion former French francs (around $A300 million) assistance over the succeeding 10 years. Ironically, France’s major investment, through the CEP, in infrastructure, port installations, roads, hydro-electric and solar power schemes, and in providing jobs, had built the territory’s standard of living and expectations to a high, possibly unrealistic, level. It would be costly to maintain.

France offered continued extensive financial support, in return for staying with France, along with continued self-government, albeit within constraints set by France and, it should be noted, with substantially fewer real powers than it accorded New Caledonia in 1998. French Polynesia’s limited economic resources meant that the stakes were lower for France than in New Caledonia. Even Temaru acknowledged that independence would lower the standard of living in French Polynesia (on 13 April 2006 he told the Nouvelles de Tahiti that independence would only be possible ‘when our country’s economic development allows it to ensure sovereignty’).

Regional concern

No doubt, with the bulk of testing requirements behind it, France was in any case ready to wind down its testing program by the early 1990s. The 1994 Defence white paper shifted emphasis from nuclear to conventional capability, and the focus of military research from nuclear to space technologies. While it remained committed to its continuing status as a nuclear power and the force de frappe (nuclear deterrent), France had already established its nuclear
credentials. The Berlin Wall had fallen and the Cold War was in its final stages. But there is no doubt that international and regional criticism played a major role in forcing France to do without continued testing and to close the CEP. In this, France had necessarily to weigh its strategic influence in terms of its nuclear imperative on the one hand, and its international reputation on the other. Events showed once again that domestic political preoccupations in Paris, linked closely with France’s international image, would determine outcomes, and that lack of coordination of agencies involved would lead to errors.

**Rainbow Warrior affair**

Just as civil society led Western government policy opposed to France’s policies towards New Caledonia, so it was strongly ahead of Australian and New Zealand official policy against French Pacific nuclear testing. Greenpeace led the charge. But, on 10 July 1985, two French secret agents bombed the Greenpeace vessel, the *Rainbow Warrior*, in Auckland, killing a photographer, Fernando Pereira, just before the vessel was to head for French Polynesia to protest against nuclear testing there. New Zealand sentenced and jailed two of the agents responsible, Alain Mafart and Dominique Prieur, in November 1985. But, in retaliation, France impeded wool and offal imports from New Zealand, New Caledonia stopped importing New Zealand lamb, and France threatened European Economic Community (EEC) reductions in the EEC quota of butter imports from New Zealand.

UN Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuellar was called upon to negotiate a settlement, involving an apology and $US7 million compensation from France, as well as an instruction to France not to obstruct New Zealand imports, in return for New Zealand releasing the two agents into French custody for detention for three years on Hao atoll. But France did not respect this agreement, freeing the agents and returning them to metropolitan France within two years. An international tribunal ruled in 1990 that France had indeed breached its obligations and required a further payment of $US2 million into a French–New Zealand fund.

There were several consequences to this act of what some called state terrorism, which came on the heels of the most violent episodes of New Caledonia’s *événements*. There were domestic repercussions. Until 1985, the nuclear testing and deterrent issue had broad-based French domestic support. But the *Rainbow Warrior* affair stimulated a change in public opinion within France (described in Dunmore 1997, 260, Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 116). France’s disregard for its UN-brokered commitment and the legal case, protracted over five years, raised further questions in the minds of leaders of its own Pacific territories about its commitments to them, particularly in New Caledonia where France
was negotiating the Matignon/Oudinot Accords based primarily on promises. The affair also underlined the role of the French defence ministry in dictating policy on the Pacific, over and above that of the foreign ministry. This did not result in good outcomes since defence planners were resentful of the activities of the anti-nuclear movement, had their own operational interests in prolonging the nuclear testing presence, and were not nuanced in foreign policy (see also Mrugudovic 2008, 185 and Dunmore 1997, 259).

The external effects were disastrous for France and its prestige. The clumsy nature of the attack, with France’s role and agents so publicly revealed, followed by blatant disregard for UN mediation efforts, suggested more the action of a banana republic than a world leader. France’s reputation was badly damaged and its behaviour, including showing blithe contempt for successive SPF resolutions condemning French testing, counteracted the efforts it was making in other areas to improve its image in the latter 1980s. The *Rainbow Warrior* affair enabled Pacific leaders to galvanise their efforts and to receive a sympathetic hearing on the international stage. France’s argument against others interfering in their affairs had been cut dead by its own interference in a New Zealand port. Its action presented a golden opportunity for the islanders to demonise France, especially to portray it as an outsider creating instability (noted by Du Prel 1996, 9 and Maclellan and Chesneaux 1998, 190).

On a broader scale, the *Rainbow Warrior* incident hardened New Zealand’s support for banning visits by nuclear ships, which was arguably against broad Western interests in the Pacific at the time, widening differences within ANZUS. Thus, just as French handling of issues in New Hebrides and New Caledonia had inadvertently opened the region to adverse strategic consequences, so did this aspect of its dealing with the French Polynesia testing issue undermine fundamental Western strategic interests.

**Regional criticism**

To understand the depth of feeling and intensity involved in regional opposition to French nuclear testing in the South Pacific, and France’s seeming disregard of this opposition for many years, requires an acknowledgement of significant spatial, economic and cultural differences between France and the newly independent island countries, and between France on the one hand, and Australia and New Zealand on the other. Such differences remain to this day.

The spatial context of the issue for the Pacific countries is fundamental to their stance. In the first place, while to a well-entrenched European power, the South Pacific countries seemed thousands of kilometres removed from the 1945 Hiroshima experience of a nuclear explosion, those countries belong to the same hemisphere as Japan. For them, the recent lessons of Hiroshima, in their own
neighbourhood, and the cost in human lives and suffering portrayed in local newsreels, were stunning in their immediacy and scope, and shaped attitudes to nuclear testing in the region itself.

Secondly, whereas France claimed the testing sites were on its sovereign territory, whatever the legalities, for Pacific island countries they were taking place in their immediate neighbourhood, in what they repeatedly referred to as their ‘backyard’. The backyard is a concept of being at home and, therefore, the space for private family activity, to be respected by neighbours (France grew to appreciate this distinction: see comments made by David Camroux in Assemblée Nationale de France, 1996 report, 53). They felt affronted by violation of this space, so proximate to their homes. France might well claim that the Hao area was thousands of kilometres from neighbouring islands, but for island countries in the vast Pacific Ocean, the distances were perceived as relatively small. Moreover, they shared long-term historical, cultural and ethnic ties and a community of interests. For them, even if the claimed risks in testing were only moderate (which they did not believe), those risks should be taken on French metropolitan territory.

The concept of being a good neighbour was also different. France’s approach to testing revealed much about its attitude to the region. Because of the lofty strategic significance of the testing program, France never ceased to conduct itself as a nuclear power even when ending its program. Even today, France would be unlikely to describe island countries of the Pacific as its neighbours (see Chapter 6 on France as ‘in’ versus ‘of’ the Pacific,). And so it has left a legacy that would take significant diplomatic and other resources to overcome.

There were other differences in perception. None of the Pacific countries, including Australia and New Zealand, had any experience of the positive uses of nuclear power in energy production, whereas in France, over 50 per cent of its energy needs were being met by nuclear power stations by the early 1980s. So, in the Pacific, there was no firsthand evidence of a successful use of nuclear energy and, by contrast, a vivid impression, from Hiroshima, of its most destructive impact. Furthermore, indigenous traditions are strongly disposed towards preserving and respecting natural forces. In contrast to secular France, Pacific island societies are religious, and operate within a more diffuse environment where the lines between religion and politics are blurred. Thus France tended to dismiss strong opposition region-wide by the regional interdenominational church group, the Pacific Conference of Churches, and Paris-based policymakers were too prepared to situate the conference’s opposition in the context of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant v. French Catholic paradigm of the nineteenth century (although the conference included both Protestants and Catholics). Rather, given their traditions and religious background, many islanders saw nuclear testing as morally wrong.
And, for Pacific islanders, the nuclear issue was closely interrelated with the question of independence for both French Polynesia and New Caledonia.

**South Pacific Forum action**

Just as the Forum’s strategy to urge self-determination in New Caledonia was based on broader, strongly held support for decolonisation, so its strategy to combat French nuclear testing was founded on a broader opposition to nuclear activity in the region. Forum member countries had opposed nuclear testing well before French testing and formation of the SPF. In 1956, both the Cook Islands and Western Samoan local assemblies, even before independence, protested against British and American atmospheric tests in the Pacific. Western Samoa’s legislative assembly described the French plan to test in the Pacific as a serious threat to health and security in the South Pacific a full year before the tests began. New Zealand also protested against American testing at the time (Mrgudovic 2008, 113; Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 184).

Australia and New Zealand took France to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1973, claiming the tests had negative radioactive fallout on the regional population. The ICJ found in favour of this proposition, at which point France withdrew from the judicial process, effectively nullifying it. But France did announce that it would switch to underground testing, which it did in 1975.

The islanders established, early, a link between independence and the nuclear testing issues, enunciated by Fijian prime minister and founding member of the SPF, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in 1973, when he said that by persuading the UN Decolonisation Committee to speed up the ‘liberation’ of the French territories, France would no longer have the right to undertake its tests there (quoted in Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 186). French writer Isabelle Cordonnier referred in 1996 to the South Pacific as a geopolitical region, and to its opposition to nuclear tests as opposition to something which was seen as one of the last incarnations of colonialism (*Assemblée Nationale* 1996, 54). The formation of a group for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) from 1975 reflected this thinking.

Such an approach was not shared by the governments of Australia and New Zealand who, in the early 1980s, exercised a moderating influence within the Forum on islander proposals targeting France and the United States, over and above their restraining role on Forum resolutions on New Caledonia.5 This is not to say that civil society shared the official view: the colonialist–nuclear link

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was made by interest groups and unions in each country. In Australia, these non-government groups conducted visceral campaigns against France including boycotts of French restaurants, interruption to French postal and maritime services, and protests and even bombing of French diplomatic and other premises. Many of these groups, particularly the unions, were constituents of the Australian Labor Party. In response to similar agitation, in 1983, the new Hawke Labor government banned uranium shipments to France, a ban which endured until 1986. Feeling in the Australian community was also running high against France’s treatment of New Caledonia at this time (as France reversed autonomy provisions in the Pons Statutes). In retaliation France banned ministerial visits to Australia in 1986 and, as noted, expelled Australia’s Consul-General from New Caledonia in 1987.

Islander anti-nuclear concerns were wide ranging. Many of the island countries not only opposed testing but wanted to control the disposal and movement of nuclear waste through the region, to limit missile testing, and restrict visits by nuclear ships.

To harness these strong feelings in the region within the context of the interests of the western alliance, Australia’s Labor government proposed a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone treaty in 1984. Australia exerted considerable diplomatic effort to refine the proposals, both with an eye to the needs of the major western ally, the United States, but also to protect the broad Western alliance, and therefore French, interests. The resultant 1985 Rarotonga Treaty prohibited Forum members from acquiring and stationing nuclear arms, nuclear testing, and depositing nuclear waste in territorial waters. Its annex exhorted the big nuclear powers not to conduct nuclear tests in the zone, not to use nuclear arms against Forum members and to apply the treaty in their territories. Individual members could make their own decisions on visits by nuclear vessels. But the definition of the zone, which included the French territories but not the US ones in Micronesia, gave rise to French grievances that they alone were being targeted.

**Nuclear testing issues linger**

There was considerable debate, which continues until today, about the environmental and health risks of nuclear testing. As time, and opposition, progressed, France became more skilled at mounting information and diplomatic offensives. France invited a succession of regional teams to visit French Polynesia and conduct tests (led by Haroun Tazieff in 1982; New Zealand scientist Hugh Atkinson, in 1984; their own world-renowned oceanographer Jacques Cousteau in 1987; and Dr Frank Feuilhade in 1990). None of these produced conclusive reports, largely because France did not allow free access to the sites. A US
Greenpeace team conducted its own tests on the reef without French support in 1990 and, before they were arrested and bundled off to Papeete by the French navy, they claimed to have found radioactive substances.

Civil society again played a role, lobby groups such as the NFIP keeping alive the question of negative impacts of the tests, ranging from damage to reefs and leaching of radioactivity into the sea, to direct health effects such as cancer or ciguatera fish poisoning. In April 2009 the French Labour Tribunal heard the first case by a group of eight plaintiffs seeking compensation for effects of the tests on their health. And, in December 2009, the French Government signed off on legislation providing for compensation for those assessed as having been affected by the tests, and set up a €10 million compensation fund (Flash d’Océanie, 23 December 2009). The matter remains controversial, with lobby groups saying the new legislation does not go far enough.

Infrastructure is another remnant of the nuclear testing era. Whereas much has been dismantled, empty buildings and airstrips remain, largely unused (Maclellan 2005e, 370). Whether and how this infrastructure is used in the future will reveal much about the safety of the atolls (and see Chapter 7 on US interest in using landing strips there). Also unresolved today is the question of the return to French Polynesia of Moruroa and Fangatufa, which were ceded to France in 1964 for the program.

Conclusion

France’s presence in the Pacific in the postwar years to the mid 1990s was characterised by its strong need to re-establish its national prestige, based on the force de frappe (nuclear deterrent) which it tested in the region; but also on the value of an extended EEZ that its Pacific territories represented; and maintaining a foothold in a region widely proclaimed as the central player in the forthcoming century. It held fervently to the stated need to protect the interests of its nationals, which were most pronounced in New Caledonia. The ambiguities of its position were evident in the UN, where France claimed equal rights with the other four permanent members, but rejected reporting and other UN obligations towards its Pacific territories. It was France’s attachment to the primacy of its national interests in the SPC, and its reluctance to accommodate growing islander confidence and independent participation, that lead to the formation of the political SPF, which opposed French policies. France initially responded with contempt, ignoring early Forum calls for change in its nuclear testing and decolonisation actions.

France’s experience in New Hebrides/Vanuatu was seminal in shaping regional attitudes to France. Traditional rivalries with Britain, concerns to protect its
nationals, an openness to innovation (in the Condominium arrangement) but duplicity in supporting rebellion and even secession, and leveraging of aid against economic support, undermining the fledgling independent state, along with institutional factors where officials answered to competing ministries in Paris, were all signals of what might come for a future independent New Caledonia or French Polynesia. And France's handling of Vanuatu's independence had strategic external repercussions, heightening regional anti-France sentiment, leading directly to the formation of another anti-France regional group, the MSG, with a strong Vanuatu base in support of New Caledonia. It also led the small Pacific states to efforts to look elsewhere, including Libya, or at least to be seen to be doing so, for support, which was contrary to the security interests of the Western alliance and Australia. The left-over issue of Matthew and Hunter Islands demonstrated both France’s continuing wish to retain territory (and desirable EEZ) in the region and that it remained prepared to back up its claims with diplomacy underpinned by force.

These consequences constituted a critical message for France, and the region, as it managed its other collectivities, and remain relevant today.

In postwar New Caledonia, France has shown innovation and flexibility in its proposals to meet local demands while retaining sovereignty. But, as in earlier centuries in the Pacific, it also showed clumsiness and inconsistency. In its 12 statutes over five decades, France reneged on agreed autonomy and even independence measures. While this stop-start process finally resulted in an ingenious series of agreed, democratically based Accords drawing elements from many past proposals, it has also left questions about the veracity of the State's word and intentions not only within the territory, but more broadly in the region. The potential strategic consequences of doubts about France's commitment was seen when Kanak pro-independence groups began training and other activity with pariah state Libya, risking regional security at the time.

The 1998 Noumea Accord was devised as a transition arrangement to restore stability, based on promised rebalancing of economic development and political power, while remaining heavily dependent on the French State. The French State was both an actor and an arbiter in political and economic life, allied, by its predilection for New Caledonia to stay within the republic, to the pro-France parties. The basis of agreement to the Accord was a restricted electorate for local elections and the final future referendums and related immigration issues; and sharing between the main communities, the economic benefits arising from New Caledonia's main source of wealth, nickel. Handling these two issues, as Chapter 4 will show, would be critical to stability, and for the pro-independence group, a fundamental indicator of the perceived commitment of the French State.
The consistent lesson in postwar New Caledonian history was the French State’s primary preoccupation with its own metropolitan political, electoral and constitutional priorities and timetables, which have complicated its administration of New Caledonia, even to the extent of provoking violence. As elsewhere in its Pacific territories, the French State linked economic support with fealty to France, and backed its presence by force, dealing firmly with protests, most notably during the événements and in its raid on the Gossanah cave. Institutional constraints included competing roles of the Overseas France, foreign affairs and defence ministries, with the latter predominating. As the postwar period progressed, France increasingly sent senior officials to the territory who had relevant experience (for example High Commissioner Alain Christnacht) but, as ever, they were rotated out within very short periods, continuing the early pattern of the ‘valse des gouverneurs’.

And in French Polynesia, where, as the site of its nuclear testing, the strategic stakes were the highest for France during this period, many of the same features were evident, with one or two important differences. The key difference was that, with a larger, more homogeneous indigenous population, demands for greater autonomy were always more broadly based. As in New Caledonia, French roll backs of initial provisions for independence resulted in strengthened support for autonomy and pro-independence political groups in the 1970s. But in French Polynesia, with the general dependence on the French nuclear testing program and in the absence of a substantial long-term French metropolitan settler population, the political dynamic shifted from pro-France v. independentist as in New Caledonia to, autonomist within France v. independentist in the 1980s. Prominent pro-France leader Flosse even advocated an independence-in-association formula as early as 1985.

Here too, with the added interest of its nuclear testing program, France flexed its military might to retain support, cracking down on protests and riots and, in 1985, fatally intervening even on a foreign vessel in a foreign port, to protect its interests. The dramatic economic windfall effect of its nuclear testing program heightened the nexus between economic support and political dependence. France’s overt promise of ongoing funding for continued fealty encouraged the practice of local political groups threatening to change sides unless further financial support was forthcoming. Political allegiance became less ideological and more clientelistic focused and fluid than in New Caledonia, and the French State was a more direct player, overtly backing the interests of the pro-France autonomy group. And in French Polynesia, too, even more clearly than in New Caledonia, because of the nuclear testing program, the interests of one part of the metropolitan bureaucracy, the military in the defence ministry, regularly overrode the other ministries with an interest in the overseas territories. As an added overlay, in French Polynesia the close personal relationship between
autonomist leader, Flosse, and French President Chirac, meant that administrative processes were circumvented and personal interests dictated policy, and even statutory change, a feature that was to intensify in the early 2000s.

Regional and international pressure played a role in shaping France’s approach in both New Caledonia and French Polynesia in the postwar period, but did not succeed in forcing France to grant independence to either. But Forum efforts to engage the UN did succeed in securing French commitment to develop a roadmap to an independence referendum for New Caledonia through the Matignon/Noumea Accords.

By contrast, regional pressure over nuclear testing succeeded in changing French policy: in 1975, when France began underground tests and abandoned atmospheric testing, in response to the 1974 ICJ court decision brought by Australia and New Zealand against France; in 1989, following the 1985 Rarotonga Treaty, when France reduced the number of its annual tests and gave advance notice of them; and in March 1996, when France ceased testing and even signed the treaty itself.

And an important legacy of regional opposition to French policies was the change of heart by France towards the region itself, its efforts to engage with the region, and to implement statutory change within its Pacific collectivities with an eye to the broader regional context, which will be the subject of the next chapter.