

The South Pacific: A Changing Face

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It is increasingly being acknowledged that the South Pacific countries, i.e. the countries which comprise the South Pacific Forum, have become an important factor in Asia-Pacific politics. One of the most substantial elements in present South Pacific policies is the establishment of a Nuclear Free Zone in the whole area. Proposed by Australia at the Fourteenth South Pacific Forum meeting held in Canberra in August 1983, it faced brighter prospects than the abortive New Zealand initiative at the United Nations in 1975. It was the election of a Labour government in Australia in 1983 and in New Zealand in 1984 that made it possible to reanimate the idea of a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone.

The Forum decided on August 28, 1984 in Rarotonga, capital of the Cook Islands, where the 15th South Pacific Forum was held, to set up a working group to examine crucial legal and other issues involved in setting up the Nuclear Free Zone (NFZ). The move was admittedly a triumph for Prime Minister Robert Hawke. The communique issued at the close of the meeting unequivocally imparted that "there should be no use, testing or stationing of nuclear explosive devices in the South Pacific; no South Pacific country should develop or manufacture, or receive from others, or acquire or test any nuclear explosive device." However, the meeting upheld the "unqualified sovereign rights" of South Pacific countries to decide for themselves on their security arrangements and such questions as access to their ports and airfields by nuclear vessels and aircraft of other countries.

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The endorsement of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty the next year -- which establishes the second NFZ in a permanently inhabited area after the Treaty of Tlatelolco setting up a NFZ in Latin America -- "reflected the deep concern of all Forum members at the continuing nuclear arms race and the risk of nuclear war." In this context, the communique continues, "the Forum welcomed the resumption of arms control talks between the superpowers and expressed its hope that these talks would achieve their declared objective of a reduction in nuclear weapons and to their eventual elimination as well as to the prevention of an arms race in space."¹ The treaty also obligates signatories not to develop or accept nuclear weapons in the area bounded by Latin America, Antarctica, the PNG-Indonesian border and the Equator. Furthermore, the nuclear powers will be requested not to conduct any tests or dump at sea radioactive waste in the region.

Earlier, on April 2, 1984, Prime Minister Hawke made an unequivocal commitment that Australia would not acquire nuclear weapons. He intimated that "the Government has never made any decision to acquire or to develop a nuclear capability and has no intention of doing so; nor has the Cabinet nor any Cabinet committee discussed the possible development of a nuclear capability by Australia."² Yet Australia is apparently the only country which decided to be free to receive visits from nuclear-armed ships and exercise with nuclear-capable allies; they will also not be hampered from exporting uranium for peaceful purposes under safeguards.

That is the reason why the "consensus" endorsement from fellow South Pacific leaders for an NFZ treaty was ridiculed by anti-nuclear movements in Australia as essentially "toothless"; it allows free naval transit and leaves the question of port calls entirely to individual states in the region. Moreover, it presents little or no obstacle to any military activity of the United States, the only superpower active in the region, and would as a consequence be ignored by France as it affects nuclear testing at Mururoa Atoll. Australia's conservative opposition, on the other hand, had tended to dismiss the treaty as worth no more than the "nuclear-free zone" various "Left-wing controlled municipalities have installed around Sydney suburbs."³ However, Hawke has now excluded the option of basing warships in Australia.

In New Zealand anti-nuclear concerns are more radical and have found expression in more exacting demands which ranges from breaking up ANZUS

¹*Communique Sixteenth South Pacific Forum*, 8 August 1985, para. 17.

²P. Lewis Young, "The Great Australian Defence Debate - 1984" in *Asian Defence Journal*, 6/84, p. 98.

³*Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 22, 1985, p. 43.

which came into force in April 1952, pursue a neutral or even non-aligned foreign policy, terminate visits by US nuclear warships, declare New Zealand to be unequivocally nuclear free and conclude a Nuclear Free Zone for the entire South Pacific area. The peace movement in New Zealand has gained strength not so much from Soviet intimidation as more from reaction to Western strategies and decisions.

NEW ZEALAND'S ANTI NUCLEAR POLICY

Prime Minister Lange's government was elected on July 14, 1984 on this anti-nuclear platform and thus had to ban the entry of nuclear warships into New Zealand. Lange has submitted a number of reasons for this tough stance. First is the absence of a widespread and strong perception of any overt threat which countries closer to the nuclear powers have. Second, New Zealand's antinuclear stand is cumulatively enhanced and largely moulded by its complete opposition to the French nuclear-testing in the South Pacific. Finally, the absence of US military facilities, nuclear and other, has very much simplified Lange's task in implementing a non-nuclear policy. The Lange's government decision to ban the entry of nuclear vessels was justified primarily on the basis of New Zealand's interests.⁴ Thus the New Zealand government was implementing an important part of its electoral platform on which it was elected to power. The US Secretary of State, George Schulz when he was in Wellington for the ANZUS Council meeting on July 16-17, 1984, took the decision seriously and dramatically stated that, if implemented, the policy of the Labour Party would signify the end of ANZUS.⁵

The end it was not. Prime Minister Lange still continues to swear by the ANZUS treaty and took time to personally admonish the Soviet ambassador over Moscow's "tendentious" propaganda in this regard. Lange's government believes that the fundamental security guarantees of the ANZUS alliance are still in force and continue to underwrite the strategic stability of the region. However, the Reagan administration did not appreciate the move and retaliated by banning New Zealand from joint military exercises, sharing of military intelligence, military training etc. One could say that New Zealand has been practically suspended from its security link with the US.

Meanwhile the New Zealand government has reviewed its defence priorities in a new strategy paper which sets forth New Zealand's "post-ANZUS" policy and redirects New Zealand defence and foreign policies towards its immediate

⁴S.P. Seth, "ANZUS in Crisis," in *Asia Pacific Community*, No. 29, (Summer 1985), p. 124.

⁵Ramesh Thakur, "A Nuclear-Weapon-Free South Pacific: A New Zealand Perspective," in *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 58, no. 2, 1985, pp. 216-18.

South Pacific neighbourhood based on a high degree of military self-sufficiency. This would mean the abandonment of its previous commitment to the defence of Southeast Asia. The new focus suggests to become the basis of a new and closer defence relationship with Australia, which is presented as New Zealand's fundamental ally. Broad areas of bilateral defence co-operation have indeed been identified after Australian Defence Minister Beazley visit to New Zealand in April 1985. The Australian press reported that the Australian government will provide assistance to New Zealand to surmount its defence problems arising from the ANZUS disruption by making special arrangements to maintain the flow of necessarily non-US intelligence, conducting extra military exercises, extending training assistance and sharing scientific research output and expertise in defence matters. New Zealand, on its part, is committed to increasing its defence expenditure, which opens up the possibility of buying more of its equipment and weapons from Australia. The Lange government has, however, withdrawn from Australia's submarine programme, opting instead to strengthen its surface fleet.⁶

In seeking to redirect its strategic priority from Southeast Asia to the South Pacific, the Lange government is focussing and drawing attention to the danger of progressive Soviet penetration in the area. Soviet initiatives and overtures to sign fishing agreements with the small South Pacific states of Kiribati and Tuvalu seem to be the main reason for the conclusion. The Melanesian group of Papua New Guinea, the Salomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia -- who are emerging as active players in the South Pacific diplomatic arena -- are being closely monitored on whether they join New Zealand in its "exclusionist line on port calls by nuclear ships or to take the Australian lead by allowing US nuclear powered ships to pass its waters."⁷ With the richest tuna stocks in their area, the Melanesian states push for tougher controls on fishing in the EEZ's. Both Papua New Guinea and the Salomons have already seized US fishing boats in their offshore zones, and thus perceive the US as not entirely protective.

Fiji and the other Polynesian states have parted company with New Zealand since Prime Minister Lange closed the country's ports to US warships that might be carrying nuclear weapons. Fiji's small professional army is currently being re-equipped with US weapons. US warships recently visited Tonga and Western Samoa.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁷*Far Eastern Economic Review*, "Australian Defence Debate," August 22, 1985, pp. 16-17.

THE AUSTRALIAN NON-NUCLEAR POLICY

Hawke had been somewhat discomfitted by the New Zealand ban as it is deemed to threaten the existence of ANZUS, even though he had been the South Pacific Forum cheerleader in drawing attention of the super-powers and France that their region sought to be a NFZ. Australia apparently seeks its security in the context of a global strategic balance of power between the US and the USSR. Foreign Minister Bill Hayden believes that the Soviet Union has achieved strategic superiority over the US in some areas of nuclear weaponry. The Soviet Union has approximately 40 per cent more destructive capabilities against US's "soft" targets, whereas the US has twice the destructive capability against Soviet "hard" targets.⁸ The hosting of US nuclear support facilities is, therefore, a substantial part of the Australia-US security relationship. The US now maintains more than some two dozen military installations in the field of communications, navigation, satellite tracking and control and various other forms of intelligence collection, making Australia the most important US security link in the Western Pacific. The three most important among these installations are the naval communications station at North West Cape and the satellite ground control station at Pine Gap and Nurrangar.⁹

However, it is now increasingly being acknowledged that -- since there are no nuclear installations in Australia -- there will be no direct security threat to that country from the Soviet Union. It is against this background that Australia's growing nuclear disarmament movement is evolving into an important political constituency. During the 1984 election, for example, a hastily-organised single-issue Nuclear Disarmament Party polled nearly 500,000 primarily votes. The Australian Democrats, another political party with anti-nuclear leanings, polled 7.6 per cent of the total votes. Another significant percentage of peace votes were allegedly at the cost of the ruling Labour Party because of the Hawke's government failure to distance itself from the US nuclear connection. Moreover, Labour Party's numerically significant Leftist faction is also largely opposed to Australia's US security link. It seems that the Hawke government is increasingly under pressure to disengage itself from or significantly modify the nuclear aspect of its US alliance.¹⁰

However, Foreign Minister Hayden stated that "something like 70-odd per cent of the community supports ANZUS."¹¹ Thus the Australian govern-

⁸Young, "Australian Defence Debate," p. 98.

⁹For details, see Seth, "ANZUS," p. 119-120.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹¹*Ibid.*

ment is facing a manifold dilemma. On the one hand, Canberra must keep reassuring Washington about its commitment to the US-Australian security relationship, while on the other, it has to convince its expanding constituency of Australia's security through the US nuclear deterrent and of its progression into disarmament. Finally, the Australia-US connection should appear acceptable and welcome to Australia's neighbours, also in Southeast Asia.

The value of the ANZUS alliance to Australia against its immediate neighbours in the Western Pacific area is doubtful. Australia is increasingly aware that the deterrent value of the US-Australia security connection is practically non-existent in low level threat situations. It is a considerable regional military power in itself; it enjoys some of the best natural defence attributes against any enemy of the region. In this context the US alliance could at best be marginal, since it has only relevance if the attack came from the Soviet Union. However, this is not going to happen except as part of a war between the two superpowers, in which case US military installations and other non-military targets in Australia will be subject to a Soviet nuclear attack.

THE SOUTH PACIFIC—ASEAN CONNECTION: TOWARDS A PROGRAMME OF ACTION?

The tremendous change in the strategic outlook is bound to have its impact on the perception of the superpower rivalry in the Western Pacific area. It is now being recognised that the importance of the bases in Vietnam and the Philippines is being overemphasised. These bases are useful as well as important, but they are far from vital for both the US and the Soviet Union. The US already has a number of bases in this area which will enable them to operate in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean area in any kind of emergency although at greater expense and inconvenience. They have bases in the Pacific islands of Micronesia, such as Guam and other islands which have long term agreements with the US, in Japan, Hawaii and in continental US itself. It would indeed mean that the US has to move further back into the Pacific, but with modern, long-range weapon systems, long-range ships and long-range armour, that is only self-evident.

The real problem in the West-Pacific area is thus not so much the problem of military bases and the problem of an arms race; that is the case in other parts of the world as well. The real problem in this area is -- in comparison to Europe -- that there are no arms-control agreements, treaties or negotiations which will moderate the progressive arms build up even into outer space. There are approximately 3,000 nuclear weapons in the Pacific region, and the only ones that are controlled are the warheads on missile-firing submarines. The

SS-20's are not controlled, neither are the new US Tomahawks, cruise-missiles; none of the nuclear tactical weapons at sea and on land are controlled. There is nothing in the Pacific area that approximates the intermediate nuclear force talks in Europe and there is nothing at the conventional level that approximates the Mutual Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) talks.

The real problem in the Asia-Pacific area is thus that the people in the region have not been as insistent on arms control as have the Europeans, even though the whole area is politically more volatile than is Europe. So, what we have here in the region is a military build-up, an arms race which is escalating all the way and frighteningly destabilising and the only thing that is necessary to check that process, i.e. any form of armed controlled negotiation or arrangement that could check the process in that direction, is just not there. The problem is magnified by the fact that both super powers believe that if one wants to have a reliable deterrence one has to be able to fight a war at all sorts of different levels, since a conventional war between the two superpowers is not going to stay conventional. Moreover, the US has now invented an additional component to its doctrine of warfare, the doctrine of "horizontal escalation," which means that if there is a war in a specific part of the world where the US is weak, say in the Middle East, then instead of fighting there, the US horizontally escalate in those areas where the Soviet Union is weak, that is in the North Pacific.

What could then be the answer. The changing political atmosphere in the South Pacific, the proclamation of a Nuclear Free Zone in the South Pacific is a major step in the process of finding the answer. The problem is how to link up the South Pacific NFZ with ASEAN's Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), particularly its parallel endeavour to establish the Nuclear-Weapon Free Zone (NWFZ) as its current major component, in the Southeast Asian region. ZOPFAN has been designed as a counterfailing factor on the superpower rivalry on the basis of equidistance and equi-involvement in the non-aligned spirit. Yet it has simultaneously also implied how best to link ASEAN-US interests in the region. So has the concept of NFZ in the South Pacific. The link between the South Pacific NFZ treaty and the ASEAN Treaty on Amity and Co-operation may bring political, diplomatic and moral pressure to bear on both superpowers to work in the direction of substantial agreements on arms control and on disarmament to substantially reduce the possibility of a nuclear war in this part of the world as well. A substantial co-operation between the regions of the South Pacific and Southeast Asia would promote such a possibility; it would help prevent a horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons and thus a horizontal exclamation in this part of the world. True, in modern, long-range warfare a nuclear free zone, a nuclear weapon free zone or even a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality may not have the in-

tended significance. Yet insistence by Australia and Indonesia on the creation and recognition by outside powers of such zones will demonstrate both countries' collective determination to demand recognition of the superpowers of their determination to remain independent and be masters of their own destinies. Australia and Indonesia should convince the superpowers that their co-operation can only be obtained by acknowledging their determination. That is the reason why Indonesia and Australia should try to reach an agreement in principle to enable them to move forward towards designing co-operation programmes between the two areas on the basis of the concept of nuclear free zones. And it is Australia and Indonesia that should take joint initiatives. Only then can Australia and Indonesia move up to the objective of pushing for arms control negotiations and agreements so necessary as a first step for a peaceful future in the whole region.