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SOUTHWEST PACIFIC

Jim Rolfe

The region known as the Southwest Pacific extends over a vast area from north of the equator to the Antarctic Circle. The sphere of political influence of the states and territories in the region (some fifteen independent and self-governing states and a number of colonies and territories administered by several metropolitan powers) is about 30 million square kilometers. Despite its size and the number of states in it, the region is not an area of international concern or even of significant international interest. The cold war more or less passed it by, and issues of "high politics," such as arms races and alliance building, have never been particularly salient. Instead, the region has a fairly well-developed sense of its own security needs and has established institutions and processes in an attempt to address them.

Traditional security, in the sense of the need to prepare against the threat of confrontation or the use of force by another state to resolve disputes, is not and has not been a significant factor in intrastate or interstate relations for the past half century. Nor has the region had to worry significantly about intrusions by extraregional powers attempting to exploit it for their own benefit. Instead, the region has for some time identified nontraditional issues, especially relating to the environment and resources, as among those that could affect the security of its members. In this, the Southwest Pacific has been ahead of the world in both identifying and attempting to resolve problems derived from nontraditional sources. This is the "new security agenda," which reduces the primacy
of the military component of security: "What they are concerned about is the immediate need to provide economic and social security for their people. The fear is that if economic issues are not addressed the result will be increased political instability. In the social area, security is related in part to the preservation of cultures which traditionally have cared for members of their extended family and community" (South Pacific Policy Review Group [SPPRG] 1990, 222).

The "security" of the new security agenda is "comprehensive security," identified first as a self-conscious and coherent concept in Japanese policy planning from the 1970s and now becoming a subject of some analytical consideration in the wider Asia Pacific region (Dewitt 1994; Kerr; Mack, and Evans 1994; Rolfe 1995a; Hassan and Ramnath 1996), although not specifically in the Southwest Pacific subregion. Comprehensive security rejects to a large extent the concern with material strength that focuses the attention of Realist analysts, but concentrates instead on the range of interests identified by each country as important to itself as it attempts to make its way in the international environment. Rolfe (1995b) discusses how, at one level, the new security attempts to define new kinds of threats against which the state must guard in case they may lead to the state becoming "nonviable," or which might lead to interstate conflict. At another level, the state is less concerned with the problems of and potential for interstate conflict, but is concerned instead with achieving security for the individual as a member of the state and as the fundamental unit with which the state must be concerned. If the individual is secure, then so too is the state likely to be.

The concepts, if not the terminology, of comprehensive security have been discussed, analyzed, and practiced in much of the Southwest Pacific since at least the 1970s. This seems to have been because, first, states did not ever feel seriously threatened by each other (they did not have the military capacity with which to threaten), and, second, in any case they had considerably greater issues to concern themselves with—issues that could have removed any viability the states might have had to maintain even a limited degree of autonomy as states. To reiterate, here security is already generally defined less with any concept of defense against military threat and more with preventing or mitigating economic vulnerability or resource and environmental degradation and, to a lesser extent, ensuring national stability (Hegarty and Polomka 1989, 2).
REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The region is one of considerable diversity. This is so whether it is grouped according to ethnicity, political status, wealth, or some other apparently logical grouping. Two unifying themes are the fact of “islandness” and, except for Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea, “smallness.” The two concepts are, as noted by Sutton and Payne (1993), closely linked. As well, they argue, islands are characterized by “remoteness, environmental precariousness, insularity, rights to maritime zones and military indefensibility” (584).

A taxonomy of the region may be made according to a rough division by ethnicity. This would show four more or less distinct regions of Australasia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. This kind of taxonomy has the benefit of apparent simplicity but hides as much as it reveals: There are too many tribal groupings within each ethnicity and too much ethnic intermingling for simple conclusions to be drawn from broad divisions like this.

Another taxonomy might be made according to the degrees of autonomy or independence held by individual countries and territories. Crocombe (n.d., 6) describes several levels of autonomy ranging from those islands that neither have nor seem to want independence (Norfolk Island, Tokelau, and perhaps Hawaii), through those with varying dependency relationships with metropolitan states (the Cook Islands with New Zealand; Kiribati and Tuvalu with the United Kingdom) to the fully independent states of Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea. A variation on this (Ross 1993, 24) has the region divided into four broad components: the island states, the French Pacific, the American Pacific/Micronesia, and Australasia. As well, Ross (1993, 25) describes four other island polities “inconsequential in security terms”: Tokelau, American Samoa, Pitcairn, and Wallis and Futuna. Again, this kind of taxonomy is not completely satisfactory, as it leads to assumptions about security concerns and behavior that may not be warranted.

Wealth, development, and economic dependency are yet other indications of regional diversity. Much of the security debate is about how to ensure that the island states are best able to ensure their own economic survival. The economy, the environment, resources and their sustainability, and population movements are all interrelated. They provide the
core of the issues that have and will continue to raise security concerns under the new security agenda.

Fairbairn (1994, 11, 12) categorizes Pacific island countries according to their resource endowments, which largely determine their capacity for long-term sustainable growth. There are relatively large countries, such as Fiji, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, which have about 84 percent of the region’s population and a relatively high degree of economic diversification. A second group consists of middle-level countries (Tonga and Western Samoa), which have only a modest resource base, limited agriculture, no minerals, and only limited potential for tourism. The third group consists of the remote and resource-poor countries of the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Niue, Tokelau, and Tuvalu, which have few land-based resources and are generally unable to exploit their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Finally, there is a group of countries with specific advantages that compensate for their otherwise poor economic prospects. Nauru has its phosphate; Palau, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas are strategically important to the United States; and American Samoa has a good harbor and is strategically located as a major fish processing center.

Table 1 gives some basic data relating to size and wealth, and more detail is available in Hoadley (1992). Clearly, levels of economic development vary considerably. Most of the island states are dependent to some extent on foreign aid and remittances from expatriate citizens, and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. In Tonga in 1984, for example, 90 percent of households were remittance recipients, and these remittances constituted some 28 percent of household income (Brown and Foster 1995, 29). The Melanesian states of western Oceania, particularly Fiji and Papua New Guinea, do have mineral and agricultural resources, but none have significant foreign investment. Nauru is a special case where considerable wealth has been obtained through the exploitation of the only natural resource, phosphate, but where depletion of the resource may well signal a sudden and dramatic drop in living standards.

Other states have almost no resources to develop and, unless they continue to have a population base able to work in Australia and New Zealand and remit money home, will never be able to have more than a subsistence lifestyle and economy unless there are significant changes in the external environment. The Cook Islands, Tonga, and Western Samoa
Table 1. States and Territories of the South Pacific

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Political Condition</th>
<th>Size (sq. km)</th>
<th>Population (000s)</th>
<th>GDP/Capita (US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Samoa</td>
<td>Unincorporated U.S. territory</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4,540 (1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>Self-governing in free association with New Zealand</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6,280 (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federated States of</td>
<td>Self-governing in free association with the United States</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,467 (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micronesia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>Independent republic</td>
<td>18,376</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>2,659 (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guam</td>
<td>Unincorporated U.S. territory</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>8,167 (1986)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>Independent republic</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>696 (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall Islands</td>
<td>Self-governing in free association with the United States</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1,576 (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>Independent republic</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22,418 (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niue</td>
<td>Self-governing in free association with New Zealand</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>A$1,533 (1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Marianas</td>
<td>U.S. commonwealth</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9,100 (1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palau</td>
<td>Self-governing in free association with the United States</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2,500 (1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>Independent state</td>
<td>29,785</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>1,336 (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>Independent monarchy</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>1,297 (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td>Independent state</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>A$1,238 (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>Independent republic</td>
<td>12,189</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>A$1,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallis and Futuna</td>
<td>French overseas territory</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>A$16 (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Samoa</td>
<td>Independent state</td>
<td>2,934</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>1,713 (1991)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes: The developed states Australia and New Zealand and the very small island territories of Pitcairn, Easter, Norfolk, and Tokelau have not been included. The fact that the GDP/Capita data is up to fourteen years old in this table points out the limited resources available to collect and analyze such information.

are in this category, but their expatriated citizens’ ability to send money home is dependent on relatively liberal immigration laws, especially in New Zealand. Other states in the region will have to rely on tourism (for which there is only and can only be a limited infrastructure because of limited population resources) and on the exploitation of their EEZs. Minerals and fisheries may be successfully exploited in the future by these states, but they will have to rely on foreign investment and expertise. Before that can work effectively, the island states will need to develop
their negotiating skills considerably. There is an unhappy record of island states chasing “get rich quick” schemes with disastrous results.

**IDENTIFYING SECURITY CHALLENGES**

Despite this diversity, there is one convenient distinction to be made: that between the developed Western states of Australia and New Zealand and the remainder of the region. Even that dichotomy may be unhelpful, though, in that considerable diversity clearly exists within the group of states and territories described as the remainder. However, unless each state is treated discretely some generalization is essential. In this chapter, most attention will be paid to Oceania, that is, to the Pacific island states of the region excluding Australia and New Zealand. Although those two countries will be discussed briefly, this chapter is more interested in the ways that the island states have been able to work together to meet the various challenges to their security.

The whole concept of the “new security” is slightly problematic in this region. As already discussed, the new security is not particularly new for the Southwest Pacific; indeed, the small island states have had no other kind of security to consider. The debate for them is to determine whether a given issue constitutes a threat or a concern. For Australia and New Zealand also, there is almost no debate about the concept of security per se, which in their case is primarily set in military terms. Specific non-military issues—the hole in the ozone layer, the emission of greenhouse gases, New Zealand as a way point for international drug traffickers—may be raised and may require government caretaking or leadership, but they are rarely set in security terms, even when individual security if not state security is clearly at stake. The “how wide can security be taken” debate has been conducted elsewhere (Ball and Horner 1992). In this chapter, the issues, unless otherwise noted, are taken to be security issues if governments and commentators treat them as such.

Of course, in discussing the security of the island states there is some danger of falling into the trap of assuming that the concerns of a Western liberal scholar are the same concerns held by those on the receiving end of the scholarship, or that they are identified in the same way. Wartho (1995) provides a stimulating counter to that tendency by reminding us that Oceania and its individual states are not necessarily small, not necessarily isolated, not necessarily dependent, not necessarily desirous
of being liberal, and have some considerable geostrategic value. In this
sense, Oceania is a construct born of colonialism and Western scholar-
ship that exists for the benefit of larger exploiters; it is “Oceania as other”
(223). But despite Wartho’s strictures, the Southwest Pacific does have
interactions with the rest of the world and is inevitably going to be exam-
ined through foreign prisms. As many of the world’s security problems
are also the region’s, so some of the proposed solutions are applicable to
the region. The converse may also be true: the region has developed proc-
cesses from which other groups of states could usefully learn. Polomka
and Hegarty (1989) provide useful contributions from analysts from
within the region.

Australia and New Zealand

These two countries are developed Western economies. Each is a mem-
ber of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
and has the advantages and disadvantages associated with advanced indus-
trialized states. Their economies are slightly different: New Zealand’s
economy is, to a large extent, based on primary production, while that
of Australia has a significant manufacturing base. New Zealand’s econ-
omy is, as a result of economic and political change in the eleven years
from 1985 to 1995, perhaps somewhat more open than Australia’s,
although both are open by world standards. They have a bilateral free
trade regime, which is moving into areas such as the harmonization of
investment practices and business law.

Neither country has seriously feared external military threat since
World War II, and both have remained more or less solidly within the
Western group of nations. Both countries recognize and welcome the role
of the United States as preponderant military power in the wider Asia
Pacific region, although Australia has been more concerned than has
New Zealand to ensure that the United States remain engaged as an ally
and protector. Differences in each country’s approach to military secu-
ritry may be seen in the relative levels of expenditure on defense and in
the relationship each state has now with the United States through the
ANZUS alliance.*

There is some effort, especially in Australia, expended in attempting
to define a new security that would be relevant to the post–cold war
world and that would alter the focus from military to nonmilitary se-
curity needs. Dalby provides a broad overview of “dissident security
discourse[s]" that do not "play the realist game," but he notes that such
dissident arguments "are often present only within the overall frame-
works of conventional thinking" (1996, 59, 62, 74).

The clear absence of military threat means that some effort can be
focused on nontraditional security issues. In neither country is there sig-
nificant concern about resource scarcity, sustained civil violence, trans-
national terrorism, or transnational organized crime, although those
issues are occasionally raised in a precautionary way to ensure that they
are watched and do not become problems. Both countries are, however,
concerned about the environment and issues relating to the rights of in-
digenous peoples, although these are both generally treated as political
or legal, rather than security, matters. The ways these issues affect the
countries and the ways they are dealt with differ, understandably, from
the less-developed countries of the region. In neither case do these issues
affect the security of the state. Rather, they are issues that affect the se-
curity and sense of well-being of individuals within each country and in
that sense are issues of the second level of the new security, discussed
above.

environmental issues Both Australia and New Zealand are large
and relatively unpopulated. Both have, however, a large middle class with
the time and the resources to ensure that environmental issues are placed
at the center of the popular agenda. There is a considerable corpus of lit-
erature in both countries dealing with environmental issues. Nongovern-
mental environmental movements are active and ensure that both central
and local governments pay attention to environmental issues as part of
any development process.

New Zealand has specific legislation (the Environment Act 1988, the
establishes safeguards for the environment and forces all levels of govern-
ment to plan to ensure environmental sustainability and to take account
of environmental implications when any form of physical development
or alteration to the natural environment is proposed. There is some ten-
sion between the desires of developers and others to gain the maximum
economic return from the environment and those who believe the envi-
ronment should be maximally protected from irresponsible exploita-
tion. Buhrs (1996) discusses many of the issues, specifically the role of
the independent watchdog—the Parliamentary Commissioner for the
Environment (PCE), in the New Zealand context. The PCE reports regularly to Parliament on matters of environmental concern.

In Australia, the debate is about the problems facing the environment and what to do about them. The State of the Environment Advisory Council (1996) recently reported on the state of the national environment, stating that the most pressing problems are overpopulation, crashing biodiversity, the inexcusable loss of native vegetation, the degradation of rivers, the continuation of an energy industry that spews out greenhouse gases, air pollution in cities, and the associated problems of urban sprawl, salinity, coastal degradation, weeds, and feral animals. There is little agreement on solutions to the problems, and fears abound that politics will supersede science as the issues are addressed.

**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES** Both Australia and New Zealand have colonial pasts that have hugely disadvantaged indigenous peoples (Maori in New Zealand: 12 percent of the population, Aborigine in Australia: 1–2 percent of the population) in socioeconomic terms. This has not, generally, been the result of overt and officially sanctioned racist policies (certainly in recent decades) so much as the cumulative effects of racially unthinking practices. Both countries have moved to ensure that indigenous peoples have proper access to education, health, housing, and general welfare benefits.

Land claims are a major issue in both countries. In the early days of colonization, the assumptions were either that land could be taken because it was not owned, or that it could be alienated by a variety of illegal or unethical practices. Now, both countries have recognized the rights of indigenous peoples and have established processes to return their land or to compensate them for it. Sharp (1991) describes the way New Zealand has established a quasi-judicial process of settling land claims, which has seen large parts of the country revert to tribal economic control. Side by side with the judicial process is a more explicitly political one where tribes with large claims negotiate with the government to achieve a settlement of their claim which, if not all that they would like, does give significant amounts of money to a tribe immediately. Barber (1995) describes the background to the settlement of one major land claim.

In both Australia and New Zealand, there is considerable resentment from parts of the European majority over the “favored” treatment being extended to indigenous peoples. In neither country, however, is this likely
to rise beyond isolated cases of criminal behavior by citizens expressing their opinion of the processes. By the same token, if the land claims issues had not been addressed, there would have been some possibility that, in New Zealand at least, a small group of radical Maoris would have attempted to occupy “their” land and exclude all others from it. As it is, the possibilities of this kind of action are considerably lessened.  

Pacific Island Countries

Because the region was never particularly affected by cold war security issues, its concerns were, from an early stage, directed toward a range of threats that could impact unfavorably on individual countries in ways that did not necessarily affect the state’s existence. This has meant that those limited armed forces which do exist play only minor roles in preparing for national defense. Ross has argued that this is because of “the considerable domestic political stability in the island states, the marginal strategic importance of the region, the overwhelmingly maritime nature of the region (there is only one land boundary) and the considerable amount of cooperation at the regional level. Of course, the low level of unwelcome intrusion by powerful outsiders has helped a lot too” (1993, 17).

A good example of national thinking in the region, probably widely shared, is that at the Cook Islands, where security strategy is “aimed largely at increasing national economic independence and improving the quality of social services delivered by the government” (Gosselin 1989, 44).

Henningham (1995) discusses some specific security issues and how they relate to sovereignty for the island states in the post–cold war period, and this theme is carried on by Thakur (1995), who discusses both the components of the new security and also the way the new security fits within a Southwest Pacific framework. Ball (1991, 19, 20) has suggested that in this region economic and environmental issues constitute by far the most important threats to regional well-being and security. The environmental issues he focuses on include soil depletion, deforestation, desertification, contaminated water supplies, global warming, and the greenhouse effect. In the Southwest Pacific, he argues, these environmental issues represent the real security problems of the next couple of decades.

Other scholars generally agree with this, although they go beyond specifically environmental and economic matters. Saemala (1989, 51) adds national unity, economic development, education, and health as
being primary security concerns for the Solomon Islands. In a similar vein, the Pacific Campaign for Disarmament and Security has followed the United Nations Development Programme in defining security with an emphasis on human security: “Forgotten were the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who sought security in their daily lives. For many of them security symbolized protection from the threats of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards. . . . [I]t is a concern with human life and dignity” (1995, 4–5).

Alley (1996) adds considerably to the list of security concerns when he discusses nuclear testing in the region (as an environmental as much as a nuclear issue), the challenges of decolonization, and, more specifically, the problems of excessive logging in the Solomon Islands and Vatnuatu, a topic that, in the context of Western Samoa, is also analyzed in some detail by Ward (1995). Other issues, less often raised in the context of a new security agenda, are questions of governance. They concern the problems of lawlessness in individual states, especially Papua New Guinea, the role of the armed forces as a threat to security rather than a guarantor of it, and a continuing lack of democracy in some Pacific island states leading to authoritarian rule at best and completely anti-democratic practices and corruption at worst. Much of this is discussed only in news reports rather than through scholarly analysis. All of these new concerns have been described as “small ‘s’ security” (Siaguru 1989), which seems to be an appropriate term.

There has been a minor debate as to whether these issues constitute threats as opposed to concerns. As noted above, Ball (1991) has discussed security threats, whereas other scholars have preferred the more neutral concept of concern. Ross argues strongly that the recent experience of the region is that its “economic vulnerability has not been closely intertwined with those developments which have tested its security” and that while environmental problems may represent the real security problems in the longer term, “for the present and immediate future such environmental developments are not significant as security considerations for the island states” (1993, 22, 89). Whether or not they represent threats, these issues are, and have been for some time, on the regional security agenda.

**ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION** The environment is fundamental to the economic well-being and hence security of most of the Pacific
islands. Much of the population relies on subsistence methods of suste-
nance, and most economic activity (some 70 percent to 80 percent) is
based on the primary sector (Boutilier 1989, 112). Even service sectors,
such as tourism, use the physical environment as a selling point. What is
significant about environmental change in the Pacific islands is that
its local impact is both more immediate and, in terms of people’s wel-
fare, more serious than long-term global processes of change (Overton
1993, 49). 6

Environmental issues, according to Kennaway, “merit consideration
as a possible source of conflict in the Asia-Pacific region” (1996, 155). Ken-
naway discusses the domestic and external influences leading to tensions
and concludes that there are “various reasons why there has been com-
paratively little acute environmental conflict at the international level,”
but that “there is the potential for increased tension and conflict . . . that
could escalate to acute levels in the next decade” (170, 177). He is, however,
discussing the Asia Pacific region generally rather than the Southwest
Pacific specifically.

There are many ways the environment can be, and is being, degraded.
Population movements, the activities of local and foreign developers,
and commercial interests with a short-term focus are all putting pressure
on local environments. There are severe problems of land erosion lead-
ing to siltation of rivers and lagoons, spoiling of village water supplies,
and damage to coral reefs and associated ecosystems. Large-scale and
indiscriminate forestry activities lead to increased storm damage and
consequent loss of local foods, building materials, and medicinal plants.
Open-cut mining techniques have also caused severe environmental
damage through the stripping of the top soil and the dumping of tailings
in river valleys with consequent effects on vegetation, water, and marine
life (SPPRG 1990, 165–68). Phosphate mining activities have covered
some 80 percent of Nauru and Banaba (part of Kiribati) and nearly 50
percent of Makatea (in French Polynesia). These levels have stretched
the environment to such an extent that Banaba was virtually abandoned
after mining ceased in 1979, and fewer than 30 people remain on Makat-
ea (169).

It is not only directly man-made problems that can affect the environ-
ment. Natural hazards, whether in the form of catastrophic disaster, such
as cyclones or volcanic activity, or through the effects of climate change,
especially of global warming, have been a major concern. The islands of
the Southwest Pacific are extremely vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters for the following reasons:

- the proportionately high disaster impact brought about because of a reliance on a narrow range of commodities, which means that a disaster can paralyse the economy;
- the fragility of the island environment;
- the scattered and isolated nature of island communities;
- increasing urbanisation without a commensurate increase in the resources to cope with the population pressures; and
- a degradation of traditional coping mechanisms as communities have declined in self-reliance and become increasingly reliant on governments and external donors. (International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction 1994, 8)

With climate change there are many uncertainties (Nunn 1990; Overton 1993, 48). There is obviously a danger of sea-level rise, but regional variations of the effects and the possible magnitude of any change are not well understood, or even known.

The range of possible effects could include coastal erosion, inundation, degradation of fresh water supplies, and damage to coral reefs leading to wave-effect damage and to the depletion of fish stocks. Changes in sea temperatures could lead to migrations of fish stocks with consequent effects on fisheries, tourism, and aquaculture (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade [MFAT] 1996, 30; Alley 1996, 56–57). If estimates of a one-meter increase in sea levels are accurate, it is likely that many if not most atolls will become uninhabitable in their present form. What matters is often not overall sea levels but the level in times of vulnerability, such as during spring tides, hurricanes, and tsunamis, as well as the level of the subsurface fresh water lens, which is reduced as sea levels rise. Without any increase in sea level, for example, a hurricane in 1946 reduced the atoll of Suwarrow in the northern Cook Islands from twenty-one separate islets to seven. The rest were swept away (Crocombe n.d., 1).

Edwards (1996) argues that many of the “worst case” effects of climate change are already occurring, but as a result not of climate change but of other factors such as emigration and overenthusiastic forest exploitation. Rather than fearing and planning for the worst, which will lead to short-term destructive solutions, Edwards concludes that more attention should be focused on indigenous management strategies that will give
the island states more control over their own affairs and will allow them to respond effectively to the gradual effects of climate change (1996, 79).

Nuclear issues have also developed an environmental component in the region. There are concerns about radioactive contamination from French underground tests in the 1980s and 1990s and about residual effects of U.S. above-ground tests in the Marshall Islands in the 1950s (SPPRG 1990, 172). Several atolls continue to be unfit for human habitation, and there are continuing health problems among local inhabitants (Alley 1996, 52).

**Resource Scarcity** Resource scarcity is tied to the health of the immediate environment. The Pacific island states have few natural resources other than the sea, the forests, and minerals, and they have extremely limited processing and manufacturing capacities. There are obvious limits to what is possible because of economic and population constraints. This means that what resources there are need to be conserved carefully through sustainable harvesting practices.

Fish are a central food source for many Pacific island people. In some areas, reef fish and other reef organisms provide up to 70 percent of caloric intake (SPPRG 1990, 169). There is some evidence that the activities of tourism, development, and overfishing are degrading the reef systems to such an extent that they may not be able to provide the levels of food that local people require (171). Particular concern has been expressed about the effects of blasting reef systems to build navigation channels and roads. These activities not only destroy the reefs but also may reduce the tidal flushing inside coral lagoons, leading to siltation, erosion, and pollution (172).

Commercial fishing is also important. The central and western South Pacific has the largest tuna fishery in the world, with an average catch worth some US$1.1 billion annually. Most of this is taken by Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States, with perhaps only some 2 percent to 3 percent of the total value going to the island states, mostly because of a lack of suitable fishing boats and trained crews (SPPRG 1990; Alley 1996, 54). The problems of lack of access were exacerbated in the 1980s with the introduction by extraregional operators of large-scale drift-net fishing techniques, which, by using walls of nets kilometers across, took not only the target catch but also all other marine fish and animals in the path of the nets. These techniques are inherently unsustainable.
Forests, also, are a disappearing asset. In Melanesia, especially, the loss of indigenous forest has become a matter of public concern, but the problems are manifest throughout the region. Between the mid-1950s and the late 1980s, the proportion of the total land area of Western Samoa under forest cover declined from 74 percent to 55 percent, and similar rates are shown for Fiji (Ward 1995, 73–74). The economic returns from forestry are important to local economies, but pressure for short-term economic gain “is dominating in the absence of adequate procedures or resources to address the issue comprehensively” (SPPRG 1990, 165). In the Solomons, forestry is a financial mainstay of the economy but is the cause of environmental disaster: Worse, at present extraction rates the Solomon Islands will, according to former Prime Minister Billy Hilly, be “completely logged out within fifteen years” (Henningham 1995, 75).

There are several dimensions to the logging issue. On the one hand, in some areas such as Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, for example, logging has encouraged alliances “attracting contrasting external supports” (Alley 1996, 56). Local governing elites and transnational commercial interests have joined forces against local land interests aligning with international conservationism. In Western Samoa, on the other hand, local customary owners are using their land according to their perceived needs. Any moves to “give statutory status to conservation areas face the competing imperatives for politicians of maintaining fa‘aSamoa,” or the Samoan way of life (Ward 1995, 91).

**DEMOGRAPHIC ISSUES** Although the region is generally sparsely populated with consequent effects on the ability of the island states to establish labor-intensive industries, there are areas of high population growth which also cause concern. In Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands, population growth rates are extremely high at around 2.7 percent per annum, a rate that is not met by economic growth and is exacerbated by rapid and unplanned urbanization. There is potential here for considerable internal tension (Vodanovich 1996, 115). Even where total populations are low, the population densities around some island capitals are very high. For example, the population density on South Tarawa, Kiribati, is 1,354 per square kilometer, greater than in Bangladesh (Cole 1993, 15).

Conversely, depopulation is a major problem for states such as Niue and the Cook Islands (with populations of 2,000 and 17,000, respectively),
whose populations increasingly migrate to New Zealand in search of economic opportunity. There is speculation that a number of these countries could be almost completely depopulated and inhabited only by tourist resorts and offshore banks if the trend continues (Ward 1989).

On the other hand, the ability to emigrate may provide a safety valve for social tensions deriving from high birth rates, underemployment, and pressures on traditional structures, all of which are challenges to social and political stability (SPPRG 1990, 137). Overton concludes that the effects of population change, in terms of people’s daily lives, “are greater than possible environmental change over a century or more” (1993, 50). If he is correct, then some attention will have to be given to this issue.

A specific issue of salience since the late 1980s is that of the relative size of indigenous populations when compared with that of later migrant groups. The Fijian coups of 1987 (see below), in part caused by fears of an (immigrant) Indian political takeover of the country, attracted considerable tacit support from the region, which accepted the argument that the indigenous peoples had superior rights to other groups. This problem, if problem it is, should be solved by the early decades of the twenty-first century in Fiji, at least, as the ethnic Fijian population is expected to outgrow that of the Fijian Indians by some 30 percent (Cole 1993, 67).

civil governanceBecause of the region’s (primarily British) colonial past, the forms of government are predominantly democratic. They do not, however, necessarily take account of traditional (and perhaps severely undemocratic) forms of government that many regard as being more appropriate for the traditional island societies (Wartho 1995, 218–220; Jennings 1990, 5). Even in the democracies, the arbitrary use of executive power, human rights abuses, and low-level corruption are endemic forms of political behavior. In their use of corruption, at least, these states are little different from other more developed states. Tensions between Western representative democracy and traditional practices do exist, but they are unlikely to cause conflict, and almost certainly not international conflict.

Although the region is generally peaceful, there are several areas in which there is actual conflict or the potential for it. These should generally remain as internal problems rather than regional or interstate ones, although that cannot be certain.

Fiji experienced two military coups in 1987 following the election of
a government widely perceived to be overly sympathetic to the interests of the immigrant ethnic Indian population. The coups led to the installation of a military government and to the discarding of the Constitution. Fiji was forced to leave the Commonwealth. Although the coups received tacit support from much of the region, as a symbol of the rights of indigenous people in their own country, they also caused considerable dismay among those who had seen the country as a bulwark of democratic practices. Since then, electoral government has been restored and a new Constitution that respects the rights of minorities proposed. Until that Constitution (which is not supported by hardline nationalists) is adopted, Fiji will continue to be a source of speculation as to its future course, although for now “the coups appear to have been an aberration” (Ross 1996, 130). It is not likely that Fiji’s internal governance will become an issue with its neighbors.

Papua New Guinea has suffered a secessionist movement on the mineral-rich island of Bougainville for several decades. The Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) has local support and perhaps the ability to control parts of the island, but it shows no sign of being able to force Papua New Guinea to relinquish the island. Fighting between the government and insurgents periodically spills over the sea border into the Solomon Islands, most recently in mid-1996, as Papua New Guinea soldiers pursued insurgent fighters into the Solomons. This is the most troublesome area for interstate relations, but, given the lack of any wide support for the BRA, the region’s record in dampening conflict, and the lack of resources the Solomon Islands has to prosecute a conflict, there is likely to be no more than political conflict between the states. There is speculation that, as the fighting on Bougainville drags on, the Papua New Guinea Army is in danger of degenerating into a government-funded bandit organization preying on the civilian population (Reuters 1996a). To the extent that that occurs in or near the Solomon Islands, there is some possibility of fighting between the two states. Neither country has sufficient resources to cause serious physical damage to the other; the real damage would be to regional unity.

Tonga is the only independent state that is not to some extent a democracy. It is a more or less absolute monarchy in which the king and the political elite rule almost unchecked. There are periodic challenges to the monarch’s absolute authority and calls for the introduction of at least limited democracy, and in time that will happen. James (1994) describes
how commoners’ achievements and interests are underrepresented and how the better educated seek to reform immoral and unethical behavior on the part of some nobles and ministers of the crown. Change may come at the end of the rule of the current king, Tāufa’āhau Tupou IV, now age 80 (Ross 1996, 132). Whether change comes or not, there is unlikely to be any spillover into the international arena.

Vanuatu has been the most independent of the regional states. In the 1980s, it joined the Non-Aligned Movement, flirted with a number of extraregional states, such as Libya, and suffered several tumultuous splits in the leadership of the ruling political party. Most recently, in October 1996, the paramilitary security force, the Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF), revolted and kidnapped the president and the acting prime minister in a pay dispute. In November, the Vanuatu police arrested all members of the VMF and a number are to be put on trial (Reuters 1996b). Again, this affair will not lead to conflict within the region.

Human rights issues have risen to some prominence. Robie documents a range of abuses in the region (he includes Indonesia) and describes them as a source of “regional insecurity” (1993, 124). Alley (1996, 59) also covers this ground and presents data on the limited levels of compliance with international human rights and related covenants. Despite their increasing salience in the eyes of Western commentators, these issues will also not lead to conflict.

Henderson (1996, 243, 244) discusses the problems of those island states where inappropriate colonial boundaries and consequent mixed cultures leave the existing states sitting uneasily as multinational states. Secession (as is being attempted on Bougainville) is a possibility, but no state will support foreign secessionist movements for fear that similar movements will be encouraged in their own territory. A proliferation of microstates is not desirable in any case, as most of the current small states already are barely viable in economic terms. There might, according to Henderson, be scope for the wider use of the “free association” model and for international recognition to be given to “nations without states” (248).

**Decolonization** A persistent feature of the South Pacific’s linkage to a world beyond has been its legacy of colonialism (Alley 1996, 51), and several colonies and territories remain in the region. Many, such as Tokelau, American Samoa, or Norfolk Island, do not wish for any significant form of independence, or even limited self-government. Others do. The
French territories of New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna are the most likely to gain some form of autonomy. For the time being, though, they remain economically dependent on France to a large extent.

In New Caledonia, there has been an independence movement that used violence in the 1980s in an attempt to achieve its goals. Following the negotiation of the Matignon Accords in 1988, which allowed a cooling-down period and which have gained “considerable acceptance” (Henningham 1993, 536), a self-determination referendum is to be conducted in 1998, and “it is inconceivable that at the end of the day the act of self-determination could simply be a continuation of the status quo in New Caledonia. Juridically, that may be possible. Politically, it would fly in the face of the logic of political evolution” (SPPRG 1990, 71, emphasis in the original). That may be so for New Caledonia, but the other territories remain locked in a dependency trap strong enough to obstruct local demands for outright independence (Alley 1996, 5).

Decolonization, then, is an issue primarily for New Caledonia. Ross notes that “since . . . 1988 there has been a virtual absence of political violence. Although the old divisions between independence and their opponents have disappeared, the important decisions—on independence or not—are still to be taken. Another period of violence is likely before the territory’s constitutional future is finally resolved” (1996, 132).

RESOLVING THE CHALLENGES

Australia and New Zealand have clear processes available to identify and resolve issues of concern that accord with standard Western liberal-democratic political and judicial procedures. Both countries have departments of state responsible for environmental issues, and each has developed a set of procedures designed to resolve the primarily land-based grievances held by their indigenous populations. As well, in theory both countries attempt to integrate all security concerns (including these) into a coherent set of security policies, even if specific threats are not expressly identified. New Zealand has a security regime in which “in formulating policies to safeguard New Zealand’s security, consideration must be given to all matters which could affect the welfare and orderly government of New Zealand, including natural disaster, military or terrorist action and economic crisis” (quoted in Rolfe 1995b, 95).
Australia also attempts to integrate its security policies in this way: "the policy responses or instruments available to protect Australia’s security are multidimensional . . . they extend to immigration, education and training, cultural relations, information activities, and a number of other less obvious areas of government activity" (quoted in Rolfe 1995b, 91). Neither state identifies specific threats in detail and neither has been notably successful in attempting to integrate the issues into a coherent and overarching security policy.

The Pacific island states are not so clearly capable of acting alone whether they wish to or not. They are individually too small and too weak. A number of the problems also affect the region as a whole, and there are thus considerable advantages in working together to ensure that issues do not become concerns and concerns do not become problems. Because of this, there is an "ongoing quest towards a community of Pacific Island States in which each member country cares and takes practical measures to resolve the problems of others through cooperation in economic, social, cultural and security matters. The evolution in this direction is, and will remain, a constant one" (SPPRG 1990, 3).

The concept of "shared view" often arises naturally as common problems are faced. A shared view facilitates the formation of an appropriate strategy through which the interests of South Pacific states might be pursued with better effect (Gosselin 1989, 47). This means that there is an attempt to deal with these issues of comprehensive security in a multilateral and comprehensive way.

In 1971, the independent states within the region joined together to form the South Pacific Forum, following the already existing South Pacific Commission, which consisted of the metropolitan powers with territories in the region and which has focused more on technical issues. The Forum consists of the independent and self-governing states within the region, has a permanent secretariat based in Suva, Fiji, and is founded on the common desire by leaders to develop a collective response to a wide range of regional issues including trade, economic development, civil aviation and maritime, telecommunications, energy and political and security matters (MFAT 1996, 3–4). The Forum meets annually as a heads of government meeting at which there is no fixed agenda, no set rules governing the conduct of Forum sessions, and no votes taken on issues. This almost noninstitutionalization of process hides some significant achievements on matters of substantial concern to the region.
Economic development concerns have been addressed through several measures. The 1977 establishment of the Pacific Forum Line (PFL) provided a regular and adequate shipping service to the region. The PFL is owned by twelve Forum governments and itself owns three modern commercial cargo vessels. The establishment of the PFL assisted intraregional trade. External trade has been promoted by the 1980 South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (SPARTECA), which guarantees duty-free and unrestricted access on a nonreciprocal basis for a wide range of island products into Australia and New Zealand (MFAT 1996).

Fisheries issues are coordinated by the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA, established in 1979), which is extremely important as a means of coordinating activities and maximizing the returns to the small island states (Gosselin 1989; Alley 1996). The FFA promotes conservation and fisheries management programs, regional fisheries surveillance, and the sovereign rights of the island states over their fisheries resources. Fishing concerns, mainly relating to access by foreign states and the use of drift-net fishing techniques, have been resolved to a large extent by increased surveillance by Australia and New Zealand using their specialist maritime patrol aircraft, by the conclusion of a multilateral treaty with the United States dealing with access to the fisheries (although no treaty has been negotiated between the region and the other major fishing states of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan), and, most significantly, by negotiating a ban on drift-net fishing through the 1991 Wellington Convention on Drift Net Fishing, which effectively stopped the practice in the South Pacific.

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which defines rights to EEZs, gave the region a sense of the value of its archipelagic nature. Maritime boundaries intersect and the region can only be entered through one or more of the island states’ EEZs. Ross notes that since the convention came into force, “the islands have cooperated in determining most of the EEZs’ joint boundaries; of those still to be finalised, none is in dispute, although some of the final delimitations have yet to be formally agreed. This cooperation has enabled the region’s richest resource, the sea, to be managed well” (1996, 133).

Environmental issues are addressed by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), which was initiated in 1974 by the South Pacific Commission and adopted by the Forum in 1980. SPREP became an independent treaty-based organization in 1995, designed “to
assist South Pacific countries and territories to protect and improve their shared environment and manage their resources to enhance the quality of life for present and future generations" (MFAT 1996, 14).

Within the SPREP there are individual programs dealing with conservation and the protection of biological diversity; the management of and planning for ecologically sustainable development and conservation of coastal areas, habitats, and resources; and the promotion of sustainable activities. SPREP has been working on environment-related issues since 1991. It acts as the regional coordinator and clearinghouse for climate change activities, and it played a prominent role through the International Association of Small Island States in the negotiations for the 1994 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Specifically on climate change, Nunn (1990, 47) has suggested a range of strategies to include mitigation through engineering, adaptation by the islanders and preventive activities such as those recommended by the United Nations, and reducing forest destruction and limiting the use of fossil fuels.

Human rights issues have been addressed collectively in only a limited manner, primarily because of the prevailing Forum ethos of noninterference. Papua New Guinea has been the subject of critical comment from Amnesty International for neither permitting independent monitoring of the situation on Bougainville nor investigating claims of abuses perpetrated by its own armed forces (Amnesty International 1993). Papua New Guinea has dismissed any role for the UN Human Rights Commission on Bougainville, but it does take its representation on that body seriously, perhaps indicating some sensitivity to the issue (Alley 1996, 59). Attempts to resolve the situation on Bougainville have also been taken collectively. New Zealand has provided a warship as a neutral venue for talks (Henderson 1996, 244), and in 1995 Australia and New Zealand provided logistical support for an ultimately abortive regional peacekeeping force with troops provided from Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu (Alley 1996, 60; Henderson 1996, 244). Fry (1990), writing before Bougainville became a salient issue, gives a critical analysis of the possibilities of regional peacekeeping.³

The Forum has worked as a bloc within the United Nations (MFAT 1996). It has addressed the question of decolonization in New Caledonia since 1981 and played an active role in the 1986 reinscription by the United Nations of that territory on the List of Non-Self-Governing Territories. The island states also worked together successfully to gain
support for the UN condemnation of the resumption of French nuclear testing in the South Pacific in 1985.

The Forum has also developed institutional links with the international community through a post-meeting dialogue with a range of states with interests in the region. The major European, North American, and North Asian (including Taiwan) states are members of this dialogue process, but no Southeast Asian states have yet become involved (MFAT 1996). This must eventually happen.

As well as these self-supporting regional efforts, there are the activities of the United Nations. According to Alley, appraisals of the region's international relations that lack a UN dimension "remain incomplete" (1994, 245). Alley discusses the role of the different agencies; however, much of his discussion relates to the Asian component of Asia Pacific. He notes the comment of Gordon Bilney, former Australian Pacific affairs minister, who criticized one agency, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), for paying insufficient attention to the Southwest Pacific (255).

THE WAY AHEAD

The processes described herein show a high level of both governmental and nongovernmental involvement in identifying and attempting to resolve these security issues. Although much of the rest of the world describes these as “new” security issues, for the island states of the South Pacific they are long-standing but increasingly relevant issues. They are also issues that, to a large extent, cannot be solved by any one state acting independently. Alley notes that "regional cooperation [has been] neither hobbled [by] nor held hostage to conflicts within the region. Although not absent, disputes have remained relatively minor, allowing social and economic priorities scope to emerge as shared regional concerns. An absence of regional trouble has allowed standard setting and rule-based behaviour to take root" (1996, 50).

The network of cooperative institutions is unmatched elsewhere in the Third World in terms of effectiveness (Dorrance 1995, 29). This effectiveness is because the island states have "developed a substantial, if informal, collective security arrangement, which has for the most part handled adeptly perceived intrusions into the South Pacific. . . . In general, through its preeminent organisation, the South Pacific Forum,
creating several subsidiary bodies, the region has considerably moderated economic resource exploitation by outsiders and the amount of environmental damage which may have been done” (Ross 1993, 18).

Because the region has these well-developed processes of communication between its member states, few of the issues are likely to lead to international conflict. The only one that is at all likely to do so is the civil insurrection on Bougainville, which has the potential to bring Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands into conflict. Already, there have been low-level clashes between the rudimentary armed forces of each side. Limits will be set on any conflict, however, because of the limited capacity each country has to deploy forces.

It is clear that there is a large measure of consensus among the states in the region as to the main issues. On many issues, there is also general agreement as to what needs to be done to resolve them and to ensure that the processes meet the needs of the whole region. But agreement does not necessarily mean that actions will be taken. The region is still one of severely limited resources, which means that solutions may not be able to be implemented effectively. On many other issues, there is much research necessary before sensible policies can be promoted. In no particular order of priority, these include questions (many of them interrelated) such as the following related to economics and resources:

♦ What are the appropriate measures to provide wealth and development?
♦ Is continuing dependence inevitable for the very small island countries?
♦ What is sustainable in terms of resource exploitation in all sectors of economic activity?
♦ Are there alternatives to the current limited range of economically viable activities? Can such alternatives help halt population drifts to urban and metropolitan areas?
♦ What level of population is viable in a given area? Why are population increases at such levels? Can they be reduced through education or birth control?
♦ How real is the possibility of global warming and sea level rise? If sea level rises occur, which specific areas will be affected and how?
♦ What can be done to prepare for and mitigate the effects of natural disasters?

Also included are the following questions related to politics and governance:
How can regional cooperation be enhanced?
- Is liberal democracy the most appropriate model of governance?
- How can the needs of small ethnic groups best be met within the context of current state boundaries?
- Are current state boundaries the most appropriate? If not, can anything be done about them?
- How can a culture that accepts “universal” human rights be developed?
- How effective can third-party conflict mediation and resolution be?

CONCLUSION

The Southwest Pacific has many advantages. Its distance from world trouble spots and its lack of resources have meant that the world has taken little interest in it and its concerns. In turn, this has meant that it has been able to determine for itself what is important for its security and has developed its own processes to resolve regional issues.

There seems to be a fairly clear consensus among analysts as to the range of issues and their potential impact upon the region and upon individual states. Policymakers have followed the analysis and focused primarily on resource and environmental issues as they attempt to ensure that the region can continue to function as a collection of individual states. Most policy prescriptions to date involve the region embracing collective responses to problems. This may work, as in the case of drift-net fishing by external powers, or it may be a device to slow down unpopular or nationally unsaleable policies, as in the case of logging in a number of island states. This is not likely to change so long as the region adheres to its informal consensus decision-making style. The processes are inevitably limited in any case by a general lack of resources.

There is little likelihood of serious international conflict occurring as a result of any of the issues. States within the region do not have sufficient armed forces to make conflict viable, and external states do not have sufficient interests to contemplate the use of armed force to resolve issues. This kind of approach has put the region ahead of much of the rest of the world, which is only now beginning to grapple with the new security issues. The region will for some time, however, be limited in its ability to resolve these issues effectively because of the gross lack of resources (financial, technical, and trained personnel) available to examine the problems.
1. The term “Southwest” may be misleading in this sense; however, the states commonly identified as “Pacific island states” include several whose territories extend north of the equator. This use of the term “region” begs the question as to whether the Southwest Pacific is indeed a coherent region. See the discussion in Ross (1993, 3). For the purposes of this chapter, the region includes Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea, as well as the Pacific islands south from about the equator and extending from Indonesia east to Easter Island.

2. This is more true of the Pacific islands than of Australia and New Zealand, which have been firmly allied with the Western group of states. Despite that, from the late 1960s the armed forces of those two countries were not designed with alliance or Western needs in mind so much as with their own needs.

3. Cook Islands citizens have a constitutional right to live in New Zealand.

4. Since 1985, New Zealand has been “suspended” from any U.S. military security guarantee following New Zealand’s refusal to allow a possibly nuclear armed warship to enter its waters in 1984 and the introduction in 1985 of legislation banning nuclear armed or powered vessels from national waters.

5. The 1996 elections brought Maori in Parliament in numbers roughly proportional to their numbers in the general population. This also should help in reducing tensions.

6. Overton (1993) gives an extensive bibliography of research into these issues.

7. The Forum now has fifteen members, including Australia and New Zealand, which provide most of the funding.

8. In 1998, following truce talks in New Zealand and Australia, a permanent ceasefire was signed.

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