

Stewart Firth, *Nuclear Playground*. South Sea Books, Pacific Islands Studies Program, Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987. Pp. xii, 176, bibliography, index, illustrations. US\$14.95 paper.

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The nuclear arms race has occasionally drawn considerable attention to itself, as happened with the deployment of medium-range missiles in Europe and once more with the recent treaty to take them out again. And when they think about it, most people would agree that nuclear weapons represent the gravest of a number of threats facing humanity today. But usually people do not think about it very much. This allows the arms race to be run largely in the way that it is run best: quietly but inexorably, doing its destructive work as unobtrusively as white ants or white-collar criminals. Attention is averted from the arms race for several reasons: because people with healthy minds cannot both remain healthy-minded and focus constantly on the unutterably horrifying

prospect of nuclear war, because other issues (Vietnam, "the Gulf," AIDS, a stock market crash) crowd it out of the headlines, and because those responsible for perpetuating the arms race have learned to do so unobtrusively, in out-of-the-way places that nobody thinks about very much, such as deserts and remote Pacific islands.

Pacific islands, however, are not remote to Pacific islanders (including those who inhabit the island-continent of Australia), and Stewart Firth has done the important service of making their story available to those who, albeit only occasionally, do think about the nuclear arms race and the threat of nuclear holocaust.

Although the nuclear age had a Pacific beginning--in Japan, in two terrible days in August 1945--Firth begins with the postwar period. Almost half the book is devoted to American activities in Micronesia: the evacuation of Marshall Islanders from Bikini and Eniwetok atolls in order to conduct atmospheric tests there, the radioactive fallout from the 1954 test *Bravo*, the use of Kwajalein as a target for testing intercontinental ballistic missiles, and the oppressive effect of all this on Micronesian steps toward independence. French nuclear testing in French Polynesia also receives extended treatment. Third, Firth discusses two recent movements in the Pacific to disengage from nuclearism: New Zealand's ban on nuclear-armed and -powered ships and the American retaliation of essentially expelling New Zealand from the ANZUS alliance, and the establishment of a somewhat anemic South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone. A brief chapter covers British nuclear tests in Australia in the 1950s, and an epilogue presents a fictionalized but all-too-plausible account, set sometime in the 1990s, of how World War III began in the Pacific.

Firth is an avowed foe of all things nuclear, and there is no difficulty in distinguishing the good guys from the bad guys in his book. The latter category includes the United States, France, and Great Britain: powers that have imperiously pursued nuclear testing in their Pacific colonies or dependencies with callous disregard for the Micronesians, Polyne- sians, and Australian aborigines who might get in their way. One of Firth's theses is that dependency status invites exploitation, and therefore that the Pacific can be truly nuclear-free only when it becomes truly independent. The accusatory finger here points most directly at France, which continues to hold colonies in New Caledonia and French Polynesia.

The good guy is New Zealand, which under current Prime Minister David Lange has the sense to realize that it is better off without the "protection" of American nuclear weapons and has courageously per-

severed in its antinuclear policy in the face of American displeasure. Vanuatu receives admiration for stressing the necessary connection between independence and a nuclear-free Pacific, and for refusing to sign the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty because (largely at Australian instigation) its provisions had been watered down in order not to be overly offensive to the United States.

The government of Firth's own Australia (he teaches politics at Macquarie University) comes in for contempt. This largest and strongest of Pacific nations, afraid to cut loose from a Great Protector, has played the role of lackey, first to Great Britain and now to the United States. Written before recent dramatic developments in Fiji, the book also chides Ratu Mara's government in Fiji for selling out to American financial enticements on the issue of port visits by nuclear vessels.

Given the patent absurdity of nuclear weapons--the hazards involved in their testing, the disastrous consequences of their use--we need to understand why the world powers have embraced them and, in the process, become hostage to them. Firth touches on this issue in his chapter, "Why the French Love the Bomb," but much deeper historical, psychological, and cultural study of the United States and the Soviet Union in this vein is sorely needed. The main contribution of this book, however, is to shed light on how nuclear weapons afford yet another opportunity for powerful nations to dominate weaker ones.