SHARPENING THE SPEARHEAD: SUBREGIONALISM IN MELANESIA

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In recent years the international political environment of the Melanesian region has been undergoing considerable change.[1] In part this change has been caused by--and at the same time has further confirmed--a growing sense of subregional identity among the three independent states of the area. Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu have increasingly asserted their distinctness in both ethnic and political terms within the South Pacific region, not merely from the metropoles of Australia and New Zealand but from the other island states to the east and north as well.

The evolution of distinct but similar political cultures and institutions in the postindependence period has, of course, been a major factor in the emergence of this group identity. Perhaps more significantly, though, developments within the South Pacific region as a whole--both externally imposed and internally generated--have created a political and diplomatic climate in which this new subregional cohesion has been consolidated through cooperative action. In March 1988 the existence of a developing political community was formally acknowledged by the signing in Port Vila of a set of Agreed Principles for Cooperation among the three members of the so-called Melanesian Spearhead group.

The decolonization process in the subregion and the varying but shared experiences of it in the three states were an important determi-

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nant of postindependence relationships among them. All three became independent within a five-year period (Papua New Guinea in 1975, the Solomon Islands in 1978, and Vanuatu in 1980), and although the nature of decolonization differed between the three, each was a close observer of the experiences of the other two. It was, in fact, the circumstances surrounding the decolonization of Vanuatu that were to sharpen the sense of shared political identity and to accelerate the process of political cooperation. French obstructiveness towards independence for the New Hebrides--and complicity in attempts to sabotage it--created the conditions for the intervention of the "Kumul Force" from Papua New Guinea, which was instrumental in consolidating Walter Lini's postindependence government.

The experience had a considerable effect on the subsequent relationship between the two states, an effect, moreover, based on ethnic solidarity. This solidarity was given greater potency by the fact that the Papua New Guinea intervention--though bilaterally agreed upon with the Vanuatu government--was essentially a unilateral action carried out despite considerable opposition from Fiji and the Polynesians in the South Pacific Forum.[2] The Solomon Islands, while lacking the resources to contribute materially to the undertaking, nevertheless strongly supported the Papua New Guinea initiative.

The division within the Forum between the more activist west, represented by the Melanesians, and a more cautious east, composed of Fiji and the Polynesians, has to an extent been confirmed by subsequent developments. A number of issues concerning the region's external relations have highlighted what has increasingly appeared to be a fundamental difference in outlook between the Melanesians and the other Forum island countries.

The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty that emerged from the Rarotonga Forum in 1985, for example, was seen by the Melanesians as an essentially Australian artifact reflecting Canberra's strategic interests. The geographical narrowness of the treaty as well as its limited restrictions on passage and port rights for nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed vessels have been perceived by many as a bid to secure American compliance.[3] If indeed this was the Australian intention, it was of course unsuccessful, but the Melanesian states expressed resentment at what they saw as an attempt to railroad through an insufficiently radical agreement.[4] Similarly, the Melanesian states were in the forefront of the drive for a fisheries agreement to curtail the activities of American tuna boats in their two-hundred-mile economic zones.

In many ways, though, the greatest impetus for cohesion among the

three states has been the problem of New Caledonia, replete as it is with a range of political and cultural resonances within Melanesia. The importance of the New Caledonia issue as a catalyst in the development of the Melanesian grouping points to the role of French colonialism (and the contrasting responses to it by the states of the region) as a connecting thread between the origins of the group and its current consolidation. The abandonment by French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac in 1986 of President Mitterrand's "independence in association" plans for the Melanesian territory obviously carried echoes of events six years previously in the New Hebrides. Similar echoes could also be discerned by the Melanesian states in what they interpreted as a lack of resolution in the responses of the other Forum members. Once again Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, now reinforced by a radically-inclined independent Vanuatu, found themselves in the position of frontline states--in both geographic and diplomatic terms. This was the context in which the first Spearhead meeting took place, in Suva prior to the opening of the 1986 South Pacific Forum.

While these imported issues have had a considerable effect on the Melanesian subregion as obvious rallying points, the phenomenon is also fueled by differing but convergent national interests among the members of the group.

Unity in Diversity?

The apparent radicalism displayed by the Melanesian grouping has different origins in the individual member states. Papua New Guinea can be considered radical only in the regional context. It has, since independence, turned its face against membership in the Non-Aligned Movement, for example, being suspicious of its anti-Western rhetoric.[5] The PNG economy is robustly rooted in private enterprise and strongly dependent on foreign investment, while the churches are a potent and essentially conservative force in PNG society.

In the regional context, though, from the Vanuatu affair in 1980 onwards, Papua New Guinea has developed something of a radical image. This was particularly prominent during the premiership of Paias Wingti, who succeeded Michael Somare as prime minister in November 1985 and remained in power through the 1987 general election until his defeat in a parliamentary vote of no confidence in June 1988. Part of a younger generation of politicians who served apprenticeships entirely in the postindependence period, Wingti brought some distinct changes in the direction of Papua New Guinea foreign policy. The contrast here

with his two prime ministerial predecessors is one of both style and substance.

Michael Somare's political image differs from Wingti's in both a historical and a geographical sense. Somare is associated with the broader Pacific independence movement of the sixties and seventies--a period when the notion of a self-defined Melanesian political grouping would have been quite premature, and the island South Pacific as a whole was the accepted focus for the new states' regional identity. His close political and personal friendship with Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara of Fiji is emblematic of this perspective. Significantly, this friendship and the political outlook it symbolized determined much of Somare's initial opposition to intervention in Vanuatu in 1980.[6] Somare's continuing commitment to the broader scope for Papua New Guinea's Pacific policy was evident when, at the end of 1987, he mounted a fierce attack on the Spearhead idea. The group was "anti-Australian and anti-New Zealand," had been "scorned in the Asia-Pacific region as being racist," and was merely a vehicle for the Wingti government to "hide behind to shield its inexperience with foreign policy aspects in respect of the greater Pacific region."[7]

Wingti's defeat in June 1988 brought Somare's Pangu Pati back to power at the head of a new coalition. Although Somare himself had stepped down as party leader just prior to the change of government, thus guaranteeing the premiership for his successor Rabbie Namaliu, the "Chief" became minister of foreign affairs in the new administration. The extent to which Somare might translate--or be permitted by his prime minister to translate--his declared hostility to Melanesian subregionalism into practical diplomatic action remains unclear, but the return of Michael Somare must reasonably be expected to have some policy implications.

Sir Julius Chan, who as prime minister in mid-1980 was responsible for the intervention in Vanuatu, is nevertheless far from a radical figure in either domestic or foreign policy. Closely associated with Papua New Guinea's growing indigenous capitalism, Chan is politically and economically conservative. Since 1980 he has been a vocal supporter of greater regional cooperation, even advocating the development of permanent peacekeeping mechanisms, but his context--like that of Somare --is broader than the Melanesian area alone. His enthusiasm for the Melanesian cause is perhaps also limited by the fact that he himself is half-Chinese and therefore not so obviously attracted to interisland cooperation on purely ethnic grounds.

Whatever the orientations of his predecessors, however, Wingti, dur-

ing his period in office between 1986 and 1988, aspired towards a redefinition of foreign policy direction, a redefinition in which eastward-looking Melanesian subregionalism played an important part. Essentially this change of diplomatic focus involved an attempt to reconstruct the basis of the postcolonial relationship with Australia. The continuing dependence on direct budgetary subvention from Canberra has been both an affront to national pride and a source of considerable economic vulnerability, as witnessed in the aftermath of the major cut in this subvention announced by Australia with a minimum of prior consultation in 1986.[8] Wingti's expressed aim was to free PNG from this dependence over a relatively short period and to change the basis of the PNG-Australia economic relationship from aid to trade.[9] Hand in hand with this economic reorientation would go, the argument ran, a corresponding change in the nature of the political and security relationship. This thinking was inherent in the Joint Declaration of Principles signed by Prime Ministers Wingti and Hawke in Canberra in December 1987.

A corollary of this redefinition of the relationship with the former metropole has been a deliberate pursuit of alternative outlets for PNG's economic and political foreign policy. As the view to the south has lengthened, that to both west and east has been brought into sharper focus. To the west the rapprochement with Indonesia, symbolized by the Treaty of Mutual Respect, Friendship, and Cooperation signed in October 1986, has been important both in itself as the basis for the resolution of future border issues and more generally as providing an entree for PNG to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region as a whole. Southeast Asia was seen by some policy planners close to Wingti as a useful economic counterweight to the Australian relationship. While it was widely accepted that full ASEAN membership was not likely in the near future, continuing links were assiduously fostered. There is no indication that Wingti's successors will substantially depart from this approach.

While Papua New Guinea is very much the junior partner in this western axis with the ASEAN countries, the prospect to the east is quite different. In this direction lie the other Melanesian states and among these Papua New Guinea is dominant in territorial, demographic, military, and economic terms.[10] The leadership role in this relationship is therefore a significant balance to the essentially subordinate one to the west. It is also one that offers the opportunity to maximize the effect of PNG's national input (and thus prestige) in the regional and global organizations that constitute such a large part of the foreign-policy activity of all small states.

In the case of Vanuatu, the traumas of the decolonization period have had an obvious influence on postindependence foreign policy. While the transfer of power has typically been an amicable process in the South Pacific, Vanuatu's experience was an exception. French intransigence--and British inaction in the face of it--meant that some of the conditions did not exist for the pro-Western foreign-policy orientation characteristic of island states in the postindependence period. Uniquely among the Forum states Vanuatu is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Vanuatu has also entered into a fishing agreement with the Soviet Union and has given a generally positive response to Libyan proposals for the establishment of diplomatic relations.

This robustly independent "Third World" foreign policy has been pursued in Vanuatu with considerable persistence. In the main this is due to the continuing dominance of Father Lini and his Vanua'aku party. The deep cleavage in Vanuatu politics between the anglophone and the francophone traditions inherited from the Anglo-French Condominium has exerted a powerful centrifugal force on each side. As a result Lini's leadership remained unchallenged for the first eight years of Vanuatu's independent statehood. Criticism of his foreign policy has been leveled at Father Lini from within his own party, though. One side has been concerned mainly at its possible effect on Vanuatu's relatively successful, profoundly capitalist financial policies by which the country has remained a major tax-haven for foreign businesses.[11] Simultaneously, however, his main challenger for leadership of the Vanua'aku party, Barak Sope, was rather more enthusiastic than Lini himself at the prospect of closer Libyan links. Although the rivalry between Lini and Sope led to a major political crisis in mid-1988, the issues involved were essentially domestic and, to an extent, personal.[12] Sope enlisted the parliamentary support of the francophone opposition in his challenge to Lini, but it was an alliance of enemies against a common foe. Previously in fact Sope, as an ultra on the side of the nonaligned foreign policy, had been a particular object of opposition hostility. Whatever common ground Lini's diverse enemies can make, it is unlikely to cover foreign policy. The established anglophone-francophone divisions on foreign policy go deep. The issue of Melanesian solidarity itself is a feature of these divisions, founded as it is on the circumstances of Lini's victory in 1980 and nourished by hostility towards France over New Caledonia.

Although in the late 1980s the Solomon Islands shares neither the declaratory radicalism of Wingti's Papua New Guinea nor the substantive variety of Lini's Vanuatu, it had been a vocal advocate of pan-Melanesian cooperation earlier in the decade. Under the leadership of

Solomon Mamaloni, the Solomon Islands proposed the formation of a "Melanesian Alliance" among the three independent states. With Michael Somare in power in Port Moresby at that time, however, the plan did not prosper.[13] Although the former British colony does not suffer as PNG does from the continued proximity of the former metropole or from the consequences of a divided and divergent colonial administration as in the case of Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands economy is dominated by Australian business interests, a situation that periodically leads to difficulties in the bilateral relationship. Beyond the Solomon Islands' political and economic relations in the region, geographical position and ethnic identity make its membership in the Melanesian grouping all but inevitable.

The Solomons does not have the influence of size exerted by Papua New Guinea and it has eschewed, at least in recent years, the high profile radicalism of Vanuatu.[14] It was, though, as already mentioned, prominent among PNG's few Forum supporters during the 1980 intervention in Vanuatu. It also shared the misgivings of its PNG and Vanuatu counterparts about the limits of the nuclear-free-zone treaty and has been an active participant in the U.N. moves over New Caledonia. And, beyond the question of political and ethnic identity, the diplomatic enabling power provided by organizational participation must obviously be a potent consideration for any state with such limited unilateral resources as the Solomons. In the case of the Solomons, adherence to the Spearhead group perhaps implies a degree of radicalization in foreign policy, but such an adjustment might be seen as a reasonable price for this enhancement of diplomatic influence.

The Perimeters of Pan-Melanesianism

The Spearhead meeting in Port Vila in March 1988 saw the group enter a new phase of institutional existence. The Agreed Principles for Cooperation signed there represent a formal compact between the three states. In no sense, however, is the agreement a binding treaty or even an organizational charter. It consists of nine largely unexceptional principles for possible future cooperation rather than concrete proposals for a closer integration of the current relationship.[15] Nevertheless, its symbolic importance is considerable. Despite the absence of clear commitments to defined diplomatic or even extensive functional cooperation, the agreement is clearly significant as an affirmation of a discrete political community.

How much further might the group develop in future, though, and in

which directions? The answers to these questions are fundamentally dependent on three factors: the potential for numerical growth within the group, the readiness of the membership to cooperate with greater integration, and the potential areas in which collective activity might be undertaken.

Clearly, a grouping that is both subregional and ethnically delimited has a very circumscribed capacity for expansion. Within these limits there are only three potential new recruits for the Spearhead group: Fiji, an independent Kanaky emerging from a decolonized New Caledonia, and a similarly independent West New Guinea.

The second and third of those can be dismissed relatively easily. Despite the transformation of the New Caledonia situation brought about by the mid-1988 fall of the Chirac government in Paris, a permanent settlement of the issue remains in the long-term future. Moreover, when such a settlement does emerge it is unlikely to take the form of a crisp transfer of power to an independent Melanesian republic free to choose its regional and international alignments without constitutional restraints.

If anything, the prospect of a Melanesian community swollen by the membership of an independent West New Guinea is even less likely. The persistence of the guerrilla effort against the Indonesian administration in Irian Jaya should not disguise its fundamental weakness.[16] Additionally, the rights of Indonesia in the territory are internationally recognixed. And, while this recognition has been shared by successive governments in Papua New Guinea, the recent rapprochement with Jakarta has sharply underlined it. The aims of Melanesian nationalism in Irian Jaya are neither feasible in their own right nor do they appear to have any place in contemporary pan-Melanesianism as represented by the Spearhead group.

Only Vanuatu has expressed any interest in taking on the question of Irian Jaya as a Spearhead issue--and then on the initiative of the Sope faction. As Sope insisted while outlining Vanuatu's general foreign-policy principles in November 1987, "All Pacific people must have their independence. Our position on West Papua [Irian Jaya] is the same. This will not change until West Papua is free. . . . Not until then will we consider diplomatic relations with Indonesia."[17] Such a position on Irian Jaya is unlikely to be pursued unless Sope were to emerge victorious in his contest with Lini.[18] It may safely be assumed, moreover, that in its own diplomatic interests Papua New Guinea would actively discourage any Spearhead involvement in Irian Jaya. Questioned on the issue at the time of the signing of the Agreed Principles, Wingti's foreign

minister, Akoka Doi, confirmed Port Moresby's recognition of the territory as "an integral part of Indonesia." It was, in his words, a "mistake done by the colonial powers so let it stay as it is."[19]

The case of Fiji, however, is not so easily dismissed. From the beginning Fiji's position in relation to intra-Melanesian cooperation has been problematic. As the first Melanesian island to become independent in 1970 it might be expected to have assumed a leadership role. Its failure to do so cannot be explained in terms of any general isolationist tendency in foreign policy. Fiji is, for example, the only island state to have participated in U.N. peacekeeping operations, with all the implications that carries for its international position. Under Ratu Mara in precoup days it was also regarded as something of an activist in the institutional politics of the Commonwealth. Yet Fiji has taken a consistently "minimalist" position on regional integration--in the context both of the Forum and of specifically Melanesian cooperation. Ratu Mara's government was one of the strongest critics of intervention in Vanuatu in 1980 even though, many would have thought, Fiji was ideally qualified to cooperate in such an intervention, given its relatively large and well-equipped army and its U.N. experience.[20]

One explanation of Fiji's position was that such an intervention might create an unwelcome precedent for future intercommunal crises in the region. In short, the anglophone-francophone conflict in Vanuatu was uncomfortably close to the Melanesian-Indian one in Fiji itself. Here a particular irony of recent developments in the Melanesian area becomes evident.

Far from lobbying for any type of Forum intervention to resolve the Fijian crisis of 1987, Papua New Guinea was insistent on a policy of complete noninterference. Wingti advocated this with considerable vigor both at the Apia Forum in May that followed hard on the coup and at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Vancouver in October. As a result he found himself in sharp conflict with his Australian counterpart, Bob Hawke, in Apia.[21] In November, despite the second coup of the year, Papua New Guinea was the first state to formally recognize Brigadier Rabuka's regime. Wingti's public justification of his notably muted approach to the brigadier's activities was that the marginalization of Fiji would be counterproductive to a settlement of the crisis. It is a reasonable assumption, however, that an underlying sympathy with Melanesian aspirations was also present in his attitude.

Yet the emergent postcoup Melanesian regime--like its pre-Bavadra forebears--shows no inclination to pan-Melanesian regional cooperation. The open invitation issued to Fiji by the Spearhead group in

March 1988 at its Port Vila meeting was firmly declined by Ratu Mara.[22] The paradox is that the supposedly non-Melanesian Labour government of Dr. Bavadra might have provided a much more willing and politically suitable fourth member of the Spearhead group, sharing as it did the common view on such issues as the nuclear-free zone and French colonialism. The Rabuka-Mara regime in contrast seems more inclined towards the siren calls of French aid on the one hand and on the other trade and diplomatic fence-mending with Australia and New Zealand. Membership in a vocal subregional grouping openly hostile to Paris and potentially at odds with both Canberra and Wellington might reasonably be seen as less than helpful in these circumstances. In short, Melanesian revolution or not, Fiji's diplomacy continues to display a caution more usually associated with the Polynesian states rather than the putative Third Worldism of its ethnic cohorts.[23]

In the present circumstances, therefore, the prospects for an expanded Melanesian grouping seem remote. The Spearhead group is both self-limiting in nature and limited by political circumstances. If then numerical growth is unlikely, what of the present membership? What prospects for further degrees of cooperation are indicated by the respective outlooks of the states already in the group?

The signing of the Agreed Principles for Cooperation was obviously an occasion for considerable self-congratulation among the Spearhead members. But amid this some words of caution made themselves heard. The Solomon Islands government did not altogether share the more ambitious aspirations being expressed by some PNG and Vanuatu elements. The Solomons government, for example, was much less sympathetic towards developments in Fiji in 1987 than was its Papua New Guinea counterpart and continues to withhold recognition from the Rabuka-Mara regime. It has also been more censorious of the use of violence by the Kanak separatists in New Caledonia, despite its commitment to independence.[24] Honiara was particularly concerned that the Spearhead group should not be seen as any kind of challenge to established regional groups, in particular the South Pacific Forum.

In this the Solomon Islands was merely emphasizing something already explicit in the Agreed Principles. The third of these insists that the agreement should not weaken "other bilateral or multilateral arrangements." This inclusion illustrates the somewhat paradoxical character of the Spearhead group in the context of contemporary regional organization in the South Pacific. The Melanesian grouping is composed of those Forum members most committed to the principle of a Single Regional Organization (SRO) for the region. This issue is con-

cerned essentially with the supposed diffusion of effort and duplication of functions between the Forum and the older South Pacific Commission. The latter--with its lingering colonial resonances--should, the advocates of the SRO argue, be dissolved to permit the concentration of resources in the Forum. What though of resources diverted into the kind of subregionalism represented by the Spearhead group?

Ironically, it appears as though the frustration of the Melanesians at the diffused efforts and caution of the other island states in the Forum might have created an obstacle to the emergence of a strong, united SRO. In this respect the continuing commitment of the Melanesians to the Single Regional Organization might act as a restraint on further integration within the Spearhead group.

The absence of a bipartisan commitment to Melanesian subregionalism in Papua New Guinea has already been touched on in relation to the fall of the Wingti administration and the subsequent return of Michael Somare to government as foreign minister in the Namaliu Cabinet. One of his first pronouncements in the post was a reaffirmation of his hostility to the Spearhead idea. He was, however, at pains to emphasize that he spoke personally rather than officially and that the Cabinet itself had no plans for a radical change of direction on the issue. The position of the Namaliu government on subregionalism will therefore depend largely on the pressure that Somare chooses to exert on the issue. It is not clear, however, that in his position of elder statesman in semiretirement he will be willing to confront what had already been asserted as a major foreign-policy "orthodoxy" by his immediate predecessors.

Cooperation, of course, is not merely a function of political will--although that is clearly important. The pace and extent of integration is also conditioned by the nature of the issues on which cooperation is focused. What then are the issue areas that confront the Melanesian Spearhead and what is the likelihood of their being addressed collectively? What aspects of the area's concerns--economic, political, and security--might be amenable to pan-Melanesian cooperation?

In the economic field the grounds for future cooperation are limited by a number of factors. Intra-Melanesian trade must remain restricted by the fact that the primary products of the island states are essentially the same. There is perhaps some prospect of preferential trading arrangements in the few exceptions to this, such as PNG coffee and Vanuatu beef, but these would hardly provide the basis of a major trading community. Papua New Guinea's predicted mineral boom that involves oil as well as precious metals might alter this picture somewhat. The impact will depend on the extent of secondary processing

that will take place in Papua New Guinea itself and, more generally, on the degree of state control that can be exercised over the largely foreign-based extractive industries.

The prospects are not much more encouraging in the area of external trade. The major agreements between the island states and their external markets tend to be fixed within established institutional structures. In the case of the principal agreement with Australia and New Zealand--the South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Agreement (SPARTECA)--the institutional framework is the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation (SPEC), which is an agency of the Forum. It is difficult to see any significant changes being brought to this arrangement by the Melanesians alone. It is possible, however, that Melanesian cooperation as a pressure group *within* the Forum could have some impact. This would be less likely in the agreements with the European Communities that exist in the context of the Lomé Convention. Any changes to this would stretch the capacity of the Forum as a whole, let alone a grouping within it.[25]

A further restraint is placed on economic cooperation within the group by the potentially divergent unilateral trading interests of its members. Papua New Guinea's ambition for a new economic relationship with the ASEAN region has already been mentioned. It was unlikely even in the Wingti administration that pan-Melanesian sentiment would have been allowed to constrain the development of extra-regional agreements flowing from this. It is even less likely in that of his successors, who do not share his enthusiasm for the Melanesian idea itself. While both the South Pacific and the Southeast Asian axes of Papua New Guinea's foreign policy are significant in the reorientation away from continued dependence on Australia, the tangible economic benefits sought from the first are likely to take priority over the less tangible political returns from the second.

The prospects for closer economic ties therefore do not seem to go further than a fairly limited range of functional arrangements. New air links between the Spearhead members have been established as a consequence of the new relationship--but it is questionable if these perform any truly practical purpose or merely a symbolic political one.[26] Visa formalities between the three states have been eased but as non-"customary" inter-island travel is largely insignificant this is unlikely to have any practical effect. Further joint undertakings are likely, perhaps in the field of product processing such as food canning and in tourist promotion. But in general, the Spearhead group does not seem destined to adhere through any spiderweb of agreements on the prescribed functionalist pattern.

The political purposes served by regional cooperation in the Third World are easily adumbrated. Institutional participation amplifies the diplomatic voice of the small state; the leadership opportunities provided within the organization reinforce the national foreign policies of the larger participants; and joint positions provide an enabling force to relations with large or hegemonic neighbors outside of the group. To some extent all of these factors might be seen as applying to the Spearhead group.

Mediation of policy aims through the group has given added force to the position of the individual Spearhead members on such issues as New Caledonia in larger forums like the U.N. and the Commonwealth. And, Papua New Guinea's implicit leadership position within the group has perhaps given a certain *gravitas* to national foreign policy not evident in the past. A new confidence has been discernible in Port Moresby's diplomacy since the mid-1980s, both regionally and globally. It is a reasonable hypothesis that in part this is both a cause and a consequence of the development of the Melanesian grouping and Papua New Guinea's authority within it during the period of the Wingti governments.

This confidence has been particularly evident in the Papua New Guinea-Australia relationship, and it is here we touch on the enabling function of the group. Australia, as the dominant regional power, is now constrained to alter, at least to some extent, its diplomatic *modus operandi* when confronted by an increasingly multilateral diplomatic entity in Melanesia rather than a series of hitherto compartmentalized bilateral relationships. This is not to suggest, of course, that the emergence of the Spearhead group is itself sufficient to precipitate major changes in Canberra's regional policy; but its existence might be expected to modify the means by which this policy is pursued.

The Strategic Dimension

There are obvious dangers in taking such speculation too far. One of these lies in making unjustifiable assumptions about the degree of political cohesion among the members of the Spearhead group. The diversity of basic foreign policy directions among the three states has already been remarked--from the radical nonalignment of Vanuatu to a fundamentally pro-Western Papua New Guinea. But such coherence as there is exists principally within the limits of the region itself and it is here that the relationship with Australia, the region's major power, is played out. And, it is in this relationship that the ill-defined boundary between questions of politics and those of national and regional security is approached. The security issue highlights the problems of differing per-

ceptions of interests and threats between the island states and Australia, both as a local power and as the principal guardian of Western strategic interests in the region.

Developments over the past decade have considerably altered the regional security agenda in the South Pacific. For the island states a number of problems have emerged, paradoxically, from generally advantageous changes in the Law of the Sea. The advent of the two-hundred-mile economic zone has provided the prospect of much greater benefits from the exploitation of marine resources. But it has also imposed the burden of providing security for these resources. Apart from the legal wrangles with the American tuna-boat owners that eventually led to the Forum Fisheries Agreement in 1987, straightforward poaching by vessels from a number of Southeast Asian countries has been a continuing problem. Australia and, to a much lesser extent, New Zealand have been the only regional states with the capacity to undertake reasonably effective marine surveillance. Australia took the lead in extending this to the waters of the closer island states both directly through the creation of a surveillance network of Orion long-range aircraft and indirectly through the Pacific Patrol Boat Programme that provides fast interception vessels to the island states themselves.

Australia's motives cannot be assumed to be purely selfless. While surveillance of their waters is to the economic advantage of the islands, it is also in the strategic interests of Australia and, more generally, the Western alliance as a whole. The Melanesian area straddles the approaches to Australia's major east-coast population centers. Increasing concern over Soviet naval activity in the area makes such long-range surveillance a necessary part of Australia's defensive posture. The Dibb Report to the federal minister of defense in 1986, which constituted a fundamental reassessment of Australia's defense interests in the late 1980s, called for the "promotion of a sense of strategic community" in the South West Pacific as Australia's "area of direct military interest."[27]

The primary cause for concern in Dibb's view is "access by the Soviet Union, especially the establishment . . . of a presence ashore."[28] The island states do not entirely share Canberra's concern at Moscow's intentions. Vanuatu has, as already mentioned, entered into a fishing agreement with the Soviet Union while Papua New Guinea has not ruled out this option for itself and is actively exploring the prospects of a closer trading relationship. It is therefore particularly useful for Australia to be able to pursue its own, largely unshared, strategic ends while simultaneously maintaining a cooperative relationship with the island states. Canberra can carry out an unobstructed program of strategic

surveillance while the islands benefit from the spin-off of marine resource protection.

This symbiosis has not been entirely trouble-free. National security and the capacity to safeguard it are, after all, crucial components of the sovereignty of the state. Dependency for this on the resources of another state is obviously a situation fraught with problems of postindependence sensitivities and nationalist *amour propre*. The defense relationship with Vanuatu came close to breakdown in 1987 during a period of greater than usual Australian "Libophobia."[29] At the beginning of 1988 there was a bad-tempered exchange between the respective departments of defense in Port Moresby and Canberra involving allegations and counter-allegations of each side's failure to execute its responsibilities in the joint surveillance activities.[30] Despite these predictable difficulties, however, there have been clear signs of Canberra's intention to pursue the recommendations of the Dibb Report and further develop its security relationships in the region. The defense minister, Kim Beazely, has been energetic in promoting these relationships both by a series of personal visits to the Melanesian states and, reportedly, by the vigorous advocacy of greater commitment to the islands against Cabinet opposition.[31] The Joint Declaration of Principles signed with Papua New Guinea in December 1987, for example, included a significant advance on previous defense commitments.[32] In a major statement to the Federal Parliament on new defense priorities in February 1988, Beazely saw the economic vulnerability of the island states as a source of "opportunities for countries with interests inimical to our own."[33] In consequence he announced a Military Cooperation Programme for 1988 involving aid of A$23 million to Papua New Guinea and a further A$16 million for the other island states of the South West Pacific.[34]

In reality there seems to be little alternative to the Australian defense connection. Prospects for pan-Melanesian security cooperation are severely circumscribed by lack of resources. Only Papua New Guinea has a military capability in any conventional sense, with a force of about thirty-five hundred men relatively poor in resources. Security cooperation among the Melanesians so far has extended no further than the training in Port Moresby of Vanuatu's paramilitary Police Mobile Force--and even this has been undertaken with considerable Australian assistance.[35] Since the 1980 intervention in Vanuatu Sir Julius Chan has been a frequent advocate of a South Pacific peacekeeping force. But the idea has been resolutely resisted by the other potential participants and would in any case be much more broadly based than the Melanesian grouping itself.[36] The asymmetrical relationship between Australia and

the Melanesians seems bound to continue, in view of both Canberra's increasing interest in the area and the lack of any viable alternative for the islands.

What then are the actual or potential effects of the consolidation of the Spearhead group on this relationship? It is certainly possible that the enhanced influence and confidence provided by the collective spirit would operate to limit Australia's dominance of the relationship. The Dibb Report, in its consideration of the region's significance to Australian security interests, emphasized the importance of being "particularly mindful of the national sensitivities and aspirations of small South Pacific nations."[37] The Melanesian position in any future negotiations--either multilateral or bilateral--could in this way be strengthened. This would presumably be the hope of the island governments.

In one sense Australian security interests might be enhanced by an increased consolidation of the Melanesian grouping. The adoption of a collective position might well strengthen the islands' hand in relation to Canberra, but by much the same token the adjustments required in adopting such a collective position could provide Australia with a more managable environment within which to pursue its security concerns. In particular, a Melanesian group's acting collectively could, for example, serve to "de-marginalize" Vanuatu's position in relation to outside influences and how to respond to them.

In short, both the maximizing and the reductive aspects of international organization may operate simultaneously here. While a collective position offers the islands the possibility of an increase in influence in the security relationship, it offers Australia the possibility of a lessening of the diplomatic complications attendant on that relationship.

The End of the "South Pacific"?

The emergence of the Melanesian Spearhead group serves to illustrate some of the inadequacies of the South Pacific as a unit of regional cooperation. While such indicators as total population and land area within the boundaries of the Forum might suggest optimum conditions for successful regional cooperation, the picture is rather different when seen in the context of the enormous and dispersed geographical area involved. To a degree, of course, this spatial separation removes some of the problems inherent in maintaining cooperation among closely bordering states; territorial disputes and border tensions are virtually absent. But large distances involve correspondingly large variations in political culture and priorities. In the South Pacific, therefore, the impetus towards

postcolonial cooperation characteristic of the Third World in general might reasonably be expected to have a subregional focus rather than the wider regional one. The proposal for a Polynesian economic organization that closely followed the formalization of the Spearhead group might be taken as confirmation of this tendency.

Does the emergence of these subregional bodies, though, place the future of the South Pacific Forum as a whole under question? If the Forum area is indeed inappropriately large and too dispersed to provide a viable basis for regional cooperation, can it now be expected to go into decline in the face of the emergence of more tractable subregions?

The answer is probably no. While the cultural and political differences between the Melanesian and Polynesian (and more recently, Micronesian) islands may make their respective subregions more suitable units for intragroup cooperation, limitations of size and resources render them much less effective in mediating members' political and economic interests to the outside world. For this external activity the Forum region as a whole provides a much more effective basis for interisland cooperation. The recognition of this, on the part of the Melanesians at least, is witnessed by their continuing commitment to the concept of a Single Regional Organization for the South Pacific as a whole. The replacement of an administration strongly committed to the notion of Melanesian solidarity by one with a more traditional Pacific-wide perspective in Papua New Guinea, the largest of the states concerned, must also be expected to have some restraining effect (if not an actively regressive one) on further levels of subregional cooperation. In short, coexistence between the Melanesian grouping and a broader, South Pacific-wide regional organization seems not only feasible but also necessary and destined to continue.

NOTES

1. Much of this article is based on a paper presented at the Pacific Islands Political Studies Association Conference in Apia, Western Samoa, in May 1988. I am grateful for a number of helpful comments offered by participants there.

2. The circumstances surrounding the PNG intervention in Vanuatu and the regional reaction to it are discussed in Norman MacQueen, "Beyond *Tok Win:* The Papua New Guinea Intervention in Vanuatu, 1980," *Pacific Affairs* 60, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 235-252.

3. On the politics of the treaty, see Paul F. Power, "The South Pacific Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone," *Pacific Affairs* 59, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 461-465.

4. See David Hegarty, "Soviet Bid to Catch the Winds of Discontent," *Pacific Defence Reporter,* 1988 Annual Reference Edition (December 1986/January 1987): 15.

5. Despite a suggestion by the acting foreign minister, Aruru Matiabe, in September 1987 that the time was now right for PNG to join the Movement, the proposal did not survive his fall from power and favor at the end of the year. See *Post Courier* [Papua New Guinea], 11 September 1987.

6. Bill Standish, *Melanesian Neighbours,* Legislative Research Service Basic Paper no. 9 (Canberra, 1984), 72. Somare was, to Ratu Mara's considerable gratitude, a consistent defender and supporter of the once and future Fijian prime minister through the various vicissitudes of 1987; see *Post Courier,* 21 September 1987.

7. *Post Courier,* 30 September 1987.

8. See *Pacific Islands Monthly,* May 1987, 19.

9. *Post Courier,* 26 October 1987.

10. Approximate comparative figures are:

	Population	Land Area km^2	GNP per capita
PNG	3,479,400	462,840	US$680
Solomons	285,796	27,556	US$510
Vanuatu	140,154	12,190	US$880

Based on data from *The Europa Yearbook 1988,* vol. 2 (London, 1988).

11. See Hegarty, "Soviet Bid to Catch the Winds of Discontent," 14.

12. Following the serious disturbances in May 1988 over reforms to Vanuatu's land registration system, Sope, who was a moving force in the protests, was dismissed from his government post as minister for immigration and tourism and from the secretary-generalship of the Vanua'aku party.

13. Standish, *Melanesian Neighbours,* 73, 114.

14. The bases of the Solomon Islands' postindependence foreign policy are outlined by David Sitai, "Low-Cost Diplomacy," in *Solomon Islands Politics,* ed. Peter Larmour (Suva: USP, 1983), 220-237.

15. The principles were first circulated in draft form at a pre-Forum Spearhead meeting held in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea, in May 1987. In précis they involve: (1) the recognition of Melanesian traditions and cultural values; (2) the facilitation of traditional and customary trade and exchange; (3) a statement of the nondivisive intentions of the agreement in respect of other bilateral and multilateral relationships; (4) a commitment to "high level" meetings on matters of mutual concern; (5) a commitment to the rule of law in international relations; (6) a commitment to explore possibilities of further economic, technical, and cultural cooperation between the signatory states; (7) a recognition of national interests as the basis for cooperation; (8) a commitment to the principle of colonial independence; (9) a commitment to U.N. principles on disarmament and human rights. See *Post Courier,* 11 March 1988.

16. The Australian defense analyst Ross Babbage puts the strength of the rebel OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, "Free Papua Movement") at between fifty and one hundred

--though the organization obviously enjoys a measure of passive support from the Irian Jayan population in the PNG border area; "Australia and the Defence of Papua New Guinea," *Australian Outlook* 41, no. 2 (August 1987): 88.

17. Barak Sope, quoted in *Post Courier,* 27 November 1987.

18. Sope's links with political exiles from Irian Jaya resident in Vanuatu in fact became a considerable point of conflict in the power struggle with Lini. In June 1988 a number of these Sope protégés were arrested on Lini's orders and deported. See *Times of Papua New Guinea,* 16-22 June 1988.

19. Akoka Doi, quoted in *Islands Business,* April 1988, 26.

20. See *Pacific Islands Monthly,* January 1981, 9-11.

21. *The Australian,* 1 June 1987. Something of a ripple was also caused to relations with New Zealand over Prime Minister Lange's suggestion that his government might consider military intervention in Fiji; see *Post Courier,* 21 May 1987.

22. *Islands Business,* April 1988, 8-9.

23. The *actual* Polynesian cultural component in the coups was felt by some in Papua New Guinea to put the issue beyond questions of Melanesian ethnic solidarity. Former Foreign Affairs Secretary Sir Paulius Matane was one influential opponent of diplomatic recognition on these grounds. See *Post Courier,* 21 October 1987.

24. *Post Courier,* 14 September 1987; *Times of Papua New Guinea,* 28 April-4 May 1988.

25. Both the SPARTECA and Lomé Convention arrangements are outlined by Uentabo Fakaofo Neemia in *Cooperation and Conflict: Costs, Benefits, and National Interests in Pacific Regional Cooperation* (Suva: USP, 1986), 78-80.

26. The political nature of the air traffic agreements is suggested by the fact that they were signed at the prime ministerial level during a series of stopovers made by Wingti en route to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Vancouver in October 1987. See *Times of Papua New Guinea,* 8-14 October 1987.

27. *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities,* Report to the Minister of Defence (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1986), 37.

28. Ibid., 49.

29. *Times of Papua New Guinea,* 14-20 May 1987.

30. *Post Courier,* 23 March 1988.

31. On the reported split between the minister of defense and his foreign affairs counterpart, Bill Hayden, on the issue of a greater defense commitment to the region, see *Pacific Islands Monthly,* October 1987, 17-18. Hayden's move to the governor-generalship and his replacement as foreign minister by Senator Gareth Evans in mid-1988 led to a more unified Cabinet position on the issue.

32. The two states are now committed to consultation on possible forms of joint action in the event of a threat to either; Australian High Commission, *Joint Declaration of Principles Guiding Relations between Papua New Guinea and Australia* (media release, Port Moresby, 9 December 1987). The relevant section is paragraph 4 (d).

33. *The Australian,* 24 February 1988.

34. *Post Courier,* 24 February 1988.

35. *Papua New Guinea Foreign Affairs Review* 2, no. 2 (April 1982): 51.

36. The idea of a Pacific peacekeeping force was raised in Papua New Guinea's first foreign-policy white paper at the end of 1981 with the proposal that island states should cooperate "in dealing with external military pressure and internal disorder"; *Papua New Guinea Foreign Policy* (Port Moresby: Government Printer, 1981), section 4.19. Chan has continued to advocate different forms of such cooperation since then--just as the other regional states have continued to resist them.

37. *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities,* 49.