

TALES FROM TAAPUNA: STRATEGY AND POLITICS IN FRENCH POLYNESIA AFTER NUCLEAR TESTING

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The perception that France's international stature has diminished again with the end of the cold war ("1989 for France was something of a second Munich"), the notion that the South Pacific is a region of scant strategic importance ("In the coming Pacific Century, the US tends to see the Pacific Basin as a donut"), and the expectation that French Polynesia will become independent with the dismantlement of the nuclear test sites (the leader of the independence party in Tahiti recently bet his counterpart in New Caledonia that Polynesia would be free before Kanaky) are all problematic. France remains an influential player in the world (with assets including seven million square kilometers of maritime zone in the South Pacific), the Pacific will continue to be a strategically important region (illustrated most recently by the successful launch of a dummy satellite into geosynchronous orbit from international waters north of Bora Bora), and France and French Polynesia are both likely to prefer continued association over independence for Papeete (albeit with the devolution of additional authority.)

INTRODUCTION

Puna, a Polynesian giant from the island of Tahaa, invaded the island of Tahiti and defeated his rival Manotahi. But Tahitian warriors avenged their giant, cut Puna into pieces, and hurled his huge jaw (Taa) onto the reef. The pass from the lagoon to the ocean on the northwest side of Tahiti has since been called Taapuna.¹

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1 The beach facing the Taapuna pass has been the site of a French military residence and recreation center, although it may soon close. The lagoon just inside the pass was the proposed site in the

Puna is a relatively minor figure in Polynesian mythology, especially compared to a demigod like Tane, son of the earth and heavens, who brought light to the universe by prying apart his amorous parents. Polynesians, of course, are not the only ones with myths of the South Pacific. The early French associated Polynesia and its islands with Aphrodite and Cythere, and the modern French have told tales about nuclear testing in Moruroa and Fangataufa, perhaps the tallest being that "not a single fish" has ever perished from an atomic experiment.² Indeed, the whole notion of "nuclear transparency" in the French nuclear testing program was bound to contain a large amount of myth in light of the rich French history of "secret d'etat" (state secret) and the Polynesian meaning of Moruroa (the great secret). Finally, Americans have developed legends of the islands; propagated by film and theater, they have been organized around the twin themes of romance and empire. This American imagery begins with the British empire at the end of the eighteenth century and the story of Mutiny on Bounty (with three major film productions, starring Clark Gable in the thirties, Marlon Brando in the sixties, and Mel Gibson in the eighties), and ends with the Japanese empire during World War II and the stage production of the South Pacific (with the famous Bali Hai, later the label of an American hotel chain in Polynesia.) Perhaps squeezed between these two images of the 1780s and the 1940s, like Tane and his siblings compressed in the dark, Americans seem to see nothing strategically significant or politically relevant about the South Pacific. This essay tries to throw these American conceptions, like Puna's jaw, into the sea, and to offer a new understanding of French Polynesia in the contemporary era.

II STRATEGIC MYTHOLOGY

Kiribati, a group of 33 islands stretching 3500 kilometers along the equator (formerly the Gilbert, Phoenix, and Line Islands), "uniquely for administrative reasons and without any connection to the millenium," has moved the portion of the international dateline running through its territory from 180 to 150 degrees west, making its easternmost atoll (formerly Caroline Island and now Millenium Island) ostensibly the first to see the dawn of the third millennium. Tonga, however, has threatened to retaliate with its own time change to recoup the status of first dawn.³

Why might a strategist care about political and strategic dynamics in the South Pacific in general and in French Polynesia in particular, especially now that Kirimati is more

late 1980's for a massive tourist complex, designed to contain 4600 rooms on an artificial island, but it was never developed. For discussion of this project, see Louis Bresson, "Tourisme: l'anti-crise," *Les Dossiers de Pacific Promotion*, No 1 (January 1993), pages 209-219.

2 See Alex du Prel, "La Preuve par le CEA," *Tahiti Pacifique* 54, Octobre 1995, pages 33-36.

3 Alex du Prel, "Pactole du Millenaire," *Tahiti Pacifique* 96, Avril 1999, pages 28-29.

interested in millennium tourists than Soviet fishing royalties, and now that French nuclear test sites in the Tuamotus have been dismantled. France seems to be as impotent as it is pretentious today; its embarrassing military performance in Desert Storm and its irrelevant diplomatic performance during German reunification reinforced the country's international marginalization that began with the surrender of the Grand Arme to Hitler and continued with the defeats in Indochina and Algeria.⁴ France's strategic nuclear weapons program has proven to be more fanfare than force de frappe, and the construction of a European community has been economically impressive but strategically disappointing, such that French grandeur now seems to exist only in museums and monuments. Meanwhile, the five archipelagos of French Polynesia may be rich in black pearls and blue lagoons, but these commodities are strategically compelling only for the jewelry and tourist industries. With a total population less than 250 thousand, Tahiti and its sister islands are demographically one thousand times less important than Indonesia.⁵ Altogether, French Polynesia seems fit only for a honeymoon destination or geometry demonstration of little concentric circles connected by a long thin line to a hexagon. The only conflict scenario in the region appears to be a battle for a one day tourist market, with Kirimati and Tonga competing for first dawn of the third millennium, Guam focusing on the American shoppers (new island motto—"where America's millennium begins"), and Samoa on the other side of the dateline offering the last sunset of the second millenium. Whether or not the Greenwich Observatory steps in as a possible mediator (it considers the new millenium to begin in the year 2001 and the first land to see sunshine on that day to be Pitt Island in the Chathams), the potential strategic consequences of this free for all appear nil.

A France

...[N]o nation had done more in Bosnia than France. President Chirac's personal intervention with President Clinton during his June trip to Washington had been vital in focusing the Administration. Success in the future depended critically on close French American cooperation, especially since the French military would be responsible for the Sarajevo sector, as it had been during the war.⁶

4 Writing about FDR, LaCouture notes that "It was the disaster of 1940 ... that convinced him that degenerate France had disqualified itself as a world power." Jean LaCouture, *De Gaulle: The Rebel* (New York: WW Norton, 1990), page 337.

5 "American Micronesia, north of the equator and west of the dateline, was the region for the American nuclear testing campaign in the early cold war and suffered from the consequences. Kissinger has been infamously quoted as saying, "They only number a few thousand, let them go to hell." Benoit Antheaume et Joel Bonnemaïson, *Atlas des Iles et Etats du Pacifique Sud* (Montpellier: GIP RECLUS, 1988), page 109.

6 Richard Holbrooke, *To End A War* (New York: Random House, 1999), page 321.

Holbrooke's suggestion that France remains a strategic player in the world runs counter to an Anglo-American penchant for disparaging France. This multifaceted tradition is at the same time popular (the London Times once featured a joke that French boulevards were lined with trees because German soldiers liked to march in the shade), official (McNamara was obviously referring to France when he made his famous NATO speech denigrating independent nuclear forces as "prone to obsolescence"), and academic (neostructuralists divided the cold war world into two superpowers and a periphery.) Yet this perception of precipitous French decline, not to mention the feeling of Schadenfreude during the DeGaulle years (especially in light of the veto of British entry into the common market for the English and the withdrawal from the integrated military command of NATO for the Americans), arguably constitutes a profound underappreciation of France's enduring, if diminished, global influence.⁷

Consider some of the contemporary evidence of France's strategic reach. The French nuclear power industry is the most ambitious and successful in the world, with a full fuel cycle (although the Superphenix breeder project has been largely abandoned) and the vigorous export of equipment and services (reactors and reprocessing among others.) The connection between power and weapons applications of nuclear technology has given special significance to French deals with Israel and Iraq, to canceled deals with South Korea and Pakistan, and to the French position in the debate over disposal options for Russian weapons grade plutonium. On the latter issue, the US has nearly reversed a long standing position and accepted the French argument on the suitability of burning MOX. The French space industry is the centerpiece for European success in the space launch and satellite market, with Ariane 4 (first launched in 1988, two years after the American Challenger disaster) capturing a substantial share of the market, and Ariane 5 (capable of placing 7 tonnes of payload in geo-synchronous orbit, compared with 4.5 for its predecessor) now successfully validated after an initial launch failure in 1996.⁸ The French defense industry has been very successful in competing for export markets in the third world, with annual exports running from 12 to 44 billion current francs between 1976 and 1997.⁹ Dassault has exported over 1400 planes of the Mirage III series and most

7 Tony Judt argues that "1989 was for France something of a second Munich. Once again the place of France in European affairs was revealed as far weaker than the country and its friends had supposed: once more, the French proved incapable of foreseeing or preventing developments that could only work to their disadvantage..." Tony Judt, "Paris and the Tribes of Europe," *French Politics and Society* 10:2, Spring 1992, pages 34- 47.

8 Arianespace advertisements note that the site at Kourou "adds two years to the life of a satellite" because of fuel economies achieved from launching near the equator.

9 Jean-Paul Hebert, "Les Exportations d'Armement. A Quel Prix?" *Notes et Etudes Documentaires*, 5080 (Paris: La Documentation Francaise, 1998), Tableau 7.

recently has concluded Mirage 2000 contracts with Qatar, the UAE, and Taiwan worth altogether over 43 billion francs.¹⁰ With respect to power projection, France has intervened militarily in numerous African crises, most notably against Libya's campaign to seize the Aozou strip in northern Chad, and it has played a key role in peace making efforts in conjunction with the UN in Cambodia, Bosnia and Kosovo. Should the European Union develop a meaningful common foreign and security policy and ultimately a common defense, there is no question France will be at the center of its activities, especially regarding any nuclear weapons posture. In sum, France still carries a considerable strategic punch, even using a narrow, primarily military based definition for strategic reach (which among other things ignores France's soccer prowess as demonstrated in the 1998 World Cup.)

B The South Pacific: Resources, Location, and Potential

"In the coming Pacific Century, the United States tends to see the Pacific Basin as a donut."¹¹

Ironically, US interest in the South Pacific seems to have diminished recently even though developments in the region and vicinity suggest its increased importance. The US withdrawal from the Philippines (Subic Bay and Clark) has certainly facilitated Chinese power plays over the various disputed rocks and islands of the South China Sea (like the suitably named Mischief Reef.) Other players, less mesmerized by the rise and fall of the Soviet Union, have raised their profiles not only in Asia but in the South Pacific as well. The Japanese doubled foreign assistance to the region in 1987 (following a pledge by Foreign Minister Kuranari Tadashi) and the Australians announced the extension of their military sphere of influence to the region in 1989 (following trouble in New Caledonia, the coup in Fiji, and the crisis in Bougainville.) The US perception of a strategic donut is thus not shared by other regional players, and arguably is problematic for three overlapping sets of reasons related to resources, location, and potential. Outside the South Pacific, islands that have these three kinds of qualities include respectively Jamaica (major producer of bauxite), the Kuriles (the eastern edge of home waters for the Russian Pacific surface and submarine fleet), and Taiwan (especially in the event of a declaration of independence.) Within the South Pacific, although many of the islands appear on first glance to have few resources, fewer locational assets, and no strategic potential, one should recall the experience of Quemoy and Matsu during the early cold war and the willingness of the US to brandish nuclear weapons for their defense. As one of the doyens of

10 Other major French arms exports in the 1990's went to Chile and Pakistan (submarine deals worth 2.5 and 5.5 billion French Francs respectively), the UAE (tanks worth over 20 billion), Thailand (missiles worth 5 billion), Turkey (helicopters worth over 2 billion), and Saudi Arabia (a frigate package worth 35 billion.) Hebert, *Ibid.*

11 The expression is from James Mak, University of Hawaii.

American strategic thought explained at the time, "Almost everyone in America, surely including the President and the Secretary of State, would have been relieved in the late 1950's if an earthquake or volcanic action had caused Quemoy to sink slowly beneath the surface of the sea;" but with American reputation and resolve engaged, US defense of these oversized rocks became crucial and irreversible in the short run despite their lack of intrinsic value.¹² In sum, if Quemoy can merit a strategic footnote and Cuba can generate strategic headlines, the South Pacific deserves at least some text as islands of intermediate strategic significance.

C *Strategic Resources*

The enormous ocean areas now encompassed by Exclusive Economic Zones—between 30 and 40 per cent of all ocean areas, depending on how the baselines are measured—and the jurisdictional complexity of the EEZ, make them an area of natural contention and one that requires ongoing accommodation of conflicting claims.¹³

The most important resources of the South Pacific are minerals, forests, and fish. Papua New Guinea, Bougainville, New Caledonia, and Nauru in particular contain some of the world's largest reserves of gold, copper, nickel, and phosphate respectively. Polymetallic nodules rich in manganese and cobalt are also located in the south Pacific (although largely in international waters in a huge ellipse running diagonally to the northeast of Fiji.) Melanesia has tropical forest second in expanse only to the Amazon, although the recent rhythm of wood production could exhaust this resource within 10 to 25 years. Half the tuna sold around the world originates in the Exclusive Economic Zones of the South Pacific, with a value of about 1.2 billion dollars.¹⁴ During the 1930's, the Japanese attempt to secure these and other kinds of resources through the conquest of Southeast Asia and the South Pacific helped produce the Second World War in the eastern hemisphere. During the cold war, the US tuna industry has been challenged by several Pacific Rim countries in Latin America and the Solomon Islands. And during the post cold war era, the US empire in the Pacific has been organized around the twin pillars of a huge exclusive economic zone and an exceptional naval power projection capability that requires navigation and overflight rights. The Law of the Sea Convention is an agreement in progress and US interests are still challenged in a variety of ways, including in territorial seas (Peru shot down a US cargo plane in 1992), in the contiguous zone (16 countries claim

12 Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), page 83.

13 George V. Galdorisi and Kevin R. Vienna, *Beyond the Law of the Sea* (Westport: Praegar, 1997), pages 150-151.

14 Elise Huffer, "Pirogues et Porte-Avions: Les Relations Internationales Dans le Pacifique Sud," *Revue Tiers Monde* 149, janvier-mars 1997, pages 48-49.

the right to prohibit military activities out to 24 miles), in international straits (Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore are trying to regulate passage through Malacca), in archipelagic waters (Indonesia has tried to limit its sea lanes to three), and in exclusive economic zones (Colombia, Brazil, and Chile among others have sought to restrict military activities in these areas.)¹⁵ The hole in this Pacific Rim donut seems to have plenty of calories.

D Strategic Location

To bring out the American fleet, the Japanese would have to threaten an asset that the Americans considered vital, and exactly what asset best filled the bill was something about which Yamamoto had thought long and hard. He had come to the conclusion that only one target would do—Midway Island, at the near end of the Hawaiian archipelago. The naval staff didn't like his plan at all: they wanted the next thrust to be made to the southwest, against Samoa and Fiji.¹⁶

The South Pacific became a strategic location of global significance when the Spanish attempted to compete with the Portuguese by way of an efficient western route to the Indies in the early 16th century. The effort was unsuccessful: the Spanish were losing two out of three ships going through the Pacific Ocean while the Portuguese were losing one out of ten going through the Indian Ocean in the period before 1529. Subsequently, the English (beginning with Drake in the 16th and perhaps most famously with Cook in the 18th century), the Dutch (with the East Indies Company, capitalized at more than 6 million guilders and empowered to negotiate treaties, raise armies, build fortresses, and wage war to dominate the spice trade in the 17th century), and the French (especially Bougainville, hoping to restore French prestige after defeat in the Seven Years War in the 18th century) continued the European scramble for the Pacific. The US joined the competition for Pacific resources and locations in the 19th century, seizing Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, and the Philippines. In between these events, in World War II, Yamamoto promised the Japanese naval staff that the advance to Samoa and Fiji would follow success in Midway. Beginning with the Cold War, the vast open spaces of the Pacific have been exploited by the permanent five Security Council countries for the development and testing of missiles and nuclear weapons, not to mention for the disposal of chemicals (Johnston Island.) Most recently, in perhaps the definitive case of locational value, the Sea Launch consortium of American, Russian, Norwegian, and Ukrainian companies successfully shot a booster and placed a dummy satellite in geosynchronous orbit from a position along the equator south of Hawaii and north of Tahiti (0 latitude, 154 longitude). Now competing for a satellite

15 Galdorisi, *op. cit.*, Chapter 9.

16 Colin McEvedy, *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the Pacific* (New York: Penguin, 1998), page 94.

launch market worth an estimated 50 billion dollars, Sea Launch has already received eighteen firm orders.¹⁷

E Strategic Potential

Tzara: Quite right! You ended up in the trenches, because on the 28th of June 1900 the heir to the throne of Austria Hungary married beneath him and found that the wife he loved was never allowed to sit next to him on royal occasions, except when he was acting in his military capacity as Inspector General of the Austro Hungarian army--in which capacity he therefore decided to inspect the army in Bosnia, so that at least on their wedding anniversary, the 28th of June 1914, they might ride side by side in an open carriage through the streets of Sarajevo (sentimentally) Aaaaah! (then slaps his hands sharply together like a gun-shot.)¹⁸

Defining "war" in the Devil's Dictionary, Ambrose Bierce noted that "The student of history who has not been taught to expect the unexpected may justly boast himself inaccessible to the light."¹⁹ No one obviously could have foreseen at the turn of the century that Guam would become an airbase for bombing runs on Vietnam and Iraq or that Moruroa, Montebello, and the Marshalls would become nuclear test sites. Although the Pacific region has been relatively pacific since the second world war, the possibility of the South Pacific islands initiating or being dragged into a bigger conflict in the future cannot be ruled out. As already suggested, islands have been at the center of some of the most dangerous confrontations of the past fifty years (e.g. Quemoy and Matsu in the fifties, Cuba in the sixties, Cyprus in the seventies, the Falklands/Malvinas in the eighties, and the Spratleys in the nineties.) In the South Pacific, Bougainville has been a source of instability and tension for the past ten years, with one of the worlds largest copper mines shut down by a secessionist rebellion. When the government of Papua New Guinea hired a South African mercenary firm called Executive Outcomes to reopen the mine, presumably by any means, PNG army dissatisfaction and international criticism, particularly from Australia, compromised the operation and resulted in the PNG Prime Minister's resignation. If Bougainville, like thousands of other small islands in the Pacific, seems another insignificant fragment in Melanesia, so Bismarck famously claimed that all the Balkans were not worth the bones of a single German soldier. Recent events in Kosovo, including the specter of a US Soviet confrontation and the potential for escalation to Greece and Turkey, have further reinforced the notions of disproportionate response and unpredictability in international relations. As popular chaos theory has been

17 Sea Launch's prices are reportedly 20 to 40 per cent lower than those of Arianespace. Alex du Prel, "Sea-Launch, c'est parti," *Tahiti Pacifique* 96, Avril 1999, page 8.

18 Tom Stoppard, *Travesties* (New York: Grove Press, 1975), page 40.

19 Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary* (New York: Dover, 1993), page 134.

translated, a butterfly's fluttering wings in China can produce cyclones in Latin America. Asia has possibly become the most volatile region in the world at the very time the South Pacific is moving away from a primary association with the US and Europe towards greater interaction with the rising dragons and tigers of the Pacific Rim. Perhaps it is no coincidence that two of the premier scholars of the South Pacific argue that the region is shifting from West to East and has labeled this movement "into the eye of a hurricane."²⁰

III POLITICAL MYTHOLOGY

We will be like the elephant and the tiger. When the elephant is strong and rested and near his base we will retreat. And if the tiger ever pauses, the elephant will impale him on his mighty tusks. But the tiger will not pause and the elephant will die of exhaustion and loss of blood.²¹

Pigs and dogs are more important in the South Pacific than elephants and tigers (in Tahitian, horses are called "pigs that run over the ground," goats are "pigs with good teeth," monkeys are "dogs that look like man," and cats are "dogs that have a good grip and that dwell in the house.") Still, there are widespread apprehensions, hopes, and general expectations that French Polynesia will sooner or later become independent, especially now that the nuclear test sites on Fangataufa and Moruroa have been shut down and dismantled. We in the US seem to think of independence movements (at least noncommunist ones against European mother countries) as natural and unrelenting, the political equivalent of entropy in thermodynamics. European and American literature examines the "myths of empire" (an international relations book on the domestic sources of overexpansion, unfortunately without a chapter on France,) "the revenge of empire" (third world immigration to Europe, not to mention a popular movie), and the "last of the empire" (a novel of post-independence political maneuvering in former French Senegal), all suggesting that empires exist only in history and science fiction. French Polynesia seemed on the verge of independence as early as the 1950's, led by the charismatic Pouvanaa a Oopa, Polynesian Deputy to the French National Assembly. Elected in 1949, 1952, and 1956 with 62, 70, and 57 per cent of the territorial vote, Pouvanaa was arrested, convicted, jailed, and exiled (1958 through 1969) by the French government in a highly controversial but effectively successful maneuver.²² The independence movement reestablished itself in the 1980's and gained momentum in the 1990's under the leadership

20 Joel Bonnemaison and Eric Waddell, "L'Extreme-Occident dans l'Oeil du Cyclone," *Revue Tiers Monde* 149, janvier-mars 1997, pages 13-34.

21 David Halberstam, *Ho* (New York: Knopf, 1987), page 79.

22 Jean-Marc Regnault, *Te Metua: L'Echec d'un Nationalisme Tahitien* (Singapour: Polymages, 1996), and "Pouvanaa a Oopa," *Tahiti Pacifique* 91, novembre 1998, pages 37-40.

of the popular mayor of Faaa, Oscar Temaru. His independence party, the Tavini Huiraatira (meaning Serve the People), has progressed in the Territorial Assembly from 2 seats in 1986, to 4 in 1991, and to 10 in 1996. In this latter election, the Tavini received 25 per cent of the vote in the entire territory and 28 per cent of the vote in the Society Islands, compared to 39 and 35 per cent for the ruling Tahoera Huiraatira party (Union of the People).²³ According to a very experienced observer of Tahitian politics, "The electoral gains made by Tavini demonstrate a groundswell in support for independence which can no longer be confused with the anti-nuclear vote."²⁴ This momentum in Polynesia has been complemented by political movement in France in terms of its willingness to hold another referendum on independence in New Caledonia. After the Accords of Noumea in 1998 postponed the referendum by 15 to 20 years, Temaru reportedly bet his counterpart Rock Wamytan (leader of the FLNKS) that Polynesians would beat Kanaks in the race for freedom from France.

IV THE SEVEN SAMURAI AGAINST TAHITIAN INDEPENDENCE: FRANCE, HISTORY, RELIGION, ECONOMICS, POLITICS, THE NUCLEAR LEGACY, AND THE AMERICAN EXAMPLE

If general historical trends and local political dynamics seem at first glance to suggest Polynesian independence in the foreseeable future, such a development would in fact confound a variety of forces conspiring to continue the association between Tahiti and France. Reviewing the various factors one by one suggests that the forces of association are stronger than those of separation in every instance, both in terms of France's interest in providing independence and Tahiti's interest in seeking it. These political variations on the laws of economics (supply and demand for independence) and the laws of physics (conservation of energy for association) are the subject of the second half of this study. In the end, Temaru was smart to bet only 200 CFP (two dollars) on independence.

A France

For our purposes, it matters very little what strange thoughts occur to people in Albania or Burkina Faso, for we are interested in what one could in some sense call the common ideological heritage of mankind.²⁵

Tahitian independence has a dual key requirement: Polynesia must want it and France must concede it.²⁶ Historically, the French empire has contracted by way of different

23 Semir Alwardi, "Les mutations politiques, un debut de 'modernite'," *Tahiti Pacifique* 62, Juin 1996, pages 15-16.

24 Karin von Strokirch, "Making sense of the Tahitian elections," *Pacific News Bulletin*, June 1996, pages 5-6.

25 Francis Fukuyama, "Have We Reached the End of History," *The National Interest*, Summer 1989.

mixes of this supply and demand, with Algeria a function of high demand (and tens of thousands of French deaths and hundreds of thousands of Algerian deaths over eight years) and Africa a function of almost exclusive supply (with most of West and Equatorial Africa becoming independent only two years after voting overwhelmingly for continued association with France.) Today, Polynesian independence appears to be an intermediate case, with neither a compelling demand nor supply side. Certainly the willingness of France to concede independence has become more thinkable with the termination of nuclear testing, but France cannot legally mandate independence and has certainly shown an enduring interest in Polynesia by way of economic investment and political reform. Specifically, France has committed to a ten year program of economic defense conversion at 18 billion CFP (180 million dollars) per year and has signaled a willingness to modify the constitution of the 5th Republic to accommodate further devolution of authority to Papeete, possibly making the overseas territory (TOM) an overseas country (POM.)

Metropolitan partisan politics could prove important to this evolution. President Chirac, a neo-Gaullist, has thus far determined the broad outlines of the French relationship with Polynesia after nuclear testing, although since 1997 he has done so in collaboration with a Socialist Prime Minister and government. Chirac has tangible reasons for maintaining a good relationship with Polynesia. His very close personal relationship with Gaston Flosse, President of the Government of French Polynesia (and most important politician for the past decade), helped deliver the Polynesian vote in 1995 by 61 to 39 per cent (vs 53 to 47 per cent in metropolitan France and 49 to 51 per cent in all nine DOM-TOMs of France.²⁷) Similarly, the Gaullist party has a vested interest in Polynesia because both of the territory's parliamentary deputies in the French national assembly are Gaullist; in fact, all five Pacific deputies are Gaullist, in contrast with the Carribean and Reunion delegations dominated by the Left.²⁸ Political dynamics in these tiny French outposts can

26 See Semir Alwardi, *Tahiti et la France* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998) and Paul de Deckker, "France," in K.R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste, and Brij V. Lal, eds., *The Tides of History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), page 277. According to Deckker, "The 1958 Constitution of France remains ambiguous and unclear on the question of overseas territories proceeding to independence... for a territory to attain sovereignty and secede from France, two guarantees are necessary: the Republic must enact a law and the interested populations must consent."

27 Mayors in Tahiti are remarkably effective in delivering their communal votes during Presidential elections, as can be seen in the Papeete vote for Socialist candidates Mitterand and Jospin. When endorsed by the mayor in 1974 and 1988, Mitterand received 45 and 52 per cent of the vote; when not endorsed in 1981 and 1995, Mitterand and Jospin received 7 and 13 per cent of the vote. Jean-Marc Regnault, "Les Polynesiens et les elections presidentielles: un enjeu local avant tout," *Revue Francaise d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer* 83:313, decembre 1996, pages 42-44.

28 The statistics for the 1995 Presidential and 1997 Parliamentary elections are drawn from *Le Monde*, L'Election Presidentielle, Numero Special des Dossiers et Documents du Monde, mai 1995, pages 62 and 123; and *Le Monde*, Elections Legislatives 1997, Dossiers et Documents, 1997, pages 125-127.

be remarkably important for metropolitan outcomes, on both parliamentary and presidential levels. When Mitterand lost the presidential election in 1974 by only one half of one percent of the vote, he attributed the defeat to Giscard's manipulation of the vote in the Comoros.²⁹

Socialists in France seem more inclined to accept independence in the Pacific territories out of both principle and advantage. Although Giscard provided Polynesia with its first statute of autonomy in 1977, the devolution of power in 1984 by Mitterand was much more far reaching, even if the Socialist president continued to insist that certain state competences were "inalienable" and that independence was not something "that the (Polynesian) population wanted."³⁰ Socialist Prime Ministers Rocard in 1988 and Jospin in 1998 negotiated accords with New Caledonia allowing for independence, although the objective of the recent agreement is "a progressively achieved and more equitable" power sharing arrangement. The 1998 preamble explicitly acknowledges French exploitation of the Kanaks, referring to "the enduring trauma of colonization for the indigenous people," and outlines a program for the "emancipation" of New Caledonia over a period of 20 years that provides for citizenship in the early stages and "a destiny of choice that could transform the community into nationality at the end of the period."³¹ In sum, unsurprisingly, there may be some affinity between leftist parties in France and movement towards independence in French Pacific territories. A definitive correlation between metropolitan politics and overseas destinies is impossible, however, as illustrated by the incredibly complex and unpredictable political dynamics of the war in Algeria. In that experience, Socialist Prime Minister Mollet initially considered Algeria a colonial war being fought for a local elite, but then introduced conscription, escalated the war and widened it by participating in the invasion of the Suez; subsequently President DeGaulle evolved from a position of French Algeria, to Algeria in France, to an Algerian Algeria, and ultimately to self determination and independence.

Beyond these partisan and ideological pushes and pulls, France has broader national stakes in Polynesia that strongly favor continued association. Most tangibly, Polynesia provides a French presence in the Asia Pacific region and adds five million square kilometers to the French exclusive economic zone (not to mention the additional 1.7 and .3 million square kilometers around New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna.) France's strategic and commercial interests in Polynesia are admittedly less salient than those

29 Jean-Marc Regnault, "Cinquante ans d'elections legislatives dans le territoire," *Tahiti Pacifique* 72, Avril 1997, pages 40-42.

30 Jean-Marc Regnault, "L'epopee de Mitterand a Moruroa," *Tahiti Pacifique* 58, Fevrier 1996, pages 23-27.

31 "Preamble, Accords de Noumea," reprinted in *Tahiti Pacifique* 85, Mai 1998, page 37.

surrounding French relations with countries like Iraq, featuring massive trade in oil and weapons before the Gulf War and presumably substantial trade and investment flows again once sanctions are lifted. But French overseas policies are arguably driven by more than simple calculations of immediate wealth and power. As Roland Dumas remarked, "With the Arab countries, we have relations of affect, relations of history, and relations of interest."³² Such a formulation might be awkward for the US, a country keener on the end than the course of history and one concerned with the countries and cultures of the third world primarily as a function of communist danger and economic opportunity. Fukayama arguably added an ideological layer to this strategic and economic weltanschauung and historical and affective vacuum in US- third world relations. France has certainly evolved away from its historical emphasis on empire to one that privileges the new Europe, but this political downsizing has been partial and continues to meet resistance. Jean-Pierre Cot, Minister of Cooperation in the early Mitterand years, lamented at the time the "newly fashionable Eurocentric moralism spread by those who having been hurt by fights they didn't fight should with horror sigh and shrug their shoulders when problems of the third world are mentioned."³³ France continues to attach tremendous importance to the promotion of French language and culture (including film festivals in Burkina Faso) and French political ideals (especially human rights.) At the end of the day, Polynesians like many other French colonial cultures are probably more fascinated by and less suspicious of America than France. Still, the French sense of affect and history, combined with minor political calculations, major strategic interests, and modest costs, is likely to guarantee continuing French interest in the islands for the indefinite future.

B History

Nous l'avons, ce OUI desire (We have it, the yes vote desired)

car il est a notre avantage (because it is to our advantage)

Mais j'avoue que j'eus prefere (But I swear I would have preferred)

Un plus important pourcentage (A greater pourcentage)³⁴

Tahiti may never become politically independent, and bad timing might one of the reasons. The archipelago was too young for independence in the 1950's even with

32 *Le Monde*, 12 Mars 1991, page 1.

33 Stephane Hessel, "Mitterand's France and the Third World," in George Ross, et al, eds., *The Mitterand Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), page 332.

34 The vote on the 1958 referendum in Polynesia was a victory for De Gaulle and the Fifth Republic, but the majority was much smaller than in most of the rest of the French empire. Regnault, *Te Metua*, op. cit., page 178.

Pouvanaa's leadership, too constrained during the heyday of the force de frappe from the 1960's through the 1980's (most of French Africa became independent in 1960 and colonies throughout the Pacific became independent in the two decades that followed, like Western Samoa in 1962, Fiji in 1970, Papua New Guinea in 1975, and Vanuatu in 1980), and perhaps too accustomed to the material advantages of the French presence in the 1990's. In the 1950's, neither the independence movement nor Pouvanaa seemed to have the visceral resentment against France that characterized the rebellions in Indochina and Algeria, even if Pouvanaa did call for throwing the French into the Sea, and referred to them as "chicken eating pigs." Still, he fought for France in World War One and admired De Gaulle (at least through 1958, when his campaign for a No vote to the 5th Republic was paradoxically accompanied by "Vive De Gaulle" slogans.) If the Yes vote supporting continued association with France was lower than the local French had desired, it still amounted to a very substantial 64 per cent. Quickly thereafter, independence in Tahiti became much more complicated and nearly unthinkable with the installation of the nuclear test center. French determination to maintain control of Polynesia had already been signaled by the conviction of Pouvanaa in 1959³⁵ and would be rebroadcast worldwide by the similarly contrived destruction of the Rainbow Warrior in 1985. Now that the nuclear test site has been dismantled and a French departure has become quite plausible, Polynesians who contemplate independence must also consider the economic and political nightmares that have plagued the independent third world over the past twenty years, from the lost decade of Latin America and the financial crash in Asia to the killing fields of Ruanda and Haiti. French Polynesians are certainly aware that the level of public assistance and standard of living in the independent Pacific, not to mention the balance of the third world, is dramatically lower than it is for their overseas territory: GDP per capita is more than ten times lower in independent Fiji than in Tahiti, (1500 vs. 17000 dollars in nominal dollars³⁶) and public assistance per capita is more than thirty times lower in the independent Pacific islands than in the French DOM-TOM's (102 vs. 3542 dollars.) In Africa, only a few years after optimists spoke of the "winds of Eastern Europe shaking the coconut trees," commentators like William Pfaff and Ali Mazrui have recently called for

35 Polynesia was studied as a potential test site in 1957 before the decision to locate the site in Algeria. For an interesting conjecture about the process and timing of the subsequent French decision to relocate to Polynesia, see Jean-Marc Regnault, "La France a la Recherche de Sites Nucleaires 1957-1963," monograph 1999.

36 Nominal GDP per capita figures substantially overstate the wealth of French Polynesia given the high cost of living there and overstate the poverty of much of the third world given the low cost of living there. Purchasing power parity (PPP) calculations, although fraught with difficulties, provide better measures for comparative wealth. Using CIA PPP numbers for Tahiti and World Bank numbers for Fiji, the difference in GDP per capita in 1996 is not tenfold but twofold, 8000 dollars for Tahiti and 4000 dollars for Fiji. See the 1998 *World Bank Atlas* and the *CIA Factbook* (website at <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/fp.html>).

"disinterested neocolonialism" and "benign colonization" to mitigate the new world disorder there, reason for the lingering semi-colonial status quo in Polynesia to appear suddenly ahead of its time.³⁷

1 Religion

In this bottom part of the world, everything belongs to God. Even if one must give to Cesar what belongs to Cesar, Cesar too belongs to God.³⁸

The Christian church has played a profound and sometimes surprising role in the evolution of Polynesian culture and politics. The London Missionary Society arrived in 1797 and quickly succeeded in Christianizing much of Polynesia, undoubtedly assisted by the depth of religion, mythology, and spirituality (e.g. ancestors and tiki spirits) already extant in Polynesian culture and by a strategic alliance with the aristocratic Pomare family fighting for political and military supremacy (and emerging victorious in 1815).³⁹ The church proceeded to revamp codes of conduct and restricted traditional song, dance, and casual romance; French annexation, civil codes and additional cultural changes followed a century later. Although there is considerable variety in Polynesia's religious archaeology (a large Protestant layer supplemented by a medium Catholic layer and then small Mormon layer), the leadership of the European faiths showed their conservative political clout and support for the French presence in Polynesia when they endorsed a Yes vote for the 1958 referendum. According to Regnault, this endorsement of France was crucial for the defeat of Pouvanaa's campaign for a No vote.

The Protestant church has also played a progressive role in Polynesian politics, particularly by promoting the Tahitian language. The first Protestant missionaries translated and printed the bible (the first one appeared in 1835) and conducted church services in the Tahitian language, ultimately providing the foundation for a cultural renaissance that would dovetail with the independence movements of the past two generations. The popularity of Pouvanaa and Sanford cannot be understood without an appreciation for their eloquence in the Tahitian language and their devout religiosity. Ironically, Pouvanaa's explained in his 1958 arson trial that his inflammatory rhetoric was simply if literally borrowing from the language and images of the Bible. This routine use of

37 William Pfaff, "A New Colonialism," *Foreign Affairs* 74:1, January/February 1995, pages 2-6.

38 Jacques Ihorai made this comment in 1997 at the bicentennial anniversary of the arrival of the London Missionary Society to Tahiti. See John Mairai, "Dieu a la folie," *Tahiti Pacifique* 72, Avril 1997, page 23.

39 The Polynesian wars occurring around the time of the European arrival were a "principal factor in the destruction of the ancient order." Jean-Marc Pambrun, "Cultures Croisees," *DIXIT* 5, (Tahiti: CREAPRINT, 1996), page 120.

the Tahitian language for the spiritual side of life and for the emerging independence movement contrasted categorically with the secular monopoly of French; students and legislators in the 1960's and 1970's were prohibited from speaking in Tahitian in the schools and in the territorial assembly, and as late as 1967 a weekly in Tahitian was not permitted for publication unless it was accompanied by French translation.⁴⁰ But with the establishment of the Tahitian Academy in 1974, the adoption of the Tahitian language as co-official language of the territory in 1984, the obligatory if superficial instruction in the Tahitian language in the elementary schools, and a university degree option in Tahitian at the University of French Polynesia, the Tahitian language is at the very least surviving, even if there are constant laments from the older generation about the horrible quality of the Tahitian spoken by the younger one.

This widespread promotion of the Tahitian language has eroded the ideological quality of culture in Tahiti, so that now too, in the former style of Pouvaana but on the pro-French association side of the spectrum, Gaston Flosse's mastery of the political game is certainly related to the way he moves effortlessly from impeccable French to eloquent Tahitian. Altogether then, if the early church was associated with the suppression of Polynesian customs, and if the more recent church has taken positions against nuclear testing and in favor of transparency, the net political effect of the contemporary church is one of a very powerful institution (or collection of faiths) unlikely to mobilize categorically one way or another on the issue of continued association or independence, effectively denying the independence movement a powerful ally.

I'm smallpox... I come from far away, across the Eastern Ocean. I am one with the white men... I bring death... No matter how beautiful a woman is, once she has looked at me she becomes as ugly as death... The strongest warriors go down before me.⁴¹

Nuclear testing has been a lightning rod for the independence movement since the weapons program was transferred from Algeria to Polynesia in the early 1960s. Teariki, for example, asked DeGaulle to practice in Tahiti what he preached to Johnson in Vietnam, namely "collect his bombs and go home." Atmospheric testing in French Polynesia ran from July 2, 1966 to September 14, 1975 (41 tests altogether, on barges, under balloons, and off planes) and underground tests ran from June 5, 1975 to January 27, 1996 (139 tests altogether, under the atoll and under the lagoon).⁴² There has been particular controversy over the health effects of atmospheric testing and the environmental effects of the

40 Maco Tevane, "Le Reo Ma'ohi, L'ame des Tahitiens," *Tahiti Pacifique* 95, Mars 1999, pages 15-22.

41 This legend of the Kiowa of the southern Great Plains of North America is taken from Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), page 207-208.

42 Bernard Dumortier, *Les Atolls de l'Atome* (Nantes: Marines, 1997), pages 102 and 175-177.

underground testing, with several high profile scientific studies of the health and environmental consequences of the testing program discounting the damages to date. During the 1980s, the Tazieff Report referred to "nearly no contamination," the Atkinson Report indicated "nearly negligible residual radioactivity," the Cousteau Report declared "everything is practically normal," and the Feuillade Report concluded "no major radiation problem." During the 1990's, INSERM and the OPRI found that the overall incidence of cancer in French Polynesia was generally the same as that for Hawaiians in Hawaii and lower than that for Maoris in New Zealand, with the exception of thyroid cancer, which was twice as high in French Polynesia. Still, the study cautioned that radiation was not the only causal candidate. Finally, in 1998, an IAEA team reported that the radiological status of the atolls following the end of nuclear testing did not contain any residual radiation posing a threat to health.

It should be strongly emphasized that these reassuring studies have typically faced French government constraints in the conduct of the investigations, have often left open the possibility of undiscovered or future problems, and have invariably been challenged by anti-nuclear organizations.⁴³ Environmentalist have alleged that following one of the early atmospheric tests in July 1966, when barges were used instead of balloons with much dirtier results, the Mangarevas received significant fallout contamination. Ecologists emphasize that in 1979, a 150 kiloton device jammed partway down the vertical shaft and was exploded, triggering a tidal wave and adding considerably to the disintegration of the atoll. And, in 1981, a hurricane tore apart and scattered a layer of asphalt used to cover plutonium that had been collected from a series of tests in the 1970's. The 1998 IAEA report confirmed that eight kilos of plutonium—an enormous quantity given its extreme toxicity and radioactive half life—remained in the lagoons. The greatest single environmental danger may be that the geological foundation of the atolls has been thoroughly compromised, resulting in the danger of radiation movement into the surrounding marine environment. According to the Earth Report, the island has sunk more than five feet since testing began and a crack up to 20 inches wide and 1000 yards long has developed in the atoll below sea level.⁴⁴

Given the convertibility of many of Moruroa's structures to non-testing uses (e.g. the port could be used for a deep sea fishing headquarters), not to mention the legal obligation

43 Jean Chesneaux and Nic MacLellan, *La France dans le Pacifique* (Paris: La Decouverte, 1992), pages 119-143. Florent de Vathaire and Beatrice Le Vu, "Estimation de l'incidence des cancers entre 1985-1995 chez les sujets nes et vivants en Polynesie francaise et recherche d'une influence des essais nucleaires atmospheriques," *Tahiti Pacifique* 95, Mars 99, pages 27-32. Alex du Prel, "L'IAEA: sites propres, oui mais," *Tahiti Pacifique* 87, Juillet 98, page 11.

44 Edward Goldsmith and Nicholas Hildyard, eds., *The Earth Report* (London: Mitchell Beazley Publishers, 1988), page 182.

to return the island with its existing infrastructure to the territory, the fact that the French have razed virtually everything on the island but the blockhouse and runway suggests that the government also deems the island unsafe for use. Moruroa and Fangataufa may indeed constitute ecological time bombs (with Hollywood's latest version of Godzilla a tiny preview of dangers to come.) But for the moment, at least on the political side, the termination of the program and the dismantlement of nearly all of the infrastructure combined with the absence of any categorical, conspicuous disaster altogether means that the most universally resented symbol of the dark, imperial side of the French presence in Polynesia has disappeared, presumably to the disadvantage of the independence movement. In the longer run, should the risks associated with the testing program remain primarily latent, a 21st century retrospective may recall the biological hot zone of the 19th century (when the population of the Marquesas experienced a free fall of over 90 percent between the late 1700's and the late 1800's) as infinitely more devastating than the nuclear ground zero of the 20th (when the overall population of French Polynesia doubled between the 1970s and 1990s.)⁴⁵

2 Economics

Bengt Danielsson described the typical work schedule for an inhabitant of the Tuamotus in the 1950's: Monday morning copra; afternoon rest; Tuesday morning chat with friends; afternoon fish; Wednesday morning rest; afternoon chat with friends; Thursday morning read the Bible; afternoon chat with friends; Friday morning copra; afternoon rest; Saturday morning rest; afternoon chat with friends; Sunday morning go to church; afternoon chat with friends.⁴⁶

Tahiti is an economic aberration. It has nominal wealth like Italy and Spain (GDP per capita 17,000 dollars), an inflated price structure like Switzerland (power purchasing parity GDP per capita substantially lower than nominal figures, 8,000 dollars in the case of Tahiti), and a productive capacity like Madagascar and Namibia (aggregate annual GDP under 4 billion dollars.) The tourist industry is the leading source of independent revenue for the islands, generating 32 billion CFP (320 million dollars) in 1996; but this sector has been a perennial source of disappointment, with only 170,000 tourists in 1996 (compared to 300,000 in Fiji, 800,000 in Guam, and 7,000,000 in Hawaii), and enormous hotel

45 Population estimates are very difficult and presumably vary, but one source estimates that the population of the Marquesas dropped from 80,000 to 2,000 in the century after the European arrival and no one questions the fact of a demographic armageddon.. Tony Wheeler and Jean-Bernard Carillet, *Tahiti and French Polynesia* (Lonely Planet, 1997), page 21.

46 Bernard Poirine, *Tahiti: Strategie Pour l'Apres-Nucleaire*, 2o Edition (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), page 10.

overcapacity due to tax incentives for tourist industry investments.⁴⁷ The black pearl and fishing industries have expanded dramatically in percentage terms over the past ten years to form the second and third leading industries, with black pearl exports increasing from under 4 billion CFP in 1990 to over 14 billion (140 million dollars) in 1996, and fish exports increasing from 3 million CFP in 1989 to 50 million (500 thousand dollars) in 1996.⁴⁸ But both sectors remain at relatively modest absolute levels. Unemployment is very high for youth (an estimated 35 per cent of 14 to 24 year olds in 1996⁴⁹), the CFP currency is horribly overvalued (discouraging export industries), the tax structure is perverse (government revenues are derived largely from customs duties⁵⁰), and the incomes policy is regressive (there is no income tax, functionaries have an indexed salary almost doubling what they would have earned in France, and workers in peripheral sectors earn a minimum wage below what they would have earned in France.) Many observers believe that the riots that accompanied the resumption of nuclear testing in 1995 were much more an expression of socioeconomic inequality and frustration than of anti-nuclear or anti-French sentiment per se.

Tahiti's developmental nightmare has been significantly mitigated by the very substantial transfers accompanying the nuclear testing program. This cash flow to the islands almost instantaneously transformed their economic structure in the 1960's, with military and testing expenditures going from 240 million CFP and 5 per cent of the GDP in 1962 to 12 billion CFP (120 million dollars) and 76 per cent of the GDP in 1966 (not counting multiplier effects.) Ministry of Defense expenditures totaled 57 billion CFP in 1989 and 46 billion in 1996, while France's total expenditures in Polynesia (adding civilian activities, especially Education, to military ones) amounted to 124 billion CFP in 1996 (1.2 billion dollars, or 33 per cent of the GDP.)⁵¹ Representing more revenue than tourism,

47 Bernard Poirine, "Orgie de defiscalisation... pour l'economie sous perfusion," *Tahiti Pacifique* 81, Janvier 1998, pages 23-26. In 1996, French Polynesia received around 230 million dollars (of which 110 for hotels) from the Loi Pons and around 45 million dollars of investment credits from the Loi Flosse.

48 Institut Territorial de la Statistique, *les Tableaux de l'Economie Polynesienne* (Papeete: ITSTAT), pages 239-272.

49 Ibid, pages 111-137. Unemployment estimates are especially problematic in Polynesia because of the absence of unemployment insurance and attendant need for registration, not to mention the traditional work profile of chatting, fishing, napping, and harvesting copra.

50 Direct taxes provide the territory with 15 billion CFP (around 150 million dollars) while indirect taxes, like customs taxes, provide 43 billion CFP (around 430 million dollars.)

51 The territorial government budget became increasingly dependent on these transfers, because even though military and testing expenditures declined as a percentage of GDP, government reliance on customs duties for its primary source of revenue increased. Military expenditures

black pearls, and fishing combined, these transfers have given French Polynesia the highest nominal per capita wealth in the Pacific and almost twice the nominal wealth of France's overseas DOMs. There is virtually none of the emigration from French Polynesia that is characteristic of other areas of Polynesia (American Samoans migrating en masse to the US, Western Samoans migrating en masse to New Zealand), there is a high level of basic medical and educational services, there is malnutrition only as a function of choice (with diabetes a chronic problem due to imported foods that are heavily processed and sweetened), and there are abundant consumer goods of every type (with massive daily traffic jams on either side of Papeete due to a ratio of cars to kilometer of paved road of 158 to 1.)⁵²

Although the French government has promised a package of funds to compensate for the dismantlement of the nuclear testing program (running 1.8 billion CFP per year from 1996 to 2006), the Tahitian economy now faces an enormous and perhaps impossible challenge. The inability to develop a robust tourist industry is especially ominous. Patrick Peaucellier, the territorial Minister of Finance, commented in 1996 that "if we can't go to 300,000 tourists per year within the next decade, we are really incompetent,"⁵³ but little in 1999 suggests newfound competence. As early as 1971, when 115,000 tourists visited French Polynesia, a promotion team suggested a variety of initiatives to attract 500,000 tourists per year by 1980, but the average annual figure for that decade turned out to be 121,000.⁵⁴ By comparison, Guam, which faced the challenge of adapting a defense dependent island economy twenty years ago, succeeded in increasing its annual tourist visits from 326,000 in 1982 to 780,000 in 1990, and Hawaii moved from 4.1 million to 6.9 million tourists in the same period. In sum, in French Polynesia the exponential increases in the small fishing industry and the medium black pearl industry are completely overwhelmed by the stagnation in the large tourist industry and the downsizing or collapse of gigantic military transfers (and surrogate Pact for Progress.) Man may not live on bread alone, but in Tahiti he no longer lives on breadfruit either, and given the movement made to satisfy demands for cultural identity (discussed above) and political autonomy (discussed below), it is hard to imagine Polynesians severing the connection that has kept Papeete looking more like Paris than Port Moresby.

represented 4 billion CFP in 1964 (46 per cent of GDP), 12 in 1966 (76 per cent), and 18 in 1990 (21 per cent.) Poirine, *Tahiti*, page 14.

52 ITSTAT, op. cit., pages 315-328.

53 Patrick Peaucellier Interview, "Après-CEP: Quelle Societe?" *Tahiti Pacifique* 59, Mars 1996, pages 15-22.

54 Bernard Poirine, "Tourisme en Polynesie: Les Reves Ecrases," *Tahiti Pacifique* 18, Octobre 1992, pages 28-30.

3 *Politics*

I am convinced that the statutory debates that have dominated political discussion in our country for the last 25 years must end in order to allow the country to devote itself exclusively to social and economic development.

Gaston Flosse 1983, leader of the Tahoera party and mayor of Pirae.⁵⁵

A referendum on self determination is an option that we defend to insure that incessant demands for statutory revision do not result in a rush towards independence.... We need stable institutions that will allow us to concentrate on the real priorities, like New Caledonia is now doing for a period of 10, 15, 20 years, such as providing professional education to our youth and putting in place development structures in the outer islands. Then we can regularly revisit the issue of statutory evolution

Boris Leontieff 1999, leader of the Fetia Api party and mayor of Arue.⁵⁶

Territorial politics—in both substance and style-- have reinforced the French presence in Polynesia. In terms of substance, France and supporters of a French connection in Polynesia now understand that modest concessions of decision making and administrative authority work more as an antidote against than stepping stone towards independence. After French Interior Minister Gaston Defferre sponsored a small devolution of power to members of the French community in 1956, the stepping stone assumption produced a quick reversal in Tahiti in 1958, with power reconcentrated in the State. Then devolution was resurrected in Tahiti, with statutory revisions granting increased autonomy in 1977, 1984, 1990, and 1996, and another revision appearing imminent. Perhaps the most salient political milestone of the past 20 years was the 1980 shift by Flosse from associating autonomy with independence to endorsing the first to prevent the second. This whole unanticipated slide resonated across the entire political spectrum, reshaping the primary partisan competition from one of status quo vs autonomy to one of autonomy vs independence.⁵⁷ The autonomy position has itself evolved, with Flosse systematically pushing for new statutory demands the moment old ones are adopted.⁵⁸ Current negotiations between Flosse and France are inspired by the compromise worked out in New Caledonia; they would create a Polynesian citizenship and would allow employment

55 Semir Alwardi, "Les Revendications statutaires du Territoire," memo, summer 1997.

56 Boris Leontieff, "Interview," *Tahiti Pacifique* 96, Avril 1999, pages 30-33.

57 Jean-Marc Regnault, "Partis Politiques," *DIXIT* 99 (Papeete: creaprint, 1999), pages 254-258.

58 Semir Alwardi, *Tahiti et la France* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), especially pages 291-293 "Une surenchere statutaire permanente."

to be controlled by the territory, even though the restrictions associated with "oceanisation of cadre" would be incompatible with the rules of the European Union.⁵⁹

As for style, procedural rules of the game and institutional features of the Polynesian system also militate against independence. First, a referendum in Polynesia would be a necessary part of the process, and public opinion polls suggest a small core of support for independence. A poll taken two weeks after the resumption of nuclear testing and the ensuing rioting in 1995 showed that 66 per cent of French Polynesians did not support independence at all or within the next 10 years (22 per cent supported independence within 3 or 10 years and 12 per cent did not respond.)⁶⁰ Second, because territorial elections are conducted under semi-proportional rules, with a 5 per cent threshold for party representation in the territorial assembly, a single party rarely has a majority on its own in a system already dominated by clientelism. As in the French Fourth Republic, coalition politics enhance the element of opportunism. Juventin, former mayor of Papeete, supported the socialist candidate in the French presidential elections in 1974 and in 1988 (Mitterand both times) but supported the conservative candidates in 1981 and in 1995 (Giscard and Balladur); Vernaudon, current mayor of Mahina, was a former Gaullist deputy in 1993, then Socialist Party supporter in the mid 1990's, and now wheeler and dealer with Flosse again in the late 1990's. One projection of the 2001 territorial elections is either Tahoera'a or Tavini forming the government in coalition with Boris Leontieff's party Fetia Api (New Star.)⁶¹ Third, the establishment of communes in 1972 (creating 44 of the current 48) has undermined the territorial assembly's political clout and preeminence because they are financed directly by the state or by mandated transfers from the territorial budget. With communal employees numbering over 5000 in 1989, it comes as no surprise that Polynesian mayors exercise an enormous influence on the communal vote at times of Presidential elections (as noted above.) Finally, election seats are weighted to favor the outer islands, where pro-French sympathies are strongest. In the 1958 referendum, the Marquesas, Tuamotus and Gambiers voted 85 to 90 per cent yes, compared to 45 per cent in the Leeward Islands (like Huahine) and 64 per cent in the Windward Islands (Tahiti and Moorea.)⁶² And in the legislative elections of 1996, the Windward Islands constituted 60 per cent of the electorate but only 54 per cent of the territorial assembly, a

59 See Guy Sem, "Oceanisation des cadres," *Tahiti Pacifique* 81, Janvier 1998, pages 15-19, and Semir Alwardi, "Malentendus sur la citoyennete polynesienne," *Tahiti Pacifique* 95, Mars 1999, pages 10-11.

60 "Sondage sur l'independance," *Tahiti Pacifique* 54, Octobre 1995, pages 15-18.

61 Jean-Marc Regnault, "L'ambiguite des elections du 17 mai 1997," *Tahiti Pacifique* 74, Juin 1997, pages 7-10.

62 Regnault, *Te Metua*, op cit, page 178.

malapportionment that hurts the independence parties because they trailed the Gaullist party by only 8 per cent in Tahiti and Moorea but by 14 per cent in the territory as a whole.⁶³ Pouvanaa reportedly had a strategy of divide the French and throw them into the sea, but the French version of divide and conquer has been more successful.

4 *The American Example*

Hawaii is ours. As I look back upon the first steps in this miserable business and as I contemplate the means used to complete the outrage I am ashamed of the whole affair.⁶⁴

The US has a much greater colonial legacy in the Pacific than Americans generally realize.⁶⁵ These former possessions have evolved in a variety of ways, ranging from complete incorporation into the US through several different forms of association to complete independence.⁶⁶ Indeed, the American experience shows that an ethnically heterogeneous and geographically distant empire can endure in modified form long after most of the third world becomes independent. Hawaii became a state in 1959 and has a fully empowered Congressional delegation, with Hawaiians now achieving high political office after decades of white and Japanese domination (Waihee was elected Governor in 1986 and Akaka has been Senator since 1990.) Guam and American Samoa are each non-incorporated territories of the US, with resident populations having US nationality and circulation rights, but not US citizenship. Instead of Congressman with full voting rights, they have Delegates who can participate in Congressional business but not vote on the floor. Guam's political status is governed by the 1952 Organic Act, but there is bipartisan support on the island for a change to a modified commonwealth, with Guamanian control over immigration and mutual consent between Guam and the US Congress over law. This initiative has been endorsed in a referendum in 1982, promoted by a bill supported by Democratic Delegate Underwood and Republican Governor Ada, and pursued in negotiations with the US Department of Interior and US Congress; but the election of a Republican Congress in 1994 immediately halted the momentum.⁶⁷ The Northern Marianna Islands became a Commonwealth in 1975, an arrangement without representation in Congress (even at the Delegate level), but with citizenship rights and modest subsidies. The island groups of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the

63 Alwardi, op. cit., "Les mutations politiques."

64 Former President Cleveland, quoted in Barbara Tuchman, *Proud Tower* (New York: Macmillan 1966).

65 Robert Kiste, "United States," *Tides of History*, page 228.

66 Paul de Deckker, "La methode anglo-saxonne," *Tahiti Pacifique* 74, Juin 1997, pages 15-24.

67 Michael Barone and Grant Ujifusa, *The Almanac of American Politics 1998* (Washington D.C.: National Journal, 1997), pages 1564-1566.

Marshall Islands each have compacts of free association, concluded in the 1980's and 1990's, with fairly substantial aid flows in compensation for past nuclear tests and current strategic services. Finally, the Philippines became independent in 1946, but maintained a special relationship with the US that included two of America's most important overseas military bases until the end of the Cold War and that produced a sizeable Filipino community in California and the American Pacific (e.g. Guam's population is 22 per cent Filipino and Hawaii recently elected a Filipino-American governor, Cayetano.) Altogether then, US experience with its Pacific empire (with the partial exception of the Philippines) suggests that there is considerable room to maneuver for France and Polynesia short of independence.

IV CONCLUSION

When Tevita Alanoa stole his neighbor's pig and protested, after being caught, that he had only eaten one leg, he was telling a quarter-truth.⁶⁸

The perception that France's international stature has diminished yet again with the end of the cold war, the notion that the South Pacific is now a region of scant strategic importance, and the expectation that French Polynesia is headed for independence following the dismantlement of the nuclear test sites are arguably quarter truths. This essay promotes other ideas, perhaps three-quarter truths. First, France remains a global player, with strategic technologies in defense, space, and nuclear power, among other things. Second, the south Pacific remains an important region in the world, partly because of a wealth of resources, partly because of proximity to the hyperactive Pacific Rim, and partly out of sheer strategic potential. And third, French Polynesia is as likely as France to prefer continued association over independence. French pretensions are well served in Tahiti, and Polynesia does not seem to be eager to become independent for reasons that include historical timing, cultural recognition, economic advantage, political satisfaction and division, the termination of nuclear testing, and the comparable status of several American Pacific territories.

LES LÉGENDES DE TAPUNA: HISTOIRE DE LA STRATÉGIE NUCLÉAIRE DE LA FRANCE DANS LE PACIFIQUE

La fin de la guerre froide a certainement modifié le perception traditionnelle que l'on pouvait avoir de la dimension internationale de la France.

De plus la prise de conscience de l'importance stratégique de la région Pacifique confrontée à la perspective qu'un jour la Polynésie Française, tout comme la Nouvelle

68 Epeli Hau'ofa, *Tales of the Tikongs* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), page 7.

Calédonie, puissent devenir indépendante, ajouté au démantèlement des sites d'expérimentations nucléaires, sont autant d'éléments supplémentaires qui tendraient à laisser croire que la France va encore voir son influence diminuer .

En fait, à bien y regarder, l'étendue de la zone économique maritime française dans cette région du monde en particulier, lui assure toujours une place maîtresse sur l'échiquier mondial, position qu'elle n'entend certainement pas sacrifier aux vellétés indépendantistes radicales des Territoires d'outre-mer du Pacifique.

Elle obligera sans doute chacune des parties en présence à trouver une solution de compromis sous une forme d'association, privilégiant d'abord une association avec la France plutôt qu'une coupure radicale.