

THE PACIFIC ISLAND STATES

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The Pacific Island States

Security and Sovereignty in the
Post-Cold War World

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First published in Great Britain 1995 by
MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-349-39416-6 ISBN 978-0-230-37243-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9780230372436



First published in the United States of America 1995 by
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, INC.,
Scholarly and Reference Division,
175 Fifth Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10010

ISBN 978-0-312-12513-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Henningham, Stephen, 1950–
The Pacific island states : security and sovereignty in the post
–Cold War world / Stephen Henningham.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-312-12513-4

I. Oceania. II. Title.

DU17H46 1995

995—dc20

95–14906
CIP

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1995 978-0-333-63311-3

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For Kate, Elizabeth, Patrick, David, Minou and
H. Paul

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Preface

The Pacific islands region was one of the last parts of the world to be decolonised. From 1962 however, beginning with Western Samoa, fourteen small states emerged. These new states maintained close connections with the Western nations. In contrast to some other regions of the developing world, constitutional and more or less democratic forms of government have mostly been present. During the Cold War era, tendencies to 'non-alignment' were muted. Soviet overtures to the island states were in most instances rebuffed, especially following the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

But in the mid- and late 1980s, the region became more unsettled. The key developments included the following. The conflict in New Caledonia between the Kanak nationalist movement and its opponents erupted in violence; the United States/New Zealand leg of the ANZUS (Australia–New Zealand–United States) treaty relationship ceased to operate; two coups took place in Fiji in 1987, ending what had been presented as an example of multiracial and democratic harmony; the constitutional arrangements established at the time of independence came under question in several other states; French agents blew up the Greenpeace vessel *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland harbour, causing one death; and external powers with no traditional links with the region – including the (then) Soviet Union and Libya – showed heightened interest.

Meanwhile the predominance formerly exercised in much of the region by Australia and New Zealand was reduced by their other concerns, by increased assertiveness on the part of the island states, and by increased attention to these states by the United States, France, Japan and other powers. In addition a major revolt erupted on Bougainville island in the North Solomons province of Papua New Guinea, and the economic problems of several island states worsened.

Then, by around 1990, changes in the wider world, especially the end of the Cold War and the increasing economic dynamism of Northeast and Southeast Asia, embodied new challenges. Henceforth the island states were obliged to respond to the implications of the end of superpower rivalry, of increasing multipolarity, of the enhanced influence of international and regional organisations and of international law, and of the greater emphasis on economic issues in international affairs.

As a result of these various changes, the Pacific islands region ceased to be a place apart. The region had become less insulated from the wider

world. And its similarities to some other parts of the developing world had become both more pronounced and more evident. Nowadays the Pacific islands are very subject to the waves of change. Environmentally, the very existence of some of them may be threatened by global warming. Economically, their chronic problems mostly imply continued dependence. Politically and constitutionally, they are seeking to merge new institutions and ideas with old customs and values. And strategically, they are no longer subject to the 'strategic denial' umbrella of the Cold War era and are increasingly open to ripple effects from trends and developments in Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and the wider world. Meanwhile, with the end of the Cold War era, the strategic importance of the Pacific islands region in the wider Asia-Pacific context, which had already been modest, rapidly dwindled, helping reduce the interest and involvement of the United States and the United Kingdom. Many of these changes were inevitable. Some were for the better. The overall outcome, however, is that the region has become more politically complex and in some respects more potentially volatile.

This book is a study of security and defence issues and trends in the Pacific islands region, and of the challenges which the Pacific island states face to their security and sovereignty. In recent years, largely in response to the conflicts and tensions evident in the 1980s, numerous articles and several collections have been published dealing with various aspects of the security of the region. This volume is, however, among the first more extended examinations of the subject by a single author. It is also perhaps the first lengthy study which seeks to take account of post-Cold War circumstances.

I give particular attention to political and military issues and trends. I do, however, interpret the concept of security broadly, and thus include some consideration of environmental, economic and other general aspects of the defence of the national interests of the island states. Yet I avoid stretching the elastic concept of security so far as to render it so comprehensive as to be useless. In particular, I do not concern myself with matters of primarily internal concern in the island states, except insofar as they have wider implications for the security of the state concerned, including with respect to its relations with its neighbours, or have become items on the regional security agenda.

My emphasis is on trends and issues over the last decade, and on prospects over the next. In what is a broad-ranging study, intended for both a general and an academic readership, I have generally sought to keep detail to a necessary minimum. But I have chosen to consider in greater depth three topics which have attracted special attention from policy-

makers and commentators, both in the island states and elsewhere. These topics are: French nuclear testing and related nuclear issues (Chapter 5), the role of Australia and New Zealand in the region (Chapter 7), and military and paramilitary intervention in the states of the region (Chapter 8).

I focus on the governments of the Pacific island states as central actors in the international affairs of the region. This approach is especially relevant with respect to the Pacific island states, in part because of the general lack in most of them of domestic awareness of, and interest in, external affairs. In addition most of them lack powerful business and other domestic interests and lobbies operating independently of government. But I have sought to ensure that my approach is also informed by an awareness of the importance of non-government actors, interests and influences, both domestic and transnational.

My standpoint is that of an Australian commentator who has had the opportunity, since 1982, to follow developments in the region closely, first as a public servant and then as an academic. I have endeavoured to understand and describe the attitudes and assessments of island governments and islander commentators, but make no claim to speak on their behalf.

We must of course distinguish between the security perspectives and aims of governments, and the security interests of the populations under their (real or putative) authority. In our world there is sadly no shortage of cases in which the security of a government is maintained at the cost of the security interests, broadly defined, of all or part of the population concerned. Fortunately, examples of this phenomenon in the Pacific islands region have been infrequent. But this tension does exist, especially because the structures and systems of the modern state are a recent imposition on the many and varied societies of the region. In Fiji following the military coups in 1987, which protected established interests and asserted indigenous Fijian primacy, the security of the non-Fijian section of the population was in some respects diminished. In Papua New Guinea in the late 1980s and early 1990s, some of the measures employed by government forces to combat the secessionist movement on Bougainville reduced the security, broadly regarded, of local communities on that island.

But consensual traditions are present in several island societies, while more or less democratic forms of government are to be found throughout most of the region. Accordingly, we can assume, for the purposes of this study, the existence of a reasonably broad area of commonality between the security concerns of island governments and those of the populations under their administration.

In this book I use the term 'the Pacific islands region', conceived as a broad strategic and political zone, to refer to the island states and territo-

ries and the intervening ocean in a vast area. This predominantly maritime zone is bounded by but also includes Kiribati and the various entities of 'American' Micronesia to the north, the island of New Guinea to the west, and French Polynesia to the east. To the south it is bounded by, but does not include, New Zealand. Its component states and territories have a population which numbers, including the inhabitants of Irian Jaya, some eight million.

My main concern is with the island states, but I also give some attention to the dependent territories in the region. I generally differentiate between the island states and the island territories, but in some instances use the term 'entities' to refer to both the states and/or the territories as a group. I have avoided the term 'South Pacific', because in some usages it is inclusive of New Zealand, and because it is at times used to refer only to those island states and territories south of the equator, excluding those to the north.

Though extensive, the Pacific islands region as defined above is less all-inclusive than the concept of Oceania. I have chosen not to use the term Oceania, because in its broadest usage this term incorporates all the insular areas between the Americas and Asia. Even in its narrower usages, it often refers to Australia and New Zealand as well as to the Pacific islands.

But we should note that there are significant populations of Pacific islanders outside or on the fringes of the Pacific islands region as I have here defined it. They are to be found in New Zealand (or 'Aotearoa,' to give it its Maori name), the Hawaiian islands and Easter Island, all of which were originally settled by Polynesian peoples, and in the mainly Melanesian islands of the Torres Strait. These entities have, however, become or been incorporated into states dominated by non-Pacific Islanders, respectively New Zealand, the United States, Chile and Australia. New Zealand's Polynesian peoples make up around 12 per cent of the total population and comprise both indigenous Maori and immigrants from other parts of Polynesia. The Polynesian communities in New Zealand have attained significant cultural and social recognition. But in its overall population, values, culture, institutions and economy, New Zealand remains distinct from the island states. In the Hawaiian islands – as happened by the way in most of Australia – the indigenous population has been swamped by immigrants. On Easter Island the population, although mostly Polynesian by descent, numbers only a few thousand. The Torres Strait Islands also have only a small population, and many of these islanders have migrated to the Australian mainland. Some Torres Strait islanders have argued for self-determination and independence, but overall, nationalist and secessionist sentiments have been muted by econ-

omic dependence, cultural recognition and increased participation in local self-government. With the important exception of New Zealand, these entities neither play a role in nor have substantial direct relevance to Pacific islands affairs. Accordingly, with the exception of a consideration of New Zealand's role in the region, I do not discuss them except in passing. The same goes for the Pitcairn Islands, a remote British possession to the southeast of French Polynesia with a population of mixed European–Polynesian descent of less than one hundred.

I begin this study with a review of the general features of the Pacific islands region and in particular of the island states (Chapter 1). The Pacific island states and territories are more diverse in history, culture, traditions and present circumstances than outsiders often appreciate. But despite their variety, they are also united in some respects by common experiences, common problems and common interests. Accordingly, they have been able to cooperate with considerable effect in various regional bodies.

I suggest that, from an Australian perspective, the states and territories of the region, and their surrounding ocean areas, may usefully be considered as belonging to one of three sub-regions, with respect to their security and defence characteristics. These sub-regions are: 'American' Micronesia, Melanesia and Fiji, and Polynesia and 'Commonwealth' Micronesia. American Micronesia includes the Micronesian entities presently or formerly under American rule. Melanesia and Fiji includes the three Melanesian states, Fiji and the French territory of New Caledonia, which has a Melanesian indigenous population. Polynesia and Commonwealth Micronesia includes the Polynesian entities and the two Micronesian entities, namely Kiribati and Nauru, which were formerly part of the British imperial system.

I next examine the potential for military conflicts between the states of the region and for the emergence of external military threats (Chapter 2). Overall, despite the presence of bitter conflicts in particular states and territories, and despite intermittent tensions between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea over the activities along their common border of the OPM (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka* – Free Papua Movement), the region seems likely to remain relatively peaceful. This is because of the combination of traditions of cooperation with the absence of external and intra-regional military threats, of border and territorial disputes, of disputes over resources, and of armed forces with offensive capabilities.

I then discuss the security perspectives of the island governments (Chapter 3). In the absence of military threats, and in view of their other problems, these governments have generally employed a broad definition of what national security entails. They regard it as involving environmental,

economic and other dimensions additional to more traditional defence and military concerns. In this chapter I also review the role of the South Pacific Forum, the main regional organisation, in fostering security and other cooperation, and in seeking to defend the interests of the island states.

In the following chapters I review several of the key issues and trends relevant to the security and sovereignty of the island states. In Chapter 4, I discuss the way in which the island governments have generally upheld indigenous and local rights and have supported decolonisation. In particular they have focused on the French territory of New Caledonia, where the indigenous Melanesian community – the largest ethnic group in the territory, although in a minority overall – has been campaigning for independence. They have given less attention to the other French Pacific territories, namely French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna, where pressures for independence have been weak or absent. They have generally accepted continued United States sovereignty over American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, largely because of the absence of independence movements in these entities. They have welcomed the constitutional evolution of the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and more recently Palau, towards a qualified form of sovereign independence. They have mainly chosen not to focus attention on the status of the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, and on the vexed question of Bougainville in the North Solomons province of Papua New Guinea.

Next I consider nuclear, environmental and resource issues (Chapter 5). The island governments have denounced the French nuclear testing programme in French Polynesia, criticised plans to dump nuclear waste in the region and endorsed the Treaty of Rarotonga, which embodies the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone. Their stance on nuclear issues reflects the strong concern in the island states over threats to their vulnerable environment. Although the dramatic risks associated with global warming have attracted particular attention, the island governments have also focused on the management of forestry and fishing resources and on the general dangers of waste dumping; and are becoming conscious of the environmental dangers associated with economic development and population growth.

Of course the Pacific island states are subject to a broad range of external pressures and influences. Often they must adjust to circumstances and trends not of their making. Accordingly, I also discuss the interests and activities of external actors in the region (Chapter 6). Until the late 1980s the Western powers pursued a policy of strategic denial, but this policy has been outmoded by the end of the Cold War, by the collapse of the Soviet Union and by the increased interest of the island states in diversify-

ing their external connections. In addition to discussing external states, I also note the role of non-government actors, including business firms, lobby groups, international development bodies and criminal groupings.

Next I examine the manner in which, among the Western and associated states, Australia and New Zealand have played a special role in the region because of their proximity, relative scale and historical connections (Chapter 7). Both these states are regarded by the island governments as being closely associated with but not *of* the islands region. In 1971 however they accepted an invitation from the island governments to join the island states as founding members of the South Pacific Forum. I also discuss the question of possible military or paramilitary interventions in the island states by Australia and/or New Zealand, focusing on the risk that their capabilities may not be appropriate to some of the prospective scenarios (Chapter 8).

Finally (Chapter 9), I sum up my findings and consider prospects over the next decade. My main conclusions are as follows. Direct military threats to the island states from outside or within the region are unlikely to increase – except conceivably from Indonesia with respect to Papua New Guinea over OPM activities along their common border. Conversely, continued strong emphasis is likely to be placed on environmental, economic and other ‘non-military’ challenges to security. The end of the Cold War, despite its obvious benefits, has nonetheless been a mixed blessing for the island states and territories. The attention of aid donors and investors has in some measure been diverted elsewhere. The island states are now less able than some of them were hitherto to attract attention and aid because of their strategic location, or more generally to profit from Western concern that they might respond to overtures from non-Western powers. Declining interest by traditional aid donors may not, in the longer term, be compensated for by assistance from those powers, notably Japan, which in recent years have assumed a somewhat larger role in the region. For its part, Australia in the longer term may be less able and willing to assist than is often assumed.

The island states will face some difficult security and associated problems over the next decade or so. Ultimately, responsibility for grappling with the problems ahead will rest with their governments. These governments will need good leadership and good fortune. They will also need an understanding, by external policy makers and commentators, of the complex circumstances and issues involved. My hope is that this book will contribute to that understanding.

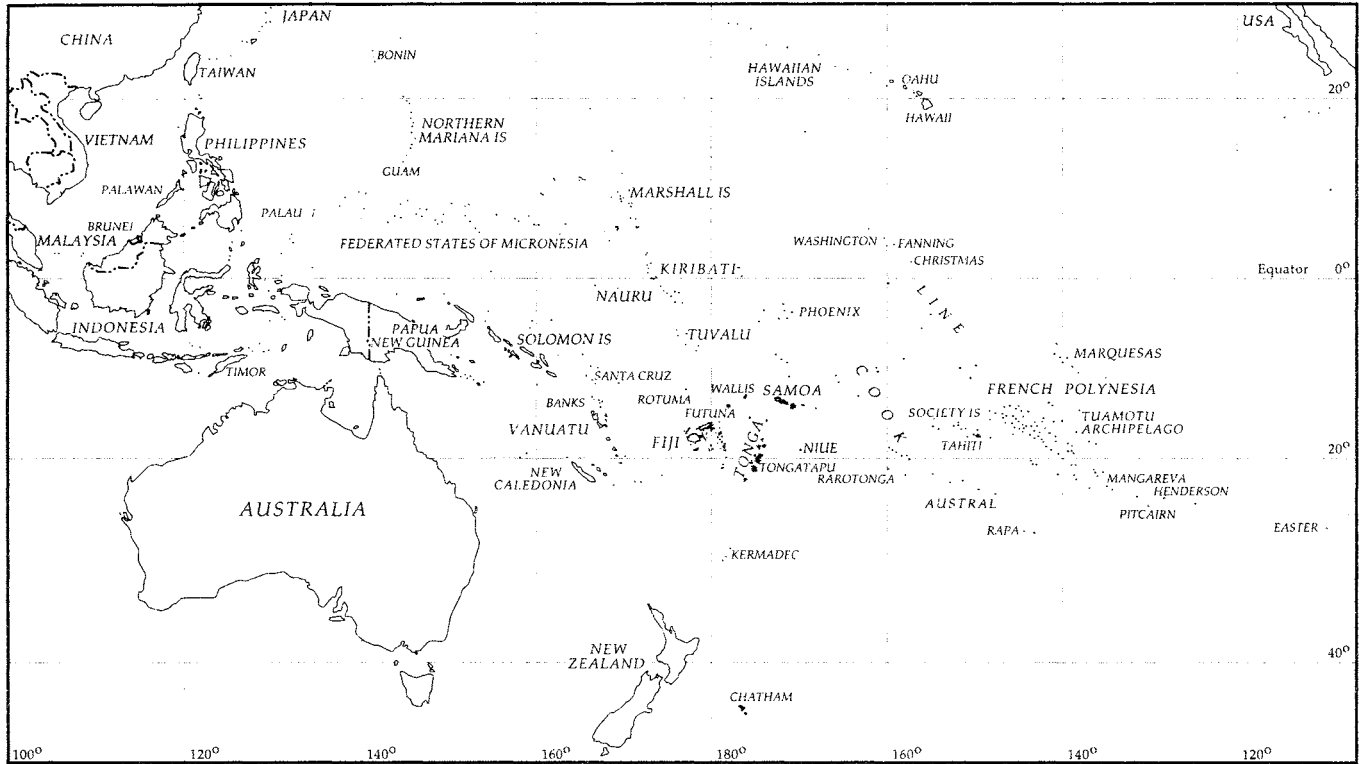
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to several people for assistance during the preparation of this book. Julie Gordon and Jude Shanahan of the Pacific and Asian History Division in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS) at the Australian National University provided word-processing and other practical assistance with several of the draft chapters. Keith Mitchell, head of the Cartography Unit, RSPAS, drew the maps, with his usual skill and care. My thanks also go to Richard Wright, who prepared the index.

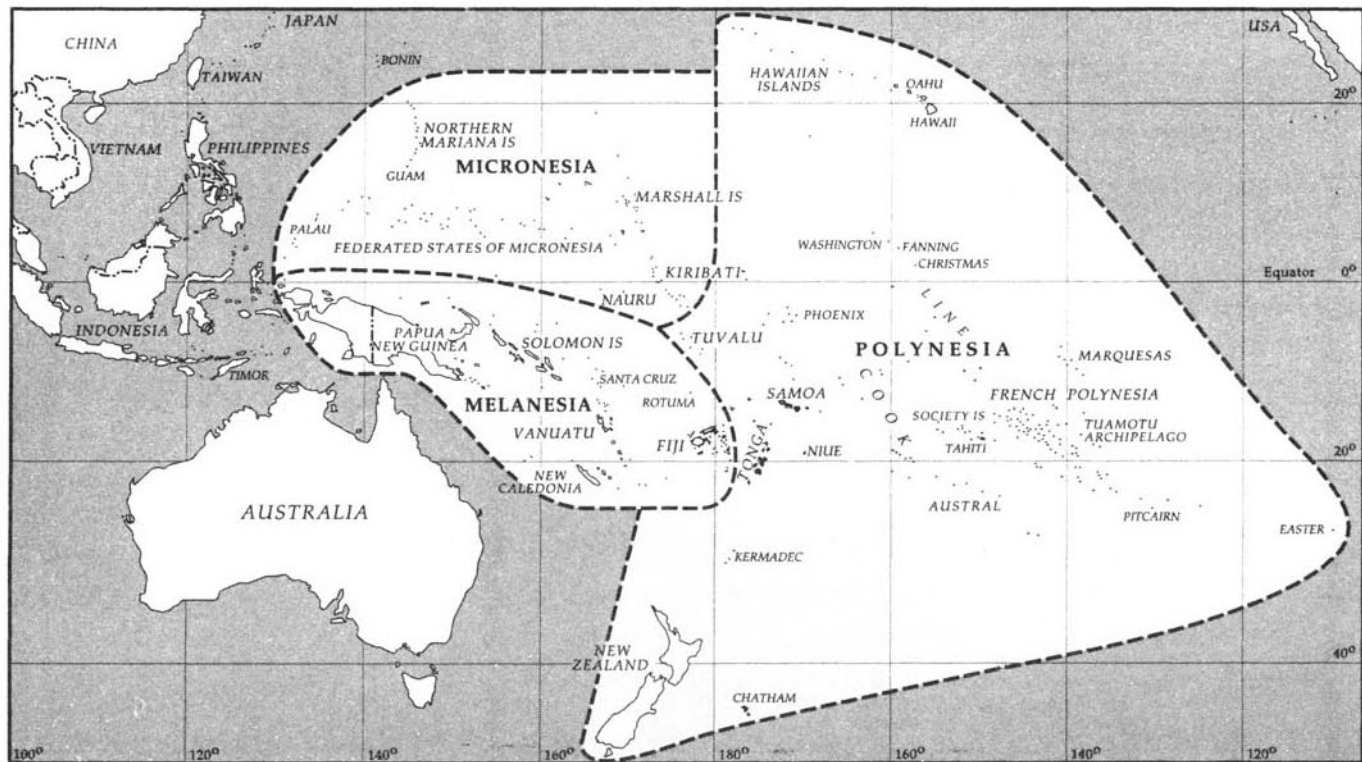
Several friends commented on an earlier draft. I did not in all instances agree with their particular views, but they provided several corrections, and some very helpful perspectives and suggestions. I am indeed most grateful to Peter Larmour, Ken Ross, Bill Standish, Karin von Storkirch and Stewart Woodman. Much of Chapter 8 of this book appeared in an earlier version in an article co-authored with Stewart Woodman in *The Pacific Review*; Dr Woodman should be regarded as the co-author of this chapter.

In preparing a book of this kind one draws on the work of many researchers, as I trust the references and the bibliography will attest. I also benefited greatly from working in the stimulating ambience provided by the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, and by the rest of the Australian National University. And I have learnt much from numerous conversations, in several locations and over several years, with a broad range of participants in, and commentators on, Pacific islands affairs. Meanwhile, at home, Kate, Elizabeth, Patrick, David and Minou helped me keep my feet on the ground. They, or at least Kate, also helped in many much-appreciated practical ways. I have dedicated this book to them, and to my father, H. Paul Henningham, who has always encouraged and guided my writing. To all those who have helped, I owe sincere thanks. But I retain responsibility for the facts and personal opinions presented herein.

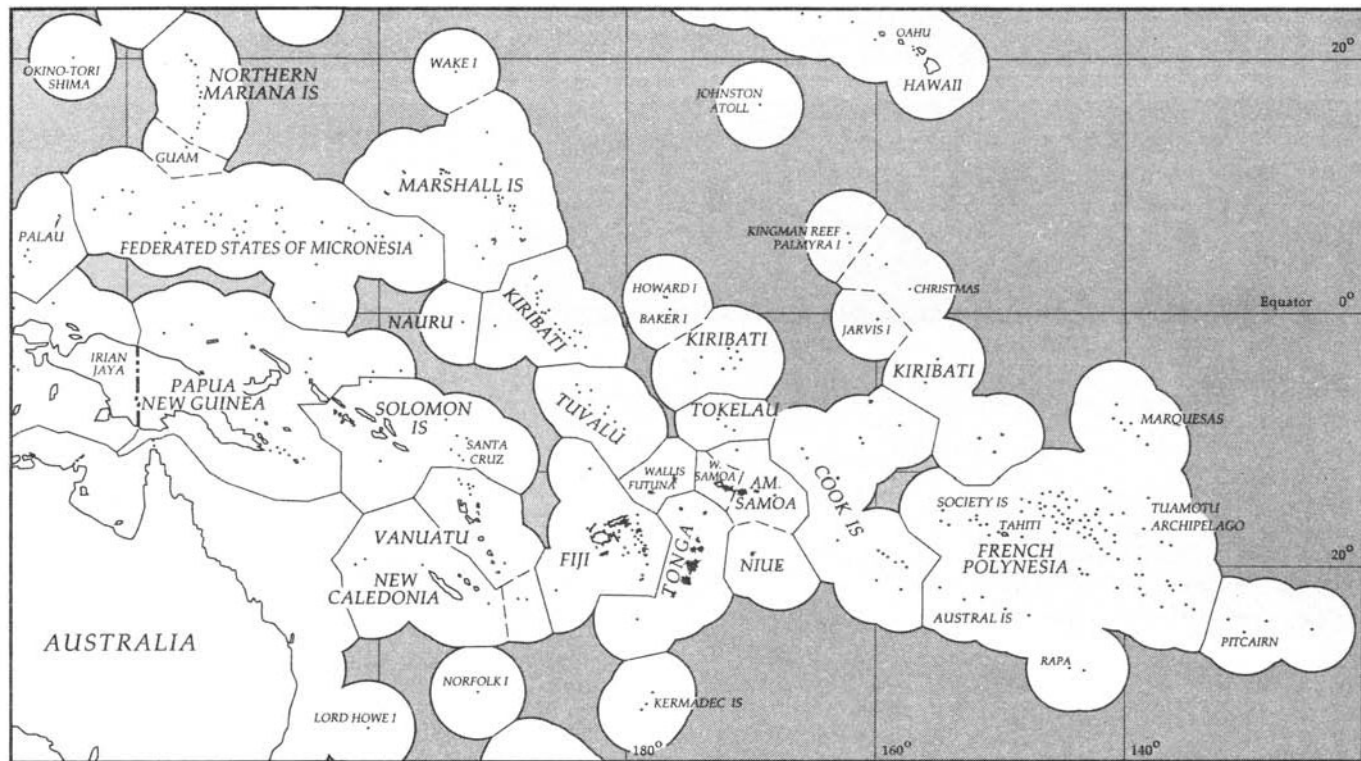
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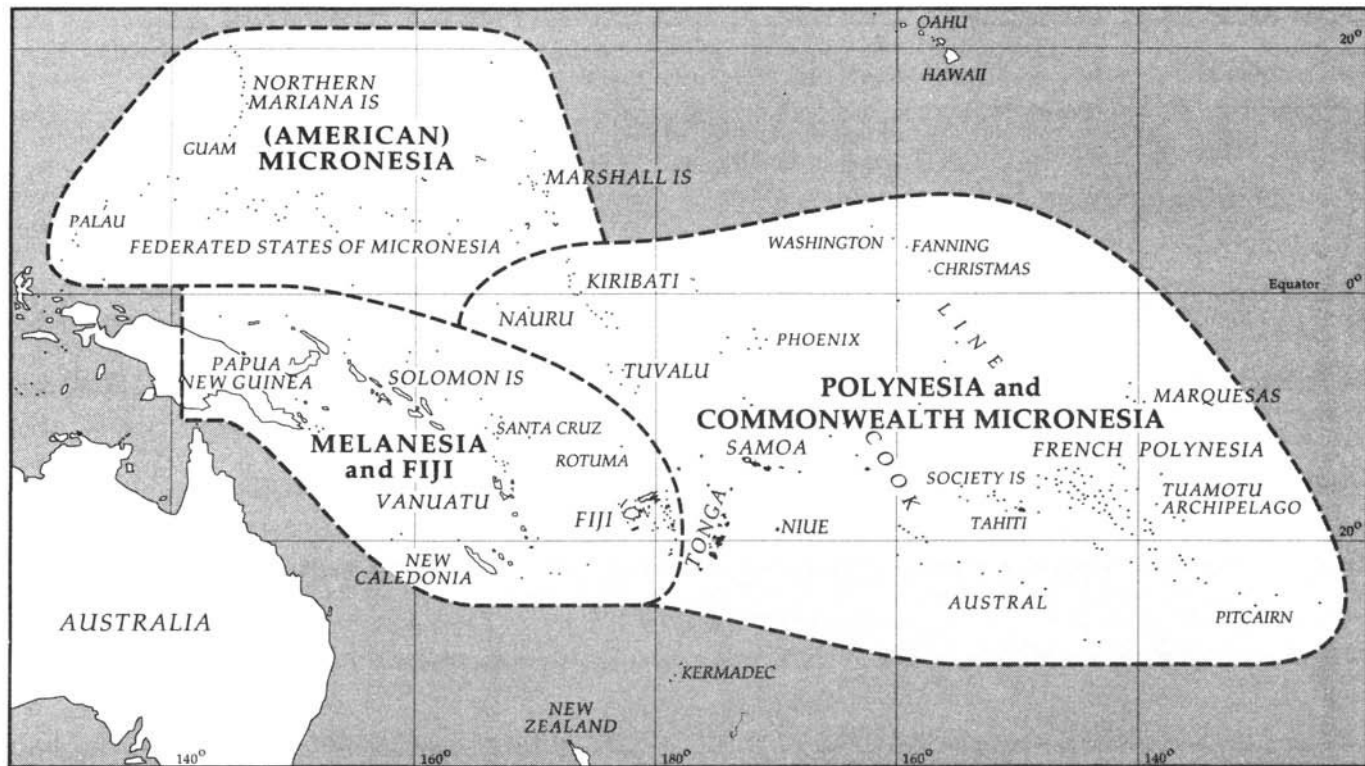
Map 1 The Pacific islands in their Asia-Pacific setting



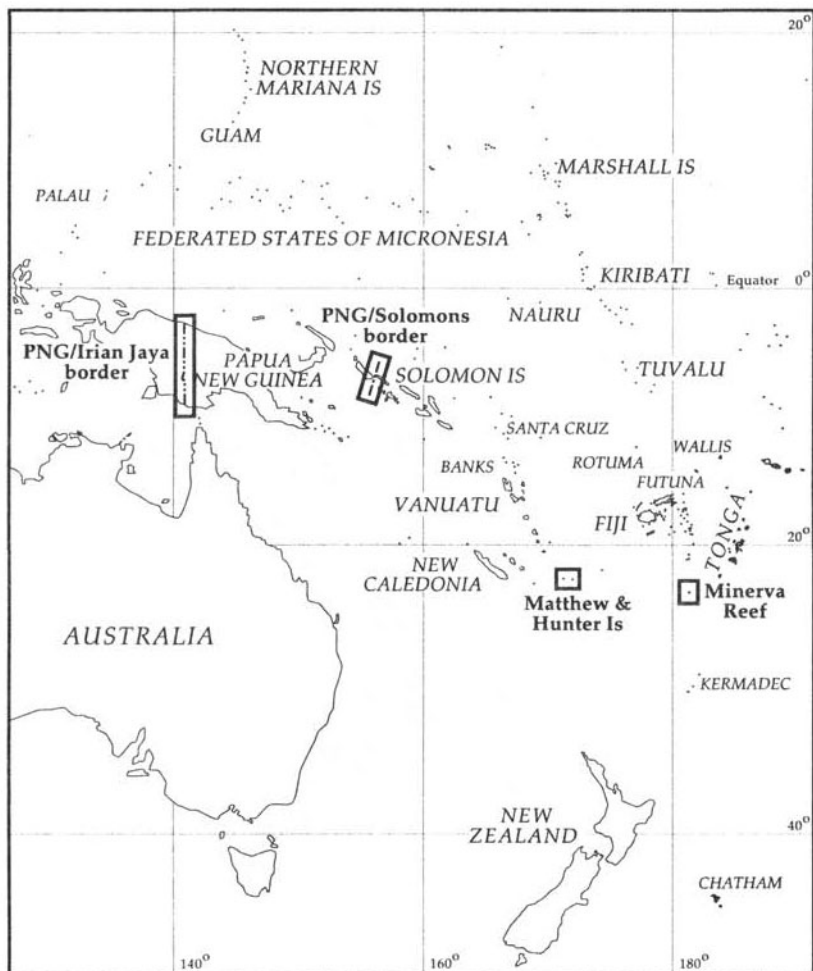
Map 2 The Pacific islands: Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia



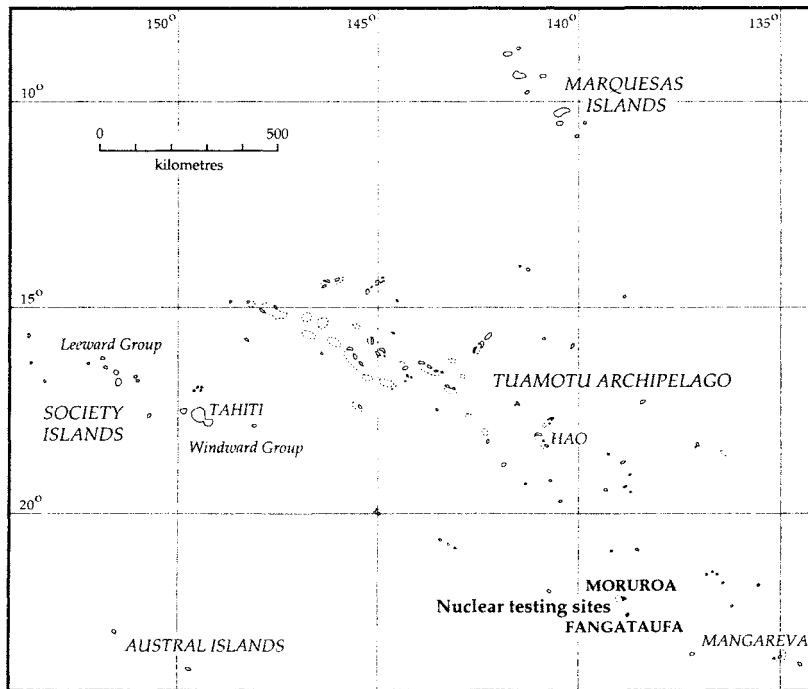
Map 3 The Pacific islands – Exclusive Economic Zones



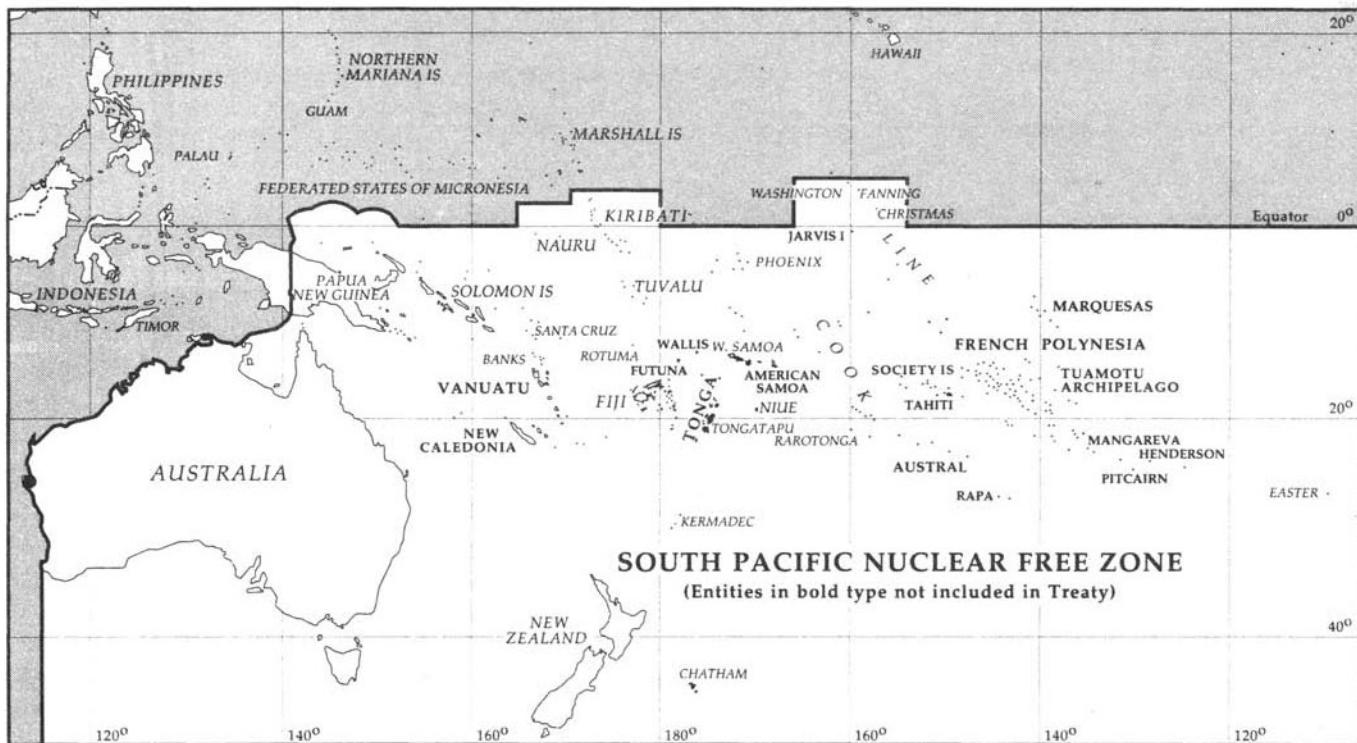
Map 4 Three security and defence sub-regions: 'American' Micronesia, Melanesia and Fiji, and Polynesia and 'Commonwealth' Micronesia



Map 5 The Pacific island states – troubled border zones and disputed maritime areas



Map 6 French Polynesia – the French nuclear testing sites



Map 7 The treaty area of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone