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France: “in” or “of” the South Pacific region?

by

Denise FISHER*

ABSTRACT

In the 1980s, amid regional controversy over France's policies in South Pacific, a debate emerged around the idea of whether France was simply a sovereign presence “in” the region, or could also be seen as being “of” or “from” the region. It is an important question, as it goes to the heart of how France wants to be seen in the South Pacific region, and in the world. If France wants to remain “in” the Pacific, as is evident from recent official policy and statements, then the nature of its future effective presence will be shaped not only by its own perceptions, but by those of regional countries, about its status as part “of” the region. Whereas French policies in the South Pacific led to regional instabilities and even threatened regional security in the second half of the last century, in recent years France has been a useful western ally in the South Pacific. With new regional uncertainties, including new interest from China, by seeing itself as a country “of” the region, France may better be able to maintain an effective sovereign presence “in” the Pacific, at a time when it is addressing the future of its principal Pacific entities.

KEYWORDS: Regional security, Decolonization, Independence, Sovereignty, Self determination, Pacific Islands Forum

RÉSUMÉ

Dans les années 1980, alors que sa politique dans le Pacifique Sud est controversée, un débat s'engage sur la possibilité de percevoir la France non seulement comme une présence souveraine « dans » mais aussi « de » la région. Cette question importante révèle comment la France souhaite être perçue par le Pacifique Sud et, au-delà, par le reste du monde. Si la France veut rester « dans » le Pacifique, la nature et l'efficacité de sa présence comme partie prenante « de » la région dépendent autant de sa volonté que de celle des pays du Pacifique Sud. Si dans la seconde moitié du xx^e siècle, la politique de la France a été une cause d'instabilité et a même pu menacer la sécurité de la région, la France est récemment devenue un allié occidental utile pour la zone. Alors que de nouvelles incertitudes apparaissent, liées notamment au rôle de la Chine, la France, en se considérant elle-même comme étant « de » la région, serait plus à même de conserver une présence souveraine efficace « dans » le Pacifique au moment où se pose la question de l'avenir de ses principales collectivités du Pacifique.

MOTS-CLÉS : sécurité régionale, insertion économique, décolonisation, auto-détermination, souveraineté, indépendance, Forum des îles du Pacifique

« Nous sommes d'ici et de nulle part ailleurs, vous êtes d'ici mais aussi d'ailleurs. »¹ (Kanak independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou to New Caledonian pro-France leader Jacques Lafleur, in Fraser, 1990)

When Kanak independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou spoke these words to pro-France

Caldoche leader, Jacques Lafleur, in 1983, in the midst of turmoil leading to civil war in France's South Pacific possession, New Caledonia, he was no doubt enunciating a key difference between the local long-term French residents (the Caldoches) and the indigenous people (the

1. «We are from here and nowhere else; you are from here but also from somewhere else».

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Kanaks), but at the same time he was making a generous concession to France, one full of possibilities. To concede that “you”, the French newcomers from the nineteenth century to the present, were “from” or “of” the Pacific (the French word “*de*” means both), as much as being “from” or “of” another place, was an extraordinarily inclusive idea from a preeminent regional indigenous independent leader. It is a conciliatory construct that even today presents France with possibilities for enabling greater autonomy for its Pacific entities, while maintaining a continuing role in guaranteeing the stability of the South Pacific region².

One strand of academic discussion that emerged in the later 1980s, as regional opposition to French nuclear testing and decolonization policies in the South Pacific region gathered strength, was the idea of whether or not France with its sovereign presence was just “in” the region, or whether it could also be construed as being “of” the region. This remains an important idea as it goes to the heart of how France wants to be seen in the Pacific region, and in the world. Its own perceptions, and those of regional countries, about its status, will shape the future effective role of France in the Pacific.

The question is a relevant one in the next few years, as a watershed deadline looms in New Caledonia, France’s pre-eminent South Pacific entity. After decades of controversy over demands for independence and greater autonomy, successive statutes, and even civil war in the 1980s, a temporary settlement in New Caledonia was negotiated in the Matignon/Oudinot Accords of 1988, and extended in the 1998 Nouméa Accord. The terms of this Accord will come to conclusion in the years 2014 to 2018, when a promised referendum on New Caledonia’s future status must finally be undertaken. This year, France and the principal parties in New Caledonia began discussions about the nature of the French presence there beyond 2018.

The New Caledonia deadline of 2014-2018 coincides with a number of other deadlines and developments in its immediate neighbourhood, known as a “Melanesian arc of instability” embracing Australia’s northeast, including Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji. After years of violent secessionist demands from indigenous inhabitants of copper-rich Bougainville Island, Papua New Guinea negotiated the Bougainville Peace

Agreement in 2001. This Agreement itself partly drew on the Nouméa Accord model and specifies that a referendum for independence will be held between 2015 and 2020, which more or less coincides with the Nouméa Accord referendum period in New Caledonia. By that time, too, regional countries will be defining an end point for the Pacific Islands Forum-led Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands, the long-term plan set up in 2003 to address violent insurgency there. And Fiji is currently addressing its own governance issues relating to the claims of a large indigenous minority and more recently arrived ethnic groups, not dissimilar to the challenges facing New Caledonia.

More broadly, the denouement of the Nouméa Accord is pending at a time when the old power balances in the wider Pacific region are changing, as the new economic powerhouse China begins to assert its presence, with uncertain consequences. So far, the direct impact of China’s rise has been limited in the South Pacific (Dobell, 2007; Hanson, 2008). But, at the same time as China is seeking natural resources in the South Pacific and an increasing presence there in coming years, whether benign or otherwise, the future of the presence of France, a longstanding, well-resourced western ally in the region, is open to question as it becomes the subject of a vote by the people of New Caledonia.

France “in” the region

The fact of France’s presence “in” the South Pacific region, through its entities there, is undeniable. One of the earliest European countries to be engaged in the region, France invested extensive national resources in sending official expeditions to the South Pacific well into the nineteenth century. Its early presence was not without controversy, and was variously characterized by a spirit of scientific inquiry; national prestige and rivalry with others, most notably the British; and both triumphs and losses (evident *in* Bougainville, 1772; La Pérouse, 1788; and see Dunmore, 1978 and 1997).

By the mid-nineteenth century France had claimed possession over what remain today the French entities of French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and uninhabited Clipperton Island; and, jointly with Britain, France administered the New Hebrides, which became independent Vanuatu in 1980.

2. For the purposes of this paper, the South Pacific region refers to Pacific island entities south of the Equator. (The two regional organizations referred to, the Pacific Islands Forum and Secretariat for the Pacific Community, also include in their membership some entities north of the Equator.)

France "in" or "of" the Pacific? Regional controversies of the postwar period

As neighbouring Pacific island countries began to claim or be endowed with independence in the second half of the twentieth century, France resisted decolonization, to become essentially the only resident sovereign European power in the Pacific south of the Equator by the early twenty-first century (although the British retained responsibility for a tiny settlement of around 50 people at Pitcairn Island, and the United States retained numerous Pacific island dependencies mainly north of the Equator).

Immediately after World War II, France took early steps towards extending greater autonomy and even independence to its overseas possessions. These included decentralization provided for at the 1944 Brazzaville Conference; the provisions for self-administration and representation in the French Assembly and Senate for overseas possessions in the 1946 Constitution; and the right to vote and further self-administration in the 1956 Defferre Law. These efforts culminated in referenda throughout the French empire in 1958, in the context of the 1958 Constitution's promising concept of "democratic evolution" – such that, for the African colonies, after initially opting to stay within the then French "Communauté", all but one had voted for independence by 1960. In the Pacific, all three colonies elected to stay within the Republic in 1958 (New Caledonia with a vote of 98 %, Wallis and Futuna 95 % and French Polynesia 64 %). But from then on, statutory provisions for New Caledonia and French Polynesia were fitful, providing and then retracting various steps in the direction of greater autonomy. This has involved ten statutes for New Caledonia from 1956 to 1988, with the Matignon/Oudinot and Nouméa Accords following in 1988 and 1998; and nine for French Polynesia from 1956 to 2007. The administration of tiny Wallis and Futuna has been less contentious. It operates today on the same Statute that was drawn up for it in 1961. However, most of its population has migrated to New Caledonia to find work, and therefore whatever happens in New Caledonia will have flow-on effects for this archipelago.

Although the United Nations was formed on the basis of self-determination for all peoples (Article 1 of its Charter), and France was one of only five Permanent Members of its Security Council, in 1947 France decided not to transmit information to the United Nations about its Pacific possessions, claiming that only the New Hebrides (which it administered jointly with Bri-

tain) was not self-governing (see UN list of Trust and Non-self governing territories at UN website). France ignored the establishment of the UN Decolonization Committee in 1961 and resisted the successful campaign by the Pacific Islands governments to have New Caledonia re-inscribed with the Committee as a non-self-governing territory in 1986, in UNGA Resolution 41/41A. It was only in 2004 that France, without publicity, began reporting as Administering Authority for New Caledonia (Communication, UN official, 2008).

Meanwhile, French Polynesia acquired a new strategically important status for France after 1966 with the first nuclear test at its Moruroa atoll. France had moved its testing program there after it had lost its testing ground closer to home in Algeria, after a bitter war resulted in the independence of that former French colony. The nuclear testing program was fundamental in maintaining France's status as a nuclear nation, and its defence policy of national self-reliance after the humiliations of the World Wars.

The twin French policy approaches to nuclear testing in the Pacific and to decolonization demands in its Pacific territories led to mounting regional opposition. Denied by France of the possibility of discussing these concerns in the Nouméa-based South Pacific Commission, now Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC) (see Henningham, 1992: 197), the island countries formed a new regional organization in 1971, the South Pacific Forum, known from 2000 as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The new grouping formed the core of regional and increasingly international opposition to French policies in the Pacific.

By the 1980s, unmet decolonization demands in New Caledonia had erupted into civil war there, and opposition to the nuclear issue, including within French Polynesia, had accelerated. The regional campaign of opposition was in full swing. Tentative early efforts by France to placate regional leaders through what was essentially a public relations campaign, sufficiently to ease the international heat on France, failed. It was only by the late 1990s, after France had implemented policy change in both areas of contention that the region began to soften its approach to France's presence. After a temporary suspension France ceased nuclear testing in French Polynesia entirely in 1996. And it had negotiated the Matignon/Oudinot Accords with the principal New Caledonian political groupings in 1988, deferring a referendum on independence until 1998, and subsequently deferred it again with the Nouméa Accord in 1998. That

Accord provided for a scheduled handover of many responsibilities to a locally elected government in New Caledonia before a promised referendum process on accession to full sovereignty, from 2014 to 2018, backed up by specific provisions in the French Constitution (Articles 76-77).

With the ending of nuclear testing, French Polynesia ceased to have the strategic importance it had acquired after 1966. At the same time, with the Nouméa Accord's specifically scheduled handovers of responsibilities and referendum process, New Caledonia became something of a model for French Polynesia and even other French overseas possessions (Fisher, 2012a: 5). Moreover New Caledonia was the wealthiest of France's overseas possessions, holding vast reserves of nickel, enabling it to meet increased demand for that mineral from China and India, and was assessed as having large offshore hydrocarbon resources (Vially *et al.*, 2003). By early this century, New Caledonia had displaced French Polynesia as the pre-eminent French Pacific entity.

At the same time as France was implementing significant policy change within its Pacific collectivities, it embarked on a series of measures to engage more productively in the region. President Chirac initiated triennial Oceanic Summits between the French and Pacific Islands Forum government leaders, from 2003. France built on its 1993 Arrangement with Australia and New Zealand to provide emergency assistance and fisheries surveillance to regional islands states. It became engaged in a series of defence exchanges and exercises involving regional forces, including not only from Australia and New Zealand, but from Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Tonga, and Fiji.

France "in" but not "of" the Pacific

Its extensive history and recent efforts to respond to regional concerns and pressures from within its Pacific entities demonstrate that France wanted to remain "in" the Pacific. But an academic debate that arose amidst the controversies of the 1980s pointed to certain limitations to France's regional presence and acceptance. Many analyses and official comments at the time made a distinction between France being "in" the Pacific and its being "of" the Pacific.

The debate was ironically stimulated by France itself claiming to be part of the Pacific (see below), as it embarked in the mid-1980s on a

campaign to improve its image in the region in the wake of the serious regional opposition to its policies of nuclear testing in French Polynesia, and handling of independence demands in New Caledonia. This was before the French State had implemented concrete policy change, but rather focused on public relations efforts, even while it implemented aggressive policies such as blowing up a vessel, the Rainbow Warrior, belonging to Greenpeace lobbyists in New Zealand's Auckland harbour in 1985.

At the time, there was a certain ambiguity in France's view of itself in the region. French writer Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, noting that France's French Pacific entities then returned little revenue to the motherland, underlined that a principal benefit was that they "allowed France to be present *in the Pacific*" (my italics) (Coutau-Bégarie, 1987: 286). Georges Ordonnaud, the same year, described France as "a *riveraine* power of the Pacific" through the three territories there, and foresaw France as "a *riveraine* and allied nation which it will be natural to find in the South Pacific and whose strength will support all co-responsible nations" (Ordonnaud, 1987: 43, 46). In 1989 Australian-based academics Robert Aldrich and John Connell in their *France in World Politics* explored the duality, ambiguity and paradoxes of France's global territory, writing that France saw itself as the only "tropical European power" claiming sovereign indigenous power in the Atlantic, Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Oceans" (Aldrich and Connell, 1989: Ch. 7, 164). But some French officials went further. One of President Mitterrand's foreign policy advisors, Régis Debray, speaking as Secretary General of France's High Council for the Pacific in 1987, demanded that France's right "as a member of the Pacific family, on an equal footing, be recognized" (in Chesneaux, 1987a: 1). Later, in 1996, a senior Foreign Affairs official told the National Assembly that France was "a power of the Pacific" (Assemblée nationale, 1996: 43).

It was these assertions that set off something of a debate. Pacific leaders did not respond publicly or directly to the claims. They simply retained their opposition to French policies (only modifying them after substantial policy change by France, see Regional response section below). And some French and regional writers addressed the question, not only in the latter 1980s and mid-1990s, but also well after the Matignon/Oudinot Accords were signed in New Caledonia and after the cessation of nuclear testing in French Polynesia in 1996.

France the outsider

Two writers at the time of Debray's "Pacific family" statement, one French and one Australian, were avidly opposed to France's nuclear testing policy, which was the primary context of their commentary, and led them both to conclude that France could never be part of the South Pacific simply by virtue of its nuclear testing there.

The first, French writer Jean Chesneaux, wrote in 1987, before France had stopped nuclear testing. He acknowledged the undisputed sovereignty of France "in" the Pacific, its permanent presence in its collectivities, and its rights over extensive Exclusive Economic Zones there (these are the zones extending beyond shorelines, agreed between nations under the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention). But he argued that France was fundamentally an outsider there. He highlighted the inconsistency of France's commitment to nuclear deterrence, with Pacific policies of a nuclear free Pacific. The Pacific Islands Forum countries had long opposed any kind of nuclear testing in the region, the Cook Islands and Western Samoa assemblies passing resolutions against it even before they were independent, in 1956, and the Forum agreeing on a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty in Rarotonga in 1985. Chesneaux argued that, while nuclear testing ensured France's status as a nuclear power, it did not make it a *Pacific* nuclear power. He referred to the irony of France's global nuclear strategy, with its objectives defined thousands of kilometers away, being based on a technical presence in the Pacific, in "splendid isolation". Perhaps extrapolating from ideas about the wider Pacific at the time, he also questioned the reigning ideas France adduced about the Pacific: that the Pacific was the centre of the world, a kind of technological "el dorado", a theatre of Soviet-US confrontation, of French-Anglo rivalry, and of peaceful island communities subject to the covetous greed of Australia and New Zealand; and even the persistent romanticized South Pacific cultural idea leftover from French celebrities such as Pierre Loti and Paul Gauguin, all of which he said were ghosts and myths and not very coherent by the mid-1980s (Chesneaux, 1987b: 131-132, 208-213). He was suggesting that this idea of the Pacific did not reflect the reality, a reality France did not want to confront at the time.

Together with Australian writer Nic Maclellan, who was an equally voluble critic of France's nuclear policy, Chesneaux remained

unforgiving even when writing well after France had ceased its nuclear testing in French Polynesia. In 1998, Maclellan and Chesneaux saw France as ignoring the sense of regionalism, of belonging to the South Pacific, that made the settler states in Australia and New Zealand part of the region, as much as France remained "an outsider". They noted that opposition to nuclear testing was not so much due to quantitative measures of distance but to a qualitative political and cultural unity that had developed in the region. They made the harsh judgments that it was impossible for France, after nuclear testing, to be anything other than an outsider:

«After Moruroa, France can intervene in Pacific affairs, can make a valuable contribution. But it cannot be part of the region - it can only participate from outside the region, as others do [...] France can no longer pretend to be a power of the Pacific, but must act as a power in the Pacific.» (Maclellan and Chesneaux, 1998: 194, 240)

Still, even Chesneaux conceded that, while France was an outsider, it was nonetheless a longstanding outsider, and as such had an ongoing role in the region particularly in the provision of aid (Chesneaux, 1987a: 17).

In his paper on France and the South Pacific island countries, Australian writer Stephen Bates too saw France as an outsider. He argued that, as in the past, France's approach to Pacific matters would primarily be dictated by its own national interests, and its interests within Europe. Crucial decisions about the South Pacific would continue to be made on the other side of the globe.

Bates warned about this, noting that "in any conflict between its national security interests in Europe and regional interest in the South Pacific, the former will inevitably take precedence" (Bates, 1997: 137-138). Because of this, France could do and say things that seemed incomprehensible to people in the Pacific. Bates used the example of France during the vexed 1980s, telling the Pacific island states to stay out of its internal affairs over New Caledonia and French Polynesia, and yet seeing no inconsistency in sending agents to New Zealand to attack a ship in its harbor (the *Rainbow Warrior* affair).

A further strand in the debate was the identification of a tendency of France to distinguish itself from Anglo-Saxon ways of thinking as a factor contributing to France being seen as an outsider. This tendency is deeply rooted in the rivalries France entered into with other European powers, principally but not solely the

British, over centuries of exploration and settlement. In the twentieth century this kind of thinking was extrapolated to extend to Australia and New Zealand.

French Admiral Sanguinetti in 1985 referred to the role of French/Anglo-Saxon rivalry in justifying France's continued presence in the region (Sanguinetti, 1985: 32). Robert Aldrich in a critique of French geopolitical analysis at the time refers to the idea of an "Anglo-Saxon conspiracy" (Aldrich, 1988: 65). Regional writer Miriam Dornoy-Vuroburavu began her 1994 essay on *Perceptions of France in the South Pacific* with the observation that France was «essentially a European power and partner with expertise, not a Pacific country». She proceeded to illustrate this by examples of a particularly French way of thinking, citing the French Minister for Cooperation in 1975 saying that France must be present everywhere in the world, «where her thinkers' genius has given her a place without any relation to her demography or resources»; President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing saying "France is what is best"; President Mitterrand referring to "this indefinable genius" of France; and de Gaulle himself saying "our action aims at linking objectives, which, because they are French, answer the needs of all men" (Dornoy-Vuroburavu, 1994: 1). Régis Debray is once again cited as applying this kind of thinking to the Pacific, saying in 1986 "To demilitarise the Pacific would deprive it of Francophonie" (op. cit.: 3). Dornoy-Vuroburavu described Australia at the time as considering itself as a Pacific country, and considering France as an external power (op. cit.: 15), which was certainly reflected in Australia's participation in the PIF in the 1980s, when the Australian government worked to moderate intra regional pressure opposing French nuclear testing policies, acknowledging France's role as a nuclear power and western ally (see comments on this moderating role in Regional Response section below).

Maclellan and Chesneaux wrote about France's tendency to attribute opposition to it and its policies variously to imperialist ambitions of the Anglo-Saxon countries Australia and New Zealand, or even to a 'conspiracy' of customary law of the Pacific islands and the Biblical morality of the London missionaries (Maclellan and Chesneaux, 1998: 193). The accusations cut both ways: at the end of her concise monograph on Australian and French "mutual misunderstandings" in the Pacific, Martine Piquet, having suggested that France "never claimed to be a South Pacific nation", gives way to frustration when she attributes some

of the Australian attitudes to France as "something about loving to hate the French" (Piquet, 2000: 8, 29). The emotive reciprocal perceptions at the time are outlined also by Mohamed-Gaillard (2009).

These kinds of comments should be regarded in the context of the visceral opposition at the time to specific French policies.

France the outsider *and* insider by virtue of its Pacific collectivities

French political scientist Isabelle Cordonnier took the debate further, perhaps in a more productive direction, writing in 1995 that, while the French collectivities themselves were seen by Pacific island states as part of the region, continental France (the "*métropole*") was not. It was in this context that she saw Tjibaou's comment to Lafleur of 1983, cited at the beginning of this paper, "We are from here and nowhere else; you are from here but also from somewhere else": in South Pacific eyes, you are an insider if you come from there and nowhere else. She saw Australia and New Zealand, implicitly with indigenous populations from there and nowhere else, as insiders but France as not.

Cordonnier saw these differences as explaining some of the critical ambiguities in French policy, for example, how it could support nuclear testing in the region as an instrument of France's *grandeur* and status as a middle global power, in the face of negative perceptions in the region based on fear that testing would provoke a spiral of terror in case of nuclear war (Cordonnier, 1995: 20-25).

Persistence of the Idea of France the outsider

And yet not only did the idea of France as an outsider persist beyond the cessation of nuclear testing and the signature of the 1988 Matignon/Oudinot Accords addressing New Caledonia's decolonization issues, as evident in the foregoing citations. The idea has persisted as a kind of default perception into the 2000s and even to the present.

In 2005, still referring to France's nuclear policies, regional anti-nuclear commentator Nic Maclellan wrote that the "sense of belonging – of looking to the skies, seeing the Southern Cross, and feeling at home – underlies much of the regional opposition to France's nuclear policy", and he said this emotion against "outsiders" from Paris rang just as true in Australia and New Zealand as in the Islands. He noted that even in 2005, nine years after the cessation

of testing, the nuclear issue was not closed, with continuing issues such as dumping of waste; passage of waste ships; uranium mining; testing of missile defence satellite systems threatening the multilateralism of space; and issues over the long-term effects of past nuclear testing, where French positions were at odds with those of the Pacific (MacLellan, 2005: 365). (It is notable that, perhaps aware of its responsibilities, in April 2009, France announced compensation measures for those whose health had been affected by its testing in the Pacific, potentially covering 150,000 former workers, and on terms which removed the prior onus on the worker to prove cause [*Flash d'Océanie*, 1 July 2009].)

In 2008 book based on her 2006 thesis, Nathalie Mrgudovic noted that whereas France had seen itself as a power "of" the South Pacific until the end of the 1980s, it had since tended to claim simply to be "in" the Pacific, while working for the integration of its entities in "their" region (Mrgudovic, 2008: 37, 240).

Australian journalist, Graeme Dobell, writing in 2007 about China's activities in the region, lumped France along with China and Japan as external powers or outside players who acted as though they wanted a stake in the region (Dobell, 2007: 9). As recently as 2009, one prominent Australian think tank had made tentative plans to convene a regional conference on "outside powers" in the Pacific, which it spelled out in its flyers as France, China and Japan. In 2009, Australia's Defence White Paper similarly made no mention of France as a resident Pacific power. It mentioned France along with other NATO countries such as Spain, Germany, Italy and Sweden, as a cooperative European partner, with a brief reference to practical cooperation in the Pacific and Southern Oceans and Afghanistan; and as a donor in the South Pacific to support capacity building (Defence, 2009: 98,100).

The comments outline above demonstrate the strength of emotion that was aroused by France's nuclear and decolonization policies at the time, and the persistence of the perception that France is an outsider "in" the region rather than a sovereign long-term presence "of" the region, a status that some French leaders had sought to claim.

However the discussion flags some possibilities for change: first, by French leaders themselves even wanting to be seen as "of" the region enough to risk that assertion amidst the hostile emotions of the time; second, by the trend over time towards acceptance that the French collectivities in the Pacific were "of" the Pacific, even if France was not; and third, by

Tjibaou's own comment accepting that France was "of" New Caledonia even if it was also "of" somewhere else, that is, a concession towards France by the indigenous pro-independence leader with the most at stake at the time.

Regional response to France

With France's ending of nuclear testing in the Pacific, and the 1998 Nouméa Accord signed, regional Pacific countries did begin to unbend in their treatment of France. They responded well to French initiatives. They have participated in the triennial regional Oceanic Summits, initiated by President Chirac, in Papeete in 2003, in Paris in 2006 and in Nouméa in 2009, although the level of attendance at the latter suffered, particularly when France's President Sarkozy was unable to attend. They have participated in France's programs of development and defence cooperation, and have welcomed France's contribution to monitoring and sharing fisheries surveillance intelligence through the trilateral FRANZ arrangement.

Pacific Islands Forum leaders have also progressively warmed towards accepting the three French Pacific entities into their fold, rewarding French policy change, by according Observer status to New Caledonia in 1999 after the Nouméa Accord was signed, and French Polynesia in 2004 after French statutory reforms there. They created a special category, Associate Member, for these two entities in 2006, when they admitted Wallis and Futuna as an Observer. The French entities are all members of the SPC, and members of many of the technical regional organisations. One or more of the French collectivities are represented in some way on seven of the ten inter-governmental members of the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific (CROP): the Secretariat for the Pacific Community, the South Pacific Regional Environment Program, the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, the Pacific Islands Development Program, the South Pacific Tourism Organisation, the Forum Fisheries Agency and the Pacific Power Association. All three entities, however, do not participate in all these organizations at the moment. There are only three CROP bodies in which the French Pacific collectivities are not represented: the University of the South Pacific, the Fiji School of Medicine, and the South Pacific Board for Education Assessment.

But even to the present, the Pacific Islands Forum governments have retained a reserve towards France and even the French

collectivities. They have maintained their annual United Nations General Assembly resolution keeping New Caledonia under the ongoing examination of the Committee of 24 (see for example UNGA Resolution A/Res/66/87: 12 January 2012). When they were putting together the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands in 2003 under the PIF Biketawa Declaration on collective regional security, they resisted early Australian efforts to include France. In the event, regional island leaders, sounded out informally in the corridors of a meeting hosted by the Australian Government in Sydney to plan the Mission, were not responsive to the idea of French participation, and the idea was dropped, (Communication from then Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, 2009). While welcoming the French entities as Associate members, they have stopped short of agreeing to New Caledonia's wish, expressed in 2010, to become a full member of the Forum. In the 2010 Summit Communiqué they referred to New Caledonia's wish, but simply noted that the Nouméa Accord "self-determination" process itself would resolve the question of New Caledonia's international standing, and welcomed further engagement with the Forum, including by a visiting Forum mission to New Caledonia (such visits were to take place regularly to evaluate Nouméa Accord implementation but have not taken place since 2004, although a separate Melanesian Spearhead Group visited in 2010, see below) (PIF Communiqué, 2010). They made no mention of New Caledonian membership in their 2011 Communiqué, even though France had expressed its support for full membership only a few weeks before. In Paris, on 1 September, Minister for Overseas France, Marie-Luce Penchard, had supported the formal request by New Caledonian President Harold Martin at a meeting of Ambassadors to countries adjoining the French Overseas collectivities (*Flash d'Océanie*, 8 September 2011). Again in 2012 the PIF did not refer to the wishes of France and New Caledonia for full membership for New Caledonia.

Melanesian Pacific islands leaders resisted tentative efforts by France in 2009 to have New Caledonia replace the FLNKS as a full member of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). Philippe Gomès, then President of New Caledonia, expressed this wish in October 2009 (*Flash d'Océanie*, 19 January 2010), which was rejected by FLNKS spokesman Tutogoro (*Les Nouvelles calédoniennes*, 19 February 2010, and see Makin, 2010). The MSG was formed in the mid 1980s expressly to support the Kanak independence movement and includes Papua New Guinea,

Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, the FLNKS, and Fiji from 1998. Although it has expanded its focus to fostering economic links between Melanesian countries, which are being consolidated, it has maintained a watching role on New Caledonia and the implementation of the Accord. Despite France allowing the FLNKS to host a meeting of the MSG in 2001, and inviting the MSG to visit New Caledonia in June 2010, the MSG has retained a critical stance. In 2003 the PIF Summit Communiqué attached an annex expressing the MSG's concern at "the lack of implementation of certain provisions of the Nouméa Accord, in particular the electoral process and issues relating to New Caledonia's referendum process". In 2009, the MSG signed the Kéamu Declaration supporting the position of Vanuatu over the disputed Matthew and Hunter islands group which is claimed by France and Vanuatu. And in June 2010, when it sent a visiting mission to Nouméa, the MSG expressed continuing concern at the slow rate of implementation of Nouméa Accord commitments (May, 2011: 6, Makin, op. cit.). A subsequent planned MSG visit in 2011 was postponed because of objections by some New Caledonian leaders to its being led by controversial Fijian leader Bainimarama. Against this background of reserve about France's position, it is notable that the MSG turned to China for funding when it wanted to construct a secretariat building, which was completed in 2007. This is reminiscent of Vanuatu's, and New Caledonia's Kanak independence supporters, turning to Libya to put pressure on regional countries to support their policy stances on New Caledonian decolonization in the 1980s (see for example Mrgudovic, 2008: 220-221 and Mohamed-Gaillard, 2010: 230-234).

Pacific islands leaders have also been reticent over the question of French Polynesian independence demands. Pro-independence leader Oscar Temaru is well known to many of them, over many years. Since his party won the 2004 elections in French Polynesia, Temaru has been frustrated by a combination of statutory change sponsored by France, and floor-crossing and personal politics involving pro-France parties which have led to thirteen changes in government to 2011. In April 2011 after yet another no-confidence motion, Oscar Temaru became President once more, for the fifth time in seven years. He regularly calls for French Polynesia to be listed as a non-self governing territory with the UN Decolonization Committee, particularly on the eve of Pacific Islands Forum summits. Forum leaders as a whole have tended not to take a position on this question, but have instead in

their Communiqués consistently urged France and French Polynesia to work together for French Polynesia's self-determination. Once again, in 2011, the Forum leaders "recalled their 2004 decision to support the principle of French Polynesia's right to self-determination. They reiterated their encouragement to French Polynesia and France to seek an agreed approach on how to realize French Polynesia's right to self-determination" and in 2012 used similar words, noting as well that the election of a new French government opened fresh possibilities for a positive dialogue between the two (PIF Communiqué, 2011 and 2012).

An indication of the unease of many Pacific islands leaders about the ongoing frustration of electoral endorsements of pro-independence leader Temaru in French Polynesia was the public statement of support for French Polynesia's reinscription with the UN Decolonization Committee, by a number of them who met on the eve of the 2011 PIF summit. Fiji, Solomon Islands, PNG, Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Nauru, Tonga, Timor Leste, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Marshall Islands and French Polynesia, met and signed a Communiqué indicating that "Leaders supported the re-inscription of French Polynesia/Tahiti Nui on the UN Decolonization Committee's list as the first step in the process of self-determination, at international level" (Nadi Communiqué, 2011).

The position of Pacific islands leaders, usually expressed through the PIF Summit Communiqués and sub-regional groups such as the MSG, is not the same as that of Australia and New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand as western allies have generally taken an approach more supportive of France. For example, Australia recently expressed official support for New Caledonia's full membership of the PIF notwithstanding the Forum's reticence (Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2010 and 2011). Even, or perhaps, especially, through the troubled 1980s, Australia and New Zealand exerted a moderating influence on Forum positions, notwithstanding domestic opposition to French policies within each country and France's treatment of New Zealand over the Rainbow Warrior affair. For example Australia softened wording in PIF Communiqués on New Caledonia; and Australia and New Zealand moderated the regional stance on nuclear issues, finally expressed in the Raratonga Treaty (Mrgudovic, 2008: 141, 149-150). This was variously acknowledged by the then French Foreign Minister (Assemblée nationale, 1985: 549-55); by Coutau-Bégarie (1987: 287); and in a report to the National Assembly (Gonnot, 1995).

Where to for France? French desire to remain "in" and "of" the Pacific

Despite the reticence of Pacific leaders, and the persistence of the idea of France as an outsider, it seems that France not only wants to remain "in" the region, but it wants once again to be seen to be "of" the region, and indeed believes that it has secured regional support for this.

There are few explicit public statements of French policy objectives in the South Pacific region. Indeed, France's 2008 Defense White Paper parallels Australia's 2009 Paper cited above, in the sense that it does not see France as an insider in the Pacific region. The strategic outlook set out in the Paper is entirely European. The Pacific is mentioned only in references to France's own collectivities there and to domestic defense arrangements located in them. It does not speak of any strategic interests in the surrounding Pacific area or of strategic reach accruing by virtue of the sovereign resident French presence in the Pacific. At one point it even refers to the "*éloignement*" or isolation of Asia, a decidedly non-Pacific perspective (Défense, 2008).

Still, there are other pointers to the strategic benefits accruing to France by virtue of its overseas possessions, including in the South Pacific. The Pacific possessions contribute to France's national status as part of the string of French possessions around the globe; provide strategic ballast for France's international roles in the United Nations (including as one of the Security Council's five Permanent Members), the EU and NATO; deliver real and potential commercial return through New Caledonia's nickel and potential hydrocarbon resources and the extensive Exclusive Economic Zones they represent for France, making it the world's second largest maritime zone power (most of which is contributed by the French Pacific entities' zones); and represent a vast springboard for France's scientific research (see Fisher, *in* Neilson and Aldrich, 2011: 237-254). France's global EEZ extends to 11.57 million square kilometres, of which 7.3 million square kilometres derive from its Pacific entities alone (and of that, just under 5 million square kilometres from French Polynesia alone). France's continental Europe EEZ is just 340 290 square kilometres (Faberon and Ziller, 2007: 9).

In speeches to the French Overseas possessions in November 2009 and January 2010, then President Sarkozy referred to some of these

attributes of the overseas possessions as a whole. In 2009 he noted France's status as the second maritime nation of the world with an Exclusive Economic Zone equal to that of the United States; as a premier space and nuclear power, and one with major diplomatic influence over oceans, and unrivalled biodiversity, all owing directly to the Overseas France (Sarkozy, 2009). In 2010, he said that it was thanks to these overseas entities that France was "*La France des trois océans*" – France "of the three oceans". In a way, he was saying that France is "of" the Pacific Ocean as much as of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans in which other French possessions lie. He also said that people from the overseas entities contributed to France's identity, participating in "our influence, our grandeur and our power".

In the same speech, while signaling flexibility in developing political institutions appropriate to each of the diverse French Overseas possessions, Sarkozy defined a «red line' [...] never [...] to be breached, that of independence. The Overseas [France] are French and will remain French» (Sarkozy, 2010). More specifically relating to the South Pacific, in August 2011, Sarkozy publicly expressed his preference for New Caledonia to remain within France (Sarkozy, 2011).

France's Economic, Social and Environment Council, an ongoing advisory body, made recommendations in early May 2012 based on a judgement that the Overseas possessions represented «a strategic asset for France and the European Union, which should be better used as a catalyst for regional development» (CESE Projet d'avis, 9 May 2012). The Council elaborated that France represented the second largest maritime zone, and was the only State in the world represented in each of the three oceans, thanks to its overseas possessions, which as such represented strategic assets.

To the time of writing, the stance of François Hollande, elected President in April 2012, on the strategic value of the Overseas French possessions had not been specifically articulated. However as a candidate he indicated that he wanted the overseas portfolio to answer to the Prime Minister's office rather than the Interior Ministry (see *Le Figaro*, 17 January 2012) and he has since his election, elevated the portfolio from Secretary of State to full Minister. In his first public speech, he said that wherever the French lived, in the hexagon or Overseas, "we are a France reunited in one same community of destiny", while promising to revive "local democracy". On the question of New Caledonia, as a

candidate he did not indicate a preference for the future but simply indicated that «the choice was that of the archipelago's voters alone» (*L'Express*, 13 April 2012).

The idea of France being part of the Pacific family (therefore "of" the Pacific) has also been revived in recent years. Then Overseas France Minister Estrosi told Pacific islands government leaders at the 2007 post Forum summit that France was the only European member country directly present "in" the Pacific. He said that the preceding 2006 Oceanic Summit with South Pacific leaders in Paris had been based on a simple idea, that France, by virtue of its three collectivities, was part of "this great Pacific family", a wonderful opportunity for France. A year later, former Prime Minister Michel Rocard wrote that France had moved from the detested colonising power that detonated bombs in the Pacific to a status more like a "big sister" to the region, rejecting arbitrary dominations, accompanying "its former territories" in their progress towards autonomy much to the "relief" of the bigger powers Australia and New Zealand. The Pacific Islands Forum, he said, while it had been explicitly created to shun France in the region, had become one "of the firmest defenders and even seekers of our presence" (*in* Mrgudovic, 2008: 13-15), although this statement does not seem to fit with the current regional approach to France outlined in the preceding section.

This idea of being a big sister to the region continues the ambiguity about its role that was evident in the 1980s and 1990s: France wanting to project itself as one of the family, but ever conscious of its larger power status.

Despite the ambiguities, it seems from the foregoing that France definitely wants to remain "in" the Pacific and may even be beginning to perceive itself once again as being "of" the region, which can on its own be seen as a positive development, representing an acknowledgement of the strategic importance and benefits to France of its collectivities and regional presence, and perhaps motivating France to secure a long-term place in the region. At the same time, this paper has noted that the idea of France being an outsider in the region is a persistent one in the region itself, and that Pacific Island leaders are maintaining a reserve before accepting France fully into the region.

Some of the trends of the evolving France: "in" or "of" the region debate point to the possibility of convergence of interests between France, its collectivities and Pacific islands countries.

Future status of the French collectivities

A first such pointer, from the debate from the 1980s and 1990s, and especially from Cordonnier's views, is the evolution of the idea that France's collectivities (if not the motherland) are already largely accepted as being part of the region. And as noted the pre-eminent regional Forum, the PIF, has welcomed the collectivities in new but limited forms of association, flagging that their future status in the organisation will be determined after the playing-out of the Nouméa Accord process in New Caledonia, while in the meantime expecting France and French Polynesia to cooperate on self-determination issues in that entity.

These developments represent a democratic springboard from which France can consolidate its own long-term status, regardless of whether the collectivities move towards independence or, as seems more likely, remain with France. The region has signaled that it will be important that France handle well the issues relating to autonomy and independence demands in its collectivities. This means in French Polynesia, that France implement statutory change in a fair and unbiased way, and not ignore the role of the United Nations in future outcomes.

But because New Caledonia is now the pre-eminent French Pacific collectivity, seen largely as setting the pace for French Polynesia and with the role of principal employer of those from Wallis and Futuna; and because of the inbuilt timetables and regional support for the Nouméa Accord, the single most important thing France can do to secure a long-term place for itself in the region, is to implement fully and honourably its commitments under the Nouméa Accord.

Bearing in mind that the final outcomes of the Accord coincide with significant regional developments, and at a time of change in strategic balances in the broader Pacific, France and the major parties in New Caledonia could benefit from taking regional leaders more into their confidence about the steps they are taking to define the future of New Caledonia. In this way, France and New Caledonian leaders would be acting in the spirit of the PIF notion of regional consensus and collective security as reflected in the Forum's Biketawa Agreement, and proving themselves as worthwhile potential full members of the PIF.

France could also become more open to accepting visits to New Caledonia by the Pacific Islands Forum Ministerial Committee tasked with monitoring implementation of the Nouméa Accord. It should continue to support a role for

the Melanesian Spearhead Group as a vehicle for regional engagement in the Nouméa Accord process, as it has done by hosting meetings of the Group in Nouméa and welcoming a visit by an MSG mission in July 2010. France should accept that the FLNKS would continue to represent New Caledonia in the MSG at least until after Nouméa Accord processes are complete (i.e. after 2018).

Sharing with regional leaders the successes and difficulties associated with implementing the Accord to date will be helpful in securing regional support for a future negotiated settlement in New Caledonia. With three years remaining before the final referendum process begins, the fact is that the record so far in implementing the Accord is mixed, perhaps not surprisingly in view of the complexities (see Fisher, 2012b; Muckle, 2009: 190-191; Anaya, 2011; and comments by Natapei, *in* Makin, 2010). On the plus side, new and complex institutions have been created including provincial assemblies, an entity-wide Congress and collegial (all-inclusive) Government executive, elected peacefully for three 5-year terms from 1999; an innovative idea of New Caledonian citizenship with special voting and employment protection rights; and institutions including a Customary Senate amongst others as vehicles for indigenous inputs on pertinent legislation, land, language and cultural matters. Economic re-balancing is occurring, with two massive new nickel projects under way, one in the Northern Province now run by pro-independence Kanak parties, and one more in the mainly European pro-France administered Southern Province, together involving investments backed up by French State tax exemptions and other support, totaling more than \$US 6 billion. But progress in these projects and the economic re-balancing they represent, have been negatively affected by the global financial crisis and complex local issues. And on the minus side, France has been seen as unhelpful and partisan in its handling of sensitive issues such as a restricted electorate, ethnicity questions in censuses, and immigration from other parts of France. There have been perceptions that France has acted pre-emptively by constructing a major military headquarters complex in Nouméa in 2008 and in seeking support for use of the Euro in New Caledonia after it became French currency in 2002, when the Nouméa Accord specifically provides for defence and currency (as two of five "sovereign" responsibilities) only to be considered after 2014. The timetable of handing over some important powers such as secondary education has slipped.

France and New Caledonian authorities, by explaining their progress and problems, will win the further respect and support of regional island neighbours for a kind of collegial government that does not exist elsewhere in the Pacific.

Aid to the region

Second, the debate in the 1980s and 1990s pointed to the obligation on France, even if only seen as present “in” the region, to contribute to the development of the region. This presents another opportunity for France, particularly if it genuinely wants to be seen to be more “of” the region. France has already delivered a certain amount of aid to the region (see below), and, importantly, has encouraged and supported EU aid inflows to the region as well. France was largely responsible for the introduction of the EU’s Overseas Countries and Territories program and the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific programs which overarch EU support for the French Pacific entities, for the independent island economies, and engagement with the SPC (for further background, see Fisher, 2012c). But these amounts are relatively modest, especially when compared with what France spends in its Pacific collectivities. EU support for Pacific island governments through the Tenth European Development Fund 2008-2013 averages \$A 90 million a year (European Commission, 2007: 7 and Fisher, 2012c). Official figures for French aid have varied in recent years and are unclear as to whether or not they include assistance through the EU. The most generous interpretation points to France having spent Euros 103 million or \$A 163 million in 2008 on bilateral aid to the Pacific (Affaires étrangères, 2009), while it spent around \$A 4 billion in its three South Pacific entities alone, excluding Clipperton (ISEE, 2008: 960; French High Commission, 2007; SPC, 2009). And France does not see the Pacific as a priority region for its development cooperation. France’s 2011 *Strategy statement on cooperation to development* does not even mention Pacific countries. It identifies as priorities for assistance sub-Saharan Africa (60 %), the Mediterranean (20 %), countries in crisis (10 %), and “emerging countries” (10 %), with “other countries and regions” being covered under EU and multilateral arrangements “with limited budget cost” (Affaires étrangères et européennes, 2011: 8).

There remains scope for France to provide more development cooperation to the South Pacific, and to identify them as regional neighbors, drawing on the expertise in its own Pacific collectivities in the areas such as fisheries, sustainable development, mineral exploitation, in genuinely mutual exchanges. France could build on its *Fonds Pacifique*, the Fund it set up in 1986 which in recent years targets linkages between its three Pacific entities and their regional neighbours, with funding of around Euros 2 million a year.

By identifying and funding a higher priority for the Pacific region in its development cooperation program, France would demonstrate its ongoing interest in the region, and shore up support there for its future presence, regardless of the democratic outcomes on the future status of its Pacific collectivities.

Retaining a Pacific focus

Third, Stephen Bates and the 1980s and 90s “in”/ “of” debate showed the risks for France in taking its eye off the Pacific ball as it focuses, properly, on its other priorities, as a major European and UN power. It has been seen that some French decisions were bad for the region (and in turn for France’s own international image), partly because they were based on France’s European priorities in very specific areas. The most important example was its nuclear testing policy. But there are particular examples in New Caledonia’s recent history where French national priorities dictated local policy with disastrous results locally and regionally. The clearest example was the ill-advised French raid on a cave in New Caledonia in 1988, after frustrated Kanak independentists had killed four French police and held others hostage. The decision to undertake the raid, which resulted in twenty-one more deaths, occurred as competing French candidates Chirac and Mitterrand sought to be seen to be making strong decisions, since the event took place between two rounds of voting for the French Presidency (graphically depicted in Mathieu Kassovitz’ 2011 film *L’Ordre et la Morale*³). A more recent example was the effort to accelerate delicate discussions on the sensitive flag issue in New Caledonia, partly to prepare for senior visits from mainland France, risking compromising hard-won collegial arrangements within the fledgling New Caledonian government (see Fisher, 2011 and 2012b).

3. NDLR. – See also JSO 134, Leblic, « Le film de Mathieu Kassovitz, *L’Ordre et la morale*. Quand la fiction se confronte à la réalité » (pp. 111-120) and Faurie et Nayral, « *L’Ordre et la morale* : quand l’industrie du cinéma bouscule la coutume kanak » (pp. 121-136).

It will be important for France to continue to post as its most senior representatives in the French Pacific entities, individuals with experience in and deep knowledge of the South Pacific region. There is also scope for France to tighten its administrative structures in Paris, to be sure all agencies are working together but with an understanding of regional needs. Given the importance of developments in New Caledonia in the next few years, this could mean strengthening the South Pacific unit within the Overseas France ministry, and improving inter-agency coordinating mechanisms in Paris, setting up an ongoing steering group engaging other government departments, such as Foreign Affairs, rather than ad hoc management as occurs now.

As evident in the omissions from its 2008 Defence White Paper and 2011 Cooperation to Development Strategy, there is scope for France to reflect, in its strategic planning at the highest levels, the way in which it wants to be seen in the Pacific.

Galic v. Anglo-Saxon distinction

Fourth, the idea of a *Anglo-Saxon v. Galic* distinction which recurred in the early debate was a factor limiting France's acceptance in the region. Officially France has already made a number of changes which signal its awareness that these types of distinctions are not helpful. For example, it is increasingly conducting its defence exercises with Australia and other regional partners in English. It is increasingly using interpretation devices as a matter of course when its delegations participate in regional forums, rather than insisting upon the regional organisations using French as well as English not only for all their meetings but for written publications as well, as it has done in the SPC for over 70 years.

Further genuine efforts to enmesh its collectivities in the wider life of the region will be important. France's continued sensitive diplomatic activity will be important, through regular Oceanic Summits, engagement in regional structures such as the PIF (as a dialogue partner) and SPC (as a founding member and donor), and through its Embassies in the region (in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Vanuatu) and as a major contributor to EU activity there. However, greater support is needed for the Pacific collectivities to develop their own capacity to participate productively in their own right in regional organisations, through well-resourced external affairs units. Training in English, in diplomatic practice, and in relevant

foreign affairs and trade matters will be important, with specific measures to include indigenous personnel. France has begun attaching trainee diplomats from its Pacific entities within French Embassies in the region, which is a start but regional countries want to see the entities represented in their own right. There is also scope for two-way exchanges involving personnel, including indigenous personnel, from the French Pacific entities within for example the foreign affairs and trade ministries of regional islands governments.

Conclusion

Although it is over twenty years since his assassination, the words of Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou, when he described France as being "of" or "from" the Pacific while also being "of" or "from" somewhere else, still provide inspiration for conciliatory change in the Pacific region.

His statement provides an opportunity for France to develop its relationship with the Pacific from one of a resident sovereign State "in" the region, to a State truly "of" the region, a relationship that could endure well beyond the completion of the Nouméa Accord processes, which had their origins in Tjibaou's signature of the Matignon/Oudinot Accords.

At a time when France is seeking to maintain its claims in a changing world as one of the only five privileged Permanent Five member of the UN Security Council, as it takes on new leadership roles within NATO, and consolidates its leadership of the European Union, France is increasingly beginning to acknowledge publicly, if rarely and indirectly, the strategic weight that accrues from its Pacific presence. It seems to be beginning to identify benefits in projecting itself as a power not only "in" but also "of" the South Pacific Ocean. Hopefully, it will do so more explicitly in its public strategic documents.

As the 1980s and 1990s debate showed, a determining factor in achieving regional acceptance as a country "of" the region will be how France implements its commitments in its Pacific collectivities, particularly in New Caledonia under the Nouméa Accord as it times out from 2014. Action by the French State in other areas, such as development cooperation and understanding Pacific perceptions as much as European ones, will contribute to France maintaining a respected place in the region beyond the expected resolution of the status of its collectivities.

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