

Story: Pacific Islands and New Zealand

Fraenkel, 2012a

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Page 1. New Zealand and the Pacific

New Zealand is a South Pacific nation with strong cultural, economic and political ties with other Pacific states and territories. People of Pacific Island descent were 7.4% of the total population in 2013. Auckland, with a quarter of its population identifying themselves as Māori or Pasifika in 2013, was regularly described as the world's largest Polynesian city. Since 1993, Pacific Islanders have held seats in New Zealand's Parliament.

Pacific identity

New Zealand has always been, geographically, a group of Pacific islands. As New Zealand's identity has shifted away from being a distant outpost of the British Empire, it has increasingly emphasised linkages, both cultural and political, with other island nations in the Pacific. New sources of cultural inspiration – including those brought by Pacific migrants – have become important.

Special relationships

New Zealand, economically and politically a minnow in the wider world, is relatively large and powerful in the Pacific. Foreign policy towards the Pacific Islands has been driven by a variety of objectives – some of them long-standing, such as expanding trade and capital flows, or strategic considerations. Others include the provision of development assistance, opposition to nuclear testing, and the management of post-colonial political crises. There has been an underlying focus on political stability.

New Zealand retains special relationships with its former colonies. The Cook Islands and Niue have 'free association' agreements, giving their governments substantial budgetary assistance and the people New Zealand citizenship. In 2020 Tokelau remained a non-self-governing New Zealand territory. Western Samoa was under New Zealand jurisdiction from 1914 to 1962, when it gained independence. Generally, New Zealand has assumed greater responsibilities in Polynesia, while Australia has taken the leading role in Melanesia.

New Zealand's first minister of Pacific Island affairs (Richard Prebble) was appointed in 1984. In 1990 the Pacific Island Affairs Unit became the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (later the Ministry for Pacific Peoples), which was concerned with the social, economic and cultural development of Pasifika in New Zealand.

New Zealand–Australian alignment

New Zealand policy towards the Pacific Islands has often been closely aligned with Australia, whether in relation to trade, aid or the handling of political crises. The two countries tend to adopt a common approach on Pacific matters at meetings of the Commonwealth and United Nations, and where disagreements occur these are usually kept out of the media limelight. An exception in the late 2010s was climate change, where New Zealand was sympathetic to the concerns of affected Pacific Islands while Australia was somewhat out of step with the other states in the region.

The Pacific Islands Forum

In August 1971 the Pacific Islands Forum (initially the South Pacific Forum) held its first meeting in Wellington, attended by representatives from Nauru, Western Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, Fiji, Australia and New Zealand. An earlier regional organisation, the South Pacific Commission, had been set up in 1946. Its founding members were the colonial powers present in the Pacific: Britain, France,

the United States, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand. The commission concentrated on advancing the technical, professional, scientific and administrative capability of Pacific Island people.

The forum developed into the premier regional political body. In the 1980s it focused on opposing the dumping of nuclear waste and the resumption of French nuclear testing at Moruroa. The South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty was agreed at Rarotonga in August 1985. As conflict flared in New Caledonia between pro-independence and loyalist groups in the mid-1980s, the forum backed the French territory's reinclusion on the United Nations list of 'non-decolonised territories'.

Crises in 2000 posed particular challenges for New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific Islands Forum. The Fiji coup of May 2000, followed by a coup in the Solomon Islands, generated growing concern about 'failed states' within the region. Riots in the Solomon Islands and Tonga in April and November 2006 respectively, and another coup in Fiji in December 2006, generated friction within the forum. The situation in all three countries improved markedly during the 2010s.

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Page 2. Immigration and aid

Close links with and employment opportunities in New Zealand have led to considerable migration of Pacific peoples to New Zealand.

New Zealand citizenship and rights of residence have encouraged the migration of Cook Islanders, Niueans and Tokelauans. There has also been substantial migration to New Zealand from Samoa, Tonga and Fiji. Samoans, Tongans and Fijians are not New Zealand citizens, so migration from these countries has been more strongly affected by periodic changes in New Zealand government policy. Smaller numbers of people from other Pacific Islands have also migrated here.

The Pacific population in New Zealand reached 266,000 in 2006. Increasing numbers of this group were New Zealand-born, and the relative youthfulness of the population suggested that continued strong growth was likely. In some cases the New Zealand-resident population was larger than the population of the original island home.

In 2006 New Zealand's population included:

- almost 57,000 Cook Islanders, compared with almost 13,000 in the Cook Islands
- almost 22,500 Niueans (with more than 1,200 in Niue)
- almost 7,000 Tokelauans (with almost 800 in Tokelau)
- more than 131,000 Samoans (with almost 176,000 in Samoa)
- more than 50,000 Tongans (with almost 99,000 in Tonga).

In 2007 the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme was introduced. This brings thousands of workers from the Pacific Islands each year to work in New Zealand horticulture and viticulture on short-term contracts.

Self-help

Government aid is not the only source of financial help sent from New Zealand to the Pacific Islands. A lot of money is sent home by those who have emigrated. Known as remittances, these gifts to family have been a major source of development finance for island nations.

Aid in the 2000s

In the 2000s over half of New Zealand aid went to the Pacific region. Countries facing the greatest challenges – Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu – received the greatest amount. The Cook Islands, Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, Fiji, Tuvalu, Niue and Tokelau were also assisted. From 2008, the new National-led government shifted the focus of aid efforts from poverty alleviation to sustainable economic development.

Mid-20th-century expansion

Prior to the Second World War Pacific Island communities in New Zealand were very small, with the largest numbering only a few hundred. Faced with labour shortages in the post-war period, the New Zealand government encouraged Pacific migrants. Programmes brought young men over as agricultural and forestry workers, and young women as domestics. An acute labour shortage in manufacturing in the early 1970s drew many more.

The provision of aid to the Pacific Islands increased in the 1950s and 1960s. The 1972–75 Labour government is frequently identified as a turning point in New Zealand's relations with Pacific states. Prime Minister Norman Kirk substantially increased overseas development assistance and raising the proportion channelled to the South Pacific.

Cutting back immigration and aid

The oil crisis and economic recession of the 1970s led to a reversal of aid and immigration policy. By the 1980s and early 1990s the aid budget allocation had fallen to less than half its 1975–76 high point of \$59.7 million (around 0.5% of gross domestic product).

Soured relationship

Police with dogs bursting into homes at dawn, random street checks on immigration status, draconian powers for the courts and Department of Immigration, prosecutions of Pacific Islanders while others who overstayed their visas were ignored – these factors soured New Zealand's relationship with Pacific Island states in the 1970s and 1980s.

political gain.

In 1974 the Kirk government clamped down on people overstaying the time allowed by their visas. Pacific Islanders attracted the most attention, with Samoans and Tongans particularly affected, and 'dawn raids' by police on the homes of suspected overstayers were introduced. Immigration policy continued to be tightened under the National government that won power in 1975. Dawn raids ended in the late 1970s after considerable public outcry, including protests by the Polynesian Panthers, a group of New Zealand-born Pacific Islanders influenced by the American Black Panthers movement.

Periodic amnesties allowed migrants to more easily acquire citizenship, but a stereotype developed of Pacific Islanders as troublesome, as school drop-outs or as bearers of health problems. This stereotype was sometimes exploited for

Shaping migration

Rates of immigration rose and fell as government policy was liberalised then tightened and New Zealand's economy thrived then shrank. The government briefly trialled visa-free status for Fijians, Samoans and Tongans in late 1986 and early 1987, then backtracked when numbers of arrivals were greater than expected. From the later 1980s the shrinking of New Zealand's manufacturing sector substantially reduced the number of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs available. Between 1991 and 1993 more Samoans and Tongans left New Zealand than arrived.

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Page 3. Colonisation and trade in the Pacific

Although New Zealand was originally settled by Polynesian migrants (the ancestors of Māori) around 1250–1300, links with Polynesia were subsequently lost until European vessels renewed those connections in the 17th and 18th centuries.

With the expansion of European and North American whaling activities in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the protected anchorages of New Zealand's Bay of Islands became an important base for the provisioning of Pacific-bound vessels, particularly those from America. Māori agriculture was transformed by servicing whaling ships. Forests were cleared to make way for cultivation of potatoes, wheat and maize, and Polynesians were recruited on American ships bound for the Pacific whaling grounds. Many of these vessels deliberately left New Zealand short-handed, intending to pick up a full crew in New Zealand, Hawaii or elsewhere in the Pacific.

Selling bird poo

In 1861, 16 Cook Islanders dug up the first load of guano from Starbuck Island in Kiribati (the Gilbert Islands), loading it into the *Coral Queen* to bring to New Zealand. The 40-tonne cargo sold well and was effective as fertiliser. The bird-droppings trade flourished. By the late 1860s there were a number of vessels bringing hundreds of tonnes of Pacific guano to the New Zealand market.

Dreams of a Pacific empire

English emigrant Coleman Phillips's Pacific colonisation scheme, which he submitted to New Zealand Governor Sir James Fergusson and Premier Julius Vogel in 1873, included plans for the 'ultimate dominion' of all Pacific islands and the forced 'supply of native labour'. 'I cannot see,' he wrote, 'why we should allow European Powers to take up or decline at pleasure that which is ours by proximity'.¹ Like many such proposals, the scheme was intended as a Pacific version of the immensely profitable British East India

The foundation of the New South Wales penal colony in 1788, and the expansion of European settlement to Hobart Town in Tasmania, and across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand, soon fostered sporadic trade linkages with the Pacific Islands.

Exports and imports

In the 1880s Auckland dominated trade to and from the Pacific Islands. Much of what was sent were 're-exports' – manufactured goods made elsewhere (usually Britain), shipped to New Zealand and then on-sold to the islands. Over time exports expanded to include meat, butter, potatoes, cement, coinage and textiles. Imports included sugar, fresh fruit, cocoa beans and copra (dried coconut).

Imperial rivalry

In the late 19th century most New Zealand (and Australian) politicians aspired to political ascendancy in the Pacific. New Zealand was 'ordained by nature to be future Queen of the Pacific',² claimed MP for Auckland East (and former Governor and Premier of New Zealand) Sir George Grey, who in 1883 introduced a Confederation and Annexation Bill to allow the building of an island empire. The Polynesian schemes of New Zealand delegates at the Inter-Colonial Convention of November 1883 – like those advanced in the 1870s – attracted little sympathy from the Colonial Office (responsible for running Britain's empire). Grey's bill did not receive the royal assent.

Rivalry over commercial linkages, land acquisition and strategic issues helped drive New Zealand's interest in the Pacific Islands. Deep-water harbours like those in Tonga's Vava'u or Samoa's Pago Pago were eagerly sought by the

Company. Although the detail of his scheme was ignored, Phillips inspired Fergusson and Vogel, igniting a passion for empire in 19th-century New Zealand.

world's industrial powers, generating fears in New Zealand of maritime dominance by potential enemies.

Footnotes:

1. Quoted in Angus Ross, *New Zealand aspirations in the Pacific in the nineteenth century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, p. 116.
2. Quoted in James Drummond, *The life and work of Richard John Seddon*, p. 74, (last accessed 3 April 2012).

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Page 4. Samoa

German colonisation and withdrawal

In the late 19th century control of Samoa prompted particular anxiety in New Zealand. In 1889 Britain agreed to share control with Germany and the US. A decade later, in 1899, Samoa was partitioned. Germany took most of the territory, while the US retained the small islands of Manu'a and Tutuila and a deep-water port at Pago Pago. Britain traded off Samoa for concessions in Tonga, the Solomon Islands, Niue and Africa, including Zanzibar. The arrangements were vigorously opposed in New Zealand as a sell-out of colonial interests.

On the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, New Zealand sent a military expedition to take control of Western Samoa. New Zealand's authority was initially as a technically British military administration and then, after the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, as the holder of a League of Nations Class C mandate.

Hopeful empire-builder

John Landon, a man with a sharp eye for the main chance and an interest in Pacific empire-building, arrived in Samoa in the early 1880s. He wanted to buy land for the Auckland South Sea Island Produce Company. Faced with competition from powerful British and German businesses, Landon persuaded the Samoan Parliament to seek annexation by New Zealand (an opportunity New Zealand declined). A few years later, the British consul described Landon as so 'ingeniously' building on 'the smallest remark or circumstance ... to produce the wished-for effect, as to make the original intention or fact quite unrecognisable'.¹

Flu epidemic

Failure to quarantine the SS *Talune*, arriving from Auckland in November 1918, allowed the global influenza epidemic to spread to Western Samoa. As a result, 8,500 Samoans, more than a fifth of the population, died. The epidemic did not spread to neighbouring American Samoa, where effective quarantine rules were observed.

Mau rebellion

The Mau rebellion, which began in 1927, was a peaceful movement for self-government or 'Samoa mo Samoa' (Samoa for the Samoans). Supporters wore a distinctive violet lavalava (wrap-around skirt) and published a newspaper, the *Samoa Guardian*. New Zealand responded forcefully to demonstrations, boycotts and other forms of civil disobedience, arresting 400 Mau supporters. On Saturday 28 December 1929, New Zealand military police fired on a peaceful Mau demonstration, killing at least nine Samoans, including high chief Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III. The arrival of the New Zealand warship *Dunedin* in January 1930 was aimed at crushing what remained of the Mau movement. Its leaders were exiled and the movement suppressed.

Historians have variously identified the causes of the Mau movement as the failure to protect the island from influenza, disquiet among customary chiefs about the reshaping of the traditional order, disgruntled merchants angered by colonial constraints, and the dictatorial rule of New Zealand administrators.

Moving towards independence

Although relations between New Zealand and Samoa improved after the 1935 election of a Labour government in New Zealand, Samoans came to treat the island's administration with disdain. Samoan

desire for independence remained strong, and was to benefit from the setting up of the United Nations and the New Zealand government's concern for its international reputation.

Plain speaking

When New Zealand Governor-General Cyril Newall visited Samoa in 1944, he was told by Mata'utia Ioane Brown, the leader of the Fono of Faipule (a council of district representatives), 'We have lost confidence in the trusteeship of New Zealand which has shown a lack of interest in the territory and treated its people as stepchildren. Our wish is that the Samoans be granted a larger measure of self-government.'² Such blunt speaking prompted the speedy arrival of New Zealand Prime Minister Peter Fraser, and the beginning of moves towards Samoan independence.

The UN trusteeship system, under which New Zealand governed Samoa, required governing countries to pay heed to the wishes of the indigenous people. The Samoans pushed for independence based on the Tongan model of indigenous control of internal matters, with foreign relations handled by a friendly colonial power. Believing that Samoa would not be satisfied with the Tongan solution in practice, the New Zealand government offered full independence with continuing support. This approach, unusual at the time, enabled relatively rapid movement toward self-government. New Zealand would subsequently follow variations on this approach in the Cook Islands and Niue.

Samoan independence

In 1962 Samoa became the first Pacific island state to regain its independence. A new constitution was accompanied by a Treaty of Friendship that guaranteed New Zealand assistance in areas such as foreign affairs and defence. On 9 May 1961, 83% of voters had backed the constitution in a referendum supervised by the United Nations.

In 1997 'Western' was dropped from the nation's name, and it became known as Samoa.

Footnotes:

1. Quoted in David Routledge, 'John Landon – biography.' Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, (last accessed 26 March 2012).
2. Quoted in Mary Boyd, 'The decolonisation of Western Samoa.' In *The feel of truth: essays in New Zealand and Pacific history*, edited by Peter Munz. Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed for Victoria University of Wellington, 1969, pp. 63–64.

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Page 5. Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau and Nauru

Cook Islands and Niue

The Cook Islands, taken under a British protectorate in 1888, became New Zealand's first South Pacific Island colony in 1901. British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain acknowledged what he described as the legitimate disappointment of New Zealand in regard to the 1899 settlement in Samoa (in which Britain withdrew its claim to the islands, which were divided between Germany and the US). Chamberlain backed the appeals of New Zealand Prime Minister Richard Seddon for annexation of the Cooks. Land was to remain under native tenure and the ariki (chiefs) were to be consulted. In practice, the British Colonial Office authorised annexation before receiving the consent of the ariki, based on assurances from Seddon and Governor Lord Ranfurly.

The borders of New Zealand were extended on 11 June 1901 to incorporate not only Rarotonga, Aitutaki and the rest of the southern Cook Islands, but also the northern Cook Islands and Niue. Eventually Suvarrow and Nassau were also included within the territory of the Cook Islands.

First World War service

Several hundred Cook Islanders and Niueans reinforced the Maori (Pioneer) Battalion during the First World War, serving with British troops in Egypt, Palestine and France. Many were ammunition handlers. Admired by the British for their stamina, capability and cheerfulness, the men were commended for 'steadiness and contempt for danger'.¹

Self-government in the Cooks and Niue

The Cook Islands secured territorial self-government through a 'free association' agreement with New Zealand on 4 August 1965. Niue established a similar arrangement on 19 October 1974. Both adopted constitutions that empowered 'Her Majesty the Queen in Right of New Zealand', and both remained part of 'Our Realm of New Zealand'.² Agreements allowed islanders continued New Zealand citizenship and thus open access to New Zealand. The associated states were expected to have 'shared values' and received ongoing budgetary assistance. Unlike the Micronesian associated states linked to the United States, Niue and the Cook Islands did not become members of the United Nations.

Tokelau

New Zealand assumed control over the Tokelau Islands from Britain in 1926, and incorporated them within the territorial boundaries of New Zealand in 1948. Tokelau, which had fewer than 2,000 people on its three atolls, voted in 2006 on the proposal that the territory become a self-governing state in free association with New Zealand. 349 registered voters were in favour – 60.1%, short of the required two-thirds majority. A second referendum in 2007 obtained the support of 697 voters (64.4%) – 16 fewer than needed.

In 2020 Tokelau remained a New Zealand dependent territory. In practice, the *taupulega* (village councils) of the atolls of Atafu, Fakaofu and Nukunonu exercised ongoing powers, with the territory also having a General Fono (assembly) and elected officials – a Faipule (leader) and Pulemaku (village mayors) on each atoll. New Zealand provided broad but distant oversight from Wellington.

Nauru

After the First World War, New Zealand shared in the British Empire mandate over Nauru (previously controlled by Germany). The mandate, administered by Australia, guaranteed a plentiful and cheap supply of the island's phosphates to assist New Zealand agriculture. In 1968 Nauru became the second Pacific Island state to obtain independence.

Until the 1990s the profits from phosphate mining made Nauru wealthy. Once the easily mined phosphate was gone, Nauru became heavily indebted, and by 2004 was in great financial difficulty. The government sought and received assistance from the Pacific Islands Forum on the basis of the Biketawa Declaration. In 2009 forum leaders decided that Nauru no longer needed special assistance. From 2012 Nauru received aid from Australia in return for hosting an offshore Australian immigration detention facility.

Footnotes:

1. Quoted in Denis Fairfax, 'Pa George Karika.' Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, (last accessed 21 February 2012).
2. 1983 Letters Patent Constituting the office of the Governor-General of New Zealand, (last accessed 21 February 2012).

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Page 6. Fiji and Tonga

Both Fiji and Tonga were drawn into the British sphere of influence – Fiji was a colony from 1874 and Tonga was under British protection from 1900. Both gained full independence in 1970, as Britain gradually withdrew from the Pacific.

Scuttling off

Britain was 'in a leaving mood' by the early 1960s, and New Zealand fears of 'a British "scuttle" in the Pacific' had little effect. Once its imperial parent left, the 'stability and welfare of the islands must, in the longer term, be of increasing importance to us,' wrote an anonymous foreign affairs official.¹

the indigenous Fijian elite sided with the European community, further entrenched racially defined communities. Constitutional arrangements put in place prior to decolonisation in 1970 reserved parliamentary seats for ethnic Fijians and Fiji Indians, and ensured indigenous Fijians predominated in the Senate. From independence in 1970 to 1987, Fiji was governed by the Alliance Party, in which the indigenous Fijian elite was dominant.

Fiji coups

1987 coups

The first coup, in May 1987, was led by the mainly indigenous Fijian military. It came in the wake of an election that brought a largely Fijian-Indian-backed government into office.

In September 1987, when negotiations led by Fiji's governor-general proposed a government of national unity, the military again intervened, declaring Fiji a republic. The coup resulted in suspension of New Zealand defence cooperation and trade-union blockades of Fiji-bound vessels at New Zealand ports. The Australian and New Zealand governments contemplated intervention. Other Pacific Islands Forum member states were more sympathetic. When Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, an indigenous leader and former prime minister, accepted appointment by military leaders as prime minister, his actions were described by Papua New Guinea Foreign Minister Sir Michael Somare as 'something all Pacific people both understand and respect, and will support'.²

2000 coup

In May 2000 a small group of indigenous Fijian extremists seized control of Fiji's Parliament, removing from office Fiji's first ever prime minister of Indian descent, Mahendra Chaudhry. The coup gained support from some sections of the military. President Ratu Mara was removed from office and the 1997 constitution was abrogated. In March 2001 the Fiji Court of Appeal restored Fiji's constitution, and fresh elections were held in August. Nonetheless Fiji remained on the Commonwealth agenda until

Colonial Fiji

Fiji satisfied the 19th-century New Zealand imperial dream in a way no other Pacific Island did. It bought more goods than any other island from New Zealand, and supplied raw materials to New Zealand industry. From 1874 a plantation system was set up under Australian control to supply unprocessed sugar to the Colonial Sugar Refinery's Auckland factory.

Between 1879 and 1916, 60,553 Indian labourers were brought to Fiji to work on the plantations. Although many stayed, there was little intermarriage between Fijians and Indians. Labour disputes during the 20th century, in which

2004 because of the new government's reluctance to follow the 1997 constitution's power-sharing provisions.

2006 coup

The elections of August 2001 resulted in a government led by Laisenia Qarase, an indigenous Fijian. Squabbles between Qarase and military commander Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama led to another military coup in December 2006, which New Zealand made last-ditch efforts to forestall. Three successive New Zealand heads of mission in Suva were expelled over the period 2007–9.

The coup created severe difficulties for the Suva-based Pacific Islands Forum. Bainimarama assumed the chairmanship of the Melanesian Spearhead Group in 2011, with the support of some leaders in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi remained strongly opposed to Fiji's military regime.

Tonga

While Fiji moved sharply away from democratic rule, Tonga steered a reverse course. Under the 1875 constitution, Tonga's king directly appointed the prime minister and cabinet, who sat in Parliament alongside MPs selected by nobles and a small group of popularly elected MPs.

In the 1990s and 2000s pressure for democratic change grew. Australian and New Zealand troops were despatched to Tonga after 2006 riots in the capital, Nuku'alofa, in which eight people died and the business district was burnt down. In 2010 King George Tupou V agreed to new arrangements under which 17 of the 26 MPs were popularly elected, and the selection of the prime minister came under the control of Parliament.

Footnotes:

1. Quoted in Malcolm McKinnon, *Independence and foreign policy: New Zealand in the world since 1935*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1993, p. 256.
2. Quoted in Ron Crocombe, *Pacific neighbours: New Zealand's relations with other Pacific islands*. Christchurch: Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury; Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1992, p. 211.

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Page 7. Melanesia and the Bougainville crisis

Contact between New Zealand and Melanesia was encouraged by Christian missionaries from the mid-19th century. The Anglican Church adopted Melanesia as its 'special field' for mission work in 1862, and Presbyterians were active in the New Hebrides (later Vanuatu). Mission activities were publicised through public lectures and in local newspapers. It was widely thought that the Melanesian mission of New Zealand would be followed by a Melanesian colony.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, the main fighting in the Pacific war occurred in western Melanesia and Micronesia – far away from what had become New Zealand's core areas of responsibility in central and eastern Polynesia. New Zealand troops were stationed in Fiji and New Caledonia, and participated in heavy fighting in the Solomon Islands. With the end of the war, New Zealand interest in Melanesia again subsided.

Bougainville crisis

The 1988–97 conflict on Bougainville proved a catalyst for New Zealand engagement in Melanesia. The crisis was sparked by local grievances over the distribution of revenues from, and jobs at, Conzinc Riotinto Australia's Panguna mine. It grew into a secessionist struggle after Papua New Guinea police and military forces attempted to suppress the uprising, but then withdrew leaving the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) in effective control.

Conflict continued, with the BRA pitted against the Bougainville Resistance Forces, and a myriad of local-level conflicts. In 1997 Papua New Guinea's government hired a mercenary firm, Sandline International, to resolve the impasse, but this sparked a mutiny in the Papua New Guinea defence forces.

Negotiating peace

New Zealand had been involved in earlier efforts to broker negotiations, including providing a neutral venue for talks that culminated in the 1990 Endeavour Accord. The 1997 Sandline crisis, at a time of war weariness on Bougainville, offered a unique opportunity for peace. New Zealand Foreign Minister Don McKinnon and Ambassador to Papua New Guinea John Hayes invited all sides to talks at the military barracks in Burnham, near Christchurch, in 1997, and then at Lincoln University in 1998. Negotiations emphasised confidence-building and involved militia factions, church groups and non-government organisations as well as government representatives. They culminated in the establishment of a New Zealand-led Truce Monitoring Group.

After agreement to a permanent ceasefire in April 1998, leadership of the group passed to Australia, although New Zealanders continued to play key leadership roles. A peace agreement was signed in Arawa on 30 August 2001. It included plans for the establishment of an autonomous government for Bougainville, for a referendum on independence, and made provision for weapons disposal. In 2019, 98.3% of those who voted in a non-binding referendum favoured independence rather than continued autonomy within Papua New Guinea.

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Page 8. Solomon Islands

In June 2000, two-and-a-half weeks after a coup in Fiji, the Solomon Islands also experienced an illegal overthrow of government. Tensions had been brewing since late 1998. An uprising on Guadalcanal had resulted in the eviction of around 25,000 settlers from the island of Malaita during 1999. In retaliation, militants formed the Malaita Eagle Forces (MEF) and seized weapons from police armouries.

The coup was a joint operation by the MEF and the heavily Malaitan paramilitary wing of the Royal Solomon Islands Police, the Police Field Force. Efforts to resolve the crisis involved both Australian and New Zealand officials, and culminated in a peace agreement signed at the military base in Townsville, Australia, in October 2000. The Townsville Peace Accord, however, failed to secure a comprehensive surrender of weapons, and fighting continued – though now primarily within, rather than between, the Guadalcanal and Malaitan militia groups.

Biketawa Declaration

The Biketawa Declaration was agreed to by leaders at the 2000 Pacific Islands Forum in Kiribati as a framework for responding to regional crises. It was first used to support the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in July 2003. Responding to a request by Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza, 2,225 military and police personnel were deployed, most from Australia and New Zealand, with some from Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Papua New Guinea. Australians filled the RAMSI Special Coordinator position, in each case with a New Zealand deputy.

Reconstruction

Most of the militia fighters were arrested, and the bulk of the weapons seized and destroyed. Efforts to reconstruct the Solomon Islands police force and prison service took longer, and RAMSI personnel also became heavily involved in key sectors of the civil service, such as finance and the treasury. New Zealand Foreign Minister Phil Goff's endorsement of the large military-led RAMSI operation was criticised by some in cabinet, including Prime Minister Helen Clark, who preferred a lower-key approach.

Fighting renewed

After elections in April 2006, riots broke out in the Solomon Islands capital, Honiara. The Chinatown district was burnt down, and RAMSI personnel and vehicles were targeted. The initial catalyst was a popular reaction to a flawed prime-ministerial selection process. In the face of popular disquiet, new Prime Minister Snyder Rini resigned eight days after his election.

Rini was replaced by Manasseh Sogavare, whose prime ministership was marked by mounting hostility towards RAMSI and Australia. Australian Police Chief Shane Castles and Australian High Commissioner Patrick Cole were both expelled. Sogavare lost a no-confidence vote in late 2007, paving the way for an easing of tensions under the 2007–10 government of Derek Sikua. RAMSI's military force was withdrawn in 2013 and its policing role ended in 2017.

Biketawa in Nauru and Tonga

The Biketawa Declaration was also invoked in a regional response to a financial crisis in Nauru in 2004. Australian and New Zealand troops were despatched to Tonga after riots in the capital,

Nuku'alofa, in November 2006.

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Story: Pacific Islands and New Zealand

Cook Islands annexed, 1900



Queen Makea of the Cook Islands (left) listens as New Zealand Governor-General Lord Ranfurly reads the annexation proclamation on 7 October 1900. In the background are British military personnel. Women were among the most powerful of the Cook Islands' ariki (chiefs). However, their public role did not fit New Zealand administrators' view of appropriate behaviour, and whenever possible their authority was ignored or limited.

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