Committee: Special Political and Decolonization Committee (GA4)

Topic: Mitigating political conflict in post-colonial territories in the Pacific Islands

Student Officer: Evelina Stathi

Position: Co-Chair

Topic Introduction

Cultures and economies of the Pacific Islands have changed to varied degrees since the advent of Europeans in the early 16th century. Initially, these changes were brought about by interactions with explorers who passed through the region, and starting in the late 18th century, they were also influenced by more frequent visitors like traders, castaways, and beachcombers. In the 19th and 20th centuries, with the newest migration flows, the Pacific Islands began seeking their independence.

Melanesia itself poses a great example as it included the countries of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. These countries had all been colonized by the Europeans and after gaining independence from their respective colonial powers were faced with a great level of political instability. By 1980, most other Pacific Islands gained independence. The colonial governments—apart from the French — headed toward independence or self-governance, however the pace of political development in the Pacific Islands was influenced by outside pressure inside the UN.

Political instability has thus manifested in the form of civil war, coups, political assassinations, grassroots uprisings and constitutional crises that engulfed the Pacific Region as a whole. This also created ethnic groups that are in constant political conflicts with each other as they fight for power. All these political conflicts present a serious challenge for how to stabilize the situation. It is also known that to protect the civilians who are constantly in danger and do not have the opportunity to live in a safe environment under a stable and democratic government we need to tackle these conflicts as soon as possible.

Definition of key concepts

Post-Colonial

Happening in or relating to the period after the end of colonial rule (= control of a country by another country)[1].

Grassroot movements

Grassroots movements organize and mobilize individuals to take actions intended to influence social and political issues[2].

Political Conflict

Disagreements or disputes between individuals, groups, or nations caused by differences in political ideologies, beliefs, or interests[3].

Self-determination

The determining by the people of the form their government shall have, without reference to the wishes of any other nation, especially by people of a territory or former colony[4].

Mediation

Mediation is a process wherein the parties meet with a mutually selected impartial and neutral person who assists them in the negotiation of their differences[5].

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[1] "POST-COLONIAL | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." *Cambridge Dictionary*, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/post-colonial. Accessed 25 June 2024.

[2] Longley, Robert. "What Is a Grassroots Movement? Definition and Examples." *ThoughtCo*, 30 Oct. 2020, www.thoughtco.com/grassroots-movement-definition-and-examples-5085222.

[3] "Political Conflict: Identity, Power & Causes." *StudySmarter*, https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/politics/foundations-of-american-democracy/political-conflict/. Accessed 25 June 2024.

[4] "Definition of Self-Determination | Dictionary.com." *Www.dictionary.com*, www.dictionary.com/browse/self-determination.

[5] JAMS. "What Is Mediation? What Happens in a Mediation?" *Www.jamsadr.com*, 2022, www.jamsadr.com/mediation-defined/.

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Commonwealth

A country or part of a country that is governed by its people or representatives elected by its people[6]

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Protectorate

A country that is generally controlled and defined by a more powerful country[7].

Freedom of association

The right of a person to join with other people, for example, as a union, in order to defend their rights[8].

Referendum

A vote in which all the people in a country or an area, are to give their opinion about or decide on an important political or social question[9].

Background Information

Colonization

19th century	European Powers started colonized the Pacific Islands for their own benefit
1836	Intervention of Tahiti by France
1843	Establishment of a protectorate in Tahiti by France

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[6]   Cambridge   Dictionary.   "Commonwealth."   *@CambridgeWords*,   24   July   2024, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/commonwealth#google_vignette.

[7]   "Protectorate."   *Dictionary.cambridge.org*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/protectorate.

[8]   ---.   "Freedom   of   Association."   *@CambridgeWords*,   9   Dec.   2021, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/freedom-of-association.

[9]

1853	France gained control over New Caledonia
1857	Germany turned Samoa into a trading post
1874	Britain took complete control of Fiji in order to stop violence and exploitative labor trade by European factions.
1884	The division of territories continued with Britain and Germany dividing New Guinea and the Solomon Islands into spheres of influence
1899	Germany later expanded its holdings in Micronesia by buying the Carolines and the Marshalls from Spain
1904	The United States of America strengthened its presence as well by annexing Hawaii, acquiring Guam, and securing American Samoa, thereby completing the division of the Pacific Islands among the great powers.
1906	cooperative colonial government was demonstrated by France and Britain's joint administration of the New Hebrides.

The process to decolonization and self determination

Despite the United Nations' support for self-determination after 1945[10], for strategic and economic reasons such as the need for military positioning by the US, the economic and resource dependencies of territories such as the Marshall Islands and Palau and the provision of citizenship and subsidies by administering powers to their respective territories, are reasons the Pacific region remains only partially decolonized. France, which included its Pacific territories in 'overseas France' and granted their people French citizenship in 1946, violently suppressed nationalist movements in Tahiti and New Caledonia in the 1950s[11].

After the Second World War, the US made military use of a variety of Pacific islands as it consolidated its defense positions in the North Pacific. Under UN trusteeships, the Northern Marianas became a US commonwealth, while the Marshall Islands, Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia chose free association with the US, gaining self-government with continued ties. By 1980 nearly all Pacific Islands had gained political independence as nation-states but not all secular sovereign nation-states were created equal. Political development, other than in Francophone areas, was also linked to UN pressure and moves by colonial powers towards self-government.

Political scene in the Pacific Islands

The Pacific Islands political landscape is very divided into administering territories which are independent nations and members of the UN. Territorial governments often receive assistance, but they can still be politically tense as currently seen in New Caledonia where long standing tensions over the political status of the territory will come to an independence referendum this year. On the other hand, island countries such as Palau and Marshall Islands are effectively dependent states who are reliant upon external support for their existence in many sectors and have to deal with significant issues. Independent nations that are generally stable also face issues around what might be best termed weak governance capacity. Melanesian nations have had major difficulties governing

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[10] "Pacific Islands - Independence Movements | Britannica." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, www.britannica.com/place/Pacific-Islands/Independence-movements.

[11] "Pacific Islands - Colonial Rule after World War I." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/place/Pacific-Islands/Colonial-rule-after-World-War-I.

geographically large, ethnically diverse populations using modern systems of governance. Fiji above all has shown how a relatively modern state can function without much political stability. Lastly, the pacific islands in general, mostly because of their political instability and tensions that they face due to the influence of external forces such as post-colonial powers and neighboring countries, face challenges in demography, urbanization, immigration, health and health systems, gender relations and governance[12].

Importance of territorial sovereignty

Territorial sovereignty in international relations implies that a state has the right to govern its territory free from any interference, and that no other state may rightfully impose its laws in that territory. This is a basic principle of international law and the UN Charter. It means that each state possesses complete and exclusive power over its territory[13] and nobody else's. In practice, for Pacific islands and more specifically their prevailing political context, territorial sovereignty is critical as it forms the basis for their ability to maintain their independence, use resources in a sustainable way and engage in international diplomacy on equal terms with other states. Territorial ownership also plays an important role for Pacific states as part of the maintenance of cultural identity, economic development and political stability within the community of nations, since it is fundamental for them to have the right of self-determination and be able to determine their own political and socioeconomic status after being colonized and then under the influence of an administering power for a long-lasting period.

Major countries/ organizations and alliances

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom played a key role in the colonization of the pacific islands due to the fact that in the late 18th century and early 19th century it expanded its empire by colonizing various islands in the Pacific Ocean like Fiji, Solomon Islands and Kiribati. However, more recently the UK has

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[12] Firth, Stewart. "Instability in the Pacific Islands: A Status Report." *Lowyinstitute.org*, Lowy Institute, 4 June 2018, www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/instability-pacific-islands-status-report.

[13]   "Territorial   Sovereignty."   *Unacademy*, unacademy.com/content/upsc/study-material/law/territorial-sovereignty/.

contributed to mitigating political conflicts through aid programs, partnerships with commonwealth countries and support for interventions led by other countries.

France

France was also another major contributor to the colonization of the Pacific Islands since it also colonized numerous pacific islands, such as Tahiti, New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna for its own benefit in the early 19th century. Nevertheless, it has also played a significant role in tackling this issue through organizing mediation, providing financial aid and maintaining military presence in the Pacific.

French Polynesia

French Polynesia is divided in 118 islands, grouped in five Archipelagos and was firstly colonized by France in 1842 due to France's desire for resources and for strategic control over the Pacific[14]. The colonization disrupted the French Polynesian culture and way of life by France imposing language, education, and political systems and later the French Nuclear Testing Program , which was conducted by its colonizer, led to ongoing political and social challenges.

Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands were colonized by Britain and Germany during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although the islands have achieved independence since 1978, they still face political instability mostly due to ineffective government , ethnic tensions, and challenges related to governance and socioeconomic development.

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[14] Schafer, N. "When Was French Polynesia Colonized? A Historical Overview." *Far and Away Adventures*, 22 Feb. 2023, farandawayadventures.com/when-was-french-polynesia-colonized/.

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea was colonized by multiple European powers and its post-colonial political scene is often characterized by a diverse and split party system. As a result, Papua New Guinea deals with challenges mostly related to governance issues such as corruption and weak institutional capacity.

Pacific Island Forum

The Pacific Island Forum was established in 1971 and consists of 18 different pacific islands. The PIF brings the region together to address pressing issues and challenges[15] and most crucially promotes regional cooperation and conflict resolution highlighting political and economic challenges in post-colonial territories of the Pacific Islands.

Previous attempts to solve this issue

Bougainville Peace Agreement

The Bougainville Peace Agreement was signed on 30 August 2001 by the Government of Papua New Guinea and Bougainville leaders. This agreement functions as a "road map" for both parties and its main aim is to find lasting peace and a political settlement for the people of Bougainville[16]. This agreement has been relatively efficient in bringing about lasting peace and autonomy to Bougainville and its population, nonetheless implementation challenges remain.

Pacific Peacebuilding Partnership (PPP)

Founded in 2007, the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding is a non-profit organization that collaborates with private and non-governmental organizations, government, intergovernmental, regional, and

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[15] "The Pacific Islands Forum | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat." *Forumsec.org*, 2024, forumsec.org/pacific-islands-forum.

[16] "Bougainville Peace Agreement." *Abg.gov.pg*, abg.gov.pg/peace-agreement.

international institutions, and all communities and works to strengthen peace and conflict resolution efforts in the Pacific Islands by addressing the root causes of political conflicts in post-colonial territories. The PPP has been relatively effective in fostering dialogue and promoting stability in the region though challenges remain.

Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia

In 1976 the treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia was created. The purpose of this Treaty is to promote perpetual peace, everlasting amity and cooperation among their peoples which would contribute to their strength, solidarity and closer relationship[17] and more specifically promotes principles of mutual respect, non-interference, and peaceful resolution of conflicts. This treaty has been largely efficient in promoting peace and cooperation among Southeast Asian nations though challenges and regional tensions persist.

Possible solutions

Mediation and diplomatic dialogue

By urging diplomatic dialogue between governments and ethnic groups we could achieve the share of beliefs, wants and knowledge that could result in a compromise among them and a new constitution that will include proposals and laws by both parties. Moreover, the mediator would be an impartial party that would be responsible for supervising and aiding.

Decolonization and support programs

To offset the long-term impacts of colonial rule in post-colonial jurisdictions, decolonization and support initiatives aim at promoting self-determination, effective governance and sustainable growth. Policies of such nature could encompass means like providing expertise in building strong political institutions, assistance in diversifying economies that depend on one commodity and educational efforts that will empower local people. It is through these programs that post-colonies

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17 "MOFA: TREATY of AMITY and COOPERATION in SOUTHEAST ASIA." *Www.mofa.go.jp*, www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/asean/treaty.html.

can attain political stability, economic autonomy as well as social integration but most importantly mitigate political disputes.

Development of capacity and structures for efficient government

The development of capacity and structures for efficient government in the Pacific Islands involves creating strong, transparent, and responsible institutions that have the ability to properly control public finances and provide social amenities. Fair distribution of resources, rule of law as well as addressing the root causes of political conflict are some of the ways through which efficient government structures may benefit a nation at large. This will lead to more political stability, economic advancement, trust between governments and citizens, thus helping alleviate political tensions in post-colonial societies.

Regional Cooperation and community engagement

Regional cooperation and community engagement could be accomplished with the help of relevant regional organizations to help with the disputes among the community and their resolution. Additionally, through this kind of cooperation issues that are related to the socio-economic and political instability of the region could be discussed and tackled through ways such as fostering peace, stability and development and most importantly ensure security by addressing common threats and resolving conflicts without violence.

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