

New Zealand After Nuclear War

THE BACKGROUND PAPERS

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BACKGROUND PAPER
1 (A) LIKELIHOOD OF NUCLEAR WAR,
1 (B) STUDY ASSUMPTIONS

460

CONTENTS

- 1a. The Likelihood of Nuclear War; 1b Study Assumptions, by the Study Team
2. Impacts on New Zealand's climate and growing season, by A.B. Mullan and M.J. Salinger
3. Impacts on New Zealand's natural environment, by Bob Brockie
4. Meeting New Zealand's food needs, by Diane Hunt
5. Effects of electromagnetic pulse on power and communications, by Gerald Coates
6. Impacts on energy systems in New Zealand, by Jeanette Fitzsimons
7. Impacts on communications systems in New Zealand, by Judith Wright with contributions from John Tiffin and Harry Whale
8. Disruptions to transport systems in New Zealand, by Judith Wright
9. Radiation effects on the environment and people of New Zealand, by Peter Roberts
10. Impacts on health and the health care systems in New Zealand, by Phillipa Kitchin
11. Human responses to disaster - a review, by Neil Britton
12. The impact on New Zealand society, by Cathy Wylie
13. Impacts on New Zealand's urban systems, by David Haigh
14. Government agencies for control and recovery in New Zealand, by John Mitchell
15. Policy options and planning approaches for the New Zealand government, by a working party
16. Initial impacts on New Zealand's financial sector, by Peter Rankin with contributions from Paul Tompkinson
17. Initial disruptions to trade and employment in New Zealand, by Kevin Makin and Campbell Gillman
18. International migration to New Zealand, by Judith Wright
19. Implications for links with South Pacific countries, by Kevin Clark and David Small

BACKGROUND PAPER 19
**IMPLICATIONS FOR LINKS WITH
SOUTH PACIFIC COUNTRIES**

by

Kevin Clark and David Small

*This is one of a set of background papers prepared, in consultation with the Nuclear Impacts Study Team, from material provided by a wide range of contributors for a study of the impacts on New Zealand of a major nuclear war. Along with other sources the papers comprised the basis of the book **New Zealand After Nuclear War**, by Wren Green, Tony Cairns and Judith Wright, published by the New Zealand Planning Council, 1987. The assumptions that the study was based on are explained in Background Paper 1, note particularly the assumption that New Zealand is not a target, and the variable assumption involving an electromagnetic pulse (EMP - for an explanation, see Background Paper 5).*

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses some of the links between New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. It addresses in regional terms some key areas, such as trade, food production, development assistance, migration, remittances, the environment, communications and transport, likely to be affected by a nuclear war.

No attempt has been made to look at the relative importance of these questions on individual countries in the region. This will be necessary to get a full picture of the regional implications of nuclear war and a clearer idea of the kinds of assistance different countries might seek from New Zealand.

A nuclear war would fundamentally change economic and social relations both within and between countries. The major preoccupation of all peoples would be survival and access to the means to ensure survival (e.g. food, shelter, medicines). Social disruption would be unavoidable but its severity would be moderated if available supplies of food and other necessary items were equitably distributed. In the longer term, access to land to enable food production will be a vital element in maintaining any degree of stability.

How would New Zealand relate to Pacific Island neighbours in this situation? Does it or should it have any commitment to or responsibility for the welfare of Pacific Island communities in the region?

This paper assumes that all countries would first and foremost consider their own needs, and assistance beyond home shores would probably be motivated by self-interest as much as humanitarian concern. This might be tempered by a belief that there is a common interest in cooperation. This is most likely to be appreciated before the event.

In this context, current constitutional, political, economic and social relationships could play a major part in determining a regional rather than a national response to nuclear war. A look at what these are and also the level of

dependence of Pacific Island countries on foreign trade, in particular raw materials, food and technology, will highlight potential areas of cooperation to be explored later in this paper.

NEW ZEALAND LINKS WITH PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

New Zealand ties with Pacific Island countries are closest where there has been common historical experience. Tokelau, the Cook Islands, Niue and Western Samoa were all territories of New Zealand and continue to have a wider range of political, economic and social relationships with New Zealand than other countries in the region. Tokelau is still a territory and the Cook Islands and Niue are self-governing. The citizens of these three are also New Zealand citizens with free access to this country. Large numbers of these island communities now live in New Zealand, work here and send money back to family in the islands.

Western Samoa has been independent since 1962 but still enjoys a special relationship with New Zealand. Each year a number of Western Samoans are able to gain permanent residence in New Zealand and there is now a large Western Samoan community. Tonga is another country with a special relationship to New Zealand. As a country never colonised and one of our closest neighbours, many of its citizens have come here on work permits and some have become permanent residents.

With the length of time that members of these different Pacific Island communities have lived in New Zealand there are now sizeable numbers of Pacific Islanders who have been born here and have spent little or no time in their family's home island.

Of the other South Pacific island countries, Fiji has the closest relationship to New Zealand. It has been independent longer than most other countries in the region and also had workers in New Zealand on work schemes. Fiji's links with Australia, however, are greater than with New Zealand.

As a member of the South Pacific Forum, New Zealand expresses a political commitment to wider regional cooperation, not only with the countries already mentioned but also with Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Nauru. Through regional organisations such as the South Pacific Commission, it also demonstrates an interest in regional cooperation with French and US territories.

Current major links with Pacific Island countries are in the transfer of goods and services and through people. Trade, development assistance, remittances and migration are amongst the most important. The infrastructure that supports this interaction, in particular transport systems and communications, are also important.

While historical relationships with Polynesian countries are strongest, New Zealand is playing an increasing role with some of the more recently independent Melanesian and Micronesian states. Trade and development assistance with these countries are growing.

THE INTEGRATION OF PACIFIC ISLAND ECONOMIES INTO THE WORLD ECONOMY

In the event of nuclear war, the dependence of Pacific Island states on the outside world would be important in considering how individual countries and communities would cope, and the extent to which they might look to New Zealand for support.

Trade

In the event of all trade with the North ceasing and limited, if any, trade within the Pacific region, Pacific economies (indeed, all economies, including New Zealand) would have to either reorient themselves towards self-reliance as a means of survival or re-establish traditional trade links between islands. The more dependent that Pacific economies and the lifestyles of their people are on world trade, the greater the adjustment would have to be.

Pacific Island states are becoming increasingly integrated into the global capitalist economy and more and more involved in international trade. This dependence goes beyond a mere desire for luxury consumer goods to a move away from self-sufficiency in food production.

The drift of people from rural to urban areas which physically removes them from their subsistence base has led to a significant and steadily increasing demand for imported food products.

Government policies, often aided by development assistance programmes, put pressure on the use of land for the development of cash crops - coconuts, coffee, sugar, cocoa and the like - to generate export funds to meet foreign exchange commitments.

The value of goods imported into the Pacific has been steadily growing, and a wider variety of goods are being imported. Although a large proportion of these imports continues to come from Australia and New Zealand, an increasing amount and range are coming from Japan, North America and Europe. In the American and French territories an even bigger proportion of imports come from the North. It is also these territories (French Polynesia, American Samoa, New Caledonia and Guam) which record the highest value of imports per capita. The lowest of these, Guam imported twice as much per capita in 1976 (A \$2,267) as the fifth highest importer, the Cook Islands.

Some of the Northern imports, notably oil, could not be substituted. A sudden and total severance of oil supplies would have a major impact throughout the Pacific Islands. The impact would be greater on the more industrialised islands such as Fiji, New Caledonia and Papua New Guinea although, with much of the demand coming from export industry, its loss may not be quite so significant. For impact on day-to-day living, the loss would be more intensely felt in more motorised societies such as Guam, with one car per 5 people, than in others such as Vanuatu and the Cook Islands with one car per 20 and 42 people respectively.

New Zealand's trade with the Pacific might be severely restricted, if not completely cut, by a lack of fuel for offshore shipping and air freight. Many of New Zealand's exports to the Pacific are non-essential items such as paper, electrical appliances, furniture and dyes. These, together with some potentially replaceable food items (for example, processed fish, vegetables, animal feed) are

own resources for reconstruction. The knowledge that New Zealand, Australian or sometimes French or American relief-supply planes will soon be on the scene is comforting but dependence-creating at the same time. In the post-nuclear war scenario, no (or relatively little) such aid would be forthcoming.

Issue for further discussion:

In the aftermath of a nuclear war, what kind of assistance would Pacific Island countries need and what is the likelihood of New Zealand being willing and able to offer this assistance?

Environment

In some Pacific countries there are signs of environmental stress caused by population pressures and "development". The extent of the damage caused by past and present nuclear testing and dumping in the region is a concern, but difficult to assess accurately.

The assumptions of temperature drops, a 50 percent increase in ultra-violet rays and the generation of other air-borne pollutants post nuclear war could have a significant effect on the Pacific. Marine life, in particular, has shown a marked sensitivity to increases in ultra-violet radiation. As one of the few areas escaping the effects of nuclear blast, the food potential of the waters of the Pacific could assume even greater importance than it currently has. With the destruction of so much land-based food production, the ocean could become the global bread-basket. Issues of the effect of Northern nuclear war on marine life as well as sovereign control of fisheries and the allocation of limited fossil fuels to fishing could become critical issues.

The effect that temperature changes and clouds of pollutants above the Pacific would have for overall weather patterns is uncertain. Cyclones in the Pacific appear to be striking more regularly and with greater devastation than in the past. It is difficult to predict what effect the anticipated environmental changes caused by a nuclear war would have on weather patterns or on the production of staple food crops in the Pacific.

The reorientation towards self-sufficiency that would be necessary after nuclear war would make any ecological unbalance serious for Pacific people.

Issue for further discussion:

To what extent might marine life in the Pacific be endangered by nuclear war in the North? What effect would expected climatic changes have on the frequency and severity of cyclones and on food production in the Pacific?

Communications

One of the first desires of people in the scenarios under discussion would be to find out about the fate of families and friends abroad. Governments would also wish to establish communication with other countries to assess the impacts of the nuclear war. Communication with the outside world would become highly sought-after. In the event of an EMP-caused breakdown in telecommunications affecting New Zealand, communication channels in the Eastern and Central Pacific could be one of

New Zealand's links to the rest of the world. Re-establishing effective operation of these few remaining channels of communication would therefore become a priority.

Transport, as a means of communication, would be limited by the shortage or absence of fossil fuels. Effective ocean-going sailing vessels would become invaluable as alternative means of transport. Some traditional communication channels might also be changed as a result. This might even extend to national boundaries. For example, people in the east of the widely scattered Cook Islands (such as the inhabitants of Penrhyn) might find links easier with French Polynesia than with the Western Cook Islands.

Issues for further discussion:

How would communication channels be established and what would be the priorities for their use? Similarly, priorities for the use of transport by sea and air would need to be determined.

Overview

The previous discussion suggests that in the eventuality of nuclear war, the countries best able to survive would be those which are currently least integrated into and dependent on international trade and technology. It does not follow from this that Pacific Island states should pursue economically isolationist policies in order to prepare themselves for the aftermath of nuclear war. Overall living standards throughout the Pacific have improved markedly in the change from subsistence living to a money economy. The exercise does, however, illustrate a trend which sees Pacific Islanders losing control of their own means of survival.

It perhaps also suggests the need for an examination in Pacific states of their ability to meet such a crisis without outside assistance or with much more limited assistance than they currently receive in emergencies.

Such an analysis would be an extension of disaster preparedness plans which already exist to prepare for a response to cyclones, hurricanes and other natural disasters that regularly hit the region.

A REGIONAL RESPONSE

As one of the few areas of the world to come through a nuclear exchange relatively unscathed, the South Pacific would assume a far greater importance in world affairs. Given the extent of the direct and indirect impact of global nuclear war on every country in the Pacific region, some international assessment of the effects and the preparation of a co-ordinated response to the establishment of order and strategies for reconstruction would be in everyone's interests. Thus, a Pacific regional body like the South Pacific Forum might become very influential.

New Zealand's identification with its regional neighbours would probably be put before historical ties and allegiances to Britain, the United States or Europe. The severance of communication links with what would be left of the North would eliminate the sort of links which had been established in "the global village". The economic and political gains for New Zealand in these links would, in any case, no longer apply.

New Zealand would need to establish a common interest with its Pacific neighbours and with the wider global community to participate in a co-ordinated Pacific response. However, New Zealand public opinion in the aftermath of nuclear war would probably (and quite naturally) be very inward-looking. The perception of New Zealand's need to survive and become self-reliant is likely to dominate over what might be seen as the luxury of an altruistic or philanthropic response to our Pacific neighbours or the wider world. It may be perceived to be against New Zealand's interests to be concerned with those more severely affected than itself.

It may, therefore, be necessary for some pre-established mandate for an internationalist approach in the event of nuclear war.

Issue for further discussion:

To what extent might it be possible or desirable for New Zealand to co-ordinate its short- and long-term response to a global disaster with neighbouring Pacific Island states?

CONCLUSION

This paper has suggested that there may be a common interest in cooperation between South Pacific states in the event of a nuclear war. Given the stresses on countries and people in responding to nuclear war, such a common interest and strategies for cooperation would need to be agreed and planned well in advance. In the possible absence of normal communication channels, a regional plan would need to be capable of being implemented with minimal consultation.

The first step in development of such a plan would be the acceptance by a number of countries that there is a common interest. This would need to be based on each country undertaking its own assessment of how it would cope with a nuclear war and the advantages of cooperation with other countries.

A New Zealand input to the South Pacific resulting from this nuclear impacts study might therefore start with promotion of the idea of national impact studies in South Pacific Island countries and consideration of assistance to enable these to be undertaken.

The South Pacific Forum might be an appropriate place to raise such an issue and provide the political commitment to establish a special working committee (maybe in the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation) to follow through the work programme defining and examining the major issues and developing a strategy for response. In one sense this could be seen as an extension to disaster preparedness planning in the region. In the end, however, whether countries in the region respond to the idea will depend on their priorities, on their current concerns weighed against future possibilities, and the availability of financial as well as human resources to undertake the work.

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