

The Pacific

Post

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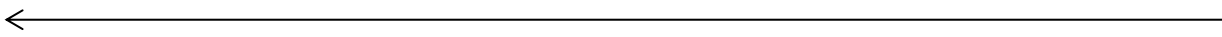
Microstate, Major Stakes: Nauru, Russia, and the Battle for Georgia's Sovereignty

Written by

Swapnarka Arnan

In the vast Pacific Ocean, the tiny island nation of Nauru, the world's third-smallest country in terms of geography, with a population of around 12,000, has a significant impact on global diplomacy. Nauru remains one of the very few countries in the world to officially recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the two pro-Moscow breakaway republics of Georgia, as recognized states. With the West intensifying its battle against Russian influence on the world stage, persuading Nauru to withdraw its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia can be a symbolic and strategic victory; a victory that affirms international law and undermines Moscow's diplomatic maneuvers.





Te Arawhata: A Kiwi connection in the heart of France

Sam Rea-Rankin

I recently had the opportunity to visit Le Quesnoy, a small, fortified town near the Franco/Belgian border and it's somewhere that may not be the first place that comes to mind when you think of Franco/Kiwi relations. Yet, this town is rich in history and holds a deep connection with Aotearoa New Zealand.

On the 4th of November 1918, Kiwi soldiers of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade liberated the village in a somewhat unconventional manner. Foregoing artillery bombardment to spare civilian lives, Kiwi soldiers instead used flaming oil barrels to provide smoke cover, and whilst an assault was being launched on the town's gate, a small detachment of men circled the wall and on a narrow platform, scaled Le Quesnoy's 13-metre ramparts with a ladder. The entry of New Zealand soldiers into the town led to the Germans' surrender. The assault on the 4th claimed the lives of 122 New Zealanders and left 375 wounded, but it resulted in the capture of roughly 2,000 German soldiers and freed the town after four years of occupation - all without a single civilian casualty.

Since the liberation, there exists an enduring connection between Le Quesnoy and Aotearoa, a great friendship to the people who came from "l'autre extrémité du monde" to liberate them. The New Zealand Liberation Museum, also named 'Te Arawhata' - meaning 'the ladder' in Te Reo Māori, was opened in Le Quesnoy in October 2023 and provides an immersive experience into the liberation of the town, allowing one to follow the footsteps of the men who participated in the assault and to connect with their stories.

I found the experience in Le Quesnoy to be incredibly moving. Run by a small and passionate team of New Zealanders in France, Te Arawhata is an incredible testament to the memories of these Kiwi soldiers who fought to liberate Le Quesnoy, and it serves as a place for New Zealanders to connect with their history on the western front.

Kei roto i tō tātou hītori, he oranga mō tātou.

Within history is our future wellbeing.

(Quote by Te Arawhata)

Caldoches: a history and an identity.

Lenka Lalie

What does "Caldoche" mean? It is a common word used in New Caledonia to talk about a specific group of people: the descendants of the prisoners sent to New-Caledonia from the 1860's to the 1990's. However, this identity tends to be simplified by the media as it has a complex history related to it.

After becoming a French colony in 1853, the small island served as a penal colony (the first one being Guyana). In 1864, the first prisoners arrived from France. The prisoners contributed to the urbanization program planned by the French State and built the streets and roads of the only city of New Caledonia: Nouméa. After serving their sentence, some prisoners went back to France, and other stayed. Some prisoners had the obligation to stay and set up in New Caledonia, as part of the settler colonialist program. These ones were given local lands by the French State, lands previously taken from the autochthone population, the Kanak. Among the prisoners who stayed, some married Kanak women, creating a mixed heritage.

Numerous confrontations occurred during the 1890's as a result of tensions between Kanaks who wanted to take their lands back, and the former prisoners and their descendants who set up their homes on these lands. This historical period, known as "Les événements" in New-Caledonia (The events) lasted from 1984 to 1988. It was marked by violent protests, strong demands and deaths. During this period of civil war, 2 main camps confronted each other: the Loyalists, who wanted New-Caledonia to remain a French territory, and the Nationalists who claimed the independence and sovereignty of the island. At that time, most of the Caldoches were Loyalists, and most of the Kanak were Nationalists. Multiple events sparked violent confrontations between the 2 communities, like murder of Yves Tual: a young student whose death triggered the anger of many Caldoches, who demanded the death of one of the Nationalists leaders held as responsible. On the road, filter checkpoints were built, either by Kanak or Caldoches, depending on the place. Groups of populations had to leave because of the threats, like hate messages scrawled on walls, or properties being burnt down...

Before being commonly called "Caldoches", the descendants of the prisoners were referred to as the "Caledonians" by the French government. There were not the only ones to be called that way, since other ethnic groups were called Caledonians, as a result of a massive immigration wave on the island, mainly workers for the mines.

At first, the term Caldoche had a pejorative sense, as it was connected to the penal past. The former prisoners and descendants struggled to assume these origins, until May 68: a delegation of young students from New-Caledonia came back from France, where they witnessed May 68 in France, when massive strikes were launched across the country, along with numerous intellectual debates and discussions, mainly organized by students. The young delegation from New-Caledonia met intellectuals and motivated students from France and all around the world. By discussing with different activists and intellectuals, they have concluded that they should embrace their origins, by encouraging their elders to tell the story and to not hide it. The descendants of French prisoners, and living in New Caledonia, were seeking a proper name that could define their cultural identity, rooted in their history. That is how the name "Caldoche" was born. The first generations of Caldoches who came back from France promoted their identity. Local intellectual figures like Louis-José Barbançon were among the first ones to open discussions with elders about their past.

Historical trajectory and cultural context have shaped the situation in New-Caledonia, "where anyone could be Caldoche because it is a social and cultural appropriation" according to the Kanak historian Henry Lalie. Both communities are in constant interactions with each other, but also with other cultural communities like Indonesians, Tahitians, Wallisians, Vietnamese...as a heritage from the past, the Caldoche families are mainly located in the north of the island, living from farming, hunting.

Caldoche has now become an identity, embraced by the holders.

Kings of the French Republic: The Unique Government system of Wallis and Futuna

Swapnarka Aman

The French Revolution stands as one of the most influential uprisings in world history. It ushered in the First French Republic and famously sent the former king to his death by guillotine. Although the monarchy was restored a few times in the years that followed, modern France remains a republic, with the revolutionary ideals of republicanism and democracy not only forming a pillar of its government but also deeply embedded in its national identity. Yet, within this republic, there are individuals still recognized as monarchs; something most French citizens are unaware of. What might seem like a contradiction is a unique political arrangement found in a remote corner of France: a group of small islands in the Pacific.

Let’s explore the fascinating history and governance of Wallis and Futuna.

Evidence of human habitation on the islands dates back to the Lapita culture, around 850–800 BCE. Their location made them natural stopover points for maritime travel. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Tongan invasions brought a mix of resistance and assimilation. Futuna retained much of its pre-Tongan society and traditions, while Wallis underwent more profound changes in its language, culture, and social structure. The islands’ early inhabitants constructed forts and other notable structures, many now in ruins, some of which were later occupied and modified by the Tongans. The French were the first Europeans to settle on the Islands in 1837 with the arrival of French missionaries. The Queen of Uvea signed a treaty in 1887 becoming a French Protectorate, and the Kings of Sigave and Alo did the same in 1888. The Islands came under the authority of the French colony of New Caledonia. In 1959 the residents of the Islands voted to become a separate territory from New Caledonia. While the Islands are a part of the French Republic, under a Statute signed in 1961, the French Government agreed to maintain three customary monarchies; Uvea in Wallis, and Ago and Sigave in Futuna. Therefore, Customary Rights of the Monarchies co-exist with

French Law.

The Monarchs are appointed by the royal families, assisted by a prime minister and a 'chefferie', which is comprised of the village chiefs. While French criminal law still applies on the islands, These Monarchies administer justice in non-criminal matters such as land disputes according to customary law. They also play a significant role in religious and customary ceremonies. What makes the monarchy in the territories even more unique is that they are not strictly hereditary, with the Kings usually selected by a from a small set of noble families by a council.

This has led to disputes and the most notable one was the 2016 dispute in Uvea. In 2016, the throne of the Kingdom of Uvea, which was vacant for two years, was filled Tominiko Halagahu was installed as King by the Great Chieftancy. Earlier in the week, tensions flared as opponents occupied the royal palace. Two days later, a rival Chieftancy then proceeded to hold its own ceremony at the palace, installing Patalione Kanimoa, a former president of the territorial assembly as their king. On the 3rd of June 2016, the French Government announced that it would recognise Kanimoa as the King. This move was denounced by Halagahu and his supporters who saw it as the French Republic interfering in the matters of the Kingdom.

France has a lengthy and sometimes contradictory history. A country formed by centuries of colonization, expansion, and cultural interaction, while also being the centre of a great revolution that dethroned a monarchy and espoused values of liberty and republicanism. The tale of Wallis and Futuna represents a small but significant chapter in France’s story. Although France is a republic that upholds democratic principles, in its most remote regions, Kings are still recognized. This cohabitation illustrates the layered structure of government, where national rules and local customs converge, rather than being an exception. As the example of France demonstrates, political systems are rarely simple; they are the result of history, identity, and compromise and are frequently far more complex than the crude classifications we employ to characterize them.

Nan Madol: Ruins of an Ancient Pacific Civilization

Swapnarka Aman

Located off the southern coast of Pohnpei in the country Micronesia is Nan Madol, a large complex of more than 100 artificial islets built on a coral reef. Constructed between 1200 and 1500 CE with serious walls of basalt and coral stones, these islets have within them the remains of stone palaces, temples, tombs, and residences. Together, they form the ceremonial heart of the Saudeleur dynasty, an era that witnessed one of the most colorful pages in the Pacific Islands' history.

Nan Madol is the only known ancient city built entirely over a coral reef, and it is surrounded by walls made of stone. Affectionately called the "Venice of the Pacific," its title translates to "between the intervals" in honor of the waterways that flow between the islets. The structures themselves are an engineering wonder of the prehistoric era: the pillars of some basalt weigh up to 100,000 pounds, but were transported and positioned without mortar, heavy machinery, or scuba gear. The largest building, Nandauwas, is a royal temple surrounded by 25-foot-high walls, which stand intact centuries after the city was deserted.

Saudeleurs appeared around the year 1100 and built Nan Madol around the early 1200s. Pohnpeian oral legend says that the first Saudeleurs to arrive on Pohnpei were two brothers, Olisihpa and Olosohpa, canoe-exploring sorcerers who were endowed with magic by the gods and used their spell to build Nan Madol. This so impressed the native Pohnpeians that they pleaded with the Saudeleur to marry into their lineage. When the death of one of the brothers came later, the second proclaimed himself as king. Nan Madol was built by the Saudeleur as a temple for the farm god Nahnisohn Sapw, the God worshiped by the Saudeleur elite.

The Saudeleur wielded political and religious authority in a manner unprecedented for the western Pacific. Ranking chiefs had the biggest houses in the city, and archaeology has produced artifacts that reflect their higher status.

Warrior hero Isokelekel conquered Pohnpei in 1628 and defeated the Saudeleur tribe. Isokelekel, in Pohnpeian oral tradition, was a demigod and the wrathful son of the Pohnpeian god of storms Nahn Sapwe, who was disillusioned with the alleged tyranny of the Saudeleur.

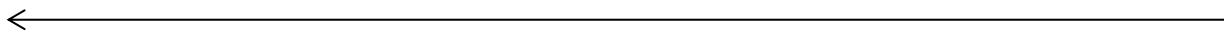
Historians believe that Isokelekel was the leader of a Micronesian settler group from the Kosrae island that bordered the Pohnpei island. Isokelekel, with his war band of warriors, women, and children, gained the favor of the Pohnpeian people who were oppressed to vanquish the Sandaleur. The significance of Nan Madol to Pohnpeians lost its value gradually and it was finally abandoned in the 18th century.

The scale, sophisticated planning, and unique placement of Nan Madol make it one of the region's most important Pacific archaeological sites. It is a testament not only to Micronesian engineering brilliance but also to the advanced social, political, and religious structures of the time. The city's plan, with nobility separated from commoners and religious leaders focused in sacred enclaves, bears witness to a highly stratified society.

The location today is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a listing of World Heritage in Danger due primarily to siltation of its water courses, uncontrolled development of mangroves, and degradation of its stone foundations. The whole 18-square-kilometer location is protected by the Pohnpei Historic and Cultural Preservation Act (2002) and administered by a management committee with the Pohnpei Tourism Office, customary landowners, and the Nahnmwarki Chief.

Nan Madol is not just an archaeological wonder; it is one of the most significant parts of Pohnpeian history and culture. The modern-day Nahnmwarki and traditional chiefs remain connected with the site, connecting the island's present to its mythological past. For tourists, Nan Madol offers a special opportunity to step into a city of rich history, shrouded in myths, where the waters splash against the hems of old stone walls, whispering stories of warriors, gods, and an extinct empire.

Sites like Nan Madol are a testament to the rich history of the Pacific Islands that often gets overlooked by the rest of the world.



Microstate, Major Stakes: Nauru, Russia, and the Battle for Georgia's Sovereignty

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In the vast Pacific Ocean, the tiny island nation of Nauru, the world's third-smallest country in terms of geography, with a population of around 12,000, has a significant impact on global diplomacy. Nauru remains one of the very few countries in the world to officially recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the two pro-Moscow breakaway republics of Georgia, as recognized states. Although Officials from the Country claim to do this because they are supporting the will of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian people, many experts, such as Dr Malakai Koloamatangi of Massey University, believe they are doing this for financial reasons. With the West intensifying its battle against Russian influence on the world stage, persuading Nauru to withdraw its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia can be a symbolic and strategic victory; a victory that affirms international law and undermines Moscow's diplomatic maneuvers. By offering focused economic aid and development programs, the United States, the European Union, Australia, and New Zealand can counteract Russia's power and persuade Nauru to side with the international community and against Russian efforts to undermine the sovereignty of other States .

How Nauru Became One of Russia's Few Allies

Nauru is no stranger to diplomatic maneuvering in exchange for economic support. Historically, it shifted between recognizing the Republic of China (commonly known as Taiwan) and the People's Republic of China based on financial incentives. The country has often used its diplomatic positions as bargaining chips, seeking aid to sustain its fragile economy. This is not uncommon in geopolitics. Honduras' relations with the ROC (Taiwan) were strained after Honduras felt they were not receiving sufficient economic aid. After switching to recognizing the People's Republic of China, they benefited economically. Following the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, Russia unilaterally recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, despite overwhelming international rejection. The West condemned Moscow's actions, insisting that the two regions remain part of Georgia's sovereign territory. However, Russia sought to bolster its claims by securing diplomatic recognition from a handful of nations, particularly those in economic distress. Nauru's decision to maintain its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia serves as a lingering diplomatic win for Moscow, one that the West should challenge.

Why This Matters to the West and Georgia

Though Nauru's diplomatic recognition does not have much influence,

its acknowledgment of Russia's secessionist republics has larger geopolitical significance:

- Undermining International Law – The Recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia not only undermines Georgian territorial sovereignty but also encourages Russia to aggressively support separatism amongst their neighbouring states and bolster their hegemonic power.
- Strengthening Russian Influence in the Pacific – Russia's ability to maintain diplomatic influence in the Pacific strengthens its ability to resist Western alliances in the region, as China also expands its presence.
- Affecting Georgia's Sovereignty – Russia uses every recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to erode Georgia's claim over its territories. Convincing Nauru to back out of its move would help to reaffirm Georgia's sovereignty in the international community.
- Testing Western Resolve – If the West can't persuade a small island state to revoke recognition, it questions the extent to which it can reverse Russian influence elsewhere.

How the West Can Bring Nauru Back

- The United States, the European Union, Australia, and New Zealand possess the leverage to influence Nauru to roll back its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The trick is to provide Nauru with the proper economic incentives that they require. Potential inducements are:
- Direct Financial Assistance – The West can provide direct financial support for the functioning of the country.
 - More Development Assistance – Australia and New Zealand already provide aid to Pacific nations. An aid package on education, health, and climate resilience can be very persuasive and beneficial.
 - More Regional Integration – Convincing Nauru to take the Pacific Islands Forum's stance, which has repeatedly condemned Russian aggression in Ukraine and elsewhere could bring it back into the fold of a group of countries supporting Georgia's sovereignty.
 - Strategic Diplomacy – Direct communication by U.S., Australian, Kiwi and European diplomats can strengthen the benefit of withdrawing recognition, especially if it opens the door to stronger ties with the EU and world financial institutions.

A Small Move with Big Implications

Persuading Nauru to reverse its acknowledgment of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would be a minor diplomatic victory, but it would be a strong signal that the West remains dedicated to resisting Russian expansionism—even on the furthest margins of the world. It would reaffirm international opposition to Moscow expansionism, consolidate Georgia's sovereignty, and discredit Russia's ability to buy diplomatic legitimacy. In a world where great-power rivalry plays out in the unlikeliest of places, even the smallest of nations can shape the world order. By acting now, the West can ensure that Nauru's foreign policy choices adhere to the standards of sovereignty, stability, and the rule of law.

THE TEAM



Lilou HARDONNIÈRE

Founder

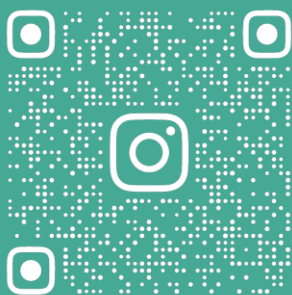


Swapnarka ARNAN

Editor in Chief



Photography by Dr. Mélissa Kodituwakku. Fatu Hiva Dance Group Practice, 2022.



Thank You



I hope you enjoyed this first edition of The Pacific Post! Exploring linguistics, food, history, gender, arts and the environment, we’re opening the door for you to explore a wonderful region of the world.

This newspaper would have been impossible without the help of our sponsors. Thank you to Sciences Po Paris, Le Havre campus for continued logistical and financial support. We also thank the Association of France – New Zealand, based in Paris for their interest in our project, their partnership and financial support. The Pacific Post’s articles can be found on our social media platform, to keep up with new editions coming up and the hottest takes in our articles. Head over to our Instagram page to discover more about the Pacific and delve into it’s waters.

