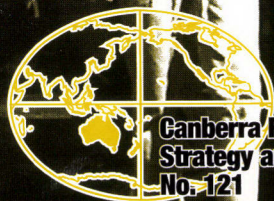


A Brief Madness: Australia and the Resumption of French Nuclear Testing

Kim Richard Nossal and Carolyn Vivian



Canberra Papers on
Strategy and Defence
No. 121

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**Published by
Strategic and Defence Studies Centre
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
Canberra
1997**

Printed and Published in Australia
at the Australian National University 1997

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National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Nossal, Kim Richard.

A brief madness : Australia and the resumption of French nuclear testing.

Bibliography.
ISBN 0 7315 2719 4.

1. Nuclear weapons - France - Testing. 2. Nuclear weapons - Public opinion - Australia. 3. Underground nuclear explosions - French Polynesia - Mururoa Atoll. 4. Nuclear weapons - France - Testing. 5. Antinuclear movement - Australia. 6. France - Foreign public opinion. 7. Australia - Foreign relations - France. I. Vivian, Carolynn Claire, 1975- . II. Australian National University. Strategic and Defence Studies Centre. III. Title. (Series : Canberra papers on strategy and defence ; no. 121).

361. 230994

Series Editor Helen Hookey
Word processing by Elza Sullivan
Cover design by Roy Blinston Design Studio
Printed by CPN Publications Pty Ltd
Published and distributed by:
Strategic and Defence Studies Centre
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
Australia

Telephone (02) 62438555
Fax (02) 62480816

Cover photograph: Demonstrators outside the French Embassy, Canberra, August 1995. Photographer Gary Schafer, used with permission of *The Canberra Times*.

ABSTRACT

In June 1995, the newly elected president of France, Jacques Chirac, announced that his government was planning to conduct a number of underground nuclear tests at the French testing facilities in Polynesia. The announcement sparked public protests around the Asia-Pacific, but nowhere was the anger at Chirac's decision more vigorous or widespread than in Australia. If anger is a 'brief madness', as Horace suggested, then over the winter of 1995, Australia was gripped by such a brief madness: hundreds of thousands of ordinary Australians, from all parts of the community, expressed their opposition to the testing, engaging in a variety of protests. This monograph traces that opposition, looking at the ways in which the anti-nuclear movement unfolded. It pays particular attention to the role of the media in shaping those protests. It also seeks to explain this brief but unprecedented spike of national anger. The authors look at the various explanations put forward to account for the outburst of Australian rage, and argue that none of them adequately explains this case. Rather, they conclude that the most potent explanation lies in the nature of the nation doing the testing rather than the testing itself.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Richard DeAngelis, Stewart Firth, Richard Leaver, and Andrew Mack for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of our work; Jena Hamilton for research assistance; and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its support under research grant 410-95-1085.

Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence are a series of monograph publications which arise out of the work of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University. Previous Canberra Papers have covered topics such as the relationship of the superpowers, arms control at both the superpower and Southeast Asian regional level, regional strategic relationships and major aspects of Australian defence policy. For a list of New Series Canberra Papers refer to the last pages of this volume.

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INTRODUCTION

Ira furor brevis est

Horace

Horace's description of anger as a brief madness is an appropriate way to characterise the reaction of Australians to the resumption of French nuclear testing in the South Pacific in 1995. For fully three and a half months after the newly elected French government of President Jacques Chirac announced on 13 June 1995 that it was going to resume nuclear testing at French facilities on Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls, a wave of public anger swept over the country, involving hundreds of thousands of Australians in protests against the French government's decision.

Of course Australians were not alone in their anger against the decision to renew nuclear testing. Public protests were held in numerous countries, both around the Asia-Pacific and in Europe, including street demonstrations and consumer boycotts of French products. In some countries, the protests turned violent: for example, protestors in the Tahitian capital of Papeete rioted, destroying much of the international airport and looting the centre of the city. In other countries, the response was more measured: for example, a small group of Thai protesters in Bangkok covered an effigy of Chirac's head with a *pha tung*, a women's garment, an action signifying extreme disrespect; a religious ritual was also performed - the French president's spirit was captured in a clay pot, had a spell put on it, and floated down the Mekong River so that his spirit would never return.¹ In some countries, the response from the public was next to imperceptible: for example, in Canada, street protests were scattered, consumer boycotts fragmented, and the issue was generally not seen to be of great political moment.²

But it can be argued that in no other country was the anger as pervasive, or as sustained, or as deep-seated as it was in Australia.

¹ *Bangkok Post*, 28 September 1995.

² See Kim Richard Nossal, 'Comparing Australian and Canadian Responses' in Stephen Alomes (ed.), *French Worlds/Pacific Worlds: France, Australia, and Pacific Nuclear Testing in Context* (forthcoming).

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Hundreds of thousands of Australians participated in protests of some kind; the variety of protest and demonstration of anger was wide, ranging from personal boycotts to organised flotillas. Moreover, this was an issue that produced almost complete unanimity among the Australian public: opinion poll figures regularly indicated that 95 per cent of Australians opposed the tests, an unusually high level of consensus on a political issue.³ So intense and widespread was the public anger that both the Australian Labor Party (ALP) prime minister, Paul Keating, and his foreign minister, Gareth Evans, were clearly taken by surprise. As we will see, the government initially scrambled to catch up with public opinion, then tried to moderate public anger as official French-Australian relations deteriorated over the winter of 1995, and then essentially gave up and simply went with the public flow. The consequence of this, as Trevor Findlay notes, was an unprecedented convergence in Australian political life: virtual unanimity on a foreign policy issue.⁴

This monograph has two purposes. The first is to provide a history of this brief episode of public anger over a security policy issue. While a number of authors have surveyed this latest phase in the long and contentious quarrel between France and Australia over nuclear testing, none of them provides a comprehensive account of the many manifestations of the anger of ordinary Australians at the resumption of French testing.⁵ Our purpose is to provide as full an account of the protests as possible - to demonstrate how pervasive, and how deep-seated, the anger was across the country.

Our second purpose is to explain the Australian rage in the French case, and explore the various arguments that have been put to account for the wave of anger. We will show that although an explanation for this anger may seem obvious enough - concern over the environmental and strategic implications of abandoning the moratorium announced in 1992 - in fact there is a complex of reasons that go well beyond the obvious concern over environmental damage,

3 A June Newspoll revealed that one per cent of Australians favoured the tests; 95 per cent were opposed (*Australian*, 27 June 1995); in a September poll, three per cent thought that the testing was 'right' and 96 per cent thought it 'wrong' (*Sun-Herald*, 10 September 1995).

4 Trevor Findlay, 'Explaining Australasian Angst: Australia, New Zealand and French Nuclear Testing', *Security Dialogue*, Vol.26, No.4, 1995, p.380.

5 A bibliography of the considerable literature on the resumption issue is provided at page 63.

and go to the very nature of the country doing the testing. In doing so, our hope is also that this case will provide an interesting, and illustrative, case study of public involvement in foreign and security policy, a topic that has not received a great deal of attention.⁶

This monograph proceeds in four parts. First, we survey briefly the background to French nuclear testing in the South Pacific, and provide an overview of the Australian government's reactions to the testing and the policy it pursued after June 1995. However, because the focus of this monograph is on public reaction and its causes, we do not explore government policy in great depth. The second chapter examines the reaction of ordinary Australians. We examine the nature of the protests, the range of protestors, and the tenor and tone of their anger.

We devote a separate chapter to an exploration of the media and its role in this particular issue. As we will show, both the electronic and print media played a crucial role in shaping the issue for the public, and in legitimising the terms of the protest. Indeed, the media itself became a protestor, and very much part of the Australian response.

The fourth chapter explores how we might understand this extraordinary, even if brief, explosion of anger in the Australian body politic in the winter of 1995. We explore a number of arguments that have been advanced to explain the depth and breadth of Australian anger. Some have argued that the anger was driven by domestic political imperatives that grew out of the impending general elections. Others, including President Jacques Chirac himself, have argued that the anger was merely the result of 'media-isation' - in other words, the creation of the Australian media. A third line of argument suggests that Australians saw this primarily as a neighbourhood issue, angered by the willingness of a European colonial power to conduct tests that it would never dream of conducting in the French metropole. In a related vein, the anger could be interpreted as a manifestation of the

⁶ J.W. Hudson, 'The Australian People and Foreign Policy' and Hugh Smith, 'Foreign Policy and the Political Process' in F.A. Mediansky and A.C. Palfreeman (eds), *In Pursuit of National Interests: Australian Foreign Policy in the 1990s* (Pergamon Australia, Sydney, 1988), pp.17-44; Kim Richard Nossal, 'The Rage of Nations: the Cases of Australia and French Nuclear Testing and Hong Kong and the Diaoyutai/Senkaku-shotō', Canadian Political Science Association, St John's, Newfoundland, 9 June 1997.

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wider definition of national security in the post-Cold War period. In this view, no longer are Australian perceptions of external threat fixed on military/security issues as they were in the past, but threats are defined more broadly to include such 'threats' as that posed by testing nuclear weapons. Others still see the anger as an outgrowth of the anti-nuclear sentiments that have deep roots in Australian politics.

We argue, however, that none of these factors offers a fully satisfactory explanation of anger at the French in 1995. These factors might provide solid permissive or proximate causes, but they do not answer one important question: why were so many Australians so angry at France - and willing to express that anger in a variety of imaginative and often idiosyncratic ways - but not at all angry at China, which also conducted two underground tests at precisely the same time? The relatively muted response to the Chinese tests prompts us to explore the possibility that the widespread anger in Australia had more to do with the nation doing the testing than the testing itself. Indeed, we conclude that a number of factors combined to make France an inviting target for national anger, including French pretensions to great-power status, the carefully cultured arrogance of the French president - not to mention the relative costlessness of venting rage in this case.

CHAPTER 1

THE FRENCH DECISION AND THE AUSTRALIAN RESPONSE

To set the stage for an examination of the reaction of Australians to the resumption of French nuclear testing in 1995, we begin with a brief survey of the French nuclear testing programme. We then examine the reaction of the Australian government to the Chirac announcement in June 1995 and the subsequent efforts of the government to meet the demands of the Australian public.

French Nuclear Testing

The French government began testing nuclear weapons in February 1960, when it conducted underground tests in the Sahara desert in Algeria. After the achievement of Algerian independence, the French government established the Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique, located on two atolls in the Tuamotu archipelago in French Polynesia, Moruroa and Fangataufa, some 1200 km south-east of Tahiti. Because of the remoteness of the islands, the French government decided to switch to atmospheric testing; the first test was held on 2 July 1966. Between then and 1974, 41 atmospheric tests were held.

However, France faced mounting international opposition to atmospheric testing, particularly from the South Pacific region. Australia and New Zealand eventually took France to the International Court of Justice to seek an end to atmospheric testing. Although France rejected the finding of the ICJ, it did finally decide to limit its testing to underground detonations. From 1975 until 1992, some 134 underground tests were held. The strident opposition in the region did not, however, abate, with the French government of President François Mitterrand, a Socialist, even going so far as to authorise the blowing up of a Greenpeace protest vessel, *Rainbow Warrior*, as it lay docked in Auckland harbour, killing Fernando Pereira, one of the crew members.

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The end of the Cold War produced a change in French policy on nuclear testing. Although Mitterrand had been committed to nuclear testing throughout his long tenure as president, French policy shifted. On 8 April 1992, his prime minister, Pierre Bérégovoy, announced a temporary moratorium on French nuclear testing. During the signing ceremony of the Chemical Weapons Convention on 13 January 1993, Mitterrand announced that France would refrain from testing as long as the United States and Russia did.

Between 1993 and 1995 the socialists lost power to the Gaullists: the parliamentary elections in France in March 1993 brought a conservative majority to the National Assembly and the nomination of Edouard Balladur as premier; and in the presidential elections of April and May 1995, Jacques Chirac won the presidency. This change in government would have considerable implications for French defence policy. Chirac was deeply attached to the Gaullist ideal of a *force de frappe*, and was on record as wishing to reverse Mitterrand's decision.¹ Moreover, the French ministry of defence strongly supported the idea of testing an early production model of the TN-75 warhead, to be deployed on the French submarine fleet.

As a result, the decision announced on 13 June 1995 should have come as little surprise. However, the announcement came with a sweetener: the tests to be conducted were to be the last nuclear tests at this facility. Following eight more tests, which would be completed before 31 May 1996, France would sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty at the treaty's renewal in September 1996.

Before the tests began, a ship belonging to Greenpeace, *Rainbow Warrior II*, set sail for Moruroa. Its purpose was to enter an exclusion zone of twelve nautical miles created by the French around the atoll to register a protest. It arrived at the test site on 10 July 1995, not coincidentally ten years to the day after the bombing of the original *Rainbow Warrior*. As *Rainbow Warrior II* entered the exclusion zone, French commandos boarded the ship and smashed their way onto the bridge.

¹ On Chirac, see Shaun Gregory, *Les Essais Nucléaires: France and the Nuclear Weapons Testing Resumption Decision*, Occasional Paper No.44 (Indian Ocean Centre for Peace Studies, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, WA, 1995).

The French Decision and the Australian Response 7

The first test occurred on 5 September 1995 local time - already 6 September in Australia. On the eve of the test, Chirac gave a television interview in France during which he indicated that the test programme might be shortened. Referring to a programme of 'six to eight' tests (rather than the original eight), the president claimed that if French scientists had the information they needed, the testing would be brought to an end more quickly. A second test was held on 1 October (2 October in Australia), followed by four more in rapid succession, with the last test occurring on 27 January 1996. Following that, the French government announced that it would be closing its South Pacific centre and signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

The Australian Government's Response

When Chirac was elected on 7 May, the ALP government of Paul Keating had a strong suspicion that nuclear testing would be resumed. For that reason, Gareth Evans, the minister for foreign affairs, appealed to the new government to maintain the suspension of tests introduced by its predecessor.² Perhaps this is why the government in Canberra initially responded to the announcement of the resumption of the tests with resignation tinged with a certain relief that these were going to be the final tests.

On 14 June, when the announcement reached Australia, the prime minister issued a formal protest 'deploring' the resumption of tests, noting matter-of-factly that he would be contacting other countries about registering a protest. The government immediately decided that the resumption demanded a concrete response: the sanction chosen was the freezing of all defence cooperation activities between Australia and France.³

The minister for foreign affairs, Gareth Evans, was in Tokyo: he echoed Keating, deploring the resumption and saying that 'the decision is not unexpected but it is very deeply disappointing'. At a press conference, he was asked by a reporter whether he favoured a more 'muscle-bound' response. Evans argued that such responses as sending a frigate to the testing site - favoured by the Liberal opposition foreign affairs critic, Alexander Downer - was 'adolescent grand-

² Media Release, 12 May 1995: <http://www.intexpress.co.nz/chrono.html>.

³ Media Release, 14 June 1995.

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standing of the worst kind'. However, he also tried to explain why in his view a 'muscle-bound' response would not be appropriate because this round of testing differed from the past: these tests were to be limited in number and limited in duration, and that at the end of them there would be a French commitment to a comprehensive test ban. The journalist then asked: 'Are you saying that the French decision to go ahead then is not as bad as what it could have been?'. Evans responded: 'Exactly. If the testing had been open-ended, if it had been unaccompanied by any commitment to participate in test ban treaty negotiations ... then the context then would have been very, very different ...'. The journalist persisted by expressing surprise at the response, saying that in New Zealand people were outraged and concerned about the health effects. Evans responded by suggesting that 'one has to keep things in proportion', and expanded his argument for a measured response.⁴

Unfortunately for Evans, the press in Australia did not report him beyond the word 'Exactly'. As a result, the government was widely seen as greeting the French announcement philosophically - saying that it could have been worse. It marked the Australian government's reaction as 'too soft' from the outset. Pressure mounted for the embrace of a more militant and radical posture towards the French, much to Evans's exasperation: on the eve of a meeting with Hervé de Charette, the French foreign minister, Evans asked: 'What am I supposed to do? Spit in his eye, stamp on his foot?'.⁵

Greeted by the rising tide of public anger, and dissension within its own caucus, the government moved to sharpen its response and move more in line with the public mood. On the evening of 22 June, the Cabinet met and decided to add to its punitive measures. On 23 June, the government announced that it had decided to recall its ambassador to Paris, Alan Brown, 'for consultations', albeit only temporarily, the government rejecting repeated and widespread calls for a closure of the Australian embassy in Paris. It also decided to intensify the freeze on its defence relations with France. The additional defence measures included a ban on visits by French naval vessels, military aircraft, or officers until after the tests; no French

⁴ The full transcripts of Evans's two press conferences in Tokyo are reprinted in Australia, Parliament, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* [hereafter CPD], Senate, 22 June 1995, pp. 1662-8.

⁵ *Australian*, 21 June 1995.

students would be allowed to attend Australian training courses; Australian students would be banned from a French language course in New Caledonia. While the government refused to entertain the idea of trade sanctions, it did impose a ban on any new contract for the sale of uranium until France signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

The Cabinet also decided to pursue action in a multilateral regional setting: Keating promised that members of the South Pacific Forum would discuss what action could be taken against the French, including the possibility of boycotting the South Pacific Games due to be held in Tahiti in August; he also promised to convene a meeting of South Pacific environment ministers for talks on the environmental impact of the testing.⁶

The government also decided to try public diplomacy, taking the Australian dismay with the testing decision directly to the French people. For example, Keating wrote an open letter to the French people, published in *Le Monde* on 28 June; an interview with Evans appeared in *Le Figaro*. An all-party parliamentary delegation was despatched to Paris to lobby for a halt to the tests. And eventually the government decided to provide funds to support the participation of state and federal politicians from all parties in a protest flotilla to the test site (discussed in more detail in the next chapter).

At each of the subsequent crisis points in the resumption issue, government officials maintained a hard rhetorical line criticising the French. For example, after the *Rainbow Warrior II* boarding, Evans denounced it as 'indefensible' and said that in the post-Cold War era, this was 'the last twitch of the dinosaur'.⁷ And at each point the government was pressed to add to the concrete sanctions against France.

For example, there was consistent pressure to interrupt Australian trade with France.⁸ The two-way trade was relatively small: \$1.8 billion, about two per cent of all Australian trade. Among imports, the most valuable items were French cosmetics and circuitry

6 *Age*, 24 June 1995.

7 *Canberra Times*, 11 July 1995.

8 For a survey of the evolution of Australia's economic relations with Western Europe, see J.L. Richardson, 'Australia and Western Europe' in P.J. Boyce and J.R. Angel (eds), *Diplomacy in the Marketplace: Australia in World Affairs, 1981-90* (Longman Cheshire, Sydney, 1992), pp.208-24.

(\$190 million). Other imports included medicines, chemicals, alcohol, engineering equipment, and cars. Over half of the \$763 million in Australian exports to France were wool and coal; other products included agricultural produce, uranium, and aviation equipment. However, the government persistently refused to consider a trade ban, despite the relatively small two-way trade.

There was also pressure to exclude French companies from bidding on public works. At the state level, the involvement of French firms in water privatisation in South Australia, waste-water projects in New South Wales, and electricity privatisation and the Melbourne CityLink expressway in Victoria had prompted calls for state sanctions against France. At the Commonwealth level, the most attractive target besides repudiating contracts for uranium sales was defence contracts that French firms might bid on. Indeed, factional politics within the ALP itself fixed on this as a possible sanction: the parliamentary Left of the ALP was at the forefront of pressure on the government to refuse to allow French contractors to bid on a range of upcoming defence projects, including the new lead-in fighter (LIF) for the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), ANZAC frigate helicopters, army light armoured vehicles, and the Royal Australian Navy's hydrographic ship replacement programme.⁹

The consequence of this pressure was a compromise of sorts. At the 22 June meeting when the Cabinet decided to stiffen Australia's response by embracing a range of new measures, it was also decided that the minister for defence, Robert Ray, should, 'at a time of his choosing', select one of the defence projects, and exclude a French prime contractor from tendering. While this was not included in the announcement of new measures on 23 June, hints of such retaliation were contained in the Australian government's *démarche* to the French that same day. Paris was told that all defence contracts that involved the possibility of a French contractor would receive the 'personal attention' of the minister.

Although he was reported to be 'pissed off' that his Cabinet colleagues had singled out defence contracts as the 'easy option',¹⁰ Ray took the Cabinet decision literally. On 1 August, apparently

⁹ *Australian Financial Review*, 21 June 1995.

¹⁰ Geoff Kitney and David Lague, 'How Ray had to go it alone against the French', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August 1995.

without telling either the prime minister, or members of the Cabinet meeting which he had attended the day before, Ray suddenly announced that the French firm Dassault Aviation would be barred from bidding on the \$740 million contract for a new lead-in fighter for the RAAF to replace its ageing Macchi 326 trainers. Although Ray admitted Dassault's Alpha Jet was not a 'hot favourite' with the RAAF, he was nonetheless excluding Dassault in protest over the testing.¹¹

This produced yet another deterioration in relations, perhaps not surprising given the close personal connections between Chirac and Dassault. After Dassault was banned from tendering for the LIF, the Chirac government reportedly considered invoking trade sanctions against Australia. In the end, however, Paris limited its response to withdrawing *Electricité de France* from the bidding for privatisation in Victoria,¹² and recalling the French ambassador, Dominique Girard. As he left Australia, Girard expressed concern about the state of the bilateral relationship, particularly criticising the refusal of the Australian government to override union bans on the provision of services to French diplomatic missions, which, as Karin von Strokirch notes, put the Keating government in breach of its obligations under international conventions regarding diplomatic missions.¹³ Girard observed that when France was at war with Iraq, no one would have thought of denying services to the Iraqi embassy in Paris. 'Are we at war with Australia?'.¹⁴ Although he answered 'I don't think so', there is little doubt that relations between France and Australia had soured dramatically over the course of the winter.

Following the first test in September, the government maintained its rhetorical condemnation. Keating, for example, banded the test as 'an act of stupidity'.¹⁵ More concrete steps were also taken. The French ambassador to Canberra was called in. Canberra bruited the possibility of expelling France from the South Pacific Forum or suspending its observer status. But despite the progressive stiffening of the government's position over the course of the winter, public opinion was clearly not satisfied. For example, a September poll

11 *Australian Defence Report*, 3 August 1995, p. 3; *Defense News*, 7-13 August 1995.

12 *Age*, 5 August 1995.

13 Karin von Strokirch, 'The Political Fallout from French Testing in the Pacific', *Pacific Research*, Vol.8, No.3, August 1995, p. 6.

14 *Australian Financial Review*, 3 August 1995.

15 *Australian*, 7 September 1995.

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revealed that 75 per cent favoured stopping uranium exports to France; 60 per cent believed that Australia should send a naval vessel to the test site in protest; and half believed that the Australian ambassador to Paris should be recalled permanently.¹⁶ However, Chirac's announcement before the first test that the French government was planning to limit the number of tests took the pressure off the government for further measures, and the issue diminished in political salience over the spring.

¹⁶ *Age*, 19 September 1995.

CHAPTER 2

PROTESTS AND PROTESTORS: THE POPULAR RESPONSE

Although the decision was announced in Paris on 13 June, the newspapers for 14 June in Australia had already been put to bed, so that Australians learned of the French decision on the morning of 14 June from radio and television newscasts. However, throughout the day on the 14th, a wave of public protests swept across the country; the first protests were being reported on the television news on the evening of the 14th; the first reporting by newspapers was in their 15 June editions.

The reaction of the public to the resumption of French testing was one of widespread and sustained anger. The anger was manifested in various ways: in mass demonstrations, protest flotillas, boycotts, destruction or defilement of things French (or which just sounded French). Likewise, numerous groups were involved in protests: non-governmental organisations, unions, churches, state and local governments, political parties. And hundreds of thousands of individuals contributed in small, and often idiosyncratic ways. To the panoply of protest we now turn.

Mass Demonstrations

Hundreds of thousands of Australians participated in mass protests against the decision; these took the form of street demonstrations, rallies, petitions, and letter-writing. Large numbers took to the streets in protest marches. Major rallies were organised for key dates: Bastille Day in July, the fiftieth anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in August, and following the first test in September. The Bastille Day demonstration in Sydney was attended by an estimated 25,000 people.¹ On 6 August, 15,000 people marched past the French and United States consulates; in Sydney, approximately the same number paraded through town led by 100 Japanese schoolchildren from the Hiroshima region. Smaller

¹ *Weekend Australian*, 15-16 July 1995.

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demonstrations were held in other cities: 6000 in Perth, 3000 in Adelaide, 1000 in Brisbane. The protests tended to bring together a wide cross-section of Australian society, and all age groups. Children were prominent in many of the protests: in the Bastille Day demonstration in Canberra, for example, one young child struggled with a placard that read 'My mum told me nuclear testing hurts'.²

Petition-signing was another way in which mass opinion was expressed in this case. Numerous petitions were organised around the country by community groups, by school teachers, and non-governmental organisations. Many were formally brought before the Commonwealth parliament. For example, on 28 August, members of the House of Representatives brought 15 petitions on the testing issue.³ The Body Shop and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's ABC Shops organised an Australia-wide petition: some 500,000 postcards addressed to Chirac were handed out by outlets in every Australian city. The Australian Conservation Foundation delivered nearly 2000 protest postcards to Chirac. Petitions were even placed on the World Wide Web.⁴

A common target of mass demonstrations were French diplomatic missions, particularly the embassy in Canberra and the consulate-general in Sydney, and the consulates in Melbourne and Brisbane. According to the French ambassador to Australia, Dominique Girard, the embassy in Canberra was inundated with 13,000 letters of protest in two months; Thierry Viteau, the French consul-general in Sydney, estimated that between June and September, some 30,000 Australians had registered a protest in some fashion at the consulate.⁵

A different kind of mass demonstration of Australian sentiment was organised by the advertising firm Saatchi and Saatchi. The company joined forces with the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian College of Physicians to fund a full-page

2 Reuters News Service, 14 July 1995.

3 CPD, Representatives, 28 August 1995, pp. 597-606.

4 Sites included: <http://www.macmedia.com.au/nuke/webpage.html> and <http://www.radek.slu.se/radio/french.htm>.

5 *The Bulletin*, 10 October 1995, p.26; *Mercury*, 8 September 1995.

advertisement in Parisian newspapers outlining Australian anger at the testing.⁶

Yet another means of communication was the 'Fax the French on Fridays' campaign organised by Duncan Gaye, a National Party Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) in New South Wales. The campaign had two purposes: its literal purpose was to encourage people to send a message to the French government; but it also was openly designed to create a nuisance, by tying up fax lines once a week. By the time Gaye organised his campaign in late June, many of the fax numbers of French diplomatic missions in Australia had already been withdrawn from service because of the number of nuisance faxes that had been sent by Australian protestors; the campaign provided overseas fax numbers for the Elysée Palace and the French defence ministry.

Defilement of Things French

Many acts of protest centred around defiling symbols of France or 'Frenchness'. Thus, many of the 16,000 French-born Australians who spoke accented English suffered personal abuse when they opened their mouths in public; others with French-sounding names often suffered a similar fate. People driving French cars were publicly jeered. Berets and croissants were spat upon, French loaves were stomped into crumbs, a Peugeot was dropped on an effigy of Chirac. The French flag was burned at the 6 September protests in Brisbane and Sydney (with one enterprising shop in Granville displaying a sign 'For burning: French flags, \$4').⁷

At times, however, the defilement became distinctly unpleasant. On 16 June, for example, Andrew Denton, a presenter with the Seven Network, arranged to have two tonnes of manure dumped on the driveway of the French embassy in Canberra; in a copy-cat move, bags of excrement were delivered to the French consulate in Brisbane. Patisseries and French restaurants had their storefronts smashed;⁸ a packet of French cakes purchased in a Brisbane suburban supermarket was found to be sprinkled with shards of glass;

⁶ For more information, see <http://www.macmedia.com.au/nuke/medical.html>.

⁷ *Courier-Mail*, 7 September 1995; *Australian*, 7 September 1995; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 September 1995.

⁸ For example, *Age*, 19 June 1995; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 June 1995.

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French cars - Peugeots, Citroëns, and Renaults - were frequently vandalised, their tyres slashed or their paint scraped, the efforts of their owners to demonstrate antipathy to the tests by bumper stickers seemingly to no avail; in his survey, Glen Barclay even reports that a couple in Sunnybank, a suburb of Brisbane, out walking their French poodle, was set upon by hoodlums and their dog beaten to death.⁹

The only other significant act of violence was the fire-bombing of the premises of Robert Pearce, the honorary consul of France in Perth, in the early hours of 18 June. Pearce, a plastic surgeon, had received a number of abusive faxes in the week before, as had William Cornelupe in Adelaide.¹⁰ However, no special precautions had been taken or protection offered. As a result of the fire, the medical practice adjacent to the residence was largely destroyed in the attack. An anonymous call to Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) radio in Sydney said that an organisation, the Pacific Popular Front, was claiming responsibility for the fire-bombing in what the caller claimed was an attack on French belligerence. Police in Perth subsequently arrested Michael Kelleher, a 20-year-old student who went by the alias Bosco Boscovitch. Put on trial in Perth in July, he pleaded guilty to arson, revealing that he had decided to fire-bomb the honorary consulate on the day he learned of the French decision. He was sentenced to three years in jail.

Such actions directed against things Gallic prompted the Alliance Française in Sydney and other cities to cancel Bastille Day celebrations because of safety considerations; the French embassy in Canberra moved its Bastille Day festivities from the embassy to a commercial venue for the same reason.

Boycotts

There were widespread boycotts of French goods and services. Indeed some goods and services that just sounded French were targets of abuse: for example, french polishers reported receiving abusive phone calls; one french polishing firm in Melbourne was vandalised. French restaurants (or merely restaurants with French names) bore

⁹ Glen St John Barclay, 'Problems in Australian Foreign Policy, January-June 1995', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.41, No.3, 1995, pp.352-3.
¹⁰ *Advertiser*, 19 June 1995.

much of the brunt of the public anger. Restaurant owners reported receiving abusive phone calls; restaurants had their plateglass windows smeared with faeces; they had to put up with protest pranks such as bogus party bookings.¹¹ Les Amis in the Melbourne suburb of Upwey was graffitied with the words 'Les Enemy'; Frenchy's restaurant, also in Melbourne, reported a loss of almost half of its business.

Many French restaurants simply changed their names to avoid the abuse: Clichy in the Melbourne suburb of Collingwood became Clicky; Le Café Provençal in the Canberra suburb of Red Hill became the Cafe Gondwana.¹² Likewise, stores with French names or services tried hard to distance themselves from the tests - not only to demonstrate solidarity but also to avert consumer boycotts. In Sydney, the owner of French Plus, a cafe, put up placards that said 'Anti-Nuclear Plus' and 'Down with Chirac'; many merchants displayed 'French with Sense' stickers. Likewise, companies selling product lines with French-sounding names - Le Tan suntan lotion and Creme Caramel - ran television advertisements disassociating themselves from the testing.

A more significant target for boycott action was Australian uranium. For example, the Ranger mine in the Northern Territory, owned by Energy Resources Australia (ERA) and a French nuclear company, had a 13-year contract that expired in 2001 to supply approximately 270 tonnes of uranium oxide worth \$12 million to the French power company, Electricité de France. Considerable pressure was exerted on governments at both the Commonwealth and state levels to ban such shipments. For example, the parliamentary Left of the ALP pressed the government for a full ban on uranium sales to France, a call echoed by others, such as Leigh Hubbard, secretary of the Victorian Trades Hall Council, and Ben Pearson of Greenpeace.¹³ Eventually, the Ranger uranium mine postponed a shipment of uranium oxide to France, citing 'high emotions'.¹⁴

Other boycotts included the following: a decision by Qantas flight attendants to refuse to handle French products on flights; one

11 *Australian*, 9 July 1995.

12 *Canberra Times*, 9 July 1995.

13 *Australian*, 22 June 1995, 7 August 1995; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 September 1995.

14 *Age*, 8 September 1995.

hotel, Novotel at Darling Harbour, decided to cancel its Bastille Day celebrations; Remy Australia cancelled Sydney's premier fund-raising event, the Cointreau Ball; Renault had orders for trucks cancelled; tour bookings by Australians to French territories in the South Pacific fell off.¹⁵

A survey of Australian-French trade conducted a year later revealed that trade between the two countries fell sharply during the first six months of 1996. Sales of French goods in Australia did drop. Sales of Renaults fell 30 per cent (though it should be noted the company's withdrawal from the Australian market in 1996 was caused by a dispute between Renault and its Australian distributor rather than because of nuclear testing). Citroën sales slumped, and the company began offering a \$5000 cash-back offer to boost sales. To recover its market share, Automobiles Peugeot undertook a major 'image overhaul' in 1996, picking up a \$2 million sponsorship of a National Gallery exhibition. Luxury goods reportedly fell by up to 50 per cent, according to Bob Somerville, director of the French-Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. French champagne sales fell 20 per cent over comparable periods from the previous year.¹⁶

Union Protests

Unions were at the forefront of some of the boycott activities. The president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), Martin Ferguson, called the decision to resume the tests 'contemptuous', and suggested that France conduct tests 'in Bordeaux, not our back yard'. Arguing that the trade union movement should 'mobilise around this issue', Ferguson encouraged the use of bans and boycotts. In September, he endorsed a national boycott of all French products, calling in particular on the 'top end of town' to boycott luxury products from France.¹⁷

The union movement responded. Firefighters in New South Wales quickly decided to add their voice to the protests. On 17 June, the NSW Fire Brigade Employees Union instructed its members not to

15 *Age*, 30 September 1995.

16 *Australian*, 10-11 August 1996; *The Bulletin*, 26 November 1996, p.28.

17 *Australian*, 15 June 1995; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 September 1995.

fight fires in the premises of the French consulate, which was located in St Martin's Tower at 31 Market Street, Sydney. Chris Read, the union's secretary, claimed that the ban was intended to send a 'strong message to France' because the Australian government 'hasn't done enough'. This ban happened to be announced on the very weekend that the French honorary consul's premises were fire-bombed in Perth; the union quickly lifted its ban, Read sheepishly admitting that they had never imagined that anyone would actually fire-bomb French premises.¹⁸

The embarrassment of the NSW firefighters did not deter other unions. At the end of June, the Maritime Union of Australia began rolling bans in order to disrupt shipping schedules; John Coombs, the union's national secretary, claimed that disrupting the schedules was the surest way to drive shippers out of business (prompting Greg Bondar, the director of the Australian Chamber of Shipping, to note sourly that the only impact of that would be on the Australian owners of cargo).¹⁹

In early July, the Communications, Electrical, and Plumbing Union refused to provide services to French diplomatic establishments in Australia. In violation of Australia's international commitments under the Vienna conventions governing diplomatic relations, telecommunications services were interrupted, and mail delivery was suspended. The union even seized and held a French diplomatic bag in Melbourne, which was only released after the minister for development cooperation and Pacific Island affairs, Gordon Bilney, negotiated its release with the union leadership.²⁰

Other rolling 'black bans' were imposed on services to Air France aircraft and French air cargo. Unions threatened possible action against the French teams in the Formula One Grand Prix scheduled for Adelaide in November 1995 and Melbourne in March 1996.²¹ In the Northern Territory, the Trades and Labour Council decided in September to 'frustrate and delay' the export of uranium oxide.²²

18 See *Sun-Herald*, 18 June 1995, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 and 20 June 1995.

19 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 June 1995.

20 *Australian*, 22 July 1995.

21 *Australian*, 7 September 1995.

22 *Australian*, 14 and 15 September 1995.

State and Local Governments

Governments at other levels added their voices to the protests. Although foreign policy is not normally a state concern, virtually all state legislatures held debates on the nuclear testing issue, providing legislators with an opportunity to vent what was barely disguised anger. And premiers also took an opportunity to make their sentiments known. For example, in New South Wales, the ALP premier, Bob Carr, denounced the tests as an 'unforgivable act of environmental vandalism'. The state government cancelled the annual Bastille Day celebration at La Perouse Museum. It organised a series of 'protest picnics' in cities and towns around the state on 17 September. As Carr described them, the picnics were designed to 'mobilis[e] the sorts of Australians who wouldn't normally go to a political demonstration', claiming that he wanted 'the world to see Australian families out in our beautiful parks and gardens demonstrating peacefully about what the French are doing in the Pacific'.²³ The NSW minister responsible for the 2000 Olympics publicly wondered whether the state would use French firms in the construction of the Olympic site.²⁴

In Victoria, the premier, Jeff Kennett, responded to the first test by calling it 'a bloody disgrace';²⁵ in the legislative assembly he said he was 'appalled' and 'outraged at the insensitivity' of the French government and the 'bloody-mindedness of the French president'. The Liberal government supported a resolution introduced by the ALP opposition calling on France to halt all future tests.²⁶

In Tasmania, there were several debates over the winter of 1995, with representatives of all major parties expressing their anger. The minister for the environment said that when he heard the news, 'I felt sick and disgusted ... I felt angry and wanted to take action'. The premier, Ray Groom, denounced the testing as 'disgraceful', claiming that it was 'totally offensive' to the people of the region. He suggested that Chirac was just 'beating his chest, wanting to make a hero of himself'. And while he did not endorse government boycotts, he did not regard individual protest actions as inappropriate: 'Enjoy a nice

23 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 September 1995.

24 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 June 1995.

25 *Age*, 7 September 1995.

26 Victoria, Parliament, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates*, 52nd Parl., 2nd sess., 6 September 1995, pp.71-6, 96.

Tasmanian wine - and similarly Tasmanian cheese', Groom suggested. F.M. Bladel of the ALP termed the testing a 'wicked action' that reflected a 'tremendously racist, oppressive attitude towards small nations of Pacific people'.²⁷

Formal motions condemning the testing were introduced in a number of states, with both government and opposition parties aware enough of the popular mood to compromise over wording. Thus in the Northern Territory, Shane Stone, the chief minister, and Brian Ede, the opposition leader, quarrelled over the implications of uranium exports from the territory before coming to a compromise over the wording of a compromise motion; in August, after the People's Republic of China tested a nuclear weapon, an opposition motion condemning both China and France was readily accepted by the government.²⁸ In South Australia, the Australian Democrats sought approval of a condemnatory motion that called for a complete ban on uranium sales to France from the mine at Roxby Downs, a ban on South Australian government purchases of French goods and services, and a ban on allowing French firms to tender on privatisation of the state's water and waste systems.²⁹ In Queensland, Wayne Goss, the premier, expressed his 'disgust' after the first test, and introduced a motion condemning the resumption; the motion was supported by Robert Borbidge (National Party: Surfers Paradise), leader of the opposition, who characterised the test as 'an act of international vandalism', and said that the treatment of the Polynesians was 'more akin to that of a Stalinist police state'.³⁰

Municipal governments also registered their concerns. First off the mark was Ipswich City Council in Queensland: the very day they learned of the announcement - 14 June - the council slapped a ban on the purchase of all French products, with one councillor, Paul Tully, arguing that 'these arrogant French bastards must be stopped at all costs'.³¹ Bans against the purchase of French products were embraced by the Inner Metropolitan Regional Organisation of Councils in

27 Tasmania, House of Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates*, 42nd Parl., 4th sess., 20-23 June 1995, p.1361.

28 Northern Territory, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Record*, 20 and 22 June 1995, pp. 3858-9, 4284-95, and 4304-5; 24 August 1995, pp.4811-13.

29 South Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates*, 48th Parl., 5 and 27 July 1995, pp. 2217-18, 2570-1.

30 Queensland, *Official Record*, 7 September 1995, pp. 25-8.

31 *Age*, 15 June 1995.

Sydney, a group that included ten local councils.³² Tom Pyne, the mayor of Cairns, claimed he was 'bloody upset' at the decision, and called on Australians to pelt French diplomatic establishments with dead cane toads. For his part, he shipped a stuffed and lacquered cane toad to Chirac personally.³³ Jim Soorley, the ALP mayor of Brisbane, demanded that the Commonwealth government close its embassy in Paris, and ripped up his sister-city agreement with Nice. Brisbane City Council restored the city's 'nuclear free zone' status and banned French companies from tendering for any council business.³⁴ The lord mayor of Adelaide, Henry Ninio, wrote directly to Chirac expressing concern and opposition on behalf of the people of Adelaide.³⁵

Political Parties

All political parties at both Commonwealth and state levels were united in opposition to the tests. It would be inappropriate to term that unity 'bipartisanship' as that term is usually understood, for there was dissension both within and between the major political parties on the most appropriate response to the resumption of testing. For example, within the ALP, the Left faction left in no doubt that it did not agree with the assessment of Kim Beazley, freshly appointed as Keating's Deputy Prime Minister, that the measures adopted by the Australian government represented a 'sensible, graduated response'. Rather, Senator Bruce Childs, convenor of the National Left, called for the repudiation of existing contracts for the sale of uranium, and demanded that the testing issue be raised in the General Assembly of the United Nations by the Australian government. (While Evans pronounced himself comfortable with the idea of raising the issue at the United Nations, Childs's demand that uranium contracts be repudiated was rejected out of hand by the government.)³⁶

Likewise, the opposition parties sought to capitalise on the positions taken by their political opponents. All tried to score political points from the widespread perception that the initial response of the government was too weak. Both main opposition parties sought to

³² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1995.

³³ *Age*, 21 June 1995.

³⁴ *Courier-Mail*, 6 and 7 September 1995; also Barclay, 'Problems in Australian Foreign Policy', pp. 352-3.

³⁵ *Advertiser*, 30 June 1995.

³⁶ *Canberra Times*, 26 June 1995.

embarrass the government by proposing policy responses sure to elicit a rejection. Alexander Downer, the foreign affairs spokesman for the Liberal opposition, suggested that the government send a Royal Australian Navy frigate to accompany a flotilla being put together by a number of state parliamentarians from New South Wales. The Democrats, for their part, took the ALP Left's suggestion of a repudiation of uranium bans one step further and proposed that such a ban be legislated.³⁷

Rather, there was a certain harmony of interest in cooperating to express Australia's anger, not only as representatives of a broader (angry) mass public, but also to express their own personal anger at French nuclear testing.

One idea for protest that caught the imagination of politicians was the despatch of a protest ship to the testing area. Two members of the NSW legislature organised the protest boat. One was ALP member Franca Arena: in June she declared in an interview that she wanted to get close to the tests - adding melodramatically that she wasn't afraid to die.³⁸ The other was Green MLC Ian Cohen, who suggested that 'a boatload of politicians floating around the test-zone ... would send a very strong message to France'.³⁹ Arena and Cohen secured cross-party support, invited their colleagues in both houses of the NSW legislature, and then extended the invitation more widely. The list of politicians grew to include twelve members of the House of Representatives from both the Liberals and the ALP, four senators representing the WA Greens, the Democrats, and the ALP, and 28 state politicians from all six states and both territories, and all major parties: ALP, Democrats, Greens, Liberal, and National. In the end, however, the protest trip did not materialise: although, as noted above, the Commonwealth pledged \$200,000 towards the cost of the protest vessel, the voyage had to be called off when it was discovered that the ferry that was to be used for the trip was unseaworthy; instead, 102 Australian politicians made their way to Papeete for a protest march under a banner that read 'Australian parliamentarians for a nuclear-

37 *Age*, 27 June 1995; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 June 1995.

38 *Australian*, 27 June 1995.

39 *Guardian*, 28 June 1995.

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free Pacific'.⁴⁰ But the idea did demonstrate the degree to which the political spectrum in Australia was broadly united.

Religious Groups

The Australian protests also involved religious communities, demonstrating both the diversity of responses and participants, and also the universality of the protests. The Anglican General Synod in Melbourne deplored the French action, and called for a vessel to be sent to Moruroa to join the *Rainbow Warrior II*. In July, the Uniting Church launched a blue ribbon protest in Sydney and Melbourne. Similar to the red ribbon for AIDS campaign, the blue ribbons were intended to show solidarity for opposition to the tests, with the fifty-cent purchase price going to help development in the Pacific. The church's secretary-general, Robert Johnston, declared that he was 'deeply distressed' by the first test.⁴¹

The Discourse of Protest

In addition to examining the nature of the protests and the protestors, it is also important to note the tone and tenor of the protests. Three elements stand out. First, much of the invective was aimed at Chirac himself; the tendency was to pull few punches. Second, there was a decidedly racist tone to much of the discourse of protest. And finally there was also a good-natured side to much of the Australian rage.

Chirac

Much of the anger was directed at Chirac personally. A billboard appeared in the heart of Melbourne's central business district featuring a woman whose bare bottom was painted in a *tricolore*, giving Chirac the finger; the message read 'Language is *no* barrier to our anger Mr Chirac'.⁴² The cosmetics company, Red Earth, ran

40 *Australian*, 1 September 1995; the names of the parliamentarians are listed in New South Wales, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates*, 51st Parl., 1st sess., 20 September 1995, p.1162.

41 *Age*, 28 July 1995; *Sun-Herald*, 7 September 1995.

42 The billboard was quickly ordered taken down by the city's chief commissioner, Kevan Gosper: see *Australian*, 13 September 1995, 14 September 1995.

advertisements showing Chirac in a clay mud mask and the copy 'Spoil yourself, Chirac, not the earth'. Australians also saw an advertisement run by Greenpeace that featured a Day-of-the-Jackal assassin catching a Chirac-like figure drinking a glass of wine in the cross-hairs of a rifle; the bottle of wine on the table explodes instead, spraying red wine everywhere; the superimposed message: 'Drop a bomb on Chirac's plans. Boycott French wine'.

Anti-Chirac sentiment was also evident in public protests. A banner at a Sydney protest in June read 'Chirac, your brain's gone radioactive'.⁴³ Others were less polite: for example, 'Bugger off Chirac' placards appeared in the Sydney demonstration on 6 August,⁴⁴ 'Shoot Chirac, the dumb prick', read a sign carried by a young person at a Melbourne rally in September.⁴⁵ But it was not just protestors on the street who were given to such views. As we will see below, the media contributed to the more general willingness to 'slag' Chirac. Moreover, those in public life did not hesitate to refer to the French president in impolite terms. For example, radio personality Mike Carlton called Chirac an 'oily opportunist'.⁴⁶ Jim Soorley, the mayor of Brisbane, publicly called Chirac 'an idiot'.⁴⁷ Chirac was termed a 'madman' on the floor of the Queensland legislative assembly by both the deputy premier, T.J. Burns, and his colleague, Robert Schwarten (ALP: Rockhampton).⁴⁸

Racism

Often the anti-nuclear protests were framed in overtly racist terms. Offensive slurs with a distinctly anti-French idiom were common, and widely seen as acceptable. Consider, for example, playwright Bob Ellis's criticism of the tests that centred on the 'national character' of the French:

They are a dense and arrogant people - idle, pretentious and rabbit-slaughtering, all of the men identical, as Gore Vidal so

43 *Age*, 19 June 1995.

44 *Australian*, 7 August 1995.

45 *Sun-Herald*, 8 September 1995.

46 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 June 1995.

47 *Courier-Mail*, 6 September 1995.

48 Queensland, *Official Record of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 48th Parl., 1st sess., 7 September 1995, p. 33.

rightly noted - pot belly, green skin, stubble, limp cigarette on long wet underlip, unlit but somehow dribbling ash in acres down the pendant clothing, large and serviceable penis, limp handshake, always a foot shorter than their improbably glamorous and vapidly smiling wives, torpid in conversation, unsanitary as guests, always holding a small white yapping poodle and soused on rough red wine from the age of three.⁴⁹

This widely-published view⁵⁰ was broadly mirrored in other protests. For example, a crowd of 500 protesters in front of the French embassy in Canberra chanted 'What's that stench?/It's the French'.⁵¹

'Frog', the English racist slang for French people, was particularly popular. It was used on protest signs ('Get the frog out of the South Pacific' read one Canberra placard⁵²). Parliamentarians used the term: for example, in the House of Representatives, Richard Evans (Liberal: Cowan, WA) rose to salute the establishment of an ecological 'Frog Watch' campaign in Western Australia to monitor declining frog species. Immediately afterwards, Bob Chynoweth (ALP: Dunkley, Vic) was recognised; Chynoweth began his remarks on French nuclear testing with the quip: 'Talking about frogs ...'.⁵³ The word made frequent appearance in letters to the editor: 'They say that frogs are an endangered species in Australia', wrote a Sydneysider to the *Australian*. 'Bon!'.⁵⁴ As we will see in the next chapter, the use of 'frog' and other overtly racist sentiments was also ubiquitous in the Australian media.

Humour

At the same time, however, there was also a distinctly good-humoured edge to much of the 'rage' levelled against France by Australians. The humour manifested itself in myriad ways. For example, it could be seen in the essentially friendly atmosphere of the large public protests and the humorous one-liners on protest signs.

49 See 'Grapevine', *Advertiser*, 19 June 1995.

50 For example, Ellis's views were quoted as far afield as the *Globe and Mail* in Toronto: 29 August 1995.

51 *Australian*, 19 June 1995.

52 *Canberra Times*, 10 July 1995.

53 CPD, Representatives, 18 September 1995, p. 1078.

54 See Sian Powell, 'Our French Disaffection', *Weekend Australian*, 24-25 June 1995.

Likewise, there was a tongue-in-cheek celebration of 'Bast-ard Day' on 14 July by 2000 protestors in Surfers Paradise, many wearing 'Napoleon Blownapart' t-shirts. Radio advertisements promoted the just-released film *Forget Paris* but jokingly refused to mention France or the name of the French capital. There were radio competitions featuring prizes for protest songs set to the tune of *Frère Jacques*.⁵⁵ On the menu at Clichy (then Clicky), a French restaurant in Collingwood, a printed announcement was added: 'We have dumped frogs, snails, and all other icons of Gallic low-tide tucker'.⁵⁶ Advertisers played on the issue: an Australian distiller's advertisement asked 'Why drink French brandy when there's St Agnes?' and answered: 'No reason atoll'.⁵⁷ And the Eros Foundation, which marketed erotic products, issued a tongue-in-cheek release promising that French maid outfits would be removed from their display windows; requests for French letters would be ignored; and a more suitably Australian term for French kissing would be sought.⁵⁸

What is unmistakable about the protests against the resumption of French testing in 1995 is the ubiquitousness of the anger. The range of ordinary individuals across Australian society who felt the need to speak out in some way was unprecedented, even if the absolute numbers involved in mass demonstrations might have been larger in previous protests, such as those against the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s, or the peace marches of the early 1980s. However, one group in particular needs separate mention. The Australian media, both print and electronic, was not only a 'transmission belt' that conveyed news about the testing to readers, listeners, and viewers; it also was a protestor in its own right. To an examination of the role of the media in the 1995 testing issue we now turn.

55 For the winning entry, see *Canberra Times*, 29 June 1995; also reproduced in *Pacific Research*, Vol.8, No.3, August 1995, p.8.

56 *Age*, 17 June 1995.

57 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 June 1995.

58 *Advertiser*, 16 June 1995.

CHAPTER 3

MIRROR OR PROTESTOR? THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Often the news media in liberal democratic societies is likened to a mirror that is held up to the world and reflects back the reality of life for viewers, listeners, and readers. Indeed, the mirror model of news transmission has been institutionalised among professional journalists as the mark of professionalism.¹ In this view, the media merely passes on news to its audience in an objective and impartial fashion. There is only one place where the media is permitted the luxury of expressing partisan views, and that is in its editorials and commentary by columnists. Journalists, editors, and producers may readily acknowledge that objective and professional reporting may have political effects. For example, the media can easily provide a 'contagion effect' - in other words, it provides news about what others are doing, thus prompting copy-cat behaviour.²

But in the nuclear testing case, the Australian news media was much more than just a 'transmission belt' that conveyed news about protests; it did more than provide protestors with examples of how others were responding to the testing. Rather the Australian media was also at the forefront of the anti-testing protests. Editors, producers, presenters, and writers all shaped the 'news'; and through such devices as editorials, editorial cartoons, choice of letters to the editor, and selection of pictures, clips, and stories, the media indeed helped shape and legitimate the discourse of public protest. Moreover, as we will see below, many members of the media were overtly partisan, and often participated in protests rather than just reporting on the issue. Thus, one could consider the media as a 'protestor' in its own right.

1 Theodore Peterson, 'The Social Responsibility Theory' in Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press* (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1956).

2 David Taras, *The Newsmakers* (Nelson Canada, Toronto, 1990), p.234.

Electronic Media

The electronic media devoted considerable air time to the testing issue. Mainstream television news coverage was extensive: frequently several minutes of nightly news time would be devoted to the testing issue, which in the world of the 'thirty second grab' of television news represents considerable air time. Current affairs shows - '7.30 Report', '60 Minutes', 'Lateline', 'Quantum', and 'Foreign Correspondent' - also carried extensive coverage of the issue. SBS aired three documentaries: the ageing *Moruroa: le grand secret*; *Half life: a parable for the nuclear age*; and one about Fernando Pereira's daughter and the *Rainbow Warrior* bombing.

However, mainstream television was also often quite partial in its coverage. One example cited was the coverage following the boarding of the *Rainbow Warrior II*: while SBS News ran footage of interviews and newsclips from France, demonstrating clearly that both the decision to test and the boarding was being widely criticised in France, by contrast, ABC News used much the same footage as SBS, but deleted all references to French opposition, leaving the clear impression that everyone in France supported their government on this matter.³

Radio call-in shows were also important in galvanising public opinion, and many presenters were unabashedly gleeful in encouraging their listeners to engage in anti-French protests. For example, on the day that the protests were announced, 14 June, 3AW presenter Neil Mitchell in Melbourne openly urged his listeners to disrupt the French consulate in South Yarra by tying up its phone and fax lines;⁴ presenters on talk-back shows in other cities also took the lead in urging their listeners to protest.⁵ Triple J, ABC's national radio station, produced and pushed the protest postcards available through ABC Shops across the country. The media also played a critical role in the 'Fax the French on Fridays' campaign, by openly providing the fax numbers of French government offices, if not overtly urging listeners to send a fax.⁶

3 *Age*, 2 August 1995.

4 *Age*, 15 June 1995.

5 *Australian*, 16 June 1995.

6 For example, the fax numbers of the French president and the defence minister were given out on Jenny Brockie's show, Radio 2BL 702, Sydney, 30 June 1995.

Indeed, one television network actually organised its own protest. As noted above, the Seven Network's presenter Andrew Denton arranged the dumping of two tonnes of manure on the driveway of the French embassy. The dumping was televised and broadcast on the comedy talk-back show 'Denton'. Denton himself was unapologetic about the protest: 'It's only fair', he was reported to have said. 'They dump shit on us; we dump shit on them'.⁷ While the reaction of Dominique Girard, the French ambassador, was duly solicited by reporters (Girard seemed unperturbed, noting merely that the unrequested gift was being put to good use in the embassy gardens⁸), no one is on record as asking the executives of Seven Network whether they saw the network's participation in a political protest as compromising the organisation's journalistic objectivity.

No better example of the blurring lines between coverage and activism was the symbiotic role of the media in the protests organised by Greenpeace. Greenpeace itself understood the important role of the media. Its public relations campaign coordinator, Toby Hutcheon, stated that 'when we do any of our direct actions, we clearly plan whatever we're doing to make it safe for the participants, and effective, but also visually interesting, particularly for television and, in terms of photographs, for newspapers'.⁹ From the perspective of the news media, the ability to provide what is commonly described as a 'jolt' - dramatic footage or graphic - is crucial. That is why Greenpeace ensured that when *Rainbow Warrior II* left Tahiti, it carried a number of journalists, and extended an invitation to the Nine Network's 'A Current Affair' to send along a team with the ability to broadcast in real time via a satellite uplink. The Nine Network readily agreed.

This ability was crucial to the Greenpeace strategy of confronting French authorities around Moruroa. First, the protest was carefully timed: the ship approached the exclusion zone on the tenth anniversary of the French bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland. Second, the protest was designed to ensure that the French would be provoked into some kind of action.

The French authorities did not disappoint: as the *Rainbow Warrior II* approached the exclusion zone, French naval vessels radioed

7 Advertiser, 17 June 1995.

8 Sydney Morning Herald, 16 June 1995.

9 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 July 1995.

warnings that force would be used to keep the Greenpeace boat out of the exclusion zone. The *Rainbow Warrior II* responded that it had received the message but had no comment. When further warnings went unheeded, French commandos from *La Railleuse* launched an attack while a helicopter from the *Vendemiaire* circled overhead, videographing the incident. Another French warship, the *Revi*, rammed the *Rainbow Warrior II* as the *Nageurs de Combat*, dressed in black helmets and black jumpsuits, boarded the ship from a rubber dinghy. They used sledgehammers to break into the wheelhouse, which had been bolted, spraying the fifteen or so people inside with glass. While the majority of the crew, journalists, and guests were gathered on deck, three others remained locked in the radio room: Stephanie Mills, a Greenpeace spokeswoman, who was being interviewed by a New Zealand radio station, Jean-Luc Thierry, and Thom Looney, the radio operator. Commandos smashed portholes in the radio room, and threw in tear-gas. As the attack on the radio room commenced, Mills was broadcasting live. She screamed, yelling 'They've thrown something like tear-gas ... Stop it, stop it' before commandos disabled the radio. Nine Network cameras were also rolling, beaming footage of the incident live to Australia.¹⁰

The incident was a broadcasting and public relations dream. The following day, images of black-suited French commandos, only their eyes visible, smashing the wheelhouse windows, were broadcast (and rebroadcast) around the world. It was easy to equate the black-clad, faceless commandos with a Darth Vader-like evil. Mills's tense screams added to the drama. The use of sledgehammers and tear-gas added to the portrait of nastiness. Most importantly, it allowed the event to be constructed, as Stewart Firth put it, 'as a clash between the David of world public opinion and the Goliath of an arrogant French state'.¹¹ But without the crucial role played by the media in transmitting the images that Greenpeace had provoked, there would have been little impact. This the French belatedly realised, and in September seized and confiscated both the *Rainbow Warrior II* and *MV Greenpeace*. As Tony Atkinson, a Greenpeace organiser in Auckland,

¹⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 July 1995; *Australian*, 11 July 1995.

¹¹ Stewart Firth, 'The Road to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty: Responses to French Nuclear Testing during 1995', *Australian Quarterly*, Vol.68, Autumn 1996, p.80.

noted, the seizure 'severely hampered' Greenpeace operations; the images from *Rainbow Warrior II* and *Greenpeace* 'were crucial'.¹²

Print Media

The print media also provided full coverage of the nuclear testing issue. Newspapers communicated their views in the large number of editorials that ran over the course of the testing issue. Not surprisingly, editorial opinion in all Australian newspapers was deeply critical of the decision to resume testing. Moreover, it can be argued that the arguments marshalled in these editorials often provided a more intellectualised and rational base for anger that was more visceral in origin.¹³ But editorials also helped frame action (such as support for consumer boycotts), or thought (as in the consistent reference to 'Gallic arrogance'). As the wave of public anger mounted, the editorial board of the *Australian* warned on 3 August of the 'Costs attached to punishing France', and warned again on 7 August that Australia's opposition to French testing 'will not be cost-free for us'.

Most newspapers created a special section for reporting news related to the testing. 'Fallout' was a popular heading for these sections: the *Australian* ran a regular feature entitled 'Fallout Over Nuclear Testing'; the *Sydney Morning Herald* title was 'French Testing: The Fallout'; the *Australian Financial Review* called its section 'Chirac: The Fallout Goes On'.

And, at key junctures, it was not uncommon for newspapers to devote several pages of coverage to the issue under banner headlines. For example, all but one column of the *Australian's* front page on 11 July, after the boarding of the *Rainbow Warrior II*, was devoted to the issue; and on 7 September, the entire first page was devoted to the test. Headlines tended to be melodramatic: on 7 September, the *Sydney Morning Herald's* head was 'The day the Pacific boiled'; in the *Australian*, it was 'French defiance rocks the world'.

Coverage was often sloppy. A good example of sloppiness was the reportage of Evans's initial news conference in Tokyo. No effort was made by journalists to communicate the essence of Evans's explanation of the Australian government's thinking to readers and

¹² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 September 1995.

¹³ See, for example, the *Australian* editorial, 22 June 1995.

viewers. Instead, when the minister replied 'Exactly' to the suggestion that it could have been worse, that was good enough for a lead. But that lead - collapsing as it did the government's response into a single pithy phrase - deeply influenced how the public saw the issue right from the outset.

Coverage was also often overtly partisan. A commentator in the *Australian Financial Review* argued that 'our major newspapers have essentially treated [the testing issue] not as one imposing on them a duty of public information and education, but, as usual, as a mere occasion for populist political entertainment'.¹⁴ This took different forms. For example, writers of headlines for news stories would think nothing of blatant editorialising: the *Sydney Morning Herald's* reportage of the sanctions embraced by the government on 22 June appeared under the headline 'PM's slap on the wrist for France'.¹⁵ On occasion, analysis would be twisted to fit a desired message. For example, Peter McPhee and Colin Nettelbeck, both professors at the University of Melbourne, wrote an op-ed (opinion-editorial) piece for the *Age*, comparing Chinese and French nuclear testing. When the article appeared, however, editors had deleted all references to the Chinese testing, thus altering the analysis and the message; the authors suspect the excisions occurred largely because their article did not strike the right condemnatory tone.¹⁶

At times, the coverage of the print media could easily be described as 'over the top'. Not only the tabloids engaged in this kind of reporting; the broadsheets also engaged in it - although Stewart Firth is right to single out the *Australian Financial Review* as 'a lone voice' in reportage on this issue.¹⁷ For example, when the tests were announced, the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran stories under headlines like 'Tests linked to thyroid cancer', 'Radiation sprayed all over Australia', and 'Merci, for our radioactive blanket'. Another article was devoted to a university lecturer's fear that Australia's teenage suicide rate,

14 *Australian Financial Review*, 10 August 1995, p.17.

15 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 June 1995.

16 McPhee and Nettelbeck [Nettelbeck], 'France's historical record wiped out in a wave of xenophobia', *Age*, 2 August 1995; note that the newspaper's copy-editors misspelled Nettelbeck's name.

17 Firth, 'Responses to French Nuclear Testing', p.80.

already high, would climb as a result of 'renewed teenage despair' over the testing.¹⁸

A comparable example of over-the-top reportage was the 'bomb damage' feature run after the first test in September by a number of newspapers. Under the melodramatic headline 'Bringing the horror home', the *Advertiser* ran a graphic description of what would happen if Adelaide were hit with a bomb of the same yield as the 20-kiloton nuclear device being tested on the atolls; a similar feature ran on the same day in the *Sun-Herald* showing the hypothetical damage to Melbourne.¹⁹

It appeared that no incident of protest was too small for coverage, particularly when it gave the newspaper an opportunity to present a 'local' angle. Thus, for example, when Jacquie Schefe of Mt Barker pulled her eleven-year-old son Ryan from his French classes at Mt Barker South Primary School as a protest, the *Advertiser* was there with six column inches under the head 'Outraged Ryan has the last word', dutifully quoting Ryan ('everyone decided to have world peace, then the French just come back and test nuclear weapons - that really stinks'), his mother ('I can't scream loud enough. My grandmother is French-German and I am embarrassed to say that I have that in my bloodline'), the principal ('the school respects the decision'), and the president of South Australian French Teachers Association ('pulling the child out of French classes is quite ridiculous').²⁰

The story about Ryan is, however, illustrative of a wider tendency in this case. In their reporting on the testing, the Australian media frequently broke a widespread taboo in Western journalism that proscribes involving children in political issues. Whether this was cause or effect in this case is unclear. It may have been that the media was merely reflecting the fact that children were already involved in the anti-testing protests. For example, an 'Art from the Heart' exhibition was organised at Parliament House on 19 and 20 September, consisting of 160 pieces of art from children as young as six indicating 'what the schoolchildren of Australia think of French nuclear testing'.²¹

18 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 and 16 June 1995.

19 *Advertiser, Sun-Herald*, 7 September 1995.

20 *Advertiser*, 17 June 1995.

21 See the comments of Anthony Abbott (Liberal Party: Warringah) in *CPD, Representatives*, 19 September 1995, pp. 1161-2, lauding the organisation of children's protests.

Mike Rann, the opposition leader in South Australia, suggested that a delegation of children be sent to Paris (a suggestion endorsed by the Commonwealth minister for family services, Senator Rosemary Crowley). Likewise, as we have seen, children were prominently featured in some protest marches. And, most importantly, many teachers were clearly politicising children in the classroom - as the numerous protests received from schools, including primary schools - attests.²² However, whether merely reflecting the use of children in the protests, or actively using children to make a point, the media ran a number of stories featuring the protests of children. For example, following the first test, the *Advertiser* in Adelaide ran a feature entitled 'Sadness of a nation's youth', which featured the views of seven- to twelve-year-olds attending Parkside Primary School.²³

Letters to the editor, not surprisingly given the broad national consensus, were overwhelmingly critical of the tests. The *Australian* received more letters on the issue in a single day than on any issue in the recent past, including Mabo and the issue of the republic. Ninety-five per cent of them, according to an *Australian* journalist, were 'mini-masterpieces of anti-French bile'.²⁴ Sometimes the sentiment was blunt: 'Bugger the French!' read one letter, 'The next time Germany invades them it can bloody well stay there'.²⁵ Sometimes it was maudlin, as in the case of a woman from North Fitzroy who ended a long and emotional letter on how atomic weapons 'worked' at Hiroshima with 'I'm not sleeping that well'.²⁶ Letters-to-the-editor editors did, however, select critical letters that focused on Australians' refusal to get angry at China for its tests; or the willingness to hurt other Australians by ill-considered boycotts, or hypocrisy in selling yellowcake to France. But, even in the national newspapers, some letters appeared to be selected solely on the basis of puerility. 'Stick it up your Eiffel Tower', was one suggestion for where the French government might test its devices.²⁷ 'Dear Mr Chirac, here's a box of

22 See, for example, the complaints of the French ambassador about the use of schoolchildren, *Courier-Mail*, 1 September 1995; *The Bulletin*, 10 October 1995, pp. 26-7.

23 *Advertiser*, 7 September 1995.

24 Sian Powell, 'Our French Disaffection', *Weekend Australian*, 24-25 June 1995.

25 *Australian*, 19 July 1995.

26 *Age*, 11 September 1995.

27 *Australian*, 16 June 1995.

suppositories', read another in a comparable vein. 'Please use your bombs as you would these'.²⁸

Editorial cartoons are an important part of political discourse in liberal democratic states, combining as they do humour and political commentary. Moreover, they come in a 'package' that is perfect for protest: good cartoons are inevitably snipped out of the newspaper, displayed on office doors, refrigerators, photocopied and distributed - an ideal way to identify with a particular political sentiment captured in the cartoon. Cartoons played an important part in the way in which the media portrayed the testing issue. Every newspaper ran editorial cartoons with testing as their focus. Indeed, some newspapers made more use of the technique than others. For example, in the ten editions of the *Advertiser* published between 15 June - the first edition after Australians learned of the tests - and 28 June, all but one of the daily editorial cartoons focused on the testing.

Some of the humour was self-deprecating, such as the Nicholson cartoon in which a passenger in a car, spotting a pedestrian carrying a distinctively shaped loaf, says to the driver: 'Look. A man with a baguette. Run him over!'.²⁹ Some of the humour focused on the foibles of Australian leaders: Keating's supposed fascination with French clocks provided numerous cartoonists with grist, for example. Likewise, when it was revealed that Gareth Evans was taking French lessons - seen by some as further evidence that he was seeking to become Secretary-General of the United Nations - fun was poked at his language abilities. In one cartoon, Nicholson hung a sign on a protesting Evans; in broken 'franglais', accents pointing in different directions, it read 'Je protest très much! P.S. My French lessons are going très bon, merci'.³⁰ And some of the humour could easily be considered *infra dig*: the third-finger salute in the *Advertiser* (15 June), or the *Sydney Morning Herald's* depiction of Chirac urinating into the Pacific Ocean (20 June).

The media played an important role in both reflecting and shaping the broader tone and tenor of the discourse of protest discussed in the previous chapter. First, the media contributed to the excoriation of Jacques Chirac. The French president was lampooned in

28 *Australian*, 13 July 1995.

29 *Australian*, 15 June 1995.

30 *Australian*, 29 June 1995.

any number of editorial cartoons, personally vilified in editorials and columnist commentary. In addition, the media was not hesitant to air the Greenpeace assassination advertisement - it was shown on ABC TV News on 23 August - but without comment or criticism of it. It can be argued that by presenting the advertisement in this fashion, the media was thereby legitimating a level of discourse that appeared to make it acceptable to aim a rifle at the French president.

Second, the media frequently used racist terminology or framed stories in offensive terms. A series of decisions by editors to run with a particular wording may have merely been reflecting popular discourse, but there can be little doubt that it also legitimised the use of such terms, thereby contributing to the essential racism that marked public protest. Thus, editors decided to run Bob Ellis's 'national character' lampoon of the French cited in the previous chapter rather than spiking it as unacceptably racist. Editors at the *Sydney Morning Herald* decided to go so far as to run an article under the headline 'Pourquoi les français sont des connards [Why the French are fucking idiots]'.³¹ Editorial cartoons were heavily laden with Gallic stereotypes, supposed French accents, and references to frogs. Indeed, the use of 'frog' in the media was as widespread as it was in public discourse. 'Fair go for frogs' was the heading editors at the *Sydney Morning Herald* chose for a letter to the editor urging moderation in the protests.³² 'Hit frogs with toads, mayor says' was the *Age* headline over the story about Pyne's gift of a cane toad to Chirac.³³ Bob Millington, author of 'Millo's Diary' in the *Age*, referred to a protest against what he termed the 'detestable Frogs' (8 August 1995). And even when one newspaper columnist tried to editorialise against the pervasiveness of anti-French sentiment, he put it in diplasiocoelan terms, decrying the 'orgy of frog-bashing' sweeping Australia.³⁴

31 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 June 1995; see the account of Daniele Caraty's complaint of racial vilification brought before the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board, *Australian*, 13-14 July 1996.

32 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 June 1995.

33 *Age*, 21 June 1995.

34 Padraic McGuinness, *Age*, 17 June 1995.

In short, the media played a special role in the shaping of the nuclear testing issue. Not unlike its role during the Gulf conflict in 1990-91,³⁵ the media was more than just a transmission belt, relaying the news in impartial and objective fashion to Australians. Rather, the way in which editors and producers decided to play the stories, the words they used in headlines, the decisions they made regarding what they printed and what they aired, all played an important part in the protests. For the Australian media, it can be argued, became a protestor too.

³⁵ See Frank Devine, 'The Gulf and the Australian Media', *Quadrant*, Vol.35, October 1991.

CHAPTER 4

EXPLAINING THE RAGE

What explains the widespread outburst of anger, however brief, in Australia in 1995? Numerous reasons have been put forward, including the imperatives of domestic politics, 'media-isation', geographic proximity, the tendency of Australians in the post-Cold War era to define national security in more holistic and expanded terms, or an anti-nuclear sentiment that is deeply rooted in Australian political culture. We will argue that none of these factors offers a satisfactory explanation of the anger at the French in 1995. Rather, we suggest that the anger in 1995 has more to do with the nation doing the testing than the testing itself.

Domestic Politics?

A common explanation for the anger at the testing was the imperatives of domestic politics. There is little doubt that the nuclear testing issue came at a time when the ALP government of Paul Keating was approaching the end of its three-year mandate, and the looming election was seen as an important factor in explaining reactions. For example, DeAngelis has argued that in the 'pre-election climate' the Labor government, 'for fear of electoral backlash' gave in to 'mindless populism'.¹ Indeed, the testing issue came at a time when the ALP was stuck well behind the Liberal-National coalition in the polls; the voters of Queensland were voting heavily against the ALP government of Wayne Goss; and the Greens were seeing their poll figures (and anticipated Senate seats) rise.

It would not be unreasonable to conclude that the reactions to French testing by politicians were shaped by the electoral timetable. The issue had the capacity to swing votes; it is therefore hardly surprising that, for example, the Keating government's position stiffened in the week after 14 June. However, the electoral timetable does not go very far to explain the popular reaction itself. Did

¹ Richard DeAngelis, 'Australian Foreign Policy Review 1995: Middle-Level Power Overstretch?', *Flinders Journal of History and Politics*, Vol.18, 1996, p.121.

Australians decide to be angry about the tests because they knew that they would shortly have an opportunity to go to the polls? Surely not: to understand the anger, we have to look beyond the looming election.

Can the anger be explained by the efforts of the opposition parties to politicise the issue? In the Australian case, DeAngelis has argued that the opposition took a 'demagogic' approach to the issue, 'politicising the protest movement shamelessly'.² When one looks closely, however, it could be argued that the opposition parties in Australia were playing an interesting game. On the one hand, nuclear testing clearly could not be made into a partisan issue, if only because there was such widespread agreement that it was a Bad Thing: all parties were united in their opposition to the resumption of the tests. Moreover, the Liberal-National coalition actively cooperated in ways that bordered on bipartisanship. For example, Alexander Downer, the Liberal foreign affairs shadow minister, and Ian Sinclair, foreign affairs spokesman for the National Party, joined ALP politicians in an all-party parliamentary delegation to Europe in September 1995.³ Likewise, when the rioting in Papeete prompted some to link opposition to French testing to opposition to continued French occupation of Tahiti, the minister for foreign affairs, Gareth Evans, was quick to try to separate the two issues, claiming that Australia's quarrel was with French testing, not French rule over Tahiti; Downer, for his part, immediately backed Evans up, claiming that the coalition welcomed a French presence in the South Pacific.⁴

On the other hand, opposition politicians sought to ensure that the testing issue was turned as much as possible to partisan advantage. There was broad recognition that right from the start, the Keating government had 'stuffed it up', as an ALP member put it publicly,⁵ at a stroke alienating the youth vote, and undoing all the political gains that had been made in the aftermath of the damage done to ALP fortunes by the woodchipping issue. John Howard, leader of the opposition, was quick off the mark to decry the government's response

2 *ibid.*

3 *Age*, 8 September 1995.

4 *Australian Financial Review*, 8 September 1995.

5 Laurie Oakes, 'The good cop, bad cop act', *The Bulletin*, 4 July 1995, p.98.

as 'totally inappropriate', claiming that Keating had allowed the French to walk all over Australia.⁶

At each point in the dispute, opposition politicians at both the Commonwealth and state levels sought to gain advantage by goading the Keating government, or pushing it into adopting a stronger position on opposition to testing. For example, National Party leader Tim Fischer called on government officials to 'roast, not toast' Chirac at the French embassy's Bastille Day celebrations;⁷ Senator Cheryl Kernot, leader of the Australian Democrats, criticised Keating for not taking a harder line because of Australia's uranium exports to France.⁸

While these efforts to politicise the issue are interesting, they do not tell us much about why the reactions of Australians to the testing were so lively. While some commentators were prone to dismiss the anti-nuclear demonstrations as merely rent-a-crowd protests,⁹ it stretches credulity to attribute the widespread and often spontaneous expressions of anger throughout Australia to the organising efforts of the opposition parties.

'Media-isation'?

Another common argument was that Australians were whipped up by the media into a frenzy of anti-nuclear anti-French hysteria. This is certainly how Jacques Chirac saw it: in a television interview in France in September, he argued that 'la mediatisation grande' lay behind the Australian protests.¹⁰ To what extent was this the case, and did the 'media-isation' of the testing issue have an impact on the Australian response?

There can be little doubt that the media in Australia shaped the testing issue. We noted above that on 14 June, when Australians

⁶ Glen St John Barclay, 'Problems in Australian Foreign Policy, January-June 1995', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.41, No.3, 1995, p.352.

⁷ *Australian*, 11 July 1995.

⁸ *Age*, 19 September 1995.

⁹ For example, David Haselhurst, 'Don't undo a glowing deal', *The Bulletin*, 11 July 1995, p. 88. The French ambassador to Australia, Dominique Girard, expressed a similar view about the round-the-clock protestors outside the French embassy in Canberra: they were merely 'mercenaries', he said, 'representing nobody ... You will find the same collection of fellows tomorrow when there is a demonstration about the Indonesians in East Timor'. *The Bulletin*, 10 October 1995, p.27.

¹⁰ ABC 'AM', 6 September 1995; see also *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 September 1995.

learned of the announcement, radio talk-back presenters eagerly encouraged their listeners to engage in a range of protests; we noted that the media chose to portray the government's initial response as a philosophical 'it could have been worse', which also galvanised public anger. We noted that the media occasionally even participated as a protestor against testing in its own right.

But can the evident anger of hundreds of thousands of Australians, expressed in numerous ways all over the country for a period of three and a half months, be explained by media treatment of the issue? Many students of the media note that while the media in most democratic societies have a great deal more power than the 'mirror' model implies, there are considerable limits to the capacity of the media to shape a national agenda.¹¹ In the case of French nuclear testing, it stretches credulity to imagine that the media in Australia had the kind of power attributed to them by Chirac. Rather, it makes more sense to see the media's role as following, rather than shaping, public opinion in this case. In other words, editors and producers in Australia, taking their cues from the initial reactions of the public on 14 June, understood that this was a major national story, and treated it as such. Certainly, the editorial board of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, meeting on the 14th, decided to 'run' with the issue.¹² Moreover, it is clear that media outlets took cues from one another, engaging in the copy-cat behaviour and 'oneupmanship' that is the essence of competitive journalism.

This is not to deny that in 'running' with the issue, or racing to beat a competitor, or trying to increase market share, many in the media tended to get carried away. But the limits of the 'media-isation' argument can be seen if one were to ask: What would have happened had the media tried to continue to 'run' with the issue after the steam went out of the protests in September 1995 when Chirac essentially caved in to world opinion and shortened the testing programme? It is unlikely that people would have continued to engage in protests. Or what would have been the result had the media decided to try to 'run' with the issue of Chinese nuclear testing, which was occurring at the same time as the French testing? It is, in our view, even more unlikely

¹¹ See, for example, Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder, *News That Matters* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987).

¹² Confidential interview.

that Australians would have become as worked up against China merely at the behest of editors and producers.

In short, there can be no denying that the media had a powerful influence on the shape, direction, and nature of the protests against the resumption of French testing in 1995. But it is unlikely that we can attribute the widespread rage to the propensity of some Australian journalists, editors, and producers to allow their enthusiasm for the cause to overshadow their commitment to professional standards and join the protestors.

Geographic Proximity?

Yet another reason commonly put forward for the anger is that of geography. Australians, it is argued, were concerned because the tests were being conducted in the South Pacific. The resumption of testing was occurring in what was widely considered to be 'our neighbourhood', or 'our backyard'; whatever ecological hazards or politico-diplomatic dangers that were associated with testing would redound in the first instance to the peoples and countries of the region.

On the one hand, there can be no denying that proximity to nuclear testing increases both insecurity and anxiety, and anger. This the French government understood very well: after all, the government in Paris, like the British government in London, never contemplated testing nuclear weapons systems on their own soil. Instead they chose testing sites that were physically remote from the metropole - and from Europe. Britain used sites in central Australia, and then borrowed American testing sites in Nevada; France used sites in the Sahara Desert and, after Algerian independence, built testing facilities in the South Pacific. There was little doubt that the very distance of Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls from France, from Europe, and from all other major powers, was a pivotal factor in this set of tests. In other words, if France had not had colonial possessions in the South Pacific, it is highly unlikely that the Chirac government would have embarked on a renewal of its testing programme in metropolitan France, or possessions in the 'neighbourhoods' of other great powers - such as St Pierre and Miquelon in the Gulf of St Lawrence, or Martinique in the Caribbean, or French Guinea in South America. And it is equally doubtful that a confirmed Gaullist like Chirac would have embraced the humiliation of accepting an invitation from the United States to use

American testing facilities in Nevada. Nonetheless, there was a standard French response to the question of why, if the tests were so safe, were they not conducted in metropolitan France: it would be too expensive and take too much time to construct a test site for what was going to be a final set of tests.¹³ But it was widely understood that this was a convenient justification to cover the reality that had France conducted its tests in metropolitan France, or in the western hemisphere, the political firestorm - and the associated costs to the Chirac government - would have been overwhelming.

On the other hand, the problem with the argument that proximity was a prime determinant of anti-nuclear outrage in the case of French nuclear testing in 1995 is that distance from the test sites did not in fact seem to be a major factor in predicting national anger. Outside the immediate 'neighbourhood' of the South Pacific, the atolls are relatively equidistant from most of the major urban centres around the Pacific: Vancouver, Los Angeles, Santiago, and Sydney are all within an approximate radius of 6000-7000 km from the testing sites. Auckland is 4500 km from the atolls; cities in Japan are some 10,500 km distant. And European cities are approximately 16,000 km from the test sites.

However, the pattern of protest bears little relationship to these distances. To be sure, protests tended to be more vociferous the closer one was to the testing site. But they were also widespread in very distant centres - in many European cities and some cities in Japan, notably Hiroshima. At middle-distance locations, the pattern was mixed: there was considerable protest in Chile, but the protests were particularly widespread in Australia, where the issue became a national agenda item. In the United States and Canada, by contrast, there was little of the outrage expressed by Australians.

Moreover, if distance was crucial for understanding the anger of Australians in 1995, why did Chinese underground tests at Lop Nor in May and August 1995 not produce a similar reaction? The Chinese testing grounds are closer to Australia than the atolls of French

¹³ See, for example, the testimony of the French ambassador to Canada, Alfred Siefert-Gaillardin, before a Canadian parliamentary committee: Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence*, 12 December 1995: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>.

Polynesia, and yet there was no comparable anger expressed by Australians at China.

If popular reaction to the testing appears not to be linked to physical distance *per se*, it can nonetheless be argued that the sense of 'neighbourhood' - the mental map that most peoples have of the immediate geographic area around their community - was important in galvanising opposition. Neighbourhood suggests a space that, by definition, has the greatest capacity to have an impact on one's interests, one's well-being and security. The propensity to oppose something that will produce negative externalities in one's own immediate neighbourhood (and the equal propensity to manifest indifference if the same negative externality is produced in someone else's neighbourhood) is commonly termed the NIMBY (not in my backyard) syndrome. NIMBY suggests a direct link between proximity to some negative externality and depth of opposition: the closer one is, the deeper the opposition.

Do notions such as neighbourhood and NIMBY explain the Australian reaction in this case? Australian definitions of 'neighbourhood' underwent some change in the 1980s and 1990s, as the ALP government sought to redefine traditional notions of Australia's neighbourhood, putting Australia in what Richard A. Higgott and Kim Richard Nossal argue is a liminal location in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁴ However, despite the best efforts of their élites, most Australians retain an unreconstructed mental map of neighbourhood. In this construction, distance is unimportant: the islands of the South Pacific, no matter how distant from Australian shores, are seen as part of the Australian 'neighbourhood';¹⁵ Lop Nor, in Asia, might be closer, but is not seen as part of the 'neighbourhood'. Thus, what Findlay calls the 'geography of the imagination' goes a considerable distance to explaining why so many Australians did not

14 Richard A. Higgott and Kim Richard Nossal, 'The International Politics of Liminality: Relocating Australia in the Asia-Pacific', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, forthcoming.

15 See, for example, the comments of Gareth Evans in Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s* (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic, 1992), p.161; T.B. Millar, *Australia in Peace and War: External Relations since 1788* (Australian National University Press, Sydney, 2nd edn 1991), chap. 14, 'The Pacific Neighbourhood'; also Ramesh Thakur, 'The Last Bang before a Total Ban: French Nuclear Testing in the Pacific', *International Journal*, Vol.51, Summer 1996; and Findlay, 'Explaining Australasian Angst', p.374.

become upset at China, but did become upset at France - in a way that they simply would not have had Chirac chosen to test in another neighbourhood - on the islands of St Pierre and Miquelon, for example - or in Nevada.

Anti-Nuclear Sentiment and Wider Definitions of Security?

'The generation protesting at these tests', the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorialised on 7 September 1995, 'is quite rational. It sees the danger to the delicate process of developing an effective international regime for the limitation and control of nuclear weapons. And it sees danger to the environment'. Do such anti-nuclear concerns explain the anger at the testing, as the *Sydney Morning Herald* intimates?

Findlay has argued that one of the reasons why the Australian public reacted so emotionally to the testing issue in 1995 was because the government in Canberra essentially did 'too good a job' in putting - and keeping - the issue on the national agenda. As he notes, 'public awareness of nuclear testing has been nurtured by past governments', with the result that the public seized the issue and ran well out in front of their government.¹⁶ The issue had been removed from the agenda in 1992. But when the French government put the issue back on the agenda in 1995, efforts by the government in Canberra to downplay the issue failed. Public anger demanded that the issue be front and centre.

There is little doubt that since the long history of nuclear politics in the South Pacific the issue was well entrenched in Australian political culture by the early 1990s, as the *Herald* editorial indicates. Nuclear sensitivities had been raised - and maintained - by a succession of governments. Fears of environmental damage were well entrenched in the popular imagination (even if scientific evidence of environmental damage from the underground tests remains highly contested). The important thing is that the fear was there, often confirmed by media headlines such as the one that the *Sydney Morning Herald* itself published suggesting that the underground tests were liable to 'spray radiation all over Australia' (even if the distance from the sites, the prevailing winds, and the underground location made such a possibility highly unlikely).

¹⁶ Findlay, 'Explaining Australasian Angst', p.379.

Australians also had developed a view of the role of nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War era. To be sure, there is little evidence that protestors were moved to anger by the horrific accounts of what damage would be done if a bomb of comparable power was detonated over Australian cities; there was not the kind of generalised fear of nuclear war that drew so many to the peace marches in Europe and North America in the early 1980s. Thus some have argued that the anger at French nuclear testing was driven by a symbolic concern that testing nuclear weapons in the context of the post-Cold War era was unnecessary, or would lead to proliferation, or was simply wrong and should be stopped.

This suggests a related argument: that concern over nuclear testing in 1995 was driven by a propensity to define French nuclear involvement in the South Pacific as a threat to Australian security. If it is true, as Hugh Smith has noted, that Australians are only massively aroused on a foreign policy issue when the security of the nation is threatened,¹⁷ then it is possible that the French testing issue was widely seen as a threat to national security profound enough to trigger such personal involvement on a wide basis. In this view, Australian perceptions of 'threat', and the very definition of 'security' itself, have become increasingly complex.¹⁸ No longer are external threats defined purely in terms of military/security issues, as they were so clearly in the past.¹⁹ Concern over what the French were proposing to do would flow naturally from such a comprehensive view of national security.

There can be no doubt that Australian definitions of 'security' are undergoing change in the post-Cold War era. It is evident at a governmental level;²⁰ there is also some evidence at the level of the

17 Hugh Smith, 'Foreign Policy and the Political Process' in F.A. Mediansky and A.C. Palfreeman (eds), *In Pursuit of National Interests: Australian Foreign Policy in the 1990s* (Pergamon Press, Sydney, 1988), p.34.

18 On the increasing complexity of regional security, see Desmond Ball and Pauline Kerr, *Presumptive Engagement: Australia's Asia-Pacific Security Policy in the 1990s* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1996), pp.38-40.

19 For a survey, see Alan Dupont, *Australia's Threat Perceptions: A Search for Security*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 82 (Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 1991).

20 Ball and Kerr, *Presumptive Engagement*; also Kim Richard Nossal, 'Seeing Things? The Adornment of "Security" in Australia and Canada', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.49, May 1995, pp.33-47.

mass public, in what Graeme Cheeseman characterises as Australia's 'strategic culture'.²¹

The problem is that if either general hypothesis were true - that the anger of Australians stemmed from concrete fears about their safety or symbolic concerns about nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War era - then logically Australians should have been equally angry at China when the government in Beijing conducted tests during this same period. But they were not. When the Chinese underground tests occurred, thousands of people did not turn out to protest, or dump bags of excrement in front of Chinese diplomatic missions; unions did not impose bans on Chinese goods and services; consumers did not boycott Chinese goods; Chinese restaurants suffered no loss of business.

In short, the nuclear sensitivities of Australians might have been well developed, but they were highly partial: some nuclear weapons states rated high degrees of emotional anger; others, by contrast, did not. Australians simply did not get as angry at Britain, the United States, Russia, or China as they got at France.

The French Factor

To this point, we have argued that the common explanations advanced for Australia's deep national anger at the tests do not convincingly address the differences in reaction we see between Australian reactions to French nuclear testing and testing by others. It remains to ask: could the reaction be attributed to the state which was engaging in the testing? In other words, was it the fact that it was France doing the testing that generated the anger? We argue that the French factor is indeed critical for understanding popular anger in Australia in 1995.

Again, Australian anger at France can be illuminated by comparing it with the more muted reactions of Australians towards the other state also engaged in underground testing, China. The double standard clearly infuriated French officials, but when the

²¹ Graeme Cheeseman, 'Back to "Forward Defence" and the Australian National Style' in Graeme Cheeseman and Robert Bruce (eds), *Discourses of Danger and Dread Frontiers: Australian Defence and Security Thinking after the Cold War* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1996), p.267.

Chinese conducted their tests, the protests from Australia tended to be limited to the formal objections of governments. The public remained largely indifferent.

Why did France attract such vituperative anti-nuclear anger, but not China? Definitions of neighbourhood are no doubt important: Lop Nor is not in the Australian backyard. Alternatively, one could argue that the difference lay in politico-racist assumptions (the French are 'just like us' and thus should behave 'properly', while the Chinese, as the putative 'Other', can't be expected to behave themselves). Or that it occurred because protestors were driven by pragmatic assumptions: liberal-democratic regimes like France are susceptible to the pressures of protest; illiberal regimes like China are not, so why bother trying?

There is, however, another possibility. In this supposedly post-nationalist era,²² it is worth reflecting on the possibility that at the roots of the rage against France was a widely held national image of France as an antithetical 'Other', an essential element in the construction of nationalist identity.²³ Anger at the French president or the French government easily became anger at 'France', a transference easy to achieve using the standard nationalist *modus operandi* of embracing national stereotypes and national antipathies. Certainly the national stereotypes evident in the protests, even in the various efforts at humour, was in the best traditions of the nationalist construction of the antithetical Other. In other words, France is one of the few countries that Australians can construct in this way. Three factors made France an exceptionally attractive candidate for this nationalist treatment: a historical legacy of conflict between the two countries; the French government's pretensions to great-power status; and finally the relative costlessness of provoking a rupture in relations.

22 For an elaboration of the 'post-nationalist' condition, see, for example, Yasemin Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Post-National Membership in Europe* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994).

23 He does not use the language of identity construction, but the classic statement remains Carlton J.H. Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism* (Russell and Russell, New York, 1931).

The Historical Legacy

France is the only country towards which Australians have demonstrated persistent antipathy over the last generation. Thus, the resumption of nuclear testing in 1995 must be put in broad historical context, for the anger that that announcement sparked did not arise in a vacuum. Rather, it can be seen as a culmination of a long history of poor relations.

Findlay suggests that the roots of anti-French sentiment in Australia go all the way back to Sydney Cove, 'standard British prejudices', and the historical enmity between English and French.²⁴ But it can be argued that the roots are much more recent: the Australian reaction has to be put in the context of a relationship that had for thirty years been periodically soured by deep differences over French behaviour in the South Pacific and on trade. Indeed, disagreements over the two issues of French nuclear testing in the region and decolonisation in the South Pacific combined in the late 1980s to completely sour relations between Canberra and Paris for a time.

The atmospheric testing conducted by France in the South Pacific between 1966 and 1974 left long tendrils of disaffection between Australia and France.²⁵ Every Australian government, Liberal-Country and Labor, had been prompted to protest this testing, though the intensity and variety of protest differed depending on which party was in power.²⁶ Coalition governments of the 1960s and early 1970s tended to engage in limited diplomatic protests, such as requiring the French government to provide assurances that aircraft overflying Australian territory would not carry any materials connected with the tests.²⁷

The tone and tenor of Australian protests became more muscular after the ALP under Gough Whitlam was returned to office in the 2 December 1972 elections. Australia joined New Zealand in

24 Findlay, 'Explaining Australasian Angst', pp.374-5.

25 Stewart Firth, *Nuclear Playground* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987).

26 Millar, *Australia in Peace and War*, pp.321-2.

27 Gordon Greenwood, 'The Political Debate in Australia' in Gordon Greenwood and Norman Harper (eds), *Australia in World Affairs, 1966-1970* (Cheshire, St Kilda, Vic, 1974), p.48.

sending ships to the test area and taking France to the International Court of Justice. It increased both the volume and the number of protests, taking the issue up at the United Nations, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, and the South Pacific Forum.²⁸ French-Australian relations during this period were soured not only by the Whitlam government's new activism, but also by the willingness of Bob Hawke, who was president of both the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the governing ALP, to advocate public protests against France, such as black bans on mail, communications, shipping and air services.

When the French government decided in 1975 to conduct only underground tests, Australia continued to oppose these tests, though the Liberal government of Malcolm Fraser was less inclined to protest than the Hawke government which came to power in 1983. Indeed, Hawke had only been prime minister for two months when his government decided to impose an embargo against uranium exports to France, choosing to pay Queensland Mines for the balance of the broken sales contract to Electricité de France.²⁹

The problems in the relationship caused by nuclear testing came to a head in 1985, when the French government decided to destroy the *Rainbow Warrior* and authorise agents of the French foreign intelligence service, the Direction générale de la Sécurité extérieure, to plant a bomb on the boat while it was docked in Auckland harbour. The incident deeply soured the relationship with Australia. The use of force by France against one of its own allies was widely seen as bad enough; the aftermath of the bombing was even more galling. When two of the French agents were arrested, tried, found guilty of manslaughter, and jailed by New Zealand, the government in Paris threatened to impose economic sanctions against New Zealand produce entering the European Community unless the government in Wellington allowed the agents to serve their sentences in French custody. Faced with the prospect of crippling sanctions, the New Zealand government relented. Within a year, however, the French government released both agents, and indeed decorated one of them

28 Henry S. Albinski, *Australian External Policy under Labor* (University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1977), pp. 144-6.

29 Richard Leaver, 'Long Half-Lives, Short Memories: Australian Uranium and France', *Pacific Research*, Vol.8, No.4/Vol.9, No.1, November 1995/February 1996, pp. 44-5.

for meritorious service.³⁰ Sporadic but consistent Australian opposition to testing continued throughout the late 1980s and into the early post-Cold War period, though, as a former deputy secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has noted, neither Keating nor Gareth Evans, who became minister for foreign affairs in 1988, 'maintained Labor's former rage' on the testing issue.³¹

The quarrel between the Australian and French governments over the question of colonialism in the South Pacific revolved around the future of French colonial holdings in the area and the treatment by Paris of independence movements, particularly in New Caledonia. As Findlay puts it, Australians have a view, 'justified or not', that 'the French have been more imperious and severe as colonizers than the British and that France has handled its decolonization process poorly compared with the United Kingdom'.³² Such divergent views culminated in a serious deterioration of relations in the late 1980s over the issue of New Caledonia, including the expulsion of the Australian consulate-general from Noumea in January 1987.³³

Finally, it has been argued by some that the Australian anger in 1995 was partly a legacy of the French agricultural protectionism so disliked by Australians in the closing stages of the Uruguay Round under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. There can be no doubt of the prime minister's own view of the French on agricultural issues. Privately, Keating was scathing about French protectionism: the most important thing for French leaders, he told President George Bush in January 1992, 'was to be able to see flocks of ducks and geese wandering around French villages when they drove through on their holidays'. The United States, Keating told Bush, had to 'crush the bastards'.³⁴ Keating's mood could not have improved when, a year later, Jacques Chirac's *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR) won the March 1993 parliamentary elections, which was followed by strenuous efforts by the French to reopen the 1992 Blair House agreement so important for Australian agricultural interests. Keating

30 Ramesh Thakur, 'A Dispute of Many Colours: France, New Zealand and the "Rainbow Warrior" Affair', *The World Today*, Vol.42, December 1986, pp.209-14.

31 Duncan Campbell, 'Big picture is still an empty frame', *The Bulletin*, 5 December 1995, p.19.

32 Findlay, 'Explaining Australasian Angst', p.375.

33 Carolyn O'Brien, 'Problems in Australian Foreign Policy, January-June 1987', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.33, No.3, 1987, pp.186-8.

34 John Edwards, *Keating: The Inside Story* (Viking, Sydney, 1996), p.464.

gave vent to a growing anger when he visited France on 22 September 1993. Following a ceremony at Villers-Bretonneux, site of some graves of Australian war dead from the First World War, a French reporter asked him innocently for his thoughts on the memorial service. Without warning, Keating launched into a public attack on France: 'The flower of many countries' youth was lost here in France, unselfishly for the greater good of this country. Now at an important time of world decision we are not seeing the magnanimity from France that all of us who fought and respected France have shown it'. Later, on board his aircraft, he was blunter: saying that his comments were prompted by seeing the names of 12,000 Australians chiselled into the headstones, he criticised the 'damn selfish' French attitude towards trade talks; twice this century, Keating said, Australians had helped France. 'And what does it buy us? Nothing'.³⁵

This episode may explain some of Keating's sarcasm towards France in 1995, evident, for example, in his account of his interview with the editor of *Libération*. The editor had apparently asked Keating whether he realised that French Polynesia was French territory:

I said 'Oh yes, there are Polynesians all the way down from Aix-en-Provence and Carcassone. They pop out of the woodwork in the Loire Valley. They are doing Polynesian dances in the back end of the Loire ... There are Polynesians everywhere'.³⁶

But Keating himself did not mention the agricultural dispute in 1995; moreover, if the memories of the French government's agricultural protectionism of 1993 - and Keating's anger - remained in the public memory in 1995, there is little indication that this particular historical episode played an important part in driving Australian anger. Some did mention the Australians who had died fighting for France, but in these cases there were no linkages to the agricultural dispute. Nonetheless, the dispute over trade, and the bitter link that an Australian prime minister made between Australian war dead and contemporary policy must surely have added to the sour history of French-Australian relations in the thirty years prior to 1995.

³⁵ *Age*, 24 September 1993.

³⁶ *CPD*, Representatives, 28 August 1995, p.586.

It is not incidental to an understanding of the Australian anger in 1995 that Chirac himself had been associated with different disputes with Australia for over twenty years. As minister of agriculture in the early 1970s, he had a testy exchange with Canberra over agricultural protection; as mayor of Paris in 1985, he was in a dispute over honouring Australians who had died in the First World War; and as prime minister in 1986, he had gone so far as to publicly describe Hawke as 'very stupid' for his comments about New Caledonia, and then to release an off-the-record comment expressing his hope that Hawke would be defeated in the next election. As an official in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade put it, 'Chirac just doesn't like Australia or Australians'³⁷ - a sentiment, as we have seen above, healthily reciprocated by many Australians.

It should be noted that the 1992 moratorium was seen by many Australians as an opportunity to put the conflictual relationship of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in the past. It could be surmised that the 1995 decision, no matter how sweetened by the promise that the tests would be the last ones held, was seen as a betrayal of the 1992 decision. If anger tends to be deeper when one feels betrayed, then part of the depth of the anger of 1995 can be attributed to betrayal: the resumption of testing did not merely rekindle the anger of the 1970s and 1980s, it magnified it.

France as 'Arrogant'

It can be argued that a second reason why France was a particularly attractive target for anger can be found in an aspect of Australian political culture: a widespread dislike of pretension, self-importance, and arrogance. Although invoking this as an explanation for behaviour runs the risk of national stereotyping, it can nonetheless be noted that stereotypes are often based on deeply rooted and idiosyncratic cultural practices.³⁸ Such a line of argument, applied to the anger against France, suggests the possibility that Australians were particularly angry at the great-power pretensions of the French that were typified by the testing.

³⁷ O'Brien, 'Problems in Australian Foreign Policy', pp.187-8; on Chirac generally, see Gregory, *Les Essais Nucléaires*.

³⁸ For a discussion, see Hugh V. Emy and O.E. Hughes, *Australian Politics: Realities in Conflict* (Macmillan, Melbourne, 2nd edn 1991), pp.113ff.

According to this view, Australians have a sense, even if inchoate, of the imperatives of great-power politics; they understand that great powers, such as China, or Russia, or the United States, will always engage in unpleasant power-maximising behaviour - such as bullying smaller powers, using force against neighbours, or accumulating new weapons systems - and that they will do so with the arrogance that superordinate power inexorably breeds. While people may not like it, they at least expect it, and indeed may even understand it.

But, according to this line of argument, Australians realise that France is not really a great power at all. Rather, the French government just plays at being one. Perhaps, as some have argued, it is part of an on-going attempt to compensate for the national humiliation of having to be rescued half a century ago by a real great power.³⁹ In this view, French great-power pretensions, the use of force, and the arrogance that is carefully cultivated to go with it, are all particularly galling to those in comparably sized states which have made the decision to forego efforts to imitate great-power behaviour in favour of other patterns of statecraft (usually self-perceived as more virtuous, such as 'good international citizenship').

Applied to the case of nuclear testing, this argument suggests that while the Australian government dutifully criticised China after each of its two nuclear tests in 1995,⁴⁰ ordinary Australians were inclined to give China a pass during its testing in 1995, on the grounds that, as a great power, it had an excuse; France, as a *faux* great power, had no such excuse, particularly not in the context of the post-Cold War, post-nuclear era, in which trying to accumulate enough submarine-based missiles to target Russia seems like a 'mug's game'.⁴¹ As a result, French testing was seen by Australians as 'an act of stupidity', as Prime Minister Keating so bluntly put it, rather than an exercise in justifiable power-maximisation. Moreover, the arrogance of

39 See Thomas L. Friedman, 'The bomb and the boomerang: "Don't blow it, Jacques"', *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 1 September 1995.

40 Keating, for example, described the Chinese test on 17 August as a 'serious threat to world peace'. *Australian*, 18 August 1995.

41 Findlay makes a comparable observation regarding the United States, noting that Australians have long distinguished between the American nuclear deterrent, which provided some theoretical security, and the French nuclear force, which they have regarded as 'irrelevant if not positively dangerous'. 'Explaining Australasian Angst', pp.379-80.

the French willingness to defy world opinion made it, for Australians, a hugely attractive target. There is no coincidence that 'arrogant bastards' was one of the most popular ways to describe the French in Australian political discourse in 1995.

L'Irrationale est-il fort? *The Relative Costlessness of Protest*

In his September 1995 television interview, Chirac suggested that Australian reactions to French testing could be easily explained: 'dans ce domain', he said, 'l'irrationale est fort' (this issue-area [that is, nuclear testing] is marked by a great deal of irrationality). But it can be argued that in fact Australians were demonstrating considerable rationality in their anger in 1995: in the sense that they could get angry at France - sneer at French pretensions, provoke a rupture in relations - with relatively few costs attached to the demonstration of emotion.

After all, there were relatively few ties of concrete material interest between the two countries. Trade between France and Australia, at \$1.8 billion a year, while not totally insignificant, was not enough to prompt a great degree of caution. Even the high-profile banning of Dassault from the lead-in fighter programme was costless: the Alphajet was never in serious contention. Moreover, there was no dependence either way in the relationship: nothing that France supplied Australia could not be obtained elsewhere, and vice versa; and indeed in the case of some products, such as wine, there were a number of Australians who stood to benefit from whatever interruption of trade occurred.

Australian government officials, of course, had a rather different view. They had to deal with the French government on a range of international issues, both bilaterally and multilaterally, and they grew more and more concerned as the Franco-Australian relationship came to resemble a state of war as the winter of 1995 wore on. Gareth Evans in particular was concerned that France would use

its influence, particularly among francophone West African states, to thwart an Australian bid for a Security Council seat in 1996.⁴²

But ordinary folk had no such worries: maintaining good diplomatic relations with France was, and is, relatively unimportant to most Australians. In short, Australians could freely indulge their more larrikin proclivities. As Andrew Denton of Seven Network put it bluntly after dumping manure on the French ambassador's driveway: 'There's no denying that this was a juvenile, unsophisticated, and ultimately futile protest, but by God it was satisfying'.⁴³ No doubt hundreds of thousands of other Australians who engaged in anti-French protests in 1995 felt exactly the same way.

42 *Australian*, 24-25 June 1995.

43 *Advertiser*, 17 June 1995.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In this monograph, we have tried to provide a full account of the 'brief madness' that seized so many Australians in the last half of 1995: that short but intense burst of anger over the issue of French nuclear testing. Rarely does one find a policy issue on which so many try to have their say; rarely does one find an issue where the population of a country is so galvanised in one direction. The account here stresses the pervasiveness of the protests, as well as their depth.

But we have also tried to account for the intense anger of Australians in a way that addresses the central puzzle of the case of the resumption of nuclear testing by France: why were Australians so angry at France, but so indifferent towards China, when both governments in Paris and Beijing were doing exactly the same thing, at exactly the same time, and approximately the same distance from Australia's shores?

We have argued that focusing on such factors as domestic concerns, 'media-isation', or anti-nuclear sentiment in a post-Cold War context provide only partial explanations. Rather, we suggest that a more fruitful line of analysis is to be found in the particularities of an international relationship where Australians could, with relatively few costs, engage in anger at a government that takes considerable pride in being arrogant.

This case study, we suggest, offers a number of lessons about the making of security policy. It demonstrates the capacity and the willingness of citizens to define their sense of well-being in broad terms. It also shows clearly the ability of civil society to influence government policy when there is broad consensus. It likewise provides an interesting case study in how the media can help shape a foreign policy issue, demonstrating that on certain foreign policy issues, the Australian media tends to abandon the ideals of objectivity inherent in the 'mirror' model of professional journalism. It also reveals an important element of Australian political culture - a willingness to engage in protests on a national scale on foreign policy issues, a propensity not widely shared among other OECD countries.

The case is also a useful reminder that in what is often held to be a post-nationalist age, it was all too easy for Australians to embrace a quintessentially nationalist methodology, and construct an antithetical Other, a nation that can be hated, made fun of, sneered at, or raged against.

This has particular implications for the future of regional politics in the South Pacific. Although some might be inclined to see the rage of 1995 as a unique phenomenon, a confluence of factors unlikely to be reproduced in the future, particularly with the end of French testing, it can be argued that the case of the resumption of testing would not suggest such a conclusion. It is true that events prompted the departure of French nuclear testers from the South Pacific. But French colonialists remain in the region. Given the dominant (even if highly presumptuous) conception that Australians have of 'their' neighbourhood - so well revealed in the protests over nuclear testing - it is likely that as long as there are French colonialists in the South Pacific, French policy could produce comparable anti-French sentiment in Australia in the future.

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IN JUNE 1995, the newly elected president of France, Jacques Chirac, announced that his government was planning to conduct a number of underground nuclear tests at the French testing facilities in Polynesia. The announcement sparked public protests around the Asia-Pacific, but nowhere was the anger at Chirac's decision more vigorous or widespread than in Australia. If anger is a 'brief madness', as Horace suggested, then over the winter of 1995, Australia was gripped by such a brief madness: hundreds of thousands of ordinary Australians, from all parts of the community, expressed their opposition to the testing, engaging in a variety of protests. This monograph traces that opposition, looking at the ways in which the anti-nuclear movement unfolded. It pays particular attention to the role of the media in shaping those protests. It also seeks to explain this brief but unprecedented spike of national anger. The authors look at the various explanations put forward to account for the outburst of Australian rage, and argue that none of them adequately explains this case. Rather, they conclude that the most potent explanation lies in the nature of the nation doing the testing rather than the testing itself.

