AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY: REFOCUSING TOWARDS THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

RAY KINI BALEIKASAVU

THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILMENT FOR THE MASTERS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE (STRATEGY AND DIPLOMACY)

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITY
UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA
BANGI

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have undertaken the project entitled Australian Foreign Policy: Refocusing Towards the Pacific Islands. I also declare that this thesis is entirely my own work except for the quotations and summaries, which have been duly acknowledged.

Date: 10.04.2006
Signature: [Signature]
Name: Ray Kini Baleikasavu
Registration No: 34545
ABSTRACT

Australia's foreign policy approach towards the Pacific Islands has always been considered, since the days Pacific Island states attained their independence to be of "benign neglect". Their involvement in the affairs of these states were always sporadic, merely responding only to requests of the Pacific island states and to problems that are potentially threatening to Australia's economic interests in the Pacific region. They have always relied on the capacity and willingness of island governments to handle their own affairs and tackle their own problems without any interference. The non-interference policy on the affairs of other sovereign states has always been the "brake" that prevented Australia from meddling with other states affairs. However, recently things began to change. In refocusing its foreign policy, Australia has made itself no longer a mere a spectator but a player in the affairs of Pacific islands. They are now directly involve in the development of these island states as well as the solving of problems that was once left entirely on island governments to deal with. Australia's approach has evolved from once benign neglect to an interventionist and dominant approach. The refocusing of Australia's foreign policy has also imposed new challenges for Pacific Island countries in their endeavor for self-determination and control of their own sovereignties. Despite unprecedented flow of Australian aids and assistances, and active role in the region, Pacific Island response to Australia's actions have been a mixture of cooperation and criticism. Responses were largely pragmatic and driven primarily, although not exclusively, by domestic considerations. The primary focus of this paper is therefore to identify the instrumental factors that draw Australia to the region and the underlying reasons that prompted the refocusing of Australian foreign policy. What motivates Australia to assist the region and the factors that conditioned the behavior of these small island countries will be also examined and discussed. The period to which the study will concentrate on, is from 1996 to the present, the point in time John Howard's administration acceded to the helm of Australian leadership.
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