Forum: General Assembly 4 (Special Political and Decolonization)

Issue: The question of French Polynesia

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Position: Deputy Chair

Introduction

French Polynesia is an overseas collectivity, often times referred to as an overseas country, of the Republic of France. It was a colony of France since the 19th century and had only gained its’ internal autonomy in the recent decades. French Polynesia has a very unique government. It's autonomy is greater than most other overseas collectivities of France. French Polynesia has acquired autonomy in all areas except those relating to police, monetary policy, tertiary education, immigration, and defense and foreign affairs. It even has an assembly and a President, whose duties are fashioned after those of the Prime Minister.

However, French Polynesia has a very heavy history with nuclear testing that lasted for 30 years. It is often a subject of debate between the French national government and certain French Polynesian political members.

It is also a region where the question of independence is very heated and relevant. Many French Polynesian politicians are openly outspoken against France and wish for independence. However, it has not yet had an independence referendum like New Caledonia, a fellow overseas collectivity, did. However, it is also important to note that many in that region do not wish to be separated from France. This is furthered by the results of the New Caledonian referendum, which led to New Caledonia retaining its’ status as a French overseas collectivity.

In order to resolve this issue as best as possible, it is important to understand that this is a multi-faceted and complex issue. It has existed for a very long time and requires a lot of understanding and knowledge from those that attempt to resolve it.
Definition of Key Terms

**Overseas Collectivity**

Overseas collectivities (fr: collectivités d’outre-mer or COM) are administrative divisions. These territories include and other French overseas holdings with a particular status.

**Overseas Country**

Overseas country (fr: pays d’outre mer) is the designation for the overseas collectivity of French Polynesia. Following a law passed on 27 February 2004, French Polynesia was granted the status of an overseas country. As of today, French Polynesia is the only country that holds this status.

**Metropolitan France**

Metropolitan France (fr: France métropolitaine or la Métropole) is the part of France that is in Europe. It can also be described as mainland France plus the island of Corsica.

**Referendum**

A referendum (plural: referendums or referenda) is a direct vote in which all the people in a country or an area are asked to give their opinion about or decide an important political or social question. It is alternatively referred to as plebiscite.

**No-confidence vote**

A vote of no confidence is a statement or vote which states that a person(s) in a position of responsibility (government, managerial, etc.) is no longer deemed fit to hold that position.

**Atoll**

An atoll is a ring-shaped coral reef including a coral rim that encircles a lagoon partially or completely.

Background Information
History of nuclear testing

Mururoa atoll, one of the islands of French Polynesia, was the site of nuclear testing performed by the France. In total, 193 nuclear tests were performed in that atoll between 1966 and 1996. The nuclear weapons development that led to the tests was a part of the national force de frappe developed in the late 1950s and 1960s by France as a means to distance itself from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). France tried to do so using the development of nuclear weapons as a means of nuclear deterrence. This decision was faced with protests from numerous members of the Polynesian Territorial Assembly. Nonetheless, tests continued.

By 1974, after immense pressure from the government of New Zealand, the nuclear testing was moved underneath the atoll. This move eventually led to significant damages to the ecosystem of Mururoa atoll and the ecosystems surrounding it. According to Greenpeace, the explosions sucked all the water out of the lagoon, "raining dead fish and mollusks down on the atoll", and that it spread contamination across the Pacific as far as Peru and New Zealand.

In 1985, operatives from the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE), a French intelligence agency, were charged with sabotaging and sinking Rainbow Warrior, a Greenpeace fleet that protested nuclear testing in Mururoa atoll. After the investigation into the incident and the international crisis following the bombing of the ship, France accepted responsibility and Foreign Minister Charles Hernu resigned from his post.

In 1995, French President, Jacques Chirac, completed a nuclear test in the atoll, just one year after the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. This led to worldwide protest and a temporary embargo on French wine. The tests of the atoll officially concluded on January of 1996.

The question of independence
In 2018, New Caledonia, a fellow overseas collectivity of France, was conducting a referendum for independence from France. The independence movement in New Caledonia has long been set in motion due to hostilities between the French and the native Kanak people of New Caledonia. In 1986, UN included New Caledonia in the United Nations List of Non-Self Governing Territories, a list which French Polynesia is also a part of.

Oscar Temaru, former President of French Polynesia and leader of the pro-independence Tavini Huiraatira Party, commented that French Polynesia could follow New Caledonia’s lead. He also expressed his wish to see UN organise the referendum instead of France. However, on November 4th of 2018, New Caledonians have voted to stay a part of the Republic of France and so far, France has ignored bids by French Polynesians for a referendum.

**Political instability**

It can be undoubtedly expressed that French Polynesia’s inner turmoil about independence can be expressed through the political instability it experienced in the early 2000s. The then political climate of French Polynesia, and arguably it’s current political climate, is a battle between pro-independence and pro-French political parties. For the better part of the 2000s, political leaders, Oscar Temaru, leader of the Tavini Huiraatira independence party, Gaston Flosse and Gaston Tong Sang, members of Tāhōʻēra’a Huira’atira anti-independence, continued to oust each other in leadership positions.

In 2004, French Polynesia suffered from a political crisis after Gaston Flosse’s coalition managed to pass a motion of a vote of no-confidence against the then President Oscar Temaru following the May elections for seats in the Territorial Assembly of French Polynesia. This posed into question if the national French government should call for a re-election because of the political crisis.
**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

**France**

France is at the center stage of the issue of French Polynesia. Since French Polynesia doesn’t have complete autonomy, it is up to France to go through any major changes in that region. France faces a challenge on this issue since it represents not only national French interests but also the interests of its’ citizens in French Polynesia. All in all, it would be safe to say that nearly all aspects of this issue either indirectly or directly affect France.

**United Nations (UN)**

United Nations (UN) has been a crucial part of interactions between French Polynesia and France. In 2013, French Polynesia has been re-inscribed into the list non-self governing territories, prompting an outraged response from France. Being put on the list opened up the opportunity of an independence referendum for French Polynesia, which is a huge step for the island’s independence efforts. The United Nations Human Rights Council’s Special Rapporteur has also been invited to investigate into the spillover effects of the nuclear tests conducted in French Polynesia. It serves to show the extent The United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation (UNSCD) also plays a very large part in the debates about the future of French Polynesia. All things considered, the UN is a very important part of the negotiations concerning French Polynesia.

**International Criminal Court (ICC)**

In October of 2018, Oscar Temaru, former President of French Polynesia, submitted an official complaint to the International Criminal Court against France for the nuclear tests that the nation conducted. Temaru cited “crimes against humanity” and “nuclear colonisation” as
reasons for his complaint. The complaint seeks to hold all living French Presidents that were in power since testing in Mururoa atoll began 1966.

**New Zealand**

New Zealand and French Polynesia have very close relations due to their close cultural and indigenous connections. The Māori people of New Zealand are believed to have originated from the French Polynesian islands and the two cultures still share a lot of similarities. New Zealand was also the site of the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior, a Greenpeace activist ship, by French intelligence agents. New Zealander officials very heavily involved in the investigation of the sinking of the ship. The New Zealand government continuous to maintain a strong relationship with French Polynesia.

**Timeline of Events**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>The Polynesian Islands were annexed by France and consequently, became a French colony.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>French Polynesia officially became an overseas territory under the French Fourth Republic, headed by Charles de Gaulle, and French Polynesians obtained French citizenship and the right to vote.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Nuclear tests begin in Mururoa atoll.</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Nuclear tests were moved underwater because of extensive complaints and protests from New Zealand.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Rainbow Warrior, a Greenpeace fleet, is sunk by French intelligence operatives in Auckland, New Zealand.</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>Nuclear testing in French Polynesia halts completely.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>French Polynesia became an overseas collectivity, however, due to its’ increased autonomy status, it is often referred to as an overseas country.</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>French Polynesia suffered from a grave political crisis, which consequently led up to then President Oscar Temaru to be voted out of his position. Gaston Flosse assumed the position following the exit of Oscar Temaru.</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>A law concerning nuclear testing compensation is passed in the French National Assembly and Senate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>French Polynesia was added to the list of Non-Self Governing Territories by the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation (UNSDC).</td>
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**Relevant UN Treaties and Events**

- Question of French Polynesia, 5 December 2014 (A/RES/69/103)
- Working paper prepared by the Secretariat on French Polynesia (A/AC.109/2015/16)

**Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue**

French Polynesia has long faced internal turmoil about the question of its’ own independence. However, it is important to note, that the movement towards independence has long been in action. In 2013, when French Polynesia formally requested an independence referendum, France denied this request. To this day, France continues to deny requests for referendums.
In 2009, French defence minister, Hervé Morin, introduced a nuclear compensation law to pay reparations to civilians that suffered as a result of nuclear testing conducted by France in the 20th century. However, the law was seen as too restrictive, since nearly all compensation claims had been rejected. In 2017, the French National Assembly and the Senate voted to amend the law by removing the term negligible risk as a way to allow for more compensation cases to be accepted. By August of 2018, eight more compensation claims from Tahiti had been accepted by the commission charged with poor health assessments. However, according to a French Polynesian public broadcaster, 10,000 people have developed radiation-related conditions and illnesses since 1992.

Possible Solutions

When approaching the issue of French Polynesia, delegates are expected to pay close attention to two topics. The first is the question of nuclear compensation and the second is the question of independence. While delegates are not limited to these two topics, it is important to recognise that these two problems have been at the root of most of the issues that have arisen in French Polynesia decades prior. So, in resolving the issue of French Polynesia, one has to resolve these two issues.

Firstly, when dealing with nuclear compensation, there are several routes one might want to take. However, perhaps a more sensible route would be that of negotiation. Representatives from French Polynesia, as well as representatives of the French government, need to be able to sit down at the negotiating table and settle the terms of nuclear compensation. Seeing as the laws passed previously by the French government have not been as comprehensive and many victims are still awaiting compensation, it is important for both parties to reach a reasonable compromise. In addition, inviting the UN to the negotiating table...
could also lead to a faster resolution of the problem and aid in reaching the compromise that both parties have agreed to.

Another way in which France can compensate for the damage done to the French Polynesian islands is through a wider public recognition of the nuclear testing it has conducted in that area. Public recognition is an important part of the healing process that the people who have to live with the consequences of the testing have to go through. It allows for less animated and more productive diplomatic discourse.

As for the question of French Polynesian independence, it is evident that an independence referendum, such as the one in New Caledonia, needs to be conducted. The referendum will give people of French Polynesia the option that they have been given for a long time and will settle the issue, and all the other issues connected to it, once and for all.

Bibliography


Appendix


“The United Nations and Decolonization.” United Nations, United Nations,
II.  


III.  