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BIG NORM - A PRINCIPLED PRAGMATIST?

THE ORIGINS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NORMAN KIRK'S ANTI-NUCLEAR WEAPONS POLICIES
1959-1974

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This essay aims to explore Norman Kirk's anti-nuclear weapons policies. It focuses on policy formulation and diplomatic process within the context of the 'moral and independent' foreign policy. The author does not aim to describe in detail the 1973 ICOJ case, that sought to end French atmospheric nuclear testing. Others have dealt with this event in detail and with great expertise. Instead the essay re-examines all of Kirk's anti-nuclear weapons policies, beginning in 1959 and ending with Kirk's death in August 1974. Kirk's policies continued in various forms after his death. Yet the strong and focused leadership that he provided in the field of disarmament and for humanitarian issues in general ended on 31 August 1974. The death of Kirk was a watershed for the New Zealand Labour Party. The man who dominated its leadership through two electoral defeats and one victory vanished from the political scene. Kirk's life as a mature politician constitutes an era in the history of New Zealand's anti-nuclear movement. His leadership deserves to be evaluated on its own terms.
Norman Eric Kirk
Prime Minister of New Zealand
25 November 1972 - 31 August 1974
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Page 35, Gordon Minhinnick’s view of Kirk’s stand against French nuclear testing, from *Life and Career of the Late Prime Minister, Norman Kirk*, Auckland 1974, p.45.


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Abbreviations

ANZUS  Australia, New Zealand and the United States
CHOGM  Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CND    Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CTBT   Comprehensive Test-ban Treaty
FOL    Federation of Labour
MFA    Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NFZ    Nuclear-Free Zone
NZ     New Zealand
PTBT   Partial Test-ban Treaty
RAN    Royal Australian Navy
RNZN   Royal New Zealand Navy
SEATO  South East Asia Treaty Organisation
SPNFZ  South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone
UN     United Nations
UNGA   United Nations General Assembly
US     United States of America
USSR   Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Introduction

Norman Kirk initiated a programme of external action unmatched by any New Zealand government since the end of the Second World War. An important aspect of this increased diplomatic activity was an anti-nuclear weapons policy. The politics of nuclear weapons were consistently a part of Kirk's own agenda from 1959 until his death in 1974. This anti-nuclear stance had wide implications for other aspects of Labour's policies. The nuclear arms policy principally affected diplomatic relations with the Commonwealth, France, and the United States. There were also other domestic and foreign policy issues that were intimately related to the anti-nuclear policy. Under the Third Labour Government anti-nuclear weapons policies became an integral part of a wider foreign policy mission. New Zealand's anti-nuclear challenge during the Kirk era cannot be understood without examining its strategic implications for other foreign policy initiatives.

The anti-nuclear stance was an evolving phenomenon that spanned three decades. The Second Labour Government's policy on nuclear arms was transformed by twelve years of geo-political change; and shaped by Kirk's own evolving foreign policy doctrine. A stance suited to the Cold War environment of the late 1950s was subtly refined to fit into the climate of détente. In the late 1960s New Zealand's historically paternalistic defence partners were retreating from embroilment in Asia. The United States and United Kingdom were actively encouraging South East Asian countries to take control of regional affairs. The end of the Vietnam War, President Nixon's Guam Doctrine, and Britain's East of Suez policy signaled this new expectation of increased self-reliance among SEATO nations and other ex-colonies. A more self-reliant foreign policy might not mirror American or British opinion. Thus the British and American policy shift provided a unique opportunity for New Zealand to pursue a more independent foreign policy. This is what Frank Corner, Secretary of Foreign Affairs January 1973 – May 1980, described as the “window of opportunity”. New Zealand could mobilize international opinion against nuclear weapons testing and proliferation without jeopardizing existing relationships with its allies.
Labour’s anti-nuclear weapons policy reflected Kirk’s own understanding of the changing geo-political climate. By 1973 Kirk had articulated a doctrine that has been described as the Moral and Independent Foreign Policy. He described independence in foreign policy as the ability to ‘speak out’. Foreign policy was to be more self-reliant; not guided by what the United States or Britain thought, but by New Zealand’s own independent opinion. This independence from old Great Power allies should not be construed as an insular worldview, isolationism or emerging non-alignment. Kirk’s policies were truly internationalist; he hoped that small countries could collectively challenge Great Power unanimity through the channels of international law. Kirk argued that the security of small states could only be guaranteed by the rule of law in international affairs.

Kirk sought to introduce greater cohesion and forward planning into foreign policy. Policies proceeded from a set of general moral principles. A moral stance on international issues would always be in the nation’s best interest, since ‘morally right’ policies would always gain the broadest international support. Thus Kirk’s moral-independent foreign policy involved cultivating better relations with other independently minded states. This provided an alternative form of ideological alignment to the bipolar Cold War versions. Broad international support from a variety of nations would help NZ pursue its own interests. Indeed such support was crucial in challenging large powers such as France. Moral cohesion in foreign policy became an integral part of strategic policy planning. Increased foreign aid, the cancellation of the Springbok Tour, withdrawal from Vietnam, and opposition to nuclear testing were not piecemeal efforts at righteousness, but mutually complementary policies. Kirk hoped to foster peaceful, social democratic change in the international system. Thus he needed to demonstrate to the world that New Zealand also aspired to his internationalist and humanitarian vision.

This ‘independent’ approach was reminiscent of earlier developments in NZ international relations, particularly those during the Savage and Fraser Governments. The higher echelons of External Affairs entered the civil service during the Second World War. Corner, Sir George Laking, and others had played an enthusiastic role in the Canberra Pact, the San Francisco Conference, and other important international and regional developments at the end of the war. Peter Fraser opposed Great Power veto
rights in the United Nations Charter. Kirk’s new doctrine engaged the diplomatic corps in ways akin to Fraser’s earlier version of independence. Kirk’s new approach to international relations was not dissimilar to the sentiment expressed in Corner’s ‘small power rampant speeches’. These policy papers were written for an embryonic wartime diplomatic corps that was searching for a definition of New Zealand’s new international role. It is important when assessing Kirk’s anti-nuclear strategy to recognize the participation of Foreign Affairs in developing and refining the independent approach to small power diplomacy. These officials had served a National Government for the previous twelve years and would have served any elected government faithfully. Yet Frank Corner views the Kirk era as more positive for foreign affairs than that under Keith Holyoake and John Marshall.

Norman Kirk consistently argued that moral principles were the best basis for foreign policy. This was evident in the Ministry of Foreign Affair’s (MFA) annual report to Parliament for the year ended 31 March 1973. The introduction to this document, reprinted in Foreign Affairs Review, illustrates the doctrine from which foreign policy proceeded.

The Government which I lead is determined to find and hold to a firm moral basis for its foreign policy. It may be said that the only basis for a sound foreign policy is the national interest. I see no contradiction. I believe that to base our foreign policies on moral principles is the most enlightened form of self-interest. What is morally right is likely to be politically right.

The report helps explain the strategy of moral and independent policy, but does little to help define Kirk’s very subjective morality. Issues can be examined individually, revealing what the Prime Minister viewed as morally correct. For example Kirk believed that nuclear weapons were morally wrong and relief to Bangladesh was morally right. This is still too superficial an analysis. The preceding National Government held similar views. What differentiated the Third Labour Government was its increased activity. Frank Corner argues that moral policy had more to do with ‘being positive’ than simply identifying right from wrong. Kirk argued that moral policies were most likely to prove ‘politically correct’ and find approval offshore. Thus increasing external activity in humanitarian and moral spheres would simultaneously promote NZ’s national interests.

Kirk’s morality was inextricably linked with the notion of ‘independence’. Kirk was prepared to tailor his foreign policy according to his convictions. Thus he would
sometimes find himself disagreeing with New Zealand’s allies on specific issues, such as nuclear weapons. Indeed Kirk’s independence stemmed from his dissatisfaction with the way in which international relations were locked into the Cold War. Kirk reserved the right to formulate foreign policy that was independent to New Zealand’s status as an aligned country. This did not mean that he questioned New Zealand’s role in the ANZUS alliance. Kirk equally criticised US and Soviet nuclear policy. He exploited the opportunities created by détente and the Nixon Doctrine. Kirk believed that Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger sought to harmonise US foreign policy with the conditions of global pluralism. Norman Kirk welcomed this challenge for New Zealand to play a more independent part in its own defence.

The challenge for the government was to balance this new definition of national interest with existing strategic and economic realities. An overtly assertive foreign policy would not necessarily achieve the kind of international cooperation that Kirk wanted to foster. Anti-nuclear weapons protest needed to be tempered by ANZUS and SEATO commitments, Commonwealth relations, and the changing economic situation that had been triggered by Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community.

Kirk’s anti-nuclear weapons policy evolved three distinct features by 1973. These features were a proposed South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone, the pursuit of a comprehensive test-ban treaty in the UN and specific protest measures against countries testing nuclear weapons. The International Court Case against French testing and the decision to send a frigate to Mururoa are the most dramatic examples of the third facet of Kirk’s policy. By 1974 only protest leveled directly at France had produced any concrete results. France agreed to stop atmospheric testing in June 1974. This lack of results does not render other aspects of Kirk’s anti-nuclear policy insignificant. The attempt to mobilize international opinion against nuclear weapons is fundamental to a wider notion of independent policy. The anti-nuclear programme should be evaluated within this context of a moral and independent foreign policy. Norman Kirk was successful in formulating a coherent alternative to previous foreign policies. He also succeeded in cultivating broad support among the international community. Therefore the development of the anti-nuclear policy from its inception in the late 1950s and 1960s until its implementation under the Third Labour Government warrants closer study.
Notes for Introduction


7. Ibid, pp.3,6,8,9.


11. Corner, p.4.


Norman Kirk was deeply committed to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. He genuinely believed that nuclear war and nuclear testing were real threats to humankind. In Opposition Kirk formulated policies that he thought might diminish the risk of nuclear arms proliferation, nuclear war, and environmental degradation. He also recognised that New Zealand’s search for security was inseparable from the quest for regional stability. Kirk believed that regional stability depended upon collective security. He also believed that the stability of the South Pacific would be best served by excluding nuclear weapons from the region. Thus Kirk attempted to blend New Zealand’s traditional commitment to collective security with a radical and independent anti-nuclear weapons agenda.

Before 1963 New Zealand’s major allies were the only nuclear powers that had tested nuclear weapons in the Pacific. The Labour and National Governments of the 1950s and 1960s were beneficiaries of the American nuclear deterrent; both parties remained faithful to collective security and its inseparable nuclear umbrella. In 1958 the Second Labour Government furnished Britain with support for its nuclear tests at Christmas Island. This strategic reality limited the scope of official anti-nuclear protest. In 1963 the French Government announced its intentions to move its nuclear test site from the Sahara to French Polynesia. This event dramatically changed New Zealand’s position in the nuclear testing debate and irreversibly changed New Zealand’s political landscape.

Opposition to nuclear testing and support for nuclear disarmament were humanitarian policies that fitted well with other humanitarian aspects of Kirk’s external agenda. In 1959 Kirk was already advocating untied foreign aid and nuclear disarmament to promote world peace. In 1963 Kirk, not yet leader of the Labour Party, seized the new issue of French nuclear testing. He argued that the New Zealand Government would have to be more vocal and more proactive in both international forums and in its direct
diplomatic contacts with France. Kirk focused upon the establishment of a nuclear free zone as a practical way to prevent the testing and stationing of nuclear weapons in the South Pacific. In 1965 he defeated Arnold Nordmeyer for the Labour Party’s leadership. Under Kirk’s leadership the SPNFZ became an integral part of Labour Party doctrine. Kirk’s response to French nuclear testing thus had far reaching consequences for New Zealand. These consequences became fully apparent in 1985, when the Labour Party finally failed to reconcile its anti-nuclear agenda with the ANZUS Treaty.

Norman Kirk made his first speech in the House against nuclear proliferation and testing on 30 June 1959. The speech summarized the Second Labour Government’s achievements and hopes for external affairs. Kirk argued that opposition to nuclear testing was only a beginning to eventual nuclear disarmament. He also referred to New Zealand’s increased participation in international affairs and its commitment to foreign aid and collective security as means to promote peace. In his sixteen year political career Kirk never abandoned these ideals as a basis for New Zealand’s foreign policy.

The politics of nuclear weapons were not a priority for the National Government that defeated Labour in 1960. Occasionally nuclear testing and nuclear disarmament were debated in the House. The development of Kirk’s anti-nuclear weapons policy is evident in these rare debates. In 1962 Kirk cited the American testing at Johnson Atoll as an example of how nuclear weapons had a direct impact on New Zealand. He argued that New Zealanders needed to be educated about the terrifying reality of nuclear weapons. Kirk also advocated a proposed system of separate inspection zones as means to curtail the nuclear arms race and encourage nuclear disarmament.

Three separate public petitions inspired this debate. Two of these called upon the government to condemn nuclear testing and the third asked the government not to “accept aid from” nuclear weapons or have them based in New Zealand. This petition challenged both Labour’s and National’s pro-ANZUS stance. The Petitions Committee argued that the wording of the third petition conflicted with New Zealand’s collective security commitments. Kirk did not support the third petition or offer his opinion on whether New Zealand should revise its reliance on the American nuclear deterrent. He recognised that ANZUS was crucial to New Zealand’s security, but also championed the anti-nuclear weapons movement. This contradiction challenged Kirk to devise a strategy whereby
New Zealand could maintain its partnership with the United States and simultaneously pursue a radical anti-nuclear weapons agenda.

The following year France announced its decision to move its nuclear testing into French Polynesia. This event stimulated Kirk to consider more practical ways in which the New Zealand Government could oppose the proliferation of atomic weapons. In July and August 1963 Kirk argued that the National Government should aim to establish a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNFZ). The Australian Labour Party already advocated this policy, its leader Arthur Calwell having first proposed a nuclear-free zone (NFZ) in May 1962. The Government Printer published Kirk’s July speech under the title *An Address by Mr N.E. Kirk, M.P. (Lyttelton), On The Proposal For a Southern Hemisphere Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone.* Kirk paid for the cost of circulation and printing himself - an indication of how seriously he considered the SPNFZ and the threat of nuclear testing. Kirk saw the SPNFZ as a practical first step to stopping French testing in Polynesia. Nuclear weapons were not stationed in New Zealand and the Southern Hemisphere contained no strategic targets. Kirk thus argued that the SPNFZ would not jeopardize the American deterrent, because the South Pacific was strategically insignificant. This policy was sophisticated and pragmatic; it suggested a way in which New Zealand could prevent French testing and simultaneously reconcile a radical anti-nuclear policy with ANZUS.

Kirk embellished the SPNFZ argument by comparing it to the proposed Latin American Nuclear Free Zone and the Antarctic Treaty. The US agreed in principle to the Latin American Zone, which suggested that American officials might also receive the SPNFZ seriously. The existing Antarctic Treaty included a nuclear free zone that could potentially be extended to the equator in the Pacific. This provided a legal framework and precedent to create the SPNFZ. Kirk noted that the Australian Labour Party, ‘the alternative to the present Government of Australia’, had also proposed the SPNFZ. His address concluded with the suggestion that if French testing was not stopped, other Northern Hemisphere countries might attempt ship-based atmospheric nuclear tests even closer to New Zealand.

Parliamentary debates reveal that by the early 1960s some important elements of the Third Labour Government’s anti-nuclear weapons policy were present in Kirk’s
thinking. Anti-nuclear weapons policies thus became a more prominent part of Labour policy when Kirk became Leader of the Opposition in 1965. In the mid-1960s Kirk was beginning to refine the old Labour idea of “independence” in external relations. Anti-nuclear weapons policies and an alternative approach to Vietnam were the most controversial aspects of this new agenda. As Leader of the Opposition Kirk needed a doctrine that could explain how independent policies and traditional partnerships would function together under a Labour government.

The 1966 Labour Party Election Manifesto helps explain how Kirk’s dualist notion of ‘independence’ and ‘loyalty’ might function. It described the US as a ‘staunch friend’ with whom there cannot always be ‘unanimity’. The word ‘independent’ practically became a synonym for disagreement with the US and Britain, although Kirk did not challenge New Zealand’s status as an aligned nation. The 1966 Manifesto reinforced the belief that ANZUS was essential to New Zealand’s defence, but simultaneously promised to support nuclear free zones and withdraw combat troops from Vietnam. Kirk made it clear that he wanted to reconcile his humanitarian policies with New Zealand’s strategic and ideological links with the US and Britain.

Kirk did not suggest that New Zealand should stand alone on the nuclear-testing issue. His independence was not synonymous with isolationism and non-cooperation. He argued that other concerned countries would support NZ’s initiatives against French testing. In particular Kirk had African and Pacific countries in mind. He suggested that African countries would vigorously support the SPNFZ, because New Zealand had opposed French Testing in the Sahara. Kirk firmly believed that African votes were guaranteed for any anti-nuclear weapons initiative in the UN. In December 1964 a National member suggested that African countries would not support the SPNFZ. Kirk replied by producing a memorandum from the October 1964 Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in Cairo, at which African countries played a prominent part. This memorandum suggested that the non-aligned countries should support the SPNFZ and a UN resolution condemning French nuclear testing in the Pacific. It also proposed that a legal opinion be sought at the International Court of Justice. At the 1966 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meeting in Wellington Kirk spoke against French nuclear testing. He
reminded African delegates that New Zealand had supported the 1962 UN resolution opposing French testing in the Sahara.\(^{16}\)

Kirk’s 1966 CPA Conference speech and the 1966 Election Manifesto prioritised anti-nuclear weapons policies. The introduction to the Manifesto’s chapter on External Affairs began with the sentence: ‘The threat of conflict with the attendant menace of nuclear destruction has made the conduct of foreign policy more important than ever before.’\(^{17}\) Anti-nuclear weapons protest was now inextricably tied to Labour policy. The most important policy document, the Election Manifesto, shows that Labour took nuclear weapons issues very seriously. In 1966 anti-nuclear protest was an alternative campaign issue to the Vietnam War. Vietnam was a difficult issue for the Labour Party and Kirk urged his candidates to avoid the issue during the campaign.\(^{18}\) The National Government’s decision to send combat forces to Vietnam was popular. Labour, in contrast, wanted to withdraw the artillerymen and replace them with ‘constructive aid’.\(^{19}\) This proposed abandonment of the American and Australian military effort in Vietnam was not a popular example of ‘independent’ policy. Barry Gustafson, a Labour candidate in 1966, argues that Kirk attributed his loss of the 1966 election to Labour’s anti-Vietnam War stance during the campaign.\(^{20}\) French nuclear testing provided Kirk with an alternative issue with which to launch his “independent” foreign policy.

Southern Africa was another issue that challenged the completeness of Labour’s foreign policy. In opposition Kirk was never able to deal effectively with inconsistencies in his approach to African affairs. The African problem was analogous to Vietnam; Kirk’s hands were once again tied by public opinion. Many New Zealanders cherished traditional rugby matches between the All Blacks and Springboks. Some conservative New Zealanders were also sympathetic to Ian Smith’s regime in Rhodesia. Kirk’s African policies included condemnation of racial discrimination and increased foreign aid. These were “Africa friendly” policies, but fell short of the kind of radical measures demanded by the new African states. Black Africa demanded, above all else, an end to sporting contacts with South Africa.\(^{21}\) In the eyes of decolonised Africa New Zealand was a pariah state. New Zealand continuously breached the sporting boycott with South Africa and was singularly supportive of white Rhodesia. Southern African issues seriously detracted from New Zealand’s non-racial image and the esteem of non-European countries.\(^{22}\)
Kirk believed that African countries would provide important support for his campaign against nuclear testing. This belief in automatic African support was naïve because Kirk was unable to deliver the promises that African countries demanded. In the 1972 election campaign Kirk promised that Labour would not prevent the Springboks from touring New Zealand. Diplomatic realities later forced Kirk to break this election promise.

Neither New Zealand’s racist image nor Labour’s conservative approach to Southern Africa helped win support for Kirk’s anti nuclear weapons policy. Yet Kirk was very successful in winning friends among the leaders of prominent developing countries. Diplomatic achievements in 1973 and 1974, such as his highly successful Asian tour, show that Kirk benefited from the relationships that he cultivated in Opposition. Kirk made several extended overseas trips as Leader of the Opposition. In 1970 he visited Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In Singapore he met the President, Lee Kuan Yew, with whom he later developed considerable rapport. In 1999 Lee Kuan Yew recalled that Kirk had ‘gravitus’, a natural sense of presence and ability.

In 1971 and 1972 Kirk managed to visit the United Nations in New York, The Council of Europe in Strasbourg, the United Kingdom to participate in EEC trade negotiations, India, and Bangladesh. He became chairman of the Asian Bureau of the Socialist International and was the first western politician to visit Bangladesh. Kirk participated in the 1972 Socialist International conference held in Singapore, enabling him to meet with Lee Kuan Yew again. The trips that Kirk made in Opposition provided him with valuable experience and friendships. He also raised the profile of the New Zealand Labour Party and generated considerable personal esteem. Before the 1972 election Kirk already had a significant international profile. He was probably better known outside New Zealand than any other Leader of the Opposition has ever been. Kirk’s international stature and independent stance were well known and well received before he became Prime Minister.

Good relations with the developing world were essential to the kind of independent policies that Kirk wanted to pursue. Before the 1972 election Kirk became convinced that the international climate was becoming better suited to independent
foreign policy. He interpreted détente, the Guam Doctrine, the American withdrawal from Vietnam, and the British East of Suez policy as indicators that New Zealand ought to rely less on American and British leadership in foreign affairs. Kirk had been arguing for a more independent policy since he took over the Labour Party leadership in 1965. The above mentioned developments convinced Kirk that his independent policies were a practical alternative. The United States was now encouraging Asia to take control of its own destiny; Kirk believed that New Zealand could not stand idly by and ignore this opportunity.

Kirk became convinced of this dramatic change in the Pacific Rim after his 1970 Asian tour. In a report to his own members he described how Asian countries were reacting to the Guam Doctrine and British East of Suez policy. Kirk saw the emergence of Asia as a 'great adventure' and argued that New Zealand must play a more significant role there. He argued that New Zealand's relationship with Asia depended not only upon collective security, but also developmental aid and economic cooperation.

Changing and impending changes in great power relationships with Asia and probable shifts in the balance of power within the region give policy-makers much to think about...Because these small countries live in the shadow of giants they are groping toward some broader basis of mutual assistance.

Kirk proposed independent policies that relied on 'mutual assistance' between Asian and Pacific countries. In his 1971 article for the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, "New Zealand and its Neighbours", Kirk argued that non-alignment and non-involvement were not solutions. Instead he called for a strengthening of relationships with Asia and increased participation in regional affairs. This cooperative strategy was evident in the run up to the 1972 election, when Kirk argued for a concerted effort at mobilising regional opinion against French nuclear testing.

In June 1972 there were a series of Parliamentary debates dealing with French testing in Polynesia. The National Government argued that the issue would be best dealt with by raising it at the upcoming Stockholm Conference on environmental issues. Kirk criticised this policy as being a mere gesture. He proposed that a taskforce of Pacific ministers, including the Prime Minister of New Zealand, should visit Paris and canvass other European nations. This would draw international attention to the problem and 'force
debate’. Kirk focused on joint diplomatic measures as a means to stop French testing. He used the United Nations Resolution on French testing in the Sahara as an example of collective action that had successfully applied pressure on the French Government and stopped atmospheric nuclear testing in that part of the world. 33

On 14 July 1972 Norman Kirk delivered another important speech on French nuclear testing. This speech encapsulated all of his policies on nuclear weapons. It was also a harsh attack on National’s cautious approach to the testing. The address is important because it self-consciously linked independent policy with anti-nuclear weapons policies. The Labour Party had attracted criticism over the Federation of Labour’s ban on French cargo. Kirk attributed the FOL ban to the Government’s inactivity, rather than union recklessness.

...the Government thinks that the Federation of Labour’s actions create a political disadvantage for the Labour Party, so it will sacrifice the interests of this country, because it is election year and it will try to provoke industrial difficulties in the hope that they will rebound against the Labour Party. This situation is being encouraged and continued because the Government knows that its refusal to act will create a reaction which it hopes, will rebound on the Labour Party. We will not be put over a French barrel or anybody else’s barrel. We may not be big but we will be independent. 34

The speech also identified numerous inconsistencies in National’s policy on nuclear free zones and French testing. The Government had considered proposals for a Pacific conference on testing. Eleven countries had agreed to attend such a meeting. Despite regional interest the Government did not follow up the survey and organise a conference. National had supported the establishment of the Antarctic Treaty and the Latin American Zone in the UN, but refused to support a zone for the Pacific or to ratify the Treaty of Tlatelolco. 35 Kirk effectively discredited the National Government’s protests as the political minimum. The Government’s stance seemed artificial when compared to Kirk’s personal zeal. An unidentified speechwriter from the diplomatic corps later echoed this sentiment. He or she recalled that waiting for nuclear testing policy from the National Party was like ‘waiting for Godot’. 36

Kirk said he would pursue the broadest possible nuclear free zone for the Pacific, but would also accept a very limited zone as a step forward. He also promised to support
resolutions in UN that deemed nuclear weapons to be in violation of the Charter. As an immediate measure Kirk stated that the Government should send a frigate to protest against the testing. Frank Corner first suggested this in 1963. The dispatch of two RNZN frigates to Mururoa Atoll became an important element of New Zealand’s official protest against French testing in 1973.


The Labour Party’s 1972 election manifesto included a section on nuclear weapons and testing. This brief policy outline focused almost solely on Labour’s commitment to nuclear free zones. The SPNZ was an old and consistent aspect of Kirk’s anti-nuclear weapons policy. In the late 1960s nuclear free zones and the Vietnam War were the two most significant areas of conflict between Labour policy and New
Zealand's relationship with the US. By 1972 New Zealand had already withdrawn its combat forces from South Vietnam. Kirk’s non-violent approach to the Vietnam War was now purely symbolic. It was only one of a number of progressive policies that emphasised Kirk’s fresh and independent approach to foreign policy. The SPNFZ and commitment to send a frigate to Mururoa were more poignant and controversial aspects of independent foreign policy. Anti-nuclear weapons initiatives thus became the principal vehicle for launching an independent foreign policy in the 1972 elections.

Kirk maintained his firm commitment to ANZUS as the principal guarantor of New Zealand’s defence. There was considerable continuity in Kirk’s policies between 1972 and the early 1960s. The basic concept of preserving traditional defence relationships and simultaneously reconciling them with a new and more independent external mission was unchanged. Détente convinced Kirk that his independent agenda was suited to the current climate. New Zealand’s diplomatic corps in Washington interpreted US policy shifts similarly. One report stated that New Zealand should show more flexibility and might have to ‘do more’. To some it seemed that Labour’s 1972 campaign slogans, ‘It’s time for Norman Kirk’ and ‘It’s time for a change’, were most relevant for foreign affairs.

Notes for Chapter One

10. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
25. Hayward, pp.8-9,40-41.
29. Ibid, p.69.
35. MFA file series, 106/24/1 part 3, “Draft speech notes for address in reply debate, French nuclear tests”, 20/2/73.
Before Norman Kirk was elected Prime Minister of New Zealand in November 1972 he promised a more vigorous anti-nuclear weapons policy. A new series of nuclear tests were scheduled to begin in French Polynesia some time near the middle of 1973. As a practical first measure Kirk proposed policies aimed at halting these atmospheric tests. Kirk’s manifesto included a Pacific conference to address French nuclear testing, a high level ministerial visit to Paris for talks with the French Government, an official protest voyage of a RNZN frigate to Mururoa Atoll, and the establishment of a nuclear free zone in the Pacific through international agreement. The Labour Party also supported actions in the United Nations General Assembly that sought to limit nuclear testing and proliferation.©

Kirk needed to move quickly if he wanted to exert significant diplomatic leverage on the French Government. The test’s imminence forced the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister to act swiftly. From December 1972 the MFA began discussions with the Australian and Pacific Island Governments, the logical partners in any protest against nuclear testing in French Polynesia. Diplomatic staff in other Pacific Rim countries, notably Chile and Canada, also approached governmental representatives to discuss New Zealand’s new and proactive anti-nuclear weapons policies. New Zealand’s representative in the UNGA attempted to ascertain whether African support might be forthcoming.² Kirk accepted President Pompidou’s invitation for a high-level New Zealand Minister to visit Paris for negotiations.³

The idea of a Pacific conference reflects Kirk’s desire for concerted regional cooperation against the test series. Such an event was also seen as a good way to establish interest in a nuclear-free zone.⁴ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also aware that New Zealand could not stand alone against French nuclear testing. Before the 1972 election the Ministry monitored developments in Australia with interest. The governments of Western Australia, Tasmania, and South Australia had explored the prospect of a legal
case aimed at halting French testing in the Pacific. They had hired a New Zealander, Professor DP O’Connell, Chair of Public International Law at Oxford University, to produce an opinion on the legality of French atmospheric testing. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), an international organisation in New Zealand, also advocated a legal challenge to stop French nuclear testing. 5

Gough Whitlam, leader of the Australian Labour Party, was elected Prime Minister only days after Kirk’s victory in New Zealand. In his election campaign Whitlam mentioned the proposed court case and suggested that New Zealand cooperation would be desirable, if Australia decided to take France to the International Court of Justice at the Hague. 6 Shortly after Whitlam’s victory the new Australian Attorney General, L.K. Murphy, considered O’Connell’s legal opinion and viewed it favourably. 7 Thus in the first few days of Whitlam and Kirk’s new governments, it became apparent that Australia would probably take France to the World Court.

This new development challenged Kirk’s existing strategy. The MFA quickly recognised that Australasian failure at the ICOJ would jeopardise New Zealand’s own initiatives. If the Court judged French atmospheric testing to be legal, any further action taken by New Zealand would lack legitimacy and credibility. Lengthy legal proceedings might also delay the deployment of more radical New Zealand initiatives, such as the frigate’s protest voyage. If, however, New Zealand or Australia were successful in obtaining an interim injunction calling for a moratorium on atmospheric testing in French Polynesia, substantial pressure would be brought to bear on France. If France ignored such an injunction, New Zealand would be justified in sending a frigate as a ‘last resort’ protest. 8 The proposed ICOJ case involved considerable risk, but had unparalleled potential to boost New Zealand’s official protest against atmospheric nuclear testing.

Opposition to French nuclear testing was itself a risky venture for New Zealand. The MFA feared that France might retaliate against New Zealand, if the New Zealand Government engaged in ‘negative action’. Negative action included a naval confrontation on the high seas, questioning the status of French Polynesia, or sanctioning trade union boycotts of French goods. France had the potential to retaliate economically, with prejudice against New Zealand exports to European Economic Community. The MFA noted that Kirk’s preference for international cooperation was one aspect of his policy
that reduced the risk of French retaliation. These ideas were explored in several papers prepared by the MFA before Kirk’s meeting with Gough Whitlam in January 1973. 9

Early in January 1973 senior New Zealand personnel, including Corner, met with their Australian counterparts in Defence and Foreign Affairs. The meeting took place in Canberra and preceded Whitlam’s visit to Wellington later in January. The Australians were anxious about three aspects of Kirk’s policy. These were the Pacific conference, the frigate protest voyage, and the SPNZ. Australian difficulties with Kirk’s policies will be dealt with more fully in a later chapter. The Australian Government was also undecided over the precise role New Zealand would play in any ICOJ action.10

Corner wrote to the Prime Minister on 19 January 1973, the day before Whitlam arrived in New Zealand, to present the options regarding an ICOJ case against France. The Secretary argued that it was crucial to achieve an interim injunction against atmospheric testing. He noted that the Australians made no reference to the value of an interim measure. Instead they believed that an eventual judgement would best persuade France to stop testing. The New Zealanders thus saw the case more as a short term means to legitimise and strengthen other protest initiatives. The Australians, in contrast, saw the case as the best prophylactic mechanism in its own right. Corner told Kirk that New Zealand might have a thirty percent chance of winning interim relief. Yet despite these ‘low odds’, he thought that the case was a good one. The major legal problem was the lack of scientific evidence to support the assertion that atmospheric nuclear testing had a significant environmental impact. Corner suggested that New Zealand might consider leaving the ICOJ action to Australia and instead concentrate on its own initiatives. Abandonment of the Australians was, however, an unappealing prospect. The proximity of the Cook Islands to Mururoa Atoll strengthened New Zealand’s legal case; if New Zealand opted out of the case, the Australians’ legal position would be seriously weakened. Corner thus advised the Prime Minister to remain uncommitted until the last possible moment.11

Gough Whitlam visited Kirk on 22 January; discussion focused on the ICOJ case, but neither leader made any commitments. The SPNZ was not discussed.12 Kirk wrote to Martyn Finlay shortly after his meeting with the Australian Prime Minister. Kirk stated that New Zealand was not yet ready to join the Australian case and that the Australians
were not communicating adequately with New Zealand over their plans for approaching the World Court. Whitlam's January visit thus failed to produce any meaningful developments, other than a public expression of both leaders' firm opposition to atmospheric nuclear testing in French Polynesia.

The two Prime Ministers spoke again by telephone on 26 February. This time a tenuous commitment was forthcoming. The leaders cut an informal bargain: Kirk agreed to join the Australians at the ICOJ and Whitlam said that Australia would provide a refueling tanker for the frigate if it were required. Whitlam soon became very anxious over this 'informal promise'. His advisors were overwhelmingly pessimistic about most of Kirk's schemes; their criticisms focused on the proposed frigate protest and SPNFZ. Professor Quentin Baxter, commandeered from Victoria University's law faculty by the New Zealand Government, met with Whitlam, his Attorney General, and the Australian Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Sir Keith Waller, on 2 March. Whitlam revised his earlier promise to provide refueling facilities, informing Baxter that the tanker already had a full programme in 1973. He added that if New Zealand chose to join Australia at the World Court, there would be no need for a protest voyage.

Kirk appeared relatively unconcerned by the backtracking from his Australian counterpart. He held a press conference on 6 March and told reporters, off the record, that New Zealand would proceed to the World Court. The New Zealand Government resisted making a formal announcement because Hugh Watt, the deputy Prime Minister, had not yet conducted official negotiations in Paris. As Kirk explained at the press conference: 'Off the record we will go to the Court, but if I say it before Hugh Watt goes to Paris I will be in some trouble.' Kirk's 'off the record' conversation also summarised the fact that New Zealand would present a parallel case to Australia and aim for an interim rather than final decision. Kirk told the press: 'Australia hasn't a dog's show of winning a case on hazard...off the record - we are looking at an interim order - not a final order at this stage.'

The Prime Minister further outlined the New Zealand protest programme, emphasising the importance of timing and proper diplomatic process. The Government would do nothing until Hugh Watt had conducted negotiations in Paris. This was not expected to achieve a cessation of atmospheric testing but would delay testing, since the
French would not detonate a device during or before the negotiations. The interim order would also delay the test programme. The Court would not look favourably upon France testing nuclear weapons during New Zealand’s application for an interim order. If the Court granted an interim order, France might temporarily cease its test programme. If not, New Zealand would send a frigate to Mururoa atoll. This strategy offered more than the Australian alternative. It challenged France at every step and delayed the testing for as long as possible.

The Australians’ ambivalence towards New Zealand’s naval initiative forced the MFA to consider alternative refueling options. The only other available tanker was an elderly wartime Royal Navy vessel, the Black Ranger, built in 1941. The Black Ranger was for sale on an “as is, where is” basis. The Prime Minister rejected the purchase of that vessel on the advice of Frank Comer. Cornet noted that if the Australians noticed that New Zealand was negotiating to purchase a tanker they would be ‘let off the hook’. He instead proposed that New Zealand advise the Australian Government about the naval protest’s precise function. The Australian diplomatic corps tended to see the frigate voyage similarly to the general public. The New Zealand Government wanted to avoid the popular assertion that the frigate would confront the French Navy or provide protection and official endorsement for private protest yachts. Kirk did not want to provide a flagship for the Peace Media Organisation’s fleet, which planned to embark from Auckland in time to protest against nuclear testing at Mururoa atoll. The Prime Minister thus endorsed Comer’s proposal to educate the Australians about the frigate voyage’s true purpose and advise the Australian Government that New Zealand was fully committed to Court action against France.

The frigate’s actual purpose was to provide a ‘last resort’ protest against French atmospheric testing by acting as a peaceful witness to an unconscionable act. The frigate would provide an official New Zealand protest that focused world attention on atmospheric nuclear testing. The voyage would be dramatic and provocative but not belligerent and confrontational. Whitlam faced political pressure at home to provide New Zealand with support for the voyage. Kirk faced an analogous political dilemma when Australia sought support in its approach to the World Court. Thus it was not surprising that Whitlam was unable to resist New Zealand’s need for support. Australia’s
Minister of Defence, Lance Barnard, finally issued a statement on 30 April 1973 that Australia would make the HMAS Supply available to the HMNZS Otago for refueling, in the event of a protest voyage to French Polynesia.22

From early in 1973 the Australian Government failed to grasp the purpose of Kirk’s anti-nuclear policies. Conservative Australian diplomats, such as Waller and H.E. Blakeny viewed the naval protest as an aggressive and belligerent act, and the Pacific Conference as a mechanism to launch the SPNFZ by circumventing proper discussion among the ANZUS partners.23 The Australians, fearful of Kirk’s radicalism, were often suspicious and disparaging towards his policy initiatives.

Plans for the ICOJ case, the potential frigate voyage, and to a lesser extent Hugh Watt’s visit to Paris dominated the first few months of Kirk’s anti-testing campaign. Other Pacific countries expressed only a low level of interest in the Pacific Conference. Australia and Chile thought it premature.24 The Canadian Government, an ardent opponent of all atmospheric testing, supported New Zealand in preparation for the legal case by offering opinions and information.25 Exploratory discussions with African delegates at the UN revealed a general lack of interest.26

The South Pacific Forum was scheduled in April 1973; thus Kirk was not without an international forum from which a joint protest against French nuclear testing could be launched. In early January Kirk approached the Western Samoan Government to have the Forum put forward so that the delegates might issue an early protest against atmospheric testing in the Pacific.27 Such protest would be beneficial because it would lend a genuine Pacific flavour to the campaign and detract from the Australia and New Zealand’s paternalistic dominance of the protest thus far.28 Because the Pacific Forum already placed French atmospheric testing on the agenda, there was no urgent need to stage Kirk’s Pacific Conference.

Between December 1972 and March 1973 Kirk displayed considerable flexibility and pragmatism. Upon election he faced changed circumstances and priorities. France’s invitation to negotiate and the Australian legal initiative challenged Kirk’s pre-election strategy. Kirk and the MFA met those challenges admirably. Kirk’s independent anti-nuclear weapons policies had always relied heavily on regional cooperation. In early 1973 regional cooperation was enhanced by closely coordinating direct protest against
French testing with Australian efforts. Kirk and Whitlam’s strategies were different, yet the two leaders were able to work together. The Australians placed a far greater emphasis on eventual victory at The Hague. Kirk instead focused on challenging French testing at every opportunity. Despite differences in strategy, New Zealand and Australia were able to quickly forge a lasting alliance against nuclear testing in French Polynesia. Australia, however, remained opposed to the notion of a SPNFZ.

Notes for Chapter Two

2. MFA file series, 106/24/1 parts 1-6.
4. Ibid, part 2, “Preparatory notes for talks with Australian PM, French nuclear tests”, 9/1/73.
5. Ibid, part 1, from Frank Corner to the Prime Minister, 13/10/72, see also Ibid, part 2, from Canberra to New York, 5/12/72.
6. Ibid, part 1, from Wellington to Canberra, 28/11/72.
8. Ibid, part 2, “Preparatory notes for talks with Australian PM, French nuclear tests”, 9/1/73.
9. Ibid, part 2, “Preparatory notes for talks with Australian PM, French nuclear tests”, 9/1/73.
10. Ibid, part 2, “Extract from discussion between Sir Keith Waller, Mr Blakeney, Mr Corner, Mr Hill, Dr Cumes”, 12/1/73.
11. Ibid, part 2, from Corner to Kirk, 19/1/73.
13. Ibid, part 2, from Kirk to Findlay, 25/1/73.
14. Ibid, part 5, from Wellington to Canberra, 14/3/73.
15. Ibid, part 5, from Baxter to Kirk, 15/3/73.
18. Ibid, part 5, from Corner to Kirk, 26/3/73.
19. Ibid, part 5, from Corner to Kirk, 26/3/73.
20. Ibid, part 5, from Corner to Kirk, 26/3/73.
23. MFA file series, 106/24/1 part 2, “Extract from discussion between Sir Keith Waller, Mr Blakeney, Mr Corner, Mr Hill, Dr Cumes”, 12/1/73, see also Ibid, part 6, from Corner to Kirk, 9/4/73.
24. Ibid, part 6, from Corner to Kirk, 9/4/73, see also Ibid, part 6, from New York to Wellington, 10/4/73.
25. Ibid, part 5, from Baxter to Kirk, 14/3/73, see also Ibid, part 5, from Wellington to Ottawa, 22/3/73.
26. Ibid, part 2, from New York to Wellington, 16/1/73.
28. MFA file series, 301/4/2/1 part 6, from Wellington to Canberra, 13/4/73.
Bilateral Relations with France

Ostensibly, the Third Labour Government opposed French atmospheric nuclear testing because of the possible associated health risks caused by nuclear fall-out. New Zealand’s ICOJ case against French testing focused on the fear and resentment that nuclear testing generated among South Pacific people. Although Kirk always maintained that French nuclear testing degraded the environment, this was not the only reason why he initiated unprecedented action to halt atmospheric testing in the Pacific. Kirk was a long-time supporter of anti-nuclear weapons policies because he believed that nuclear proliferation posed a serious threat to the world’s future. His Government opposed all nuclear testing. France bore the brunt of Kirk’s anti-nuclear weapons policies because it tested its nuclear devices close to New Zealand, Niue, the Tokelau Islands, and the Cook Islands.

The French Government maintained that its nuclear test-programme was an integral part of its national defence. It rejected the allegation that its atmospheric nuclear testing had a significant effect on the environment. A 1971 French document on nuclear testing stated:

Elle serait la première à réjouir si, à la faveur d’un accord pour un désarmement réel, elle pourrait envisager de renoncer à ses propres moyens nucléaires.

It would be the first to delight, in the event of a genuine disarmament agreement, in planning to give up its own nuclear forces.

In the absence of a ‘genuine’ agreement France thought it prudent to develop its own ‘defensive nuclear arsenal’. It chose to ignore the Partial Test Ban Treaty and persist with atmospheric nuclear testing. France used the pretext that, because Britain and the US conducted atmospheric tests in the Pacific in 1957 and 1962, France was also justified in using its legitimate territory in Polynesia to develop an atomic arsenal. Polynesia contained ‘vastes étendues vides d’habitants’ (vast expanses free from inhabitants),
making it an ideal location to test nuclear weapons. Because the Sahara and Antarctic were no longer available for nuclear testing, and France chose not to test in French Guyana, French Polynesia and New Caledonia were the only ‘remote’ territories still available to France. Thus the French Government felt compelled to tenaciously defend its right to test its nuclear weapons in the Pacific.

Norman Kirk’s opposition to nuclear testing and proliferation was evident at least four years before the French Government chose to move its nuclear test site from Africa to Polynesia. There is no evidence that Kirk criticised any aspect of French policy other than its nuclear testing before he became Prime Minister. Indeed Kirk seems to have been comfortable with the French colonial presence in the Pacific. The Third Labour Government’s disagreement with France was thus limited to the issue of nuclear weapons testing. Indeed Kirk emphasised that New Zealand’s opposition to nuclear testing need not damage relations with France. The maintenance of healthy relations with France was important. Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community gave France considerable power to prejudice New Zealand exports to Europe.

Corner and Kirk were concerned that non-governmental protest might blacken New Zealand’s reputation in France. They were particularly concerned that the French media would not differentiate between private and official protests. To prevent such confusion the New Zealand Government sent messages to the French Government that clarified which protests the Government supported and those they did not support.

New Zealand’s ambassador to Paris, Paul Gabites, wrote to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, George Laking, on 8 December 1972, having conducted a discussion with Pierre Boyer, France’s Plenipotentiary Foreign Minister. Gabites noted that there was concern in France that Kirk’s planned frigate protest might precipitate violence - evidence that the frigate voyage was still poorly understood by both the French and New Zealand officials. There was, however, some evidence that other aspects of Kirk’s policies were much better understood. Boyer told Gabites that he had studied Labour’s 1972 Election Manifesto and noted that both France and New Zealand shared a vision for the Asian and Pacific regions. Boyer pointed out that the two country’s single disagreement was a pity. This early communique indicated that France remained ‘friendly’, despite Kirk’s radical anti-nuclear weapons policies.
The French Government was, however, prepared to toughen its response to New Zealand. The French Ambassador, Christian de Nicolay, wrote to Kirk on 22 February 1973. The Ambassador delivered a prickly warning that New Zealand’s relations with France might deteriorate, especially in trade, if New Zealand pushed France too far. He did not clarify what kinds of protest France was prepared to tolerate.10

Kirk was determined to maintain friendly relations with the French Government and pursue his diplomatic programme against French atmospheric nuclear testing simultaneously. To achieve this the MFA ensured that the French Government was well informed about the status of New Zealand’s frigate voyage. The sequence of other New Zealand protests was orderly and predictable. Preparatory notes for Kirk’s January 1973 meeting with his Australian opposite stated that the protest’s ‘manner’ was ‘important to avoid retaliatory action’.11 The MFA was also reluctant to surprise or embarrass the French or engage in any activity that might give them an excuse to retaliate. The colonial status of French Polynesia and New Caledonia was one issue that Kirk and Corner were particularly careful to avoid.

The MFA contacted its staff in New York in January 1973 to check that there was no movement within the UN that questioned the French presence in the Pacific. Wellington was relieved to hear that nobody from French Polynesia or New Caledonia had contacted the UN committee on decolonisation.12 It seemed that independence in French Polynesia and New Caledonia was an issue that was unlikely to come up in the UN unless it was raised within the Pacific.

French sensitivity was heightened in 1973 because legislative elections were due to be held that year. Someone raised the suggestion that Kirk should write to Francois Mitterand, leader of the Socialist Party. The Socialist and Communist coalition favoured ‘anti-nuclear’ policies. Kirk agreed to advice from Gabites and Corner that such a move would be a grave error. Gabites feared that Mitterand would use a letter from Kirk against Pompidou; his advice read, ‘Keep protest compartmentalised…must not meddle in French Affairs.’.13

Kirk instead wrote to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Maurice Schumann, on 9 March 1973 to confirm Hugh Watt’s visit to Paris. Kirk used strong language to convey New Zealand’s position that atmospheric nuclear testing was a breach of
international law and reinforced the fact that nuclear testing was the only disagreement between France and New Zealand. Schumann conveyed, in reply, that France would not conduct tests during the Paris talks. Unfortunately Kirk unwittingly squandered this confidence. He told the New Zealand media on 6 March, before Schumann gave his confirmation, that tests would not take place during Watt’s visit. The French monitored the New Zealand media in minute detail and responded to Kirk’s apparent breach of confidence. The French Government advised the New Zealand embassy that in future confidentiality should be observed.

This minor breach of etiquette was less alarming than Whitlam’s undiplomatic outbursts. During March Whitlam criticised France with uninhibited zeal. He told the media that Australia was less concerned with Chinese atmospheric nuclear testing than French testing in the Pacific and described French nuclear testing as an ’insult’ to Pacific nations and a misuse of a colonial territory. Such sharp criticisms were not out of character for Whitlam. From time to time the United States also felt the Australian Prime Minister’s wrath.

Meanwhile Australian trade unions refused to handle French goods or unload French cargo vessels. Le Monde reacted by printing an inflammatory article. The French paper reported that Australasians harboured strong ill feeling against the French nation. The article did not significantly distinguish between governmental and private protests. The Australian Prime Minister successfully irritated the French Government and provoked a stern response. The French Ambassador to Canberra, Gabriel van Laethem, visited Whitlam on 27 March. He delivered a frosty message, accusing the Prime minister of encouraging public hostility towards France.

Whitlam’s brash outbursts provoked criticism from New Zealand. Kirk wrote to Whitlam on 14 March. He reminded the Australian leader, having recently learned the lesson himself, that France paid close attention to every press release in Australasia. Kirk advised Whitlam that his comments about China’s test programme were ‘regrettable’, and ‘cut the ground of our broader arguments’.

Professor Ago, an Italian international law expert employed by the Australians, continued to refine the ‘misuse of colonial territory’ argument for use in the Australian ICOJ case. The New Zealand legal team and diplomatic staff believed that the argument
should not be stated. Corner later advised Kirk that the ICOJ judges did not need to hear that argument and that it would ‘carry more weight if left unsaid’. He advised the Prime Minister that New Zealand should notify the Australians that New Zealand would not use the misuse of a colony argument in its approach to the ICOJ.22

Kirk was determined to maintain good relations with the French Government, despite a deteriorating situation between the Governments of Australia and France. Although New Zealand was allied to Australia against French nuclear testing, Kirk, in keeping with his philosophy, wanted to pursue an independent policy. He tried to ensure that New Zealand’s reputation in France remained independent from Australia’s. In this respect ‘independence’ meant following a less radical policy than Australia. Kirk’s brief to Hugh Watt, before the Deputy Prime Minister departed for Paris, stated that the first major foreign policy objective for New Zealand was to maintain good relations with France. The second policy objective was to end the French nuclear weapons testing.23

The fact that France was willing to invite a New Zealand minister to Paris indicated a new sensitivity on its part.

Kirk’s bilateral relations with France thus involved several distinct features. New Zealand was strongly opposed to trade boycotts against France whether official or unofficial, did not sanction private protest voyages to Mururoa Atoll, and opposed all atmospheric nuclear testing. Nuclear testing was a separate issue to all others between New Zealand and France; it was especially separate to trade.24

New Zealand’s official anti-nuclear weapons campaign was independent from non-governmental protests. Kirk rejected a suggestion from the journalist William Ralston, made on behalf of the Peace Media Organisation, that a citizen’s delegation should accompany Hugh Watt to Paris.25 The Peace Media fleet also planned to sail for Mururoa Atoll. Kirk advised Corner that the Government would not support, supply, or protect private voyages to Mururoa Atoll. On 6 April 1973 the New Zealand embassy sent a clear message to the Atomic Affairs Division of the Quai d’Orsay, the French Foreign Office:

Tandis que le Gouvernement de Nouvelle-Zélande comprend pleinement, et partage même le souci et l’approbation au sujet des essais nucléaires dans le Pacifique qui provoque des voyages de protestation de nature privée dans la zone du Mururoa, il ne favorise pas ce genre de protestation. Néanmoins tout citoyen
néo-zélandais a le droit selon notre loi de partir librement de la Nouvelle-Zélande et de naviguer pacifiquement en haut mer. Le Gouvernement de Nouvelle-Zélande ne voit aucune raison de prendre des mesures exceptionnelles pour restreindre ce droit.

Whilst the New Zealand Government fully understands and shares equally in the anxiety and concern about the subject of nuclear testing in the Pacific that has provoked private protest voyages to Mururoa, it does not favour this type of protest. Nevertheless every New Zealand citizen has the freedom, according to our law, to leave New Zealand and sail peacefully on the high seas. The Government of New Zealand sees no reason to take exceptional measures to limit this right. 26

Thus Kirk informed the French Government that the only protests against nuclear testing that he supported were official protests. He was, however, in no position to interfere with private protest initiatives, particularly those that took place outside of New Zealand. The best Kirk could do was inform the French of New Zealand’s official position and try to persuade non-governmental organisations to leave New Zealand’s protest to the Government. Kirk was aided by the fact that he had a good relationship with Tom Skinner, President of the New Zealand Federation of Labour. 27 The FOL agreed not disrupt trade with France until New Zealand had finished its approach to the ICOJ. The FOL decision was in contrast to actions taken by the Australian unions and rhetoric from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. 28 In 1972 the FOL maintained a blanket ban on French services to and from New Zealand. 29 Its abrupt change of policy temporarily vindicated Kirk’s 1972 claim, made in opposition, that a strong governmental response to French testing would preclude the need for trade union action. The only threat of industrial action during New Zealand’s approach to the ICOJ came when the Wellington Drivers’ Union considered leaving the French embassy’s rubbish bins unempted. Fortunately this threat was not carried out and normal sanitary relations between the Wellington City Council and the French Embassy continued. 30

Hugh Watt’s visit to Paris in April 1973 failed to convince the French Government to cease atmospheric testing in French Polynesia. New Zealand thus filed an application with the ICOJ on 9 May 1973. New Zealand went to the World Court on behalf of the peoples of New Zealand, Tuvalu, the Cook Island, and the Tokelau Islands. Australia filed its case the same day. 31 The presence of a regional block added
considerable legitimacy to the case. The fact that New Zealand acted in concert with other countries also provided insulation against French reprisals. New Zealand could not be accused of being unreasonable because it went to the Court with the support of its closest neighbors. A unanimous declaration from the Pacific Forum in April further reinforced regional opposition to the tests.\textsuperscript{32}

Kirk did not pin too much hope on the ICOJ case successfully persuading France to cease atmospheric testing. The New Zealand Government was fully aware that France was unlikely to recognise the Court’s authority. On 1 March 1973 Gabites cabled Corner about a contact the New Zealand embassy in Paris had made with an unnamed Italian diplomat. The Italian discussed the impending court case with French officials and revealed to the New Zealanders that France would not recognise nuclear testing as being within the competence of the ICOJ. The Italian also provided a French document from 1971 that discussed potential criticisms of the test programme. Gabites stressed to Corner that the Italian source should be protected.\textsuperscript{33}

Publicly the New Zealand Government was optimistic that France would respect an interim order. After the meetings in Paris Hugh Watt stated that France would respect the Court’s eventual decision.\textsuperscript{34} Any optimism that the court case alone would end French atmospheric testing was only for diplomatic effect. Kirk forged ahead with his plan to send a frigate to Mururoa Atoll because he knew that New Zealand’s protest would not stop at the ICOJ. The ICOJ case was important to Kirk as part of a broad strategy to persuade France to stop testing its nuclear weapons in the atmosphere. The frigate’s voyage was another part of this strategy.

Soon after New Zealand lodged its case at the ICOJ the French announced that they would not recognise the competence of the Court.\textsuperscript{35} On 22 June the Court ordered the provision of the Interim Measures of Protection:

\begin{quote}
The Governments of New Zealand and France should each of them ensure that no action of any kind is taken which might aggravate or extend the dispute submitted to the Court or prejudice the rights of the other Party in respect of the carrying out of whatever decision the Court may render in the case, and in particular the French Government should avoid nuclear tests causing the deposit of radio-active fallout on the territory of New Zealand, the Cook Islands, Nuie, or the Tokelau Islands.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}
On 30 June France delivered a White Paper that predictably rejected the Court’s jurisdiction. On 5 July the French President, Georges Pompidou, announced that France would conduct a series of atmospheric nuclear tests in French Polynesia.  

Pardon, M’seu, you’re standing on my bomb!  
Gordon Minninnick’s view, from Life and Career of the Late Prime Minister, Norman Kirk, Auckland 1974, p.45.

Kirk reacted positively to the Court’s decision. He made a statement on 23 June that addressed the significance of the ICOJ decision and outlined the next stage of his campaign to end atmospheric nuclear testing in the Pacific:

This may come to be the turning point in the history of the international community’s efforts to eliminate nuclear testing that creates health and environmental hazards.  

He urged the French Government to reconsider its position and recognise the Court’s authority. Kirk also noted that there was no indication that France would abandon or postpone its test series. Thus he announced that New Zealand would send the HMNZS Otago to Mururoa Atoll. Kirk explicitly indicated that:
...the purpose of sending a frigate to the test area is not physical confrontation with the French Government. It is not gunboat diplomacy. What we aim to do is to publicise what is happening in this remote part of the world, so as to stimulate world opinion still further and attract wider support for the rights of small nations. To complement this action I am sending a message to the head of government of every member of the United Nations and to the heads of government of the Pacific countries which are not members of the United Nations, calling on them back our efforts by public statements, diplomatic pressure, an in every other appropriate way.  

Kirk hoped that the frigate’s voyage would symbolise the outrage felt by many people from small Pacific nations, against whose rights the nuclear testing offended. Although the frigate came from New Zealand, it was supported by the provision of the tanker from Australia. The naval protest was thus a cooperative protest. In his message to the heads of government Kirk stressed that failure to stop French atmospheric testing would ‘weaken the fabric of international cooperation’. The Otago’s dispatch marked the climax of Kirk’s campaign to end atmospheric nuclear testing. The voyage also substantially increased the ‘annoyance factor’ against France.

Kirk could safely send the frigate in late June 1973 because he had already established its precise function and limited the purpose of its presence. The decision to send a frigate to Mururoa Atoll was not an ‘ambush’. Its deployment was orderly and predictable. The presence of the Otago produced maximum irritation without provoking France into retaliatory action against New Zealand. Kirk distanced the Government from private protests that he could not control. When France rejected the Court’s authority the FOL initiated a ban on the handling of all trade with France. The FOL cooperated with Kirk during the case and the Paris negotiations, but was determined to continue its 1972 ban. M.A. Iverson states that the Kirk Government expressed support for the FOL’s actions. This is not accurate. The National Party ferociously attacked the Labour Government the day after the FOL announced its ban. In response Kirk stated that his Government neither supported the FOL ban, nor condemned the FOL’s action.

Now I come to the point that it is because of these factors that the Federation of Labour is reacting. We should have preferred that this matter to have been left in the hands of the Government, but we live in a free
country, and what is expressed by the Federation of Labour in its action is a depth of public concern, which the National Party does not share, about French nuclear weapons testing. 43

Kirk treated the FOL ban on French trade similar to the Peace Media Organisation’s protest flotilla. He offered the FOL no support and distanced the trade ban from New Zealand’s official protest.

The HMNZS Otago departed from Devonport on 28 June 1973. Its presence at Mururoa Atoll inspired considerable interest from the world’s media. The Times in particular took a close interest in France’s test-programme, New Zealand’s protest, and the emergence of Kirk as a high profile leader. 44 There was considerable trade union action within the United Kingdom. The most disruptive action was the British postal workers’ refusal to handle mail to and from France. 45 The FOL’s ban was insignificant compared to the extensive trade union action in Britain.
The *Otago* arrived near Mururoa Atoll in time for the first nuclear test on 21 July 1973. The Cabinet Minister Fraser Colman was on board. The *Otago* was later swapped with the HMNZS *Canterbury*, which left the test area on 6 August 1973. France conducted its last atmospheric nuclear test at Mururoa Atoll on 15 September 1974.\(^{46}\)

France criticised New Zealand for inconsistently attacking its test-programme, noting that New Zealand had supported British and American atmospheric tests in the 1950s.\(^ {47}\) Kirk was anxious to show that his government was not unfairly singling out France. The same day that the *Otago* departed from Auckland Kirk issued a strong statement condemning China’s recent atmospheric nuclear explosion.\(^ {48}\) This was in keeping with Kirk’s broad anti-nuclear weapons and non-discriminatory policies. The statement was also diplomatically useful because it confirmed that New Zealand was not
unfairly picking on France. Kirk stated in the House that if France moved its test site to metropolitan France, he would still protest against it:

There are those who have said that, if the tests are as safe as the French say, they could hold them in their own locality. That is a fair argument, but we would still be opposed to French testing even on the French mainland, because we are totally opposed to nuclear testing wherever it occurs.49

This argument was in stark contrast to Whitlam’s statement that Australia was less concerned with China’s nuclear test-programme than France’s. Kirk did not want to alienate, isolate, or punish France. Instead he sought to persuade France to end atmospheric nuclear testing.

Kirk’s diplomatic and orderly handling of French nuclear testing was successful in minimising French reprisals. There is no evidence to suggest that France retaliated against New Zealand in 1973 or 1974. The French Government had little to gain in punishing New Zealand for its anti-nuclear stance, although it reserved the right to retaliate if pushed too far. Kirk realised that it was prudent to pursue a strong anti-testing stance while maintaining normal relations with the French Government. Diplomatic correspondence between New Zealand and France was thus notable only for its lack of drama in this period. Kirk did not attend Bastille Day celebrations at the French Embassy in 1973. Instead Frank Corner attended and raised a toast in honour of France.50 Kirk did not recall New Zealand’s ambassador to Paris. France did not oppose New Zealand’s entry into the OECD in June 1973.51

New Zealand’s direct protest against French atmospheric nuclear testing peaked with the Otago’s deployment in June 1973. Japan, Western Samoa, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Denmark, India, Indonesia, Libya, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sweden, and Tanzania pressured France to stop its atmospheric test-programme.52 The wide international condemnation of French atmospheric testing assisted Kirk in achieving his aim of not alienating France. Multi-national protest also increased the pressure on the French government to cease atmospheric nuclear-testing. Kirk continued to mobilise broad regional and international pressure against nuclear-testing. His anti-nuclear weapons campaign and mission to halt atmospheric nuclear testing continued after he
exhausted the bilateral campaign directed at France. Kirk initiated discussions on atmospheric nuclear-testing and the proposed nuclear-free zone within the Commonwealth and ANZUS.

Notes for Chapter Three

6. 106/24/1 part 4, “Preparatory notes for talks with Australian PM, French nuclear tests”, 9/1/73, see also Ibid, part 5, from Kirk to Watt, 28/3/73.
7. Ibid, part 6, from New Zealand Embassy (Paris) to Atomic Affairs Section of Quai d’Orsay, “Aide-memoire”, 6/4/73, see also Ibid, part 6, from Corner to Kirk, 29/3/73 and 11/4/73, see also Norman Kirk, “Nuclear Tests, Statement issued by the Prime Minister’s Office, 25 June”, in New Zealand Foreign Affairs Review, vol.23, no.6, p.82.
8. Ibid, part 2, from Gabites to Laking, 8/12/72.
10. Ibid, part 3, from Wellington to Paris, “summary of letter to Kirk from French ambassador”, 22/2/73.
11. Ibid, part 4, “Preparatory notes for talks with Australian PM, French nuclear tests”, 9/1/73.
12. Ibid, part 2, from New York to Wellington, 16/1/73.
13. Ibid, part 2, from Gabites to Corner, 25/1/73.
15. Ibid, part 5, from Paris to Wellington, 14/3/73.
16. Ibid, part 5, from Canberra to Wellington, 14/3/73, see also Ibid, part 5, from Paris to Wellington, 29/3/73, see also Ibid, part 5, from Corner to Kirk, 11/4/73.
20. Ibid, part 5, from Canberra to Wellington, 27/3/73.
21. Ibid, part 5, from Wellington to Canberra, “Mr Kirk to Whitlam”, 14/3/73.
22. Ibid, part 6, from Corner to Kirk, 11/4/73.
23. Ibid, part 5, from Kirk to Watt, 28/3/73.
24. Ibid, part 5, from Kirk to Watt, 28/3/73.
25. Ibid, part 4, from Kirk to Mr W.G. Ralston, 28/2/73.
27. Margaret Hayward, _Diary of the Kirk Years_, Wellington, 1981, pp.130,173.
28. Iverson, p.46.
30. Iverson, p.46.
33. 106/24/1 part 4, from Gabites to Corner, 1/4/73.
34. Iverson, p.42.
35. Kos, p.373.
36. Ibid, p.375.
37. Iverson, p.50.
42. Iverson, p.54.
46. Iverson, p.50.
47. Kos, p.357.
50. Conversation with Frank Corner 1/7/98.
52. Kos, p.387.
Forging an international consensus, Norman Kirk’s multilateral campaign against nuclear testing and proliferation

There was little international interest in the Pacific Conference on French nuclear testing that Kirk proposed in 1972. Kirk’s foreign policy and New Zealand’s campaign against atmospheric nuclear testing were yet to capture the imagination of other countries. In the absence of international interest the proposal for a conference quickly floundered. In the first half of 1973 there were also more urgent initiatives to undertake, such as New Zealand’s bid to join Australia at the ICOJ and Hugh Watt’s visit to Paris. In his first year in power, however, Kirk proved his resolve and New Zealand’s new independent stance to the rest of the world. Within the Commonwealth, in particular, Kirk demonstrated the importance of New Zealand’s new independent attitude.

The first opportunity for Kirk to influence other Pacific heads of government came at the 1973 South Pacific Forum held in Apia. Kirk invited Michael Somare and Albert Henry, the leaders of Papua New Guinea and the Cook Islands, to travel with him by RNZAF Hercules aircraft to Western Samoa. In January 1973 Kirk stated that he wanted the Forum to issue a strong message against French nuclear testing which could complement New Zealand and Australia’s diplomatic and legal efforts. Somare and Nuie’s Chief Minister, Robert Rex, accompanied Kirk to Apia aboard the unpressurised aircraft. This low-cost and low key arrival contrasted with Whitlam’s arrival by chartered Qantas jet aircraft and the presence of the HMAS Vampire in Apia during the Forum. Kirk’s personal secretary, Margaret Hayward, described the Australian frigate as a ‘floating cocktail platform’. Whitlam’s extravagance and overt display of Australian power did not endear him to other Pacific leaders.

The 1973 South Pacific Forum was held in April. Its timing coincided with New Zealand’s approach to the ICOJ and Hugh Watt’s trip to Paris. The meeting provided an opportunity for New Zealand and Australia to demonstrate that the South Pacific was united against French nuclear testing. Kirk aimed to broaden the campaign against French nuclear testing by giving it a Pacific, rather than an Australian and New Zealand flavour. The Forum issued a joint declaration against atmospheric nuclear testing. The
communiqué named France and welcomed a recent resolution from the UNGA for a halt to all atmospheric testing. The MFA report of the 1973 Forum described the joint declaration as ‘ammunition to be used in Paris and in London and in Pacific capitals’.

Kirk used the Forum as an opportunity to make a further statement on nuclear testing. He noted that New Zealand had dispatched a minister to visit China and that this minister would express New Zealand’s regret that China continued to conduct atmospheric nuclear tests. Kirk reiterated that opposition to France was only part of a general programme against nuclear testing. He also noted that in principle New Zealand favoured the creation of a nuclear-free zone in the Pacific.

The 1973 South Pacific Forum was important because it broadened New Zealand and Australia’s protest against French nuclear testing. The joint declaration endorsed further protests including the legal case and the MVNZS Otago’s voyage. The Forum also provided Kirk with an opportunity to express regional opposition to nuclear testing before the CHOGM, due to held in August. At this meeting Kirk would have to convince more diverse and powerful countries that it was in their interest to condemn atmospheric nuclear testing. CHOGM would test Kirk’s new independent approach to foreign affairs and his belief that broad international pressure could be brought to bear on France.

New Zealand would also play host to the 1974 Commonwealth Games. To a small country like New Zealand such an event meant a great deal. Kirk was determined that the 1974 Commonwealth Games would be a success. There could be no success without full participation from the African Commonwealth members. In 1973 there were no guarantees that African nations wished to participate in the Christchurch Games. New Zealand’s unfortunate stance on Rhodesia and sporting contacts with South Africa detracted from New Zealand’s non-racist image. Indeed African politicians tended to perceive New Zealand as a part of the old ‘white block’, alongside Australia and the United Kingdom. If Kirk wanted an anti-nuclear testing communiqué in Ottawa and full participation at the Christchurch, he needed to prove to Africa that New Zealand’s stance had changed.

The first hurdle to a better relationship with black Africa was New Zealand’s continued rugby relationship with South Africa. The situation in early 1973 anguished a Prime Minister who had promised not to meddle in sporting contacts. The threat of
protest violence in New Zealand, the threat to the Commonwealth Games, and the threat that Africa would not cooperate in any anti-nuclear weapons initiative at Ottawa or in the UNGA caused Kirk to revise his 1972 policy. He delayed the decision for as long as possible, but on 26 May advised the New Zealand Rugby Football Union to postpone the Springbok visit. Dr Abraham Ordia, President and Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, thus informed African states that they should prepare to attend the 1974 Commonwealth Games.

The political reality, that French atmospheric nuclear testing in the South Pacific did not particularly concern Africa, meant that Kirk could not rely automatically on African support in Ottawa. The Africans had their own special issue, namely the situation in Rhodesia, which they wished to bring up at CHOGM. MFA preparatory notes for the Conference argued that New Zealand needed to ‘get alongside the Africans’ if it wanted to see a pronouncement on nuclear testing.

In 1973 relations within the Commonwealth were predictable: thorny and complicated. On television Gough Whitlam had successfully alienated Lee Kuan Yew and Britain’s Prime Minister, Eric Heath. Heath and the African leaders disagreed vehemently over how to solve the problem in Rhodesia. Canada’s Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, as the leader of a fellow French speaking nation, trading partner, and NATO ally, wanted to maintain and enhance Canada’s relationship with France. Kirk, however, hoped for close support from Canada on the issue of French testing. For similar reasons to Canada, the British Government did not want to antagonise France. It was not easy for the New Zealand delegation to overcome these difficulties and reach an agreement with both the ‘white’ and ‘black’ sections of the Commonwealth.

Kirk’s new foreign policy style undoubtedly contributed to the measured success that he achieved in Canada. Kirk and the MFA worked hard to ensure that New Zealand’s stance was understood by the African delegates. Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania, stated that he wanted to see ‘not a trade union of the poor, but a trade union of the small’. Norman Kirk shared this sentiment. A feeling of Commonwealth solidarity motivated the Africans to support the Australasian inspired communique on nuclear testing. The Africans were happy to go along, but did not consider atmospheric nuclear testing to be their problem. The MFA report on the CHOGM notes that the Africans
spontaneously recognised New Zealand’s new stance and understanding, demonstrating a new warmth for New Zealand. Kirk’s leadership on the issue of white South African sporting teams was one decisive factor in persuading Africa that New Zealand had changed; his handling of the Rhodesian debate was another.

The African states sought a strong and radical resolution from the Commonwealth over the civil war in Rhodesia. Heath would have preferred if the issue was kept off the agenda. Kirk demonstrated that the tragedy of New Zealand’s policy towards Rhodesia under National governments was that relatively little action could have produced marked improved relations with Africa. In the face of British intransigence Africa warmly welcomed New Zealand’s new rhetoric that supported non-violent Commonwealth intervention in the Rhodesian crisis. Kirk proved to Africa that New Zealand could be trusted. Frank Comer’s old friendship with delegates from Nigeria and Sierra Leone, built up during his posting to New York, also helped instill trust between the New Zealanders and Africans.

New Zealand sought a strong statement against atmospheric nuclear testing from the Ottawa CHOGM. Kirk would have preferred if France was named in the statement, but did not intend to criticise any individual country above another. Kirk argued that the communiqué should be issued on the tenth anniversary of the PTBT rather than the bombing of Nagasaki or Hiroshima. He did not want to offend the United States. Early discussion with the Commonwealth Secretary General, Arnold Smith, revealed that Australia wanted to discuss French nuclear testing under the heading ‘French Colonisation in the Pacific’. This plan might have aimed to inspire interest from the staunchly anti-colonial African delegates. Comer agreed with Smith that criticising the status of French Polynesia would anger France. He told the Secretary General that there should be no questioning of French sovereignty in the Pacific.

In Ottawa New Zealand discovered that the United Kingdom would not accept any statement which explicitly mentioned France and was negative about the prospects for any statement against nuclear testing. The UK, however, also faced the more dangerous prospect of a radical Rhodesian communiqué. For the first time Australasia and Africa united at CHOGM against the UK. The most powerful country in the
Commonwealth was forced to compromise. The 1973 CHOGM thus produced a mid-conference declaration against nuclear testing.

The declaration did not name France. It sought to ‘bring about the total cessation of nuclear weapons tests in all environments’. The statement was general in content and, because it criticised tests in all environments, criticised all five nations that continued to test nuclear weapons. The MFA report on the CHOGM stated that although New Zealand did not achieve all it wanted in the statement, it ‘got the essential point’. A significant regret for the MFA was that ‘Trudeau was less idealistic than we thought’. The Canadians had helped New Zealand prepare for the ICOJ case. It came as a surprise that they did not favour a stronger statement on French nuclear testing.

At Ottawa Kirk demonstrated New Zealand’s new independence by working against Britain on the issues of Rhodesia and nuclear testing. Yet this new stance required him to cooperate and bargain with other small nations. In order for New Zealand to exert any significant influence within international forums, such as CHOGM or the UNGA, it was necessary to link up with other countries. Even direct bilateral initiatives benefited from broad regional support. The frigate’s voyage and the ICOJ action are two examples of this. Kirk ensured that New Zealand pursued an independent agenda, yet paradoxically he relied on joint action to pursue national interests. Through his independent policies Kirk fostered the ideals of interdependence and cooperative action. Indeed Kirk’s anti-nuclear weapons stance was motivated by his belief that nuclear weapons threatened all of humanity and that France’s test-programme threatened the entire Pacific.

Kirk adopted a more independent approach than his predecessors did. He was prepared to act assertively and take the initiative on humanitarian issues. His foreign aid policy is a good example of this new initiative. Kirk was not prepared to ‘sit back’ and wait for direction from larger countries with which New Zealand historically identified. His anti-nuclear weapons policy was thus independent in the sense that it was conceived in New Zealand and treated issues ‘independently’. Kirk was prepared to disagree with any government on any issue. Although Kirk is sometimes described as an idealist, this concept was actually pragmatic in the sense that it attempted to divorce important humanitarian issues from the Cold War. Thus issues such as nuclear testing could be
settled without the ideological burden imposed by rigid alignment to the bipolar Cold War.

Shortly after the 1973 CHOGM Kirk visited the United States. His agenda included a visit to the UNGA in New York. Kirk’s speech to the General Assembly marked the pinnacle of his career as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The speech was a statement of intent delivered to a broad international audience. Kirk’s delivered a scathing critique of the arms race and nuclear testing as legacies of the Cold War, but praised the current détente between the great powers. In his speech he sought to highlight the dangers inherent in the Cold War:

That new great power relationship, that relaxation, has been brought about by a concert of convenience among the few. But we, the smaller nations, who need stable peace, cooperation, and international order can not rest satisfied with such a temporary and fragile situation. We have to find a way to build upon that relaxation, to bring it within a larger, more constructive, and more permanent framework of international order...In so far as similar elements are inherent in the situation the world will continue unstable and the détente will be fragile. For, let us not forget, the great powers still remain free to undertake their unilateral actions. And some of those unilateral, often misguided actions, have brought great suffering in recent years and set back the progress of wide sections of the whole human family. In this nuclear age such unfettered freedom on the part of the great powers is too dangerous. 29

Kirk went on to elaborate his government’s policies towards nuclear weapons testing. He did not name France, but instead noted that two powers ignored the PTBT and continued to test in the atmosphere. While Kirk deplored atmospheric testing and emphasised the ‘growing outcry from world opinion’, he noted that the remaining nuclear powers continued to test underground and thus afforded a pretext for the atmospheric testers to continue with their programmes. 30

Kirk linked nuclear testing with nuclear proliferation. He argued that the absence of a comprehensive test-ban treaty advanced the certainty of nuclear war. Kirk gave an emotional depiction of the great powers’ failure: ‘Sometimes the shepherds have preyed upon the sheep...a lonely few sitting at their top table with their obscene weapons which they can only use by committing suicide.’ 31
Never before had Kirk delivered such a scathing critique of the Cold War and its attendant arms race. The speech was strong but did not attack the US strategy of containment. Kirk criticised the Soviet Union's acquisition of more advanced rocketry, but did not name the US. This contrasted with Gough Whiteman's overt criticisms of American policy in the run-up to his election in 1972. President Nixon had already initiated the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. Kirk's statements on the evils of nuclear proliferation were to some extent accepted by the United States.

Kirk argued that small countries should demand a role in disarmament negotiations. He believed that the UN was the logical organisation in which they should work towards disarmament:

> We have also to confront the simple fact that in the last 10 years or so international law and international organisations have been casualties of the Cold War... It is now for the smaller countries to take up the task of making this organisation work. If the great powers will also show a change of approach to the United Nations, and mankind with it, will get back to business.

The concept of small countries cooperating underpinned Kirk's anti-nuclear weapons strategy. The precise strategy that Kirk suggested was regional nuclear demilitarisation, where geography and circumstances were appropriate.

The idea of nuclear-free zones was an important part of Kirk's anti-nuclear weapons policy that had been sidelined while New Zealand pursued other aspects of its campaign to halt French atmospheric testing. The SPNFZ was a part of Kirk's strategy to end French testing and a part of the international campaign that sought to contain and limit nuclear proliferation. Kirk noted that his government had changed New Zealand's vote in the UNGA to support the concept of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean. He also expressed support for the LANFZ and the concept of a South East Asian zone of peace. Finally Kirk announced that his government favoured the creation of a nuclear-free zone in the South Pacific.

In view of France's attitude towards the PTBT it is unlikely that it would have ratified the SPNFZ, although the concept of a nuclear-free zone would have contributed to the regional pressure that New Zealand helped bring to bear on France. The SPNFZ differed from other strategies aimed at halting nuclear testing, the SPNFZ was important...
in its own right. Unlike the PTBT, the ICOJ case, and Kirk's other protests aimed at atmospheric nuclear testing, the SPNFZ remained relevant after France and China ceased atmospheric testing. Kirk hoped that the SPNFZ would foster eventual nuclear demilitarisation of the South Pacific. Kirk's speech to the UNGA is significant because it demonstrated the depth of his convictions and determination to push for nuclear disarmament. His support for a nuclear-free zone in the pacific was the most radical aspect of his anti-nuclear weapons policy because it required the nuclear powers to demilitarise in the world's largest ocean. This had obvious ramifications for New Zealand and Australia's status as ANZUS partners.

Kirk's speech to the UNGA is significant because it showed that he was prepared to criticize New Zealand's allies that persisted in testing their weapons underground. In July 1973 Kirk issued statements that opposed underground nuclear tests carried out by the United States and the Soviet Union. In June 1974 he issued a similar statement that criticized Britain's underground test. Although Kirk regretted the tests he did, however, note that the US and USSR rigidly adhered to the PTBT and that their programmes were legitimate, in the sense that they did not breach any international treaty. Kirk was more critical of the British test, noting that it went against the spirit of the Ottawa declaration against nuclear testing. These statements significantly broadened New Zealand's anti-nuclear weapons stance. Part of Kirk's new resolve was his strong opposition to all nuclear testing. In an attempt to work towards this goal Kirk favoured the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), that sought to end all nuclear weapons testing in all environments and eventually achieve nuclear disarmament. In November 1973 New Zealand's ambassador to the United Nations, Malcolm Templeton, urged all five nuclear powers to work towards the CTBT's ratification.

The Ottawa meeting demonstrated Kirk's ability to draw support for his anti-nuclear weapons policies by pursuing a broad humanitarian agenda. His positive policy towards Rhodesia and staunch position on apartheid and sporting contacts with South Africa won African support. At the UN Kirk continued to link his humanitarian policies together. He reiterated this concept a day later in a speech to the National Press Club in Washington. Kirk urged that the UN work towards protecting the interests of the majority of states and 'in particular of small states'. To achieve this he advocated the rule
international law to arbitrate between nations, a plethora of anti-nuclear weapons initiatives, a more equitable redistribution of energy and food to developing countries through aid programmes, freer trade for agricultural goods, and opposition to racial discrimination. Kirk stated to the UNGA: ‘This may seem idealistic; but I am not talking idealism. I am talking practicalities.’ Kirk’s rhetoric at the UN and in Washington suggests that the bargain reached at Ottawa was more than diplomatic horse-trading. A toughening of New Zealand’s stance towards Ian Smith’s Rhodesia and the Republic of South Africa fitted well with the kind of international cooperation that Kirk hoped to foster. His anti-nuclear stance was part of a broad, coherent, and socially democratic humanitarian agenda.

Independence required cooperation with other states on particular issues. Kirk picked where New Zealand would stand on a diverse range of issues. This meant that he would sometimes find himself opposing and criticising New Zealand’s traditional defence partners. It did not mean that that he favoured non-alignment. An MFA policy paper prepared for Kirk’s meeting with Nixon in September 1973 stated:

The non-aligned movement has always been characterised by anti-Americanism. New Zealand is manifestly a small country, and enjoys good relations with other small countries in the Commonwealth, South East Asia and the Pacific. It is none the less aligned...we could play a positive role in helping interpret American policy to other small countries, and in countering anti-American sentiment among them. On the other hand, we ourselves intend to play our own part in tackling the world’s problems. These certainly include the problem of nuclear armaments.

Kirk criticised Britain, the USSR, and US when they exploded nuclear weapons underground. This did not impact on his commitment to New Zealand’s status as an aligned nation.

In 1974 Kirk continued to pursue a broad anti-nuclear weapons agenda. The ANZUS Council Meeting, held in Wellington in February 1974, produced a communiqué that called for universal adherence to the PTBT, further measures of arms control, and expressed satisfaction at SALT’s achievements. Kirk’s relationship with the US was aided by détente. Nixon’s détente gave the impression that the US was working towards a measure of nuclear disarmament. The ANZUS meeting demonstrated that Kirk’s anti-
nuclear weapons stance was not necessarily incompatible with his commitment to ANZUS, although the proposed SPNFZ was a problematic initiative for the other ANZUS partners.

Throughout 1974 Kirk’s health deteriorated. Frank Corner believes that the Prime Minister became disturbed “in mind and in spirit”. His anti-nuclear weapons policy had peaked, although Kirk continued to rally against nuclear testing. The 1974 South Pacific Forum produced a final communiqué that recalled earlier protests, urged France to halt its test-programme, and expressed its desire to see an end to all nuclear testing.

In his first fifteen months in office Kirk launched an impressive international campaign against nuclear weapons testing and proliferation. He successfully participated in several international forums that exerted significant diplomatic pressure on France to halt its test programme. This display of international regret enhanced New Zealand’s own protests directed at French testing. Kirk invigorated New Zealand’s broad campaign aimed at nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and nuclear testing in all environments.

Notes for Chapter Four

2. Ibid, part 6, from Apia to Wellington, 9/1/73.
10. Hayward, pp.124,125,126,135, see also MFA file series 153/56/1 part 3, “New Zealand Initiatives at Ottawa”, 4/7/73.
11. Hayward, p.135.
15. Ibid, part 3, from Ottawa to Wellington, 9/7/73.
16. Ibid, part 4, “Record of a meeting between Kirk and Heath at hotel, 1 August 1973”.
17. Conversation with Frank Corner, 1/7/79.
23. Conversation with Frank Corner, 1/7/79.
24. 153/56/1 part 4, from New York to Wellington, 4/9/73.
25. Ibid, part 2, “Discussions with Arnold Smith, Commonwealth Secretary General, 2 April 1973”, see also Ibid, part 2, from Corner to Kirk, 30/3/73.
30. Ibid, pp.7,8.
34. Ibid, p.9.
37. “Statement by Prime Minister”, in New Zealand Foreign Affairs Review, vol.24, no.6, p.52.
40. “Prime Minister’s Address to the National Press Club, Washington, 28 September”, in “Statement by Prime Minister”, in New Zealand Foreign Affairs Review, vol.23, no.9, p.29.
42. “Prime Minister’s Address to the National Press Club, Washington, 28 September”, in “Statement by Prime Minister”, in New Zealand Foreign Affairs Review, vol.23, no.9, p.29.
44. Ibid, p.5.
48. 301/4/2/1 part 8, “Fifth South Pacific Forum Final Communiqué, 24 March 1973”.
ANZUS and the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone

The SPNFZ was an integral part of Kirk’s anti-nuclear weapons policy. The idea originated in 1962, when the leader of the Australian Labour Party, Arthur Calwell, advocated the establishment of a NFZ. Calwell’s NFZ would stretch from the existing Antarctic Zone to the equator. The Australian Labour Party did not actively pursue the NFZ after its defeat in 1964. Instead Kirk became the most active political supporter of a NFZ in the South Pacific. Keith Holyoake, Prime Minister Menzies of Australia, and representatives of the Kennedy Administration opposed the idea at the 1963 ANZUS Council Meeting. They argued that a NFZ might impact on US installations in the region and that it would not increase security against China, which was known to be seeking nuclear weapons. Thus from its inception the concept of a SPNFZ concerned ANZUS. In the 1970s the US’s strategic concern, that a NFZ would prevent the deployment of ship and submarine based nuclear weapons in the South Pacific, became the major obstacle to the establishment of a SPNFZ.

Kirk believed that this problem could be overcome. Détente and the Nixon Doctrine encouraged him to pursue the SPNFZ. The relaxation of tensions between the US and USSR fostered a climate conducive to nuclear disarmament. SALTI and SALTII heralded a new era of productive dialogue between the US and Soviet Union. The Nixon Doctrine stated that America’s ‘friends’ would have to be more self reliant for their own defence. Thus there were elements in Nixon’s new policy that encouraged Kirk’s belief that New Zealand could work productively towards the SPNFZ. Yet The Nixon Doctrine also guaranteed the presence of a ‘nuclear umbrella’ to guard against communist superpower aggression. In this respect Kirk’s SPNFZ was incompatible with American nuclear policy; the SPNFZ would restrict the US’s strategic freedom to deploy nuclear weapons in the Pacific and undermine Nixon’s guarantee that the US could protect its ‘friends’ in the event of direct Soviet aggression.

Kirk favoured establishing a NFZ by international agreement. Before this could be pursued it was first necessary to work with the US and Australia. There is no
evidence to suggest that Kirk was prepared to jeopardize New Zealand’s position in the ANZUS alliance. He hoped to secure a NFZ and maintain New Zealand’s defence relationship with the United States and Australia. This goal was evident in Labour’s election manifesto and in Kirk’s direction of New Zealand’s foreign policy in 1973 and 1974.6

In December 1972 Frank Corner noted that Kirk wanted a NFZ and that this fitted well with his ‘pattern of policy’.7 Australian officials noted in January that the NFZ was one aspect of Kirk’s manifesto that they did not support.8 During the 1973 South Pacific Forum Kirk issued a statement outlining New Zealand’s campaign against nuclear testing. He noted that New Zealand did not have a single tactic, but instead focused on several distinct initiatives. Kirk stated that he hoped to establish a NFZ in the South Pacific. In June he advised R. Mann, Secretary of the CND, that his government intended to pursue the SPNFZ.9 In July Kirk directed his staff to begin preliminary discussions with Australia and the US.10

Early discussions were discouraging. Gough Whitlam opposed the SPNFZ. He argued that the zone was not compatible with the ‘high seas issue’, as it would limit the mobility of US nuclear weapons, and would risk the ‘balance created by détente’.11 In August Lloyd White, New Zealand’s ambassador to Washington, told Corner that the MFA should expect a concerned response from the US. White spoke with William J. Porter, the American Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. This meeting revealed that the US had already prepared an opinion on the SPNFZ. The US had several specific concerns. Porter noted that a NFZ should not destabilize the area, would need to include the US, USSR, and France, would not serve the ANZUS partnership, and would create transit problems. He stated that US might in future ‘need the Pacific’. Porter saw no advantages in the NFZ and some disadvantages. He concluded that the proposed NFZ had great potential strategic significance. Thus White told Corner that ‘the Americans will take a lot of persuading’.12

Early discussions showed that the establishment of a SPNFZ was going to be a difficult task. Australia and the US were firmly opposed to the concept. After Kirk broached the subject at the UNGA it became clear, however, that the SPNFZ was still on his agenda. Lieutenant General R.J.H. Webb, Chief of Defence, sought to make the Prime
Minister 'aware of the problems' before he visited Canberra in November 1973. Webb's concerns were unfounded. Kirk did not conduct in-depth discussions with the Prime Minister of Australia in Canberra, although Kirk told Whitlam that New Zealand favoured the establishment of a NFZ. After his meeting with Whitlam, Kirk noted that he was uncertain whether the ANZUS partners could be brought quickly or easily to support a NFZ. He decided to leave the matter until the ANZUS council meeting, due to be held in Wellington in February 1974. Corner advised his officials that the Australian officials were opposed to the idea and that Kirk had failed to convince Whitlam.

Corner wrote to Kirk on 21 February 1974 to explore the arguments that New Zealand might raise at the ANZUS Council meeting. Corner noted that Kirk might choose to leave the SPNFZ for another occasion. He also argued that any restriction on the movement of nuclear submarines carrying nuclear weapons would be completely unacceptable to Australia and the US. If, however, a NFZ did not include restrictions on the deployment of nuclear weapons in the South Pacific and Southern Oceans, it would go no further than the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Corner noted, 'so we are in a box!'.

The MFA produced a substantial document in preparation for the ANZUS Council meeting. It elaborated on arguments that Kirk had raised while in Opposition. Kirk hoped that the SPNFZ would achieve three major aims. The most important goal was to keep the region, which was free from strategic confrontation, free for the future also. The second goal was to secure the region from involvement in a nuclear exchange. This would require a treaty to preclude the deployment of nuclear weapons from any territory, international waters, or air space, and preclude the testing of nuclear weapons in the region in any environment. The third goal was to promote arms limitation, which was essential, 'if the present moves on the political and economic level towards détente are to yield lasting stability'.

The zone was to run from the west coast of Australia joining with the existing Antarctic Zone at sixty degrees south. The eastern boundary would be with the Latin American Zone. The SPNFZ would stretch as far north as the equator. This ambitious project would include New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, the Pacific Island states, and territories belonging to the US, UK, and France. The most important provision that Kirk
hoped to achieve for the SPNFZ was the prohibition of the deployment of nuclear weapons. The issue of transit through the South Pacific was left open.\textsuperscript{18}

The MFA report outlined the negotiating procedure. It urged close consultation with Pacific allies and neighbors; this could begin with exploratory talks at the ANZUS Council meeting before any detailed tripartite exchanges began. The MFA argued that there was no point in prematurely approaching the UN.\textsuperscript{19} Preliminary discussions with the King of Tonga and the Prime Minister of Samoa revealed that some Pacific Island leaders supported the concept of the SPNFZ.\textsuperscript{20} Kirk had impressed these leaders at the South Pacific Forum and his anti-nuclear weapons policies captured their imaginations. Kirk, however, needed support from bigger fish, if he was to progress towards the establishment of a NFZ.

Kirk's belief in the SPNFZ rested on the assumption that the super-powers could be persuaded to accept and respect the nuclear-demilitarisation of the South Pacific. If the US could be persuaded, Kirk believed that the UK, China, and the USSR would follow. Superpower accord was essential to the credibility of any NFZ. The MFA report stated that New Zealand was not so naïve to believe that France would 'come in' in the short term. Although it noted the considerable pressure that a NFZ would generate against French testing. Kirk's policy hinged on his belief that détente and the Nixon Doctrine combined to foster an international climate in which the US might accept a NFZ. The MFA report noted that the Latin American Zone, which the US agreed to in principle, enhanced stability in that region. If the South Pacific could similarly be kept free from nuclear confrontation, all the superpowers would benefit from enhanced stability and potentially reduced burdens.\textsuperscript{21}

Kirk visited Washington in September 1973 and conducted profitable discussions with President Nixon and officials. Kirk was nervous at the prospect of meeting Nixon, who had become tainted by the Watergate scandal. Kirk was also uncomfortable at the prospect of meeting the President because of alleged US interference in Chile. Despite these difficulties the New Zealand delegation conducted candid discussions with Nixon and other State Department officials. These meetings reinforced Kirk's belief that the US welcomed his basic changes to New Zealand's foreign policy.\textsuperscript{22}
In keeping with Kirk’s own assessment and encouraged by Kirk’s discussions in Washington. The MFA report on the SPNFZ claimed that the Nixon Doctrine encouraged a more vigorous and creative New Zealand role. The report also asserted that Doctrine allowed for sharper differences between New Zealand and the US than in the past. Kirk had argued this opinion since his visit to Asia in 1970.

Kirk did not recognise another important feature of the Nixon Doctrine. In July 1969 Nixon announced his new doctrine at an informal press briefing in Guam. It was later refined by the State Department: ‘First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitments. Second we shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us…’. The United States reserved the right to deploy nuclear weapons in the South Pacific so that it could honour its treaty commitments with a nuclear shield. Despite détente and the elements of the Nixon Doctrine that encouraged local independence for conventional defence, the US was not prepared to sacrifice an area of ‘great potential strategic significance’.

Australia had its own difficulties with the United States. Gough Whitlam believes that his withdrawal of vestigial Australian forces from Vietnam cast a shadow over his government’s ability to manage its relationship with the US. In 1972 Whitlam criticised American involvement in Vietnam and its policy of containment: ‘Behind it all, behind those eighteen years of butchering and global blundering, was the Dulles policy of containing China.’ Despite Nixon’s amendments to containment in Asia, it is hardly surprising that the US formed a negative perception of the Australian Labour Party. Whitlam’s rhetoric and his criticism of the Christmas bombings were probably even more damaging to US relations than his retreat from Vietnam. Whitlam alienated the US within a couple of weeks of taking office. Despite the fact that his criticisms of containment were to some extent consistent with Nixon’s own policy, the US looked unfavourably on such an overt and negative attack on its conduct in South East Asia. In 1973 and 1974 Australia needed to rebuild its relationship with the US. This may explain why Australian officials strongly opposed Kirk’s SPNFZ initiative. Whitlam had already pushed the US too far. His poor relationship with Nixon was evident in the frosty welcome that he received in Washington in 1973.
Kirk, in contrast, was warmly received when he visited Washington in September 1973. The Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Rush described Kirk’s independent approach to foreign affairs as ‘healthy and proper’. Kirk noted, during his meeting at the State Department: ‘The United States would notice differences of emphasis in New Zealand foreign policy and sometimes disagreements; but New Zealand had no intention of adopting a baiting attitude towards the United States.’ Kenneth Rush replied to this by stating that the United States no longer looked for the kind of support it had wanted during the Cold War period. The US welcomed Kirk’s polite and balanced independence. Kirk’s independence was balanced because he did not seek out sources of disagreement between New Zealand and the United States, nor let disagreements undermine the good relationship between the two countries. Kirk equally criticised US, British, and Soviet nuclear testing, although his statements tended to be slightly tougher on the USSR and UK.

Kirk and Whitlam’s relationship with the US were subtly different. Whitlam and Kirk had both withdrawn their country’s remaining forces from South Vietnam. Whitlam engaged in direct and bitter attacks on the conduct of US foreign policy. Kirk, in contrast, criticised ‘Cold War’ politics but did not single out the US. Kirk favoured the radical policy of the SPNFZ; Whitlam strongly opposed the SPNFZ. The hallmark of Kirk’s relationship with the US was his combination of conciliatory rhetoric and a radical anti-nuclear weapons policy. Whitlam, in contrast, accepted the US nuclear deterrent and simultaneously launched a scathing critique of US foreign policy. In bilateral relations with the US Kirk emerged better off than his Australian counterpart. The presentation of Kirk’s independent foreign policy did not threaten the US.

The diplomatic historian Robert S. Litwak argues that Nixon and Kissinger attempted to reconcile military bipolarity with new conditions of global pluralism. This signified the end of the post-war era but was a continuation of containment that reinforced a bipolar world order. The Nixon Doctrine’s guarantee of an ‘umbrella’ is a good example of how the US continued to rely on the nuclear weapons to contain the USSR. Rush noted that the 1970s could be the ‘age of small powers’. He then referred to the ‘umbrella concept’ as providing protection for small and presumably independent
states. The atomic stand off between the US and USSR remained, despite détente and SALT.\textsuperscript{34}

The US’s recognition of ‘the conditions of global pluralism’ did not mean that it was prepared to limit its strategy of ‘nuclear containment’. Kirk correctly assessed the value of détente and the Nixon Doctrine as allowing a more independent stance among its allies. The US recognised New Zealand’s new independence as a positive step forward. Kirk did not, however, at first recognise that US acceptance of pluralism could not translate into US support for the SPNFZ. The US retreat from Asia and the Pacific shifted its emphasis back towards the nuclear deterrent as the ultimate instrument for containment in the Pacific Ocean.

Thus Kirk was unable to convince the US and Australian Governments to support the SPNFZ. In Washington he expressed his skepticism about ‘umbrellas’, noting that New Zealand had once relied on Britain’s very leaky naval umbrella.\textsuperscript{35} By the time of the ANZUS Council Meeting it seemed that Kirk had ‘agreed to disagree’ with the other ANZUS partners. The Council produced a communique against atmospheric nuclear testing, but made no progress towards a meeting of minds on the issue of nuclear free zones. Kirk recognised that without the involvement of the US there could be no workable or significant SPNFZ. Without Australian support he was unable to convince the US Government to reverse its stance.

On 19 August 1974 Frank Comer wrote to Kirk asking him to approve a report that rebutted a petition on the SPNFZ. The petition called for a formal proposal to the UNGA on the SPNFZ. The report concluded that the position of the major countries involved rendered a formal approach to the UNGA on the SPNFZ premature, and that instead New Zealand should concentrate on the CTBT. In reply Kirk scrawled ‘see me about this’, rather than ‘approved’. An indication that he questioned some unknown aspect of the MFA report.\textsuperscript{36} Norman Kirk died on 31 August 1974. His earlier approach to the SPNFZ suggests that he may have followed Comer’s advice, and not gone to the UNGA. The fact remains, however, that Kirk died. What his next step would have been is anyone’s guess. The SPNFZ was the most enduring aspect of Kirk’s anti-nuclear weapons policies. It is highly unlikely that Kirk would have abandoned an idea that he upheld for more than a decade.
Wallace Rowling, Kirk’s successor as Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, pursued the SPNFZ more forcefully. In October 1975 New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji co-sponsored a resolution in the UN that called for the establishment of a SPNFZ. Labour lost the 1975 election and the new National Government indicated that it was not interested in the politics of ‘gesture’.\(^{37}\) Ironically, in view of the Labour Party’s future strategy, Kirk was also uninterested in ‘gestures’. He favoured the establishment of a practical SPNFZ by international agreement.

Kirk was not prepared to turn his back on ANZUS and engage in the politics of unilateralism. He always favoured cooperative action and mutual assistance as a means to solve international problems. Because Australia and the US were New Zealand’s most important defence partners, any disarmament agreement needed to include those countries. Kirk’s independent foreign policy meant that New Zealand would disagree with other countries on a diverse range of issues. It did not mean that New Zealand would always get what it wanted. Kirk condemned the unilateral decision making that the superpowers were prone to. He did not engage in ‘lone ranger’ style initiatives. Kirk worked towards the establishment on a SPNFZ, but did not get too far ahead of the ANZUS partners. He was not prepared to sacrifice the ANZUS alliance for a truncated NFZ.

Notes for Chapter Five

3. MFA file series 111/12/36, “from Corner to Kirk”, 21/2/74, see also Hamel-Green, p.3.
5. 111/12/36, “from Kirk to Canberra”, 23/7/73, see also Norman Kirk, “Prime Minister’s Address to the United Nations General Assembly”, in *New Zealand Foreign Affairs Review*, vol.23, no.9, p.9.
7. 111/12/36, “Relations with Canada, NFZ notes for file”, 15/12/72.
8. MFA file series 106/24/1 pt.2, “Extract from Discussion between Sir Keith Waller, Mr Blakeney, Mr Corner, Mr Hill, Dr Cumes”, 12/1/73.
9. 111/12/36, “from N. Kirk to R. Mann”, 1/6/73.
10. Ibid, “from Kirk to Canberra”, 23/7/73.
11. Ibid, "from Corner to Kirk", 12/7/73.
12. Ibid, "from Lloyd White (Washington) to Corner", 10/8/73.
13. Ibid, "from Chief of Defence Staff to Minister of Defence", 12/11/73.
15. Ibid, "from Corner to Mr Norrish, Mr Scott, Mr Small, Mrs Mullins, Mr Hensley", 22/11/73.
16. Ibid, "from Corner to Kirk", 21/2/74.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid, "from Apia to Wellington", 7/12/73.
23. 59/2/4/3, “Note of the Prime Minister’s Discussions at the State Department, 12:30 P.M., Thursday, 27 September”, pp.1-3.
26. 111/12/36, “from Lloyd White (Washington) to Corner”, 10/8/73.
28. Ibid, pp.42, 43.
30. MFA file series 59/2/4/3, “Note of the Prime Minister’s Discussions at the State Department, 12:30 P.M., Thursday, 27 September”, p.2.
32. Ibid, p.2.
34. Ibid, pp.3, 191.
35. Ibid, MFA file series 59/2/4/3, “Note of the Prime Minister’s Discussions at the State Department, 12:30 P.M., Thursday, 27 September”, p.3.
36. 111/12/36, “from Corner to Kirk”, 19/8/74.
Conclusion

Norman Kirk did not survive his first term in office and voters returned his party to opposition in 1975. New Zealanders, dissatisfied with Wallace Rowling's leadership, chose a new leader. Robert Muldoon did not share Kirk's enthusiasm for humanitarian foreign policy. Muldoon had no time for a generous foreign aid programme or a strong and independent anti-nuclear weapons policy. He had no qualms in allowing sporting contacts with South Africa. The new government rejected Kirk's broad humanitarian vision as a basis for its international relations. With less than a term as Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Kirk achieved few lasting accomplishments. There is no doubt, however, that for a brief period Kirk transformed the way that New Zealand conducted its foreign affairs. He introduced an ambitious external programme. His attempt to increase New Zealand's foreign aid to one percent of gross national product and achieve a SPNFZ were dramatic and colossal challenges for a small South Pacific nation.¹

Norman Kirk never achieved these goals. He did, however, successfully re-orient New Zealand's foreign policy, setting it on a 'moral and independent' course. His anti-nuclear weapons policies were an important part of this new agenda. First on Kirk's list of priorities was his protest aimed at halting French atmospheric nuclear testing. This protest had several distinct features. Kirk maintained normal diplomatic dialogue, while simultaneously introducing more dramatic measures. He followed Australia to the ICOJ, but ensured that New Zealand maintained its own individual case. The frigate's voyage to Mururoa was a New Zealand initiative that successfully provoked considerable international attention. The Times took particular interest in both the frigate's voyage and the emergence of Kirk's new foreign policy.²

Meanwhile Kirk prioritised the issue of nuclear testing at several international forums. He ensured that although New Zealand maintained a strong and independent protest, it also represented broad regional and international opposition to French nuclear-testing. Strong international condemnation of atmospheric nuclear testing pressured France to stop testing in the atmosphere. France ceased testing in the atmosphere in 1974. Kirk also wanted to maintain good relations with the French Government. International
support for New Zealand’s protest helped achieve this. It demonstrated that New Zealand acted without malice and that its protest merely reflected strong regional opinion. An independent stance was also important because New Zealand needed to show that its criticisms of French nuclear testing differed from Whitlam’s overt criticisms of French colonialism. Kirk was comfortable with a French presence in the Pacific, but opposed its nuclear testing. Kirk successfully demonstrated the region’s strong opposition to atmospheric testing without sacrificing New Zealand’s independent and limited criticism of France’s test-programme.

Kirk’s only concrete achievement came in June 1974, when the French Government decided to cease atmospheric nuclear testing at the end of the 1973-1974 test-series.³ Even before New Zealand’s 1973 protests, the French Government was preparing to ‘go underground’, although it is not clear when precisely France planned to end atmospheric testing. Thus New Zealand could claim a victory in that the 1973-1974 test-series was the last conducted in the atmosphere. Kirk continued to oppose France’s nuclear test-programme, conceding only that France’s new policy was ‘an improvement’.⁴

Kirk failed to achieve other aspects of his anti-nuclear weapons policy. This does not, however, mean that he ‘failed’. Kirk’s anti-nuclear weapons policy, and his foreign policy in general, should be assessed according to the way in which he fostered a new foreign policy doctrine and diplomatic process. In terms of the ‘moral and independent’ foreign policy Kirk achieved much in a very short time. Kirk dramatically increased the protest against French nuclear testing without damaging New Zealand’s relations with France. He also initiated New Zealand’s participation in longer-term projects, including the SPNFZ and CTBT.

Kirk’s meeting at the State Department in September 1973 vindicated his new independence. Kenneth Rush noted:

The situation was changing worldwide and the United States no longer looked for the kind of support it had wanted during the Cold War period... This did not mean however that Russian and United States objectives had changed. The United States realized that in this new situation there was an incentive towards stronger regionalism and nationally independent policies, but it was conscious not to allow the policy of détente with its former adversaries to become a policy of confrontation towards its friends."
Kirk’s unwavering commitment to ANZUS ensured that New Zealand and the US would not find themselves in confrontation. The fact that New Zealand remained aligned under Kirk ensured that ‘disagreements’ with the US did not escalate. Although Kirk often stated that his government favoured a SPNFZ, the policy was implemented in close consultation with the US and Australia. These countries opposed the SPNFZ. Both Rush and Kirk championed the right to disagree on specific issues. Indeed this was a hallmark of Nixon’s new emphasis on global plurality. Kirk’s independent foreign policy did not guarantee success, rather it focussed on the pursuit of a morally cohesive or humanitarian foreign policy that reflected New Zealand’s national interest in a pragmatic way.

Richard Nixon recognised the value of New Zealand’s independent foreign policy. Nixon displayed surprising knowledge of the new situation in New Zealand when he met with Kirk in September 1973. Henry Kissinger and Frank Corner also attended the meeting. Kissinger noted that the French had told him in New York that France would not accept Australia into any new ‘community of developed nations’. At this point Nixon interjected, noting that the Australians had ‘demagogued’ the issue of French nuclear testing unduly, ‘whereas New Zealand had expressed its concerns basically and in the proper fashion’. Nixon hoped the French would take note of that. Nixon had similarly suffered at the hands of Whitlam, when the Australian leader attacked US conduct in Vietnam. Kirk reinforced the point that while New Zealand opposed French nuclear tests it was not ‘anti-French’.

The Americans recognised Kirk’s independent anti-nuclear weapons policy for what it was. Kirk opposed US nuclear testing but was not ‘anti-American’. In this basic sense he treated the US and France equally. Kirk divorced the overall relationship between New Zealand and other nations from specific issues. It was possible to disagree with China, the US, and France on the issue of nuclear testing, while maintaining a good relationship with those countries. In China’s case, Kirk vigorously criticised its atmospheric test-programme and simultaneously pioneered bilateral relations through diplomatic recognition and a ministerial visit. Kirk’s independent foreign policy meant that his government disagreed and agreed with other nations on a shifting set of issues. At the 1974 ANZUS council meeting New Zealand and the US jointly criticised atmospheric
nuclear testing, calling for universal adherence to the PTBT. Meanwhile New Zealand opposed US underground testing and sought to establish a SPNFZ.

Kirk maintained New Zealand’s status as a nation aligned with the US. Yet he also advocated a new era in international relations where small countries could work together and challenge ‘great power unanimity’. He hoped that issues could be dealt with independently from the Cold War confrontation between the superpowers. Kirk’s humanitarian policies set an example for international mutual assistance. His aid policy was a practical example of this. Other aspects of his broad humanitarian and social democratic agenda carried more symbolic and political emphasis. Kirk’s strong stance on Rhodesia required only a change in the presentation of New Zealand’s policy, rather than any significant activity on New Zealand’s part. Yet this policy change did much to enhance New Zealand’s image in the Commonwealth and facilitated African support for the Ottawa communiqué against nuclear testing.

Kirk’s coherent and socially democratic humanitarian agenda helped win support for his anti-nuclear weapons policies. The Ottawa CHOGM is the most dramatic example of this. Within the South Pacific Kirk’s style and understanding helped win support for his anti-nuclear weapons policies. This became apparent during the 1973 South Pacific Forum, where Kirk enjoyed considerable admiration from pacific leaders. The Pacific Island governments were already concerned about French nuclear testing. Samoa and Tonga, however, also expressed early support for the SPNFZ. On this issue they looked to New Zealand, rather than the Australian Government that opposed the SPNFZ. Pacific Island states supported the SPNFZ even after France ceased testing its weapons in the atmosphere. At the 1975 South Pacific Forum all the Island states represented at the meeting expressed strong support for the SPNFZ. Australia maintained private opposition and US openly opposed the initiative.

Neither Kirk, nor Rowling, were able to convince New Zealand’s ANZUS partners to support the SPNFZ. Kirk’s interpretation of the Nixon Doctrine contained a blind spot on the issue of the US nuclear deterrent. In 1969 New Zealand MFA staff in Washington argued that Nixon’s policies meant that New Zealand should show more flexibility and might have to ‘do more’. They also noted that the Nixon administration would increase its reliance on ‘the strategic deterrent’ in the Pacific. When Rush visited
Wellington in 1974 he stated that a NFZ would pose serious problems for the US Navy, which was converting to a nuclear powered and nuclear armed force. Yet Kirk, in contrast, argued that détente and the Nixon Doctrine were consistent with his anti-nuclear weapons policies.

Kirk’s doctrine stated that New Zealand need not follow US initiative. Indeed he wanted to escape ‘great power unanimity’. Kirk welcomed détente, SALT, and the Nixon Doctrine, but did not feel obliged to obediently follow the US. He interpreted détente independently from both Australia and the US, welcoming those aspects of the Nixon Doctrine and détente that enhanced his own agenda. Kirk was philosophical when Australia and the US strongly opposed his SPNFZ. He continued to argue for a NFZ and to criticise the nuclear deterrent. His actions, however, did not extend beyond written and verbal support for the SPNFZ. Rather Kirk cherished his capacity to disagree with the ANZUS partners, without actually breaking with them. He hoped that détente would continue, and that perhaps with further changes in the international climate, it might be possible to persuade all the nuclear powers to see the error of their ways.

This was a bright and optimistic prognosis, although Kirk stressed the fragility of détente and argued that all nations needed to cooperate if lasting stability was to be achieved. At the 1999 Stout Centre Conference, held in Parliament, Frank Corner recalled the ‘window of opportunity’ and then worsening global situation after 1973:

Within three months the course was set; New Zealand moved forward on many fronts in ways that assured Norman Kirk his favoured place in history. But the weather turned around. The window of opportunity was only open for little more than a year.

The international situation provided Kirk with a unique opportunity to launch a more independent foreign policy. Kirk quickly recognised these changes in super-power relations and in 1973 he seized the new opportunity. In 1974, however, Kirk faced economic problems and poor health. He was unable to maintain the momentum in international affairs that he achieved in 1973.

Kirk’s meetings in Washington show that in 1973 he successfully exploited the window of opportunity. He pursued an independent agenda, but maintained excellent relations with the US. Unfortunately, for some of Kirk’s policies, the ‘window’ proved to
be the wrong shape and size. Kirk, a practical man, realised that he was unable to push
his SPNFZ through the opening that US had created.

Within a brief twenty-one months Kirk implemented an ambitious anti-nuclear
weapons policy. Kirk successfully articulated a new independent foreign policy doctrine
that included practical measures aimed at ending all nuclear testing and establishing a
SPNFZ. His ambitious programme played a role in ending atmospheric nuclear testing in
the South Pacific. The SPNFZ and CTBT were ideas that required a broad international
consensus. Kirk sought this consensus, without which there could be no real progress
towards nuclear disarmament. Kirk was a pragmatic politician; his anti-nuclear weapons
policies were meaningful and practical efforts to create a world safe from the threat of
nuclear war. Thus Kirk chose to maintain New Zealand’s close defence relationship with
Australia and the US. He did not favour a brash and self-satisfying demonstration of
independence. Instead Kirk worked towards an international consensus against nuclear
weapons because he believed that this was the best way to achieve lasting peace and
stability.

Kirk, explaining his Government’s radical anti-nuclear weapons policy, stated:

If we want that [disarmament], it is not much use coming here saying ‘Yes, we are for peace, yes we are
against nuclear weapons’. If you want it you have to work for it. You cannot build a wall without picking
up bricks.\textsuperscript{15}

Norman Kirk knew all about bricks. As a young man he built his own house out of his
own homemade concrete blocks. Kirk’s anti-nuclear weapons policies were like his
house, a cohesive and practical structure, built for a specific purpose. If there was one
outstanding quality of Kirk’s anti-nuclear weapons policies, spanning his time in
opposition and in government, it was their pragmatism. It is true that Kirk was an idealist.
He pursued a ‘moral and independent’ foreign policy. Yet Kirk was also flexible and
pragmatic. Big Norm combined idealism and practicality to implement principled but
pragmatic anti-nuclear weapons policies.
Notes for Conclusion

4. MFA file series, 106/24/1 part 2, “Preparatory notes for Talks with Australian P.M.”, 9/1/73, see also Hayward, p.252.
5. MFA file series 59/2/4/3, “Note of the Prime Minister’s Discussions at the State Department, 12:30 P.M., Thursday, 27 September”, pp.2,3.
11. Hayward, p.222.
13. Ibid, p.3.
14. Corner, p.3.
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