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Why, when the image of the French in the New Zealand Press 1900-1914 was a divided one, did New Zealand enter World War I allied to France?

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2015

Acknowledgements

I suspect that the more that is written in any preamble the less is read.

Acknowledgements sound so clichéd but I now read them based on my new-found admiration for my teachers and supervisors. The brevity of this acknowledgement to Associate Professor Kirsty Carpenter and Professor Peter Lineham, both of the Massey University School of Humanities, for their supportive supervision, patience and forbearance is therefore a product of my wish that this acknowledgement is read, not a sign of any lack of gratitude on my part.

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My wife Karen has in common with the partners of so many post-graduate students sat patiently and waited.

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Preface

There was fear of French domination of the islands themselves, and also an acute awareness of the strength of France in the Pacific, the imperialistic attitude of her missionaries, the isolated position of New Zealand, and a corresponding desire to stop further French progress.¹

From the earliest days of colonisation French designs upon British (and later New Zealand) interests in the Pacific were poorly defined and non-specific but they were often cited as a motive for action or reaction as circumstances required. The strategic placement of French Catholic missions was interpreted as an underhand path to sovereignty and as a threat to British colonisation. The French were seized upon as a convenient scapegoat for Governor Fitzroy's Northern War problem and their colonial gains in the Pacific conflicted with the Seddon-led Liberal policy of a greater New Zealand.² As a result a prejudicial, anti-French attitude developed, dating from the earliest colonial European contacts. The mainly British colonists and their New Zealand descendants maintained a latent distrust of the French as a nation. As the *entente cordiale* between France and Britain metamorphosed into an alliance in the early twentieth century, these prejudicial attitudes were suppressed but not forgotten.

I have used the term 'alliance' in its everyday sense of a loose agreement or understanding. Historical (non-legal) scholarship varies on the status of the Anglo-French *entente cordiale*. Keiger has argued that the *entente* was neither an alliance nor a treaty but simply a settlement of various differences over empires and colonies. He concluded that the British acted as if there was an alliance while claiming that there was not; the French ignored British denials and claimed that an alliance existed, using Anglo-French military consultation as evidence.³ As Germany threatened France during the Moroccan crisis of 1905 Britain's warning in support of France, reinforced by the private assurances various British officials gave, was misread by the French as evidence of an alliance. As a result not one member of the French Cabinet present at its meeting on 6 June 1905 doubted Great Britain's commitment to the

¹ J.A. Salmond, "New Zealand and the New Hebrides," in *The Feel of Truth: Essays in New Zealand and Pacific History*, ed. Peter Munz (Wellington: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1969), p.119.

² "French and German Aggression: Importance of South Sea Possessions," *Auckland Star*, 10 February 1906, p.9.

³ John Keiger, "How the Entente Cordiale Began," in *Cross Channel Currents: 100 Years of the Entente Cordiale*, ed. Richard Mayne, Douglas Johnson, and Robert Tombs (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.3-11.

French cause. A later exchange of letters (November 1912) obliged the parties to consult if there was a mutual threat but freedom of action was still reserved. The British Government wanted to be able to tell their parliament there was no binding obligation.⁴ The British Generals (who despised civilian controls and political interference) militarized the *entente* and turned it into an alliance.⁵ As a result New Zealand participated in World War I as part of the British Imperial Alliance. This study investigates and reflects my own curiosity as to how this seemingly unlikely alliance came about.

⁴ Christopher Andrew and Paul Vallet, "The German Threat," in *Cross Channel Currents: 100 Years of the Entente Cordiale*, ed. Richard Mayne, Douglas Johnson, and Robert Tombs (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.24-25, p.30.

⁵ Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014). pp.222-223. Robin Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London: John Murray 2008). p.44, pp.56-57. Unofficial 'conversations' between Brigadier-General Wilson, Director of Military Operations, and the French military allowed the pretence that there was no British commitment.