

# Introduction:

## Regionalism, Security & Cooperation in Oceania

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If the three terms *regionalism*, *security* and *cooperation* from the title of the book were to be combined together, the title could translate into a more benign *regional security cooperation* or even a more reassuring *regional security architecture*. In fact, the aspirational title and focus of the APCSS workshop in Vanuatu in August 2014 was Regional Security Architecture. Realities on the ground, findings from the workshop, and this book's chapters, however, require caution and patience in heralding significant success in regional security cooperation or development of a viable regional security architecture. The Pacific Islands region, or Oceania, (the two terms will be used in the volume interchangeably at the risk of raising questions from geographic "purists" in the regional scholarly community), remains torn between various visions of regionalism, and unreconciled between notions of security and development. It also remains underwhelmed by piecemeal and reactive response and cooperation on security as well as challenged and somewhat unprepared to deal with entry onto the regional security arena of new and powerful players.

In *Chapter One*, Richard Herr summarizes specific challenges in the development of a regional security architecture. States supporting a regionalism from outside the region emphasize traditional state security issues, while those on the inside stress development-related, human security concerns. As independence has progressed across the region, and the agenda of non-traditional security concerns expanded to include resource protection, environmental protection and climate change, the separation between the relative interests in the two approaches to security became increasingly evident. Most island states do not have the domestic security infrastructure to

effectively engage regionally with standard state security arrangements used by the traditional extra-regional sponsors of the Pacific Islands' regional system. Consequently, continues Richard Herr, bridging the two approaches to security has proved challenging at many levels — not least at the regional level where institutional renovation has come under serious pressure to find mutually accommodating answers. The regional system is not self-funded, and its dependence on extra-regional funding is another important driver for architectural reform. Finally, re-engagement with Fiji after the country's democratic elections in September 2014, and given its central contribution to the regional system, constitutes the major contemporary challenge for architectural reform.

The most significant aspect of today's regional security environment in the Pacific Islands region, according to Michael Powles (*Chapter Two*), is the rise of China as a major power. His essay looks at China's ambition to resume what it sees as its rightful place as not only the predominant Asia-Pacific regional power, but also a major global power—as the driving force behind changes in the Pacific Islands security environment. For small powers in the Oceania region, security nervousness will rise or fall depending on two factors: first, the extent to which China demonstrates in its dealings with other states a respect for international law and the established international order; secondly, the extent to which the West, the United States in particular, is prepared to share power and give China the geopolitical space it seeks. Michael Powles notes that today, there is more Chinese activity in terms of movement of people, trade and cultural exchanges in the Pacific region than ever before. It raises a legitimate question of whether China might have additional objectives beyond its resumption of great power status; objectives which could impact specifically on the region's strategic environment.

Jian Zhang expounds in *Chapter Three* on China's intentions and role in the region by suggesting that Chinese regional interests are diverse, wide-ranging and expanding over time. Its objectives include enduring political and

diplomatic interests, expanding economic and trade considerations, and managing new and growing security concerns and needs. Beijing's diverse interests do not mean it has a clearly-thought, well-coordinated grand regional strategy. Instead, many of its activities have appeared spontaneous and lacking coordination, with some even undercutting the effectiveness of others. Jian Zhang offers an interesting observation that China is actually trading more with Island countries with which it has no formal diplomatic ties than with the Oceania countries with which it has formal relations. This suggests economic interests, more than political considerations, drive China's engagement with the region. He argues that China's growing regional presence is a new reality that needs to be accommodated, not resisted. Resisting Chinese influence will only lead to a zero-sum strategic competition that could divide the region. Accommodating China's role, however, requires greater understanding of Chinese interests and views.

Eric Shibuya agrees in *Chapter Four* that shifts in great power politics, most notably, the rise of China, require the United States, to consider many other actors and not take them for granted, while considering the second- and third-order effects of its policies. He believes that the United States' general goodwill and political capital in the region is not endless, nor is it unchallenged; and it would do well to consider how to reinvigorate its profile in the region, particularly with Pacific Island nations. The U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific announcement was a welcome one, but its substance has left much to be desired for many in the region. While there has been a host of diplomatic and economic initiatives — such as high level U.S. participation at the Pacific Islands Post-Forum dialogue and the Trans-Pacific Partnership — there has clearly been a gap between rhetoric and reality. For the Pacific Islands, however, there are significant obstacles to expanding cooperation. While many countries in the Asia-Pacific have concerns over erosions of sovereignty in cooperating with the U.S., the Islands must also consider issues of scale. For many island states, there is simply not enough personnel to meet official reporting and coordination requirements that the

U.S. and other international donors often place upon them. Eric Shibuya concludes that creative solutions — finding different ways to do the same things — is critical to improving cooperation. Ultimately, greater U.S. cooperation with Pacific Island nations may not be an issue of more, but rather better engagement.

The United States, while it retains primacy in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, looks to Australia, according to Jenny Hayward-Jones in *Chapter Five*, to take the lead on regional security for the South West Pacific, while it retains direct responsibility in the North Pacific. New Zealand provides for the security of the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau, while France guarantees the security of the French Pacific, with defense forces based in New Caledonia and French Polynesia. Australia may not always be the Pacific Islands region's most influential player from an economic perspective, but it is the Pacific Islands region's "indispensable" power from a security perspective. Jenny Hayward-Jones notes that Australia, like other dominant players in their own regions, will always be both damned and praised for its various actions. It has led important security interventions, including helping restore and build peace in Bougainville and restoring law and order in the Solomon Islands. But it has not done as well as it could in responding to climate change concerns. Australia has much work to do in understanding security from a Pacific Island viewpoint; it remains, however, the power most able and most likely to guarantee regional security in the interests of the Pacific Islands people.

Anna Powels points out in *Chapter Six* that colonial history, current constitutional obligations, and the role of development donor to the region, places New Zealand with Australia alongside the regional periphery powers of France, United Kingdom, and the United States. Geography, culture and historical linkages serve to situate New Zealand in the region and on its periphery. In recognition of the region's shifting strategic environment, New Zealand is increasingly playing a critical role as a conduit, or bridge,

between periphery powers, the non-traditional powers seeking an increased role in the region, and the Pacific Islands themselves. New Zealand's engagement with China on a water infrastructure development project in the Cook Islands is an example of how New Zealand has effectively harnessed China's strategic interests in the Pacific with the development needs of a Pacific Island country. This type of bilateral partnership is viewed as a discreet benchmark for development practice in the region. However, New Zealand cannot take its relationship with Pacific Island states — and the goodwill shown to it — for granted. Anna Powles echoes Eric Shibuya's warning to the United States by concluding that New Zealand too, if it is to retain its influence in the region in the face of competing states, must re-engage with the region in a far more meaningful manner.

Indonesia has recently become one such competing state that has dramatically increased its presence in Oceania. The growth of Indonesia's regional visibility can be attributed to several factors, to include its economic rise and successful democratic transition, but also its domestic concerns about West Papua. James Elmslie in *Chapter Seven* provides a detailed analysis of Indonesia's maneuvering in Melanesia. He notes that adding Indonesia into the diplomatic mix may strengthen Pacific Island nations' bargaining positions in their negotiations with Australia, New Zealand and other donor nations over a range of issues, such as access to visas, design and focus of aid programs, implementation of land registration, and general levels of assistance. Indonesia could act as a bridge for Pacific and Indian Ocean states. But Indonesia's support, it seems, comes at a price. James Elmslie believes that Melanesian countries' support for the self-determination of West Papuans in Indonesia has waned as their financial and strategic relationships with Indonesia has grown. However, with the recent election of Joko Widodo to the Indonesian presidency, a window of opportunity may have opened, both for relations between Indonesia and the Melanesian countries, and for the fortunes of the West Papua people – two closely linked issues.

No other country can help the Pacific Islands in understanding the challenges and opportunities of dealing with Indonesia better than perhaps Timor-Leste. According to Jose Sousa Santos in *Chapter Eight*, Timor-Leste is increasingly interested in interacting with countries of Oceania. He writes that the nation has a focused and proactive foreign policy driven by a form of “comprehensive and collective engagement” that seeks the path of many small nations: peaceful dialogue and collective action. This approach accurately reflects its geostrategic position at the juncture of Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, and embodies, first, a pragmatic understanding of the need for political reconciliation with Indonesia, the former occupying power, and secondly, an affinity with the island’s development challenges, which mirrors those of its Pacific neighbors. Much of the eastern half of Timor-Leste is ethnically Melanesian and Polynesian, and this has led to discussion as to whether Timor-Leste should identify as a nation with the Pacific Islands as opposed to Southeast Asia. Timor-Leste has a nascent special force capabilities, growing UN peacekeeping experience, and large, and well-trained and equipped policing and paramilitary units. Given this, and in light of the Melanesian Spearhead Group’s (MSG) proposed initiative to develop a regional peacekeeping capability, it would be advantageous in Jose Santos’ opinion, to engage Timor-Leste in strengthening the regional security apparatus. The addition of Timor-Leste to an MSG regional peacekeeping force would establish a triumvirate of states — Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Timor-Leste — with experienced and growing defense forces.

The challenges and opportunities of peacekeeping in the region are discussed by Russell Parkin in *Chapter Nine*. Referring to the ambition to establish “a regional facility (for) training civilian police for international peacekeeping” proposed by the 2013 Review of the Pacific Plan, he argues for the establishment of a Pacific Islands Peace Operations Training Centre (PI-POTC). In Russell Parkin’s opinion, such an institution would be more than just an important venue for educating and training regional security forces, both police and military. The norms and values that such an insti-

tution would diffuse throughout regional security forces would be powerful mechanisms for greater integration and cooperation in the Pacific. Educating security forces in a range of internationally recognized behaviors, protocols and skills would also significantly enhance their professionalism and contribute to the region's capacity to deal with its own security problems. The training center would create an environment where the existing level of peacekeeping expertise residing in regional military and police forces could interface with the international peacekeeping community. These interactions could produce regional approaches to peace-building, peace-making and peacekeeping that reflect the Pacific's unique cultural milieu, while still conforming to accepted international norms.

The next two chapters of the book address perhaps the most dramatic security challenges of the region: resources and environment. For Pacific Island nations, the sea is an essential source of traditional living, notes Yoichiro Sato in *Chapter Ten*. Large-scale commercial fishing of tuna species by long-distance fishing states has presented a rising level of threat to fish stocks on which local lives depend. Expanding the definition of coastal states' rights over the sea by international law has not been accompanied by corresponding growth in island states' capacity to protect their rights through maritime law enforcement. Furthermore, regional fishing management organizations have barely slowed the long-term decline of key tuna species. Additionally, improvements in science and engineering have made seabed resources more accessible for mining, and Pacific Island states have literally become the new Wild West, where a sense of lawlessness provides fraudsters opportunities for exploitation. Yoichiro Sato's chapter looks closely at Tonga's ocean resource issues in order to illustrate the serious implications of weak governance on effectively managing its maritime wealth.

By virtue of their shared geographic characteristics, writes Scott Hauger in *Chapter Eleven*, the Pacific Islands have an overlapping set of shared vulnerabilities to the environmental impacts of climate change. They are exposed

to tropical storms and rising sea levels in ways that continental states are not. Major climate-related security concerns for the Pacific Islands include: access to fresh water (due to changes in rainfall patterns and salt water intrusion); local food supply (damage to coral reefs, declining fisheries, and impacts on agriculture); and infrastructure damage (through rising sea levels, other flooding, and storm damage). Potential second-order consequences include economic loss from these events, declining revenues from tourism, and emigration to escape the situation — especially from atoll islands subject to inundation from sea level rise. For some Island nations consisting entirely of low-lying atolls, including Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands, rising sea levels comprise an existential threat. Scott Hauger predicts that climate change will present a growing challenge to Pacific Islands' security for the foreseeable future. Pacific Island countries and territories must seize opportunities for regional collaboration to plan and implement adaptation strategies, and to develop and disseminate science-based knowledge to meet the threat. They should work together to influence large nations that are substantial greenhouse gas emitters. Finally, they should take advantage of the slow-motion aspect of climate change to plan for increased capacities to manage regional and global response to future needs for humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

The eleven chapters in the book address diverse but related issues. They offer competent and profound analysis of key trends, challenges and opportunities for enhancing regional security cooperation and harmonizing Oceania's regional security architecture. At the same time, the book does not pretend to be an all-inclusive study of the regional security environment. It hopefully helps build more interest toward better understanding of Oceania's security — an interest (and attention) that is often missing or lacking cultural sensitivity and strategic vision as many of the authors in this volume suggest.