

Security in the Pacific Islands

Stewart Firth

Security is an all-encompassing concept, referring to everything that contributes to the protection and wellbeing of a national population. The key forms of security that affect Pacific Island states and territories and their populations are strategic, territorial, maritime, and environmental. After examining these, the essay will describe food and human security, criminal threats to regional security and the emergence of 'cooperative intervention' as a response to the internal security problems of some Pacific Island countries. A final note offers a brief analysis of the region's military forces.

Strategic Security

The USA has been the ultimate guarantor of the strategic security of the Pacific Islands region since World War II. Japan controlled most of Micronesia before 1941, and when the Pacific War broke out at the end of that year, the Japanese expanded their Pacific empire southwards, reaching as far as New Guinea and Solomon Islands before being dislodged – battle by battle – from all their Pacific territories by the Americans in the remaining years of the war. The USA emerged from the Pacific War not merely victors over Japan but with strategic mastery of the entire Pacific Ocean from the Americas to East Asia. American strategic predominance of the region remains to this day, fortified by military alliances with the Republic of Korea, Japan, the Philippines and Australia.

The USA is a Pacific power with significant Pacific territories. Hawai'i is an American state and the Northern Mariana Islands are an American commonwealth, while Guam and American Samoa are American territories. All send representatives to the US Congress in Washington. In addition to these overseas states and territories, three island countries – Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands – are 'freely associated' with the USA, meaning that they receive migration and aid benefits from the Americans in return for surrendering certain strategic rights. The three freely associated states have conceded strategic denial of their islands in perpetuity to any power other than the USA. The Marshall Islands permits the Americans to test missiles in their territory, and Palau guarantees American military use of certain defence sites until at least 2044.

In a broad strategic sense the USA thus controls all Pacific Island countries and territories north of the equator except for some parts of the small island country of Kiribati. The Americans maintain major military and naval establishments in Hawai'i, Guam and the Japanese island of Okinawa, together with a military testing facility in the Marshall Islands. The Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site, as it is called, undertakes operational and developmental testing of theatre ballistic missiles, strategic ballistic missiles and missile interceptors as well as performing surveillance, satellite tracking and space experiments. South of the equator the USA has traditionally looked to its allies, Australia and New Zealand, to maintain stability and ensure that independent Island countries remain within the Western orbit in their strategic outlook, defence arrangements and foreign policy. The other major regional power is France, with three Pacific territories, a significant military and naval presence in two of them, and a pro-Western strategic orientation.

The emergence of The People's Republic of China as a power in the region in the last decade has been interpreted in some quarters as a geopolitical development with strategic

implications, but so far it has been confined to diplomacy, development assistance and investment. In a deeper sense, however, China's move into the Pacific Islands is driven by security considerations, above all ensuring China's long-term national security by providing access to resources.

China has a major diplomatic presence in the Pacific Islands, with embassies in six Island countries, diplomatic relations with eight and an active program of intensifying relations. Chinese development assistance is flowing to Island countries in the form of grants and soft loans, often for constructing roads and government buildings, and on China's own terms. Unlike the European Union or Australia, China does not link aid to good governance. As Vice Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai made clear in 2011, China sees its assistance to the Pacific as 'South-South aid' delivered by one developing country to other developing countries, and has no intention of co-ordinating its aid program with other donors to Pacific states such as Australia and Japan.

Evidence of Chinese aid can be found in every independent Pacific Island country. The Justice, Police and Stadium buildings funded by China stand out amid the more modest structures of Avarua, the main town on Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, as does the new six-storey Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi building in the Samoan capital of Apia. A Chinese-financed convention centre is planned for Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu. The business district of Nuku'alofa in Tonga, destroyed during riots in 2006, has been reconstructed by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation with a Chinese loan. The Exim Bank of China has lent Papua New Guinea [PNG] US\$2.3 billion for roads, ports and other infrastructure, and China is giving the PNG Defence Force \$US2 million for armoured cars and troop carriers.

Chinese investment in the Pacific is growing. China's state-owned Metallurgical and Construction Corporation has invested \$US800 million in PNG's Ramu nickel project, and the Chinese-owned Xinfu Aurum Exploration company mines bauxite on the island of Vanua Levu in Fiji. The governments of Vanuatu and China are jointly investing in a fish processing plant. Altogether, Chinese companies have invested more than \$US2 billion in minerals, hotels, plantations, garment factories, fishing and logging in the Pacific Islands. People are migrating from China to Pacific Island countries in growing numbers, both legally and illegally, and as many as 100,000 Chinese now live in the region, many of them 'new Chinese' who have arrived in the last twenty years.

Rivalry with Taiwan has never been the principal driver of China's engagement in the Pacific Islands but was more important in the past than now. China's major move into the Pacific in 2006, when Wen Jiabao offered the region development assistance worth 3 billion yuan, was part of its worldwide 'going-out' policy, not a diplomatic counter to Taiwan. Since 2008 China-Taiwan relations have warmed under the Taiwan leader Ma Ying-jié, who told the Solomon Islands parliament in 2010 that his country and China had agreed to cease competing for recognition as the true China on the world stage. China's worldwide aid program is on a much greater scale than that of Taiwan. Since most large countries recognise the People's Republic as the true China, Taiwan has been left to seek official recognition from small countries around the world, including the Island states of the South Pacific. And in the process Taiwan's aid program has been used as to attract and keep allies. Taiwan maintains official relations with six Pacific countries (Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu). In the past some Pacific countries have switched allies in order to extract more aid, as Kiribati and Nauru did when they changed from China to

Taiwan. Both China and Taiwan fly South Pacific leaders to their capitals on all-expenses-paid visits, and give Pacific governments a large degree of control over what projects will be funded, although China tends to provide its own labour and materials.

The American response to the advent of Chinese soft power in the Pacific Islands and East Asia is the strategic turn to the Asia-Pacific. 'As we end today's wars', President Barack Obama told the Australian Parliament in 2011, 'I have directed my national security team to make our presence and missions in the Asia Pacific a top priority. As a result, reductions in US defence spending will not – I repeat, will not – come at the expense of the Asia Pacific... Our enduring interests in the region demand our enduring presence in this region. The United States is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay.' In Australia Obama announced that 2,500 marines would be rotated through the Australian city of Darwin as part of America's enhanced engagement with the Asia Pacific.

In keeping with the policy change, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton emphasised America's renewed diplomatic outreach to the region, including the Pacific Islands. Top-level American teams led by Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell held talks in 2011 and 2012 with Pacific leaders in Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands, PNG, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands with view to enhancing US involvement and assistance. American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of Northern Marianas now have Pacific Islands Forum observer status. Since the Micronesian states freely associated with the USA are also in the Forum, the USA now has a significant Forum presence and can be expected to make use of it in order to reassert influence. USAID, the American aid agency, returned to the Pacific in 2011 after a break of 16 years, with a regional office in Port Moresby, the capital of PNG.

The clearest diplomatic signal of the shift in US Pacific policy was Hillary Clinton's presence at the 2012 post-Forum dialogue of the Pacific Islands Forum, the leading regional organisation, in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, where she promised greater American assistance in maritime surveillance of Pacific countries' exclusive economic zones. The US Coast Guard would, she said, be joined by the US Navy in this task. While Clinton said the Pacific is 'big enough for all of us', meaning both the USA and China, no one was left in doubt about the renewed American commitment to the region.

Soon afterwards Leon Panetta became the first American Secretary of Defense to visit New Zealand since the 1980s, when American security obligations to New Zealand were suspended because of its anti-nuclear position. The 2012 US-New Zealand Washington Declaration on Defense Cooperation restored the bilateral strategic partnership and provided for strategic dialogues at senior level between the defence forces of both countries. Barred from US military ports for a quarter century, New Zealand naval vessels were welcome there once again, and by mid-2013 the Royal New Zealand Navy frigate *Te Mana* was in the US naval port in Guam. At the same time the US Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus visited Tonga, repeating the message that the USA would put more naval assets into the region and that by 2020 sixty per cent of the American naval fleet would be in the Pacific with its newest and most capable ships. Underpinning the strategic security of the Pacific Islands, especially those south of the equator, is the ANZUS alliance between the USA, Australia and New Zealand. ANZUS remains in effect between Australia and New Zealand, which are military allies, and the bilateral defence relationship is also enshrined in the Closer Defence Relations Agreement which seeks to facilitate joint operations.

Formal security arrangements link some Pacific Island countries with more powerful external states. New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Wallis & Futuna, as parts of overseas France, come under the security arrangements of the French Republic. The Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau are protected by New Zealand, which is legally responsible for their defence. Seven Pacific Island entities, together accounting for large areas of the Pacific Ocean, are the defence responsibility of the USA – Hawai'i, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. Less formally but significantly, PNG, a country of seven million people, is promised consultation with Australia in the event of attack on its territory, under the terms of a bilateral Joint Declaration of Principles signed in 1987.

The remaining Pacific Island countries may be said to fall under an informal security guarantee from Australia and New Zealand and to a lesser extent the USA. Australia has for long seen its immediate neighbourhood, including New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, as a strategic interest second only to the defence of the Australian continent itself. 'The security capacity of South Pacific states to deal with internal, external or transnational threats is generally limited, and is likely to be dependent on foreign assistance for decades to come', according to Australia's 2013 Defence White Paper. 'As Australia plays a central role in the South Pacific, we will need to continue to be a source of economic, diplomatic and, if necessary, military support.' Reflecting this continuing Australian security involvement, the first South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting took place in Tonga in 2013, with ministers from Australia, New Zealand, PNG and Tonga and representatives from France and Chile. Fiji, the Pacific country with the largest military force, was excluded.

Territorial Security

Territorial security is simplified for the Pacific Islands by the fact that only one regional country, PNG, shares a land border with another country. In all other cases the states and territories of the region meet each other in the waters of the Pacific Ocean. Territorial disputes exist. Fiji and Tonga, for example, dispute ownership of the Minerva Reef, while Vanuatu and New Caledonia contest Mathew and Hunter Islands. But these are of trifling significance and have little impact on bilateral relations.

The only land borders that have created security problems in the region are those of PNG – in the 1980s, when refugees fled across the border from Indonesia in search of sanctuary from Indonesian soldiers and police suppressing the West Papuan independence movement, and in the 1990s, when the conflict in Bougainville spilled over into Solomon Islands, bringing a flood of firearms and providing refuge for armed elements of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. Further trouble might be expected on the PNG-Indonesian border. The West Papuan independence movement, which originated in the 1960s, remains active and continues to be forcibly repressed by the Indonesian armed forces.

West Papua is unlikely to follow East Timor into independence for a number of reasons. The UN and the international community accept that the territory of the western half of the island of New Guinea, which now forms the Indonesian provinces of Papua and Papua Barat, is legally part of Indonesia. Settlers from other parts of Indonesia outnumber the indigenous Melanesian population and dominate the towns. The independence movement, despite the sufferings of its supporters, has not attracted widespread international attention, nor can it

ever be a match in military terms for the Indonesian Armed Forces. PNG, the closest neighbour to the two Melanesian provinces of Indonesia, adopts an official position of cooperating with the Indonesian government on the question of their political status. Nevertheless, Indonesian subjugation of independence activists might once again cause a flood of refugees into PNG.

Maritime Security

Fisheries are a major resource for Pacific Island countries and territories. All have declared exclusive economic zones in their surrounding waters and because of the dispersal of islands in Pacific states, their areas of maritime jurisdiction are vast. For example, the exclusive economic zone of the Cook Islands, which has a population of 15,000, extends over 1.8 million square kilometres of ocean. At the same time, global oceanic fisheries are being exhausted, and the Pacific Ocean is among the last maritime areas with considerable fish stocks, especially migratory tuna. The protection of the Pacific's maritime jurisdictions from illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing is therefore a security issue for the Pacific Islands, given that poachers are active and a scarcity of fish is likely in the future. The Pacific Islands, working together with Australia and New Zealand, have responded to this security challenge in a number of ways.

The first has been to reach agreements with distant water fishing nations such as the USA, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, and to establish a fisheries regime through a long-established body, the Forum Fisheries Agency, and a newer organisation called the Commission for the Conservation of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. These are tasked with surveillance of fishing areas through a vessel monitoring system. Licensed fishing vessels in Pacific waters carry an Automatic Location Communicator, which sends information about their location and heading to the Forum Fisheries Agency in the Solomon Islands.

The second Pacific response is to enforce fisheries regimes, a daunting task for small, poor Island states acting on their own, but made easier by the 22 Pacific Patrol Boats supplied by Australia to 12 Pacific Island states. They are accompanied by Maritime Surveillance Advisers and Technical Advisers. The Pacific Patrol Boats will begin retiring from service in 2018, and Australia has announced a replacement scheme to be known as the Pacific Maritime Security Programme. Effective surveillance and enforcement also requires aircraft patrols, and these are supplied by the four countries of the Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (Australia, New Zealand, France and the USA). A quarter of the total annual air time of the New Zealand Defence Force, for example, is spent flying over the exclusive economic zones of Pacific Islands Forum states. Australia has promised increased commitment to maritime surveillance, including a one-year trial using chartered aircraft.

The USA has recently intensified its involvement in Pacific fisheries regime enforcement. 'Ship-rider' agreements have been signed between the US Coast Guard and the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Marshall Islands, Tonga, Cook Islands and Kiribati, enabling Pacific Island law enforcement officers to travel on Coast Guard vessels in order to board suspect foreign fishing vessels. The USA is likely to expand its ship-rider program as part of its renewed engagement with the region.

An example of co-ordinated surveillance and enforcement of Pacific fisheries regimes was Operation Kurukuru in 2011, which covered the exclusive economic zones of Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Pacific Patrol Boards boarded 80 fishing vessels, escorting five to port for infractions, and were supported by Australian, New Zealand, French and US aircraft and naval vessels.

Future deep sea mining of ocean floor metal deposits may increase the stakes attached to the Pacific's maritime boundaries. Nautilus Minerals, for example, a company specialising in the seabed mining, has already obtained a mining lease in the territorial waters of PNG and plans to expand its ocean floor exploration in Fiji, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Zealand. Cook Islands has cobalt, nickel and copper in its exclusive economic zone, and gold and silver are said to be present elsewhere on the Pacific's vast seabed. Politically contentious within some Pacific countries such as PNG and Vanuatu, the issue of seabed mining has the potential to become a source of discord between them once the mining companies begin operations.

Environmental Security: Climate Change

If the predictions of climate scientists are borne out, climate change and rising seas present a security challenge to the Pacific Islands greater than any other. The 2011 Pacific Islands Forum meeting described climate change as 'the greatest threat to the livelihood, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific'.

Climate change has put some Pacific countries, such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, in the international spotlight because it dramatises the possibility that rising sea levels might end the very existence of a number of small sovereign states. The Tuvalu Ambassador to the UN, Afalee Pita, told the UN Security Council in 2007, 'our livelihood is already threatened by sea level rise, and the implications for our long term security are very disturbing. Many have spoken about the possibility of migrating from our homeland. If this becomes a reality, then we are faced with an unprecedented threat to our nationhood. This would be an infringement on our fundamental rights to nationality and statehood as constituted under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international conventions.' The President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, said in 2013 that not everyone would be able to stay in his country as sea levels rose but that relocation was a last option. For the moment, Kiribati is buying land in Fiji in order to ensure that it has enough food.

Climate change financing is a major issue in the Pacific Islands. Funds for climate adaptation reach the region from a wide variety of sources, ranging from the Kyoto Protocol Adaptation Fund, currently being accessed by Solomon Islands, to US government agencies, the European Commission, the Global Environment Facility, the World Bank and a large group of donor states. The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP), based in Samoa, says most Pacific countries 'are already experiencing disruptive changes consistent with many of the anticipated consequences of global climate change, including extensive coastal erosion, droughts, coral bleaching, more widespread and frequent occurrence of mosquito-borne diseases, and higher sea levels making some soils too saline for cultivation of traditional crops. Increase in droughts, changes in rainfall patterns and sea-level, flash floods and severe tropical cyclones have already contributed to the displacement of people, loss of livelihoods, increase in poverty and devastation to economies of developing countries that are heavily dependent on natural resources.' SPREP has undertaken a number

of climate change adaptation projects, including the relocation of villages and the building of sea walls.

Given the dire predictions of inundation, Pacific Island countries are active in international climate change diplomacy. All the Pacific Island countries in the Pacific Islands Forum, for example, support the position of the Association of Small Island States, which is to renew the Kyoto Protocol and its binding provisions. The issue is one of national survival for Pacific countries that consist entirely of atolls rising only a few metres above sea level. One of them, Marshall Islands, is seeking regional support for its Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership, which will reassert the Pacific's moral commitment to curbing climate change. As one of the world's largest exporters of coal and natural gas, mainly to China, Australia adopts a more moderate position but nevertheless funds the South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project, which maintains a network of stations across the Pacific in order to 'generate an accurate record of variance in long-term sea level for the South Pacific'. The participating countries are Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The complications of accurately measuring sea levels are considerable. Tide gauges can establish whether the sea is rising relative to the land, but not whether the land is sinking or rising, so it is necessary to establish absolute sea level change by reference to the centre of the earth using continuous global positioning system measurements. The El Nino phenomenon, when the warm waters of the equatorial Pacific flow to the east, can have the effect of reducing sea levels as much as 30 cm especially within the South Pacific Convergence Zone which extends from PNG to Samoa. Barometric pressure also has an effect, and a low pressure system will cause a rise in sea levels beneath it. While firm conclusions might be reached only over decades of measurement, a small sea level rise across the Pacific Ocean appears to have occurred already, and the possibility remains that populations of whole Pacific countries might one day need to be evacuated as climate change refugees.

Food Security

Some observers have linked climate change in the Pacific to future problems of food security. The Pacific Islands are less affected by food insecurity – in the sense that too little food is available – than any other region of the developing world, although occasional shortages occur in some provinces of PNG. The vast majority of Pacific Islanders have access to communally owned land, which can be used to grow food, and in Melanesia especially most people continue to live off the land and the sea.

The food problem for Pacific Islanders is not one of security, but of over-eating the wrong kinds of food, usually imported. Polynesia and Micronesia – Nauru especially – have among the world's highest rates of obesity, and the transition from traditional foods to rice and processed foods has caused an epidemic of diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. Ironically, malnutrition and Vitamin A deficiency is now observed among Pacific Island populations who have plenty to eat. These trends are likely to be exacerbated by the pressure of growing populations on the coastal fisheries that supply fish to all Island nations.

Human Security

The Pacific Island states have the lowest level of women in parliament in the world. Only 4.1% of members of Pacific parliaments are women, well below the world average of 19%. Nauru, Palau, Federated States of Micronesia and Solomon Islands are among the very few countries in the world to have no women in their parliaments. This gender imbalance in parliamentary representation is evidence of a much deeper social phenomenon across the Pacific Islands, male domination, which gives rise to routine violence against women. A recent survey in Kiribati, for example, reported high levels of gender-based violence in a country where the long absences of men, who travel abroad as seafarers, are said to contribute to the incidence of HIV infection in women and girls. The situation is almost certainly worse for women in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Gender violence, almost always male violence against women, is culturally legitimated in some Melanesian societies, and has become pervasive in most of them. One expert contends that most adult women in PNG have been raped at some time in their lives, another that the incidence of pack rape (known as *lainup* in the country's pidgin lingua franca) is extremely high by international standards. HIV/AIDS, though probably now contained to less than one per cent of the population, is a more serious threat in PNG than elsewhere in the Pacific Islands. In 2013 PNG women organised a national day of mourning over violence directed against them. 'Haus krai', as the event was called, attracted international attention and prompted the prime minister Peter O'Neill to introduce stiffer penalties for offenders, including the death penalty.

Criminal Threats to Regional Security

Money laundering, drug trafficking, identity fraud, people smuggling, electronic crimes, illegal trade in small arms and weapons and the illegal trade in endangered wildlife are all criminal activities to which small jurisdictions such as those in the Pacific are vulnerable. Money laundering is far less important as a security threat than it was a decade ago, when the USA, the OECD's Financial Action Task Force and a number of international banks made concerted efforts to stop the use of Pacific Island countries for this purpose. Nauru, Palau and Vanuatu in particular were suspected of being used to launder Russian Mafia and South American drug cartel funds at that time, but have since reformed their banking and financial practices.

The Pacific Islands themselves are not large consumers of illegal drugs, except for cannabis, but on occasion they serve as production points for drugs that subsequently enter the markets in Australia and New Zealand. Police discovered a methamphetamine factory in the suburbs of the Fiji capital Suva in 2004, and the same drug appears to be smuggled from the Philippines into Palau for export to Guam and elsewhere. Smugglers also ship cocaine from South America to Asia through Micronesia, transferring cargos at sea in Marshall Islands and Kiribati waters.

People smuggling is a contentious political issue in Australia, which insists that Pacific Island countries remain vigilant against it, but few people are smuggled into Australia from the Pacific. The boats loaded with asylum seekers from countries such as Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Iran come instead from Indonesia and make landfall on the Australian territory of Christmas Island south of Java. Two Island countries are nevertheless serving once again as sites for Australian detention centres, as the Australian authorities redirect refugees who reach Christmas Island to camps on Nauru and on Manus Island in PNG. The Australian government announced in 2013 that no further asylum seekers reaching its territory would be permitted to settle in Australia. Instead, PNG and Nauru would deal with their claims for asylum.

Foreigners are illegally entering PNG, Solomon Islands, Fiji and other Pacific countries in considerable numbers. PNG has lost control of immigration, which is in any case subject to widespread corruption, and the result is an influx of migrants, mostly from China. Uncontrolled migration creates its own internal security problems, as occurred in PNG in 2009 when a wave of anti-Chinese riots broke out across the country as a response to the domination of the Chinese in the small business sector. Riots also assumed an anti-Chinese character in Solomon Islands and Tonga in 2006. An official Chinese report on the 2006 riots in Solomon Islands, prepared by the Guangdong Office for Overseas Chinese Affairs, blamed the Chinese migrants themselves for lacking personal skills, business acumen, knowledge of foreign languages and sensitivity to local custom, and for provoking a hostile reaction from the local population, including the 'old Chinese' who have been in the Pacific Islands for generations.

A Pacific Transnational Crime Network, with units based in different parts of the Pacific, gives Island police access to the expertise in intelligence, surveillance and operations of the Australian Federal Police and the US Joint Interagency Task Force West from Hawai'i. The Australian Federal Police have enjoyed success countering money laundering and drug smuggling. The Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre, based in Samoa since 2008, is staffed by law enforcement officers from across the South Pacific.

The illegal trade in small arms and weapons, once a serious security threat in Solomon Islands, has been effectively brought to an end by the Regional Assistance Mission, but it remains a problem in parts of PNG, especially provinces such as Southern Highlands, Hela, Jiwaka and Enga, where thousands of weapons are used in inter-group fighting and crime, and most men are routinely armed, often with high-powered weapons. Firearms are traded across the border from the Indonesian province of Papua, they pose a continuing threat to human security in PNG, and the insecurity is intensified at election times. Fighting forced the abandonment of elections in Southern Highlands Province in 2002, and only the deployment of the PNG Defence Force to the region ensured that the 2007 elections were able to proceed. The PNG Defence Force was widely deployed to Highlands provinces in the 2012 elections in order to ensure that counting of votes was able to occur, and to avert violence at the declaration of polls.

Security and 'Cooperative Intervention' in the Pacific Islands

Political instability in the Pacific Islands since the 1990s has triggered external interventions by Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island countries designed to restore law and order, keep the peace, improve governance and build states, and it has given rise to the phenomenon of 'cooperative intervention'. The aid relationship between donors and recipients has been extended to encompass military intervention and state-building in fragile and post-conflict situations, and the Pacific Islands has been among the first regions in the developing world to adopt aid-security cooperation between development agencies, military forces and police.

To some extent, Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island states were influenced in adopting cooperative intervention by the increasing legitimacy of 'humanitarian intervention' in the wake of experiences in Somalia, Rwanda, Srebrenica and Kosovo. The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in 2001 reinforced this view, as did the Bali bombings of 2002, when more than 200 people were killed. The most important influences on the move to cooperative intervention in the Pacific, however, were the circumstances of the Pacific itself.

In PNG the central government fought a secessionist war with a breakaway province, Bougainville, for nine years before a tenuous ceasefire was negotiated in New Zealand in 1997. A regional peacekeeping operation was vital if the peace settlement reached in 1998 were to endure, and over the next five years more than 5,000 troops and civilians from Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu and Fiji undertook that task. They supervised the ceasefire between the contending parties, including warring groups of Bougainvilleans, repatriated villagers, reconciled enemies, disposed of weapons and restored infrastructure and government services, and by the time they left in 2003, Bougainville's stability had been largely restored. The success of the peacekeeping mission has been attributed both to traditional peacemaking among the Bougainvilleans and the fact that peace monitoring was conducted by unarmed military and non-military personnel. In addition, Australian military personnel remained in the background, supporting the peace monitors logistically but leaving operations to soldiers from New Zealand, Fiji and Vanuatu, countries that had not taken sides in the conflict as Australia had done.

The Bougainvillean war was followed by coups in Fiji and Solomon Islands in 2000. In Fiji the military forces abrogated the constitution, removed the President and assumed power after an earlier 'civilian coup', in which parliamentarians were held prisoner in the parliamentary complex. In Solomon Islands, a developing crisis of law and order reached its nadir when police, largely composed of officers from Malaita Island, replaced the democratically elected prime minister with their own appointee. These twin events, occurring within weeks of each other, pointed to a new instability that required a regional response, which came later in 2000 at the annual meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum. The Forum, meeting in Kiribati, issued the Biketawa Declaration, a regional security mechanism which provides an agreed basis for action to be taken by member states in the event of instability in the Pacific Islands. Measures range from creating a ministerial action group or fact finding mission to third party mediation, and, if all else fails, a special meeting of Forum leaders to consider further action.

Forum member states subsequently invoked the Biketawa Declaration in 2003 when they met to discuss action to resolve the continuing crisis in Solomon Islands, where government authority had collapsed, gangs and militias controlled the streets of the capital, and the situation – at least in the main island of Guadalcanal – was beginning to resemble that of a failed state. Forum foreign ministers decided on regional intervention in the Solomon Islands in the form permitted by Biketawa, that is, at the invitation of the sovereign government, and when the invitation came, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands was born as the region's first case of cooperative intervention aimed at state building.

Led by Australia and New Zealand, and with forces from nine other Pacific states, The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) entered the country with 2,300 personnel in July 2003 as a police-led, military-backed intervention. RAMSI proved highly successful in restoring law and order, and moved then to improving economic governance and the machinery of government. Over time RAMSI assumed responsibility for a wide variety of tasks, best described as 'building the state': strengthening the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force and the justice and correctional systems; improving financial management by government; enhancing the capacity of the Solomon Islands Public Service; combatting corruption; improving the rights and opportunities of women; and consulting with Solomon Islanders through an outreach program.

Australia paid most of the bills for RAMSI, which was led by an Australian special coordinator. RAMSI was a 'whole-of-government' exercise for Australia, not merely a police and military operation. It brought together officials from the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Defence Force, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, AusAID, the Australian aid agency, and many others from across the bureaucracy in Canberra including Treasury, Attorney-General's and Customs. The aim of this approach was to build the capacity of the Solomon Islands state across all sectors.

Events in Solomons tested the doctrine and practice of 'cooperative intervention' in 2006, when rioters rampaged through the capital Honiara, burning buildings and destroying property following the Solomons general election. The rioters targeted the businesses of the 'new Chinese', and the Chinese government sent an aircraft to evacuate hundreds of its citizens. Australia, New Zealand and Fiji reacted by sending extra troops and police to restore order and protect the regional assistance mission, and for a while cooperative intervention appeared vulnerable to a hostile Solomon Islands government. A nationalist prime minister, Manasseh Sogavare, deported the Australian High Commissioner, claiming that the intervention gave Australians 'direct and unrestricted access to the nerve centre of Solomon Islands public administration, security and leadership.' His successor, Derek Sikua, who was prime minister 2007-2010, restored good relations.

Even larger riots swept through Dili, the capital of the newly independent state of Timor-Leste, in 2006. Again, Australia and New Zealand sent troops and police, who became the International Stabilisation Force in Timor-Leste, working in support of the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste. The 2006 security crisis in Timor-Leste, which lingered until 2008, was a reminder that cooperative intervention could also be applied by Australia and New Zealand to nearby small states in South East Asia.

Before the year 2006 was over, riots broke out in Nuku'alofa, capital of the small Kingdom of Tonga. At the invitation of the Tongan government, New Zealand and Australia sent a Joint Task Force of troops and police, who quickly restored law and order. New Zealand police were rotated through assignments in Tonga in the months that followed and worked with the Tongan authorities on criminal investigations into the riots. Stability soon returned and has remained ever since.

If Tonga proved the value of cooperative intervention in the Pacific, however, Fiji demonstrated its limits as an instrument of regional security policy. As the democratically elected government of Fiji faced threats from Fiji's military forces in the latter months of 2006, the prime minister Laisenia Qarase appealed to Australia to intervene as it had done in other security emergencies in the Pacific Islands, in order to avert a coup. Technically, the Fiji prime minister's request conformed with the requirements of Biketawa. The request came from a democratically elected, constitutional government of a Pacific Islands Forum country requesting assistance in resolving an internal security crisis, and in theory Australia could have responded by leading a regional assistance mission of the kind taken to Solomon Islands.

But circumstances dictated otherwise. The Republic of Fiji Military Forces, while small by international standards, draw on the experience of numerous overseas engagements in UN and regional peacekeeping since the 1970s, and would have been a formidable military opponent for any interventionist force. More importantly, Australian governments have a long term policy of not intervening in the internal affairs of Fiji for fear of being seen to side

with one element against another in the complicated politics of that country. Australia did not intervene in the coups of 1987 and 2000, and resolved to maintain that policy in 2006, preferring to await developments and exert influence peacefully through a sanctions regime in the expectation that Fiji would eventually return to democracy.

After ten years in Solomon Islands, the Regional Assistance Mission has substantially withdrawn. The Combined Task Force from Australia, New Zealand, PNG and Tonga had left the Solomon Islands by 2013. The civilians who delivered aid through RAMSI were transferred to bilateral programs, and RAMSI itself became a mission focused solely on improving the performance of the Solomon Islands police force. Final judgement about the intervention cannot yet be reached. Solomon Islanders, when polled, overwhelmingly approve of the Regional Assistance Mission. They express little faith in their own police and would prefer the foreign police to remain. In one sense, these assessments point to the mission's success in imposing law and order and administering justice impartially. In another, they suggest that the fundamental divisions which caused the crisis in the first place are not yet resolved, and that foreign security involvement of some kind may be needed for years to come if the country is not to relapse into lawlessness. Given the uncertain economic future of Solomon Islands, whose tropical forests will soon be exhausted, such a relapse is a distinct possibility.

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands normalised intervention as policy in the international affairs of the Pacific Islands. The Biketawa Declaration gave it a diplomatic imprimatur, Pacific Island states supported it in the interests of regional security and Australia and New Zealand made it a key element of the missions of their defence forces. Alluding to the possibility of future interventions, Australia's National Security Statement of 2008 argued that 'Australia has made major long term commitments to help resolve conflict in Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste. But the risk of fragile states disrupting stability and prosperity in our region is an ongoing challenge.' The 2013 Australian Defence White Paper declared that after the defence of Australia from attack, 'the second priority task for the ADF is to contribute to stability and security in the South Pacific and Timor-Leste. This involves defence cooperation with these countries and the conduct of military operations with others as required.' The White Paper foresaw the future possibility of 'stability operations such as those we have led in Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands' requiring sustained deployments by the ADF.

In similar vein, New Zealand's 2010 Defence White Paper described one of the principal tasks of the NZDF as being 'to contribute to and, where necessary, lead peace and security operations in the South Pacific'. Contending that 'the outlook for the South Pacific over the next 25 years is one of fragility', the White Paper declared that New Zealand would 'continue to contribute to stability, capacity strengthening and economic development' in the region, together with 'regional maritime surveillance, search and rescue, humanitarian aid and disaster relief when required'. Since 2011 New Zealand Defence Force personnel have been deployed alongside Australians in the ANZAC Ready Response Force which is designed to intervene rapidly in security or humanitarian emergencies in the Pacific Islands.

Future Pacific interventions are likely to bring together the joint resources of Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands countries, and they are likely to occur in circumstances like those of Solomon Islands, where a beleaguered government calls for foreign assistance widely desired by its population, rather than those of Fiji, where deep internal divisions make uncontested intervention impossible.

Pacific Islands Military Forces

Most Pacific Island independent states are too small to have armed forces. The exceptions are Fiji, PNG and Tonga.

The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) is the best known and largest of Pacific Islands militaries, with a long history of participation in overseas conflicts and peacekeeping, and a record of seizing power at home from democratic governments. Fiji has a strong military tradition. Fijian soldiers fought alongside Americans and New Zealanders against the Japanese in the Solomon Islands in World War II, when the force reached a peak strength of over 8,500, of whom 6,371 were indigenous Fijians. In the 1950s a Fiji Battalion served for four years with the British against communist insurgents in the Malayan emergency.

At independence in 1970 the RFMF was of token size, a mere 200 strong, but since 1978 it has become an important contributor to UN and non-UN peacekeeping operations, which have had the unintended effect of expanding its size far beyond the defence needs of a small Pacific Island country. The first peacekeeping commitment, which lasted 22 years, was to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon, and the second, which continues to the present, was to the Multinational Forces and Observers in the Sinai. Combined with smaller Fiji contributions to UN peacekeeping in Croatia, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kuwait and Iraq, and to regional peacekeeping in Timor Leste, Bougainville, and Solomon Islands, these overseas operations have professionalised the RFMF and given officers a strong sense of confidence in their abilities, which, honed by overseas experience, they see as superior to those of civilian politicians. The latest deployment, in 2013, took more than 500 Fijian peacekeepers to the UN Disengagement Observer Force on the Golan Heights border between Israel and Syria. In an unprecedented policy initiative, Russia, which has become more active diplomatically in the Pacific Islands in recent years, supplied equipment to the Fijians.

The troop strength of the RFMF has averaged 3,500 since the mid-1990s, a tiny force by international standards, but one easily capable of mounting coups, imposing security and assuming the responsibilities of governing a country with a population of 850,000. The RFMF Land Force Commander Colonel Mosese Tikoitoga reminded the people of Fiji in 2013 that the size of the force could only be increased, not decreased.

Deep ethnic divisions have characterised post-colonial Fiji, and they have combined with an interventionist military to produce coups in 1987, 2000 and 2006, when democratically elected governments based on a Westminster parliamentary system were overthrown by force and replaced by military regimes. Fiji is not a weak state, and has not descended into anarchy despite these unconstitutional irruptions. Instead, the people of Fiji have become accustomed to democratic governments coming to a sudden end, the military commander taking charge of the country, and civilian government officials being displaced by military officers. Like Thailand, Fiji alternates between democracy and coups, and the next election – the first since 2006 – is due to take place in 2014. Even if democracy is restored in 2014, however, the RFMF will continue to play a determining role in the government of Fiji.

PNG is far bigger than Fiji in territorial extent and population, and, unlike Fiji, it shares a land border with a neighbouring state. Yet the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) is smaller than the Fiji Military Forces and has remained on the sidelines of politics since independence in 1975. PNG has never experienced a military coup, although a small group of soldiers led by a retired officer made an inconsequential gesture in this direction in early 2012.

Constitutionally, the PNGDF is required to defend PNG territory, assist in fulfilling PNG's international obligations, give aid to the civil authority when needed, and contribute to national development. In practice, the performance of the force has been hampered by lack of resources, poor discipline and uneven leadership and, during the 1990s, by being called upon to suppress a secessionist rebellion on the island of Bougainville. Soldiers rioted in 2002 and seized control of a military barracks at Wewak before being arrested by loyal members of the force.

In an attempt to deal with these problems, the PNG government reduced the size of the force from 3,340 to 2,000 with the aim of producing a smaller but more effective military arm. The reputation of the PNGDF has since improved, both for providing security during elections in 2007 and 2012, and for its contribution to the Regional Assistance Mission in Solomon Islands, where its professionalism has been praised. In 2010 the PNG Parliament amended the Defence Force Act so as to enable the PNGDF to participate in international operations in both war zones and humanitarian operations, opening the way to future PNGDF participation in UN peacekeeping. PNG peacekeepers have already been deployed to South Sudan and Darfur. The PNG Defence Minister Fabian Pok announced in 2013 that the size of the PNGDF would be increased to 10,000, though whether this would happen remained to be seen. Meantime Australia signed a Defence Cooperation Arrangement with PNG and boosted its financial assistance to the PNGDF.

The Kingdom of Tonga has a Defence Service numbering 650 officers and men in the Land Force and Maritime Force, and sent soldiers to Iraq, Afghanistan and Solomon Islands, while Vanuatu maintains a small paramilitary Mobile Force deployed at home.

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