



Security Cooperation in the Pacific: Workshop Report

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Executive summary

- On 18 and 19 November 2021 an online workshop was held to better understand security cooperation between partner states;¹ between Pacific Island countries (PICs) themselves, and their citizens;² and between partners, PICs and citizens. Speakers came from a range of PICs, as well as their major partner states, including Australia, China, Fiji, Japan, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands and the United States (US). The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Secretariat also attended part of the workshop as an observer.
- The discussions revealed challenges in defining the region and security. A key feature of this was which states are part of the 'Pacific region', and in particular, how metropolitan partners, Australia, New Zealand, France, Japan and the US, fit into the region. This has practical consequences, particularly when these larger states have different priorities and interests to PICs, and raises questions about the robustness of the PIF's convening power and coordinating role.
- Workshop discussions also illustrated that security is understood elastically, which accommodates the diversity of the region and its partner states, but can lead to practical difficulties when it comes to operationalising security cooperation within the PIF and other fora.
- Relatedly, while partner states are typically interested in traditional security concerns, PICs remain primarily occupied with non-traditional security. Although partner states provide assistance to address non-traditional security issues, workshop discussions highlighted the risk of partner states' defence and security agencies leading engagement in the Pacific, and the need to ensure that diplomacy and development are not sidelined. This raises further questions about who partner states are accountable to in the provision of security assistance, and the potential for greater localisation based on lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

In the 2018 [Boe Declaration on Regional Security](#) PIF leaders recognised that the Pacific is facing 'an increasingly complex regional security environment driven by multifaceted security challenges'. They accordingly committed to enhance regional security cooperation by 'improv[ing] coordination among existing security mechanisms', 'facilitat[ing] open dialogue and strengthened information sharing', 'promot[ing] regional security analysis, assessment and advice', and 'engag[ing] and cooperat[ing], where appropriate, with international organisations, partners and other relevant stakeholders'. Significantly, PIF leaders agreed that this cooperation would be guided by an 'expanded concept of security' that included human security, environmental and resource security, climate security, transnational crime, and cybersecurity. These security challenges are occurring against the backdrop of what PIF leaders described as 'a dynamic geopolitical environment leading to an increasingly crowded and complex region'.

The Boe Declaration built on a series of security-related statements made by PIF leaders over the preceding three decades, starting with the [1992 Honiara Declaration](#) on transnational crime and law enforcement cooperation. The most significant, the [2000 Biketawa Declaration](#), acknowledged the principle of 'non-interference in the domestic affairs of another member state', but asserted the need that, in a 'time of crisis or in response to members' request for assistance, for action to be taken on the basis of all members of the Forum being part of the Pacific Islands extended family'. The Biketawa Declaration has been invoked in relation to the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003–17; the Pacific Regional Assistance Mission to Nauru in 2004–9; Tonga in response to riots in 2006; sanctions on Fiji in 2009–14; Nauru in 2019 for election monitoring; the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020; as well as multiple election observer missions across the region from Solomon Islands in 2001 to the New Caledonian independence referendum in 2021.

The PIF has undertaken region-wide consultations to create a '2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent' that will constitute a 'regional strategy to protect and secure our Pacific people, place and prospects' (PIF 2021). The 2050 strategy is expected to involve recommendations to improve the responsiveness and collaborative capacity of the region's security architecture. The PIF has also revamped the moribund Forum Regional Security Committee that had operated until 2015, in the form of the Forum Subcommittee on Regional Security (FSRS). Since 2019 the FSRS has met regularly (including moving meetings online during the COVID-19 pandemic) to discuss security issues and monitor initiatives being taken to address them. While the extent to which the FSRS differs in practice from its predecessor remains open to question, regional officials appear hopeful that its capacity to coordinate and enable security cooperation will develop over time. Pacific Island countries are also engaged in developing national security strategies, as called for under the Boe Declaration, with three PICs having adopted their strategies so far (Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands). PNG adopted a National Security Policy in 2013. These strategies show how PICs prioritise their security interests, and while broadly aligning to the Boe Declaration, they expand and build upon the regional priorities; however, more work is needed on how to better tie national security strategies with regional declarations and outcomes.

Yet while much attention is devoted to building security responsiveness and coordination in the Pacific region, there has been little analysis of how security cooperation, defined as the 'common action between two or more states to advance a common security goal' (Bisley 2012:23), occurs between PICs, and between them and their partner states. To address this, in a [previous report](#) we mapped contemporary security cooperation in the region (Wallis et al. 2021; McNeill et al. 10/6/2021). We focus on state interactions for analytical simplicity and due to the confines of space; this should not be read as implying that the many intrastate, local, community, and civil society security initiatives in the region are unimportant. Our mapping revealed that security cooperation in the Pacific region is best described as a patchwork of bilateral, 'minilateral',³ and multilateral, formal and informal agencies, agreements, and arrangements, across local, national, regional and international levels. There is no formal, region-wide collective security agreement in the Pacific akin to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Multilateral cooperation includes formal institutions and other processes, meetings and dialogues at which state officials primarily discuss security concerns. The forms that security cooperation takes, and the targeting of resources devoted to security cooperation, is driven both by partner states and by Pacific Island governments. The resource constraints faced by PICs mean that in many ways they rely on partner state support, but it paints an incomplete picture to depict Pacific Island governments simply as passive recipients of security assistance.

Our 2021 report (Wallis et al. 2021), and our subsequent discussions with policymakers and scholars from across the Pacific and its partner states, brought to light a series of challenges facing those analysing the dynamics of contemporary security cooperation in the Pacific region.

The first of these is in grasping the many ways the Pacific region can be, and is, defined. Indeed, defining the region is not a new conundrum: Greg Fry (2019) describes the contested and debated history of the Pacific region, and many Pacific scholars, including Epeli Hau'ofa (1994) and Teresia Teaiwa (2021), have sought to reimagine a regional Pacific identity with Pacific peoples and the ocean at its heart. Our questions focus on whether the Pacific region only includes the island states and territories for the purposes of security cooperation. Are Australia and New Zealand — as members of the PIF — part of the region, even though they often have different security interests to the island state members? Are metropolitan powers, France, the US and the United Kingdom, which still have Pacific territories, internal or external to the region? What is the role of France as a de facto member of the PIF through its Pacific territories? What about Indonesia, which claims that several of its provinces are Melanesian on the basis of 11 million of the population sharing Melanesian ethnicity, language and culture (RNZ 13/4/2011) and is an associate member of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG)? If five Micronesian countries leave the PIF as purported (see Ratuva 26/2/2021), does this mean they are still part of the same region as before? How will growing autonomy at the subregional level, such as the MSG and Micronesian Presidents' Summit, reshape the region as we understand it? What is the impact of the different constitutional and diplomatic relationships that PICs have on a sense of regional solidarity? If regional boundaries are drawn in different ways (for example, the PIF without Micronesia), what are the consequences for security cooperation? This definitional problem is compounded by the fact that the membership of the various regional organisations and institutions differ, and not all have direct relationships to the PIF, FSRS, or are part of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP).

The second challenge is in understanding the ways in which security is defined in the region, and in particular whether boundaries can be drawn around the 'expanded concept of security' adopted in the Boe Declaration. Human security is closely linked to development, but this raises the question of whether we should include aid, trade and investment, since they contribute to development which is key to achieving human security. Should we include political security, particularly corruption? And what about human rights and gender-based security concerns, since civil and political rights are important to human security? This in turn broadens the question of who is involved in defining security beyond the state. If the concept of security is both widened and deepened, this may impact how security is understood and acted upon by

the PIF and its partner states. It is also unclear how each PIC prioritises the range of security concerns identified in the declaration. This is a reminder that there are significant size, geographic, historical, developmental, cultural and diplomatic differences between PICs. The pledge by five Micronesian members to withdraw from the PIF in 2021 highlights that regionalism may not always be sufficiently robust to contain these differences (Ratuva 26/2/2021).

The third challenge lies in understanding how (and whether) existing and emerging security cooperation mechanisms can reconcile the attention focused on the non-traditional security concerns typically prioritised by PIC members of the PIF, and those traditional security matters such as geopolitical competition, emphasised by Australia, New Zealand, the US and France. PICs are not insulated from geopolitical competition, as there has been a longstanding fault line between PICs that recognise either China or Taiwan. The November 2021 riots in Honiara, Solomon Islands, suggest that this issue is becoming more divisive (Aqorau 2021).

With these challenges in mind, in November 2021 an online workshop was held to better understand security cooperation between partner states; between PICs themselves, and with their citizens; and between partners, PICs and citizens. The goal of the workshop was to discuss papers that are intended to form the basis of chapters in an edited book about security cooperation in the Pacific Islands. Speakers came from a range of PICs, as well as their major partner states, including Australia, China, Fiji, Japan, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and the US. The PIF Secretariat also attended part of the workshop as an observer. Panels were organised around three key areas: regional security cooperation; the role of partner states in security cooperation; and security cooperation to address specific security challenges. This paper deals with each of these three areas before considering the question: 'who is accountable to whom in the provision of security assistance?'

Regional security cooperation

After an introduction by Professor Joanne Wallis from the University of Adelaide (UoA), the first panel analysed security cooperation at the regional level. Associate Professor Sandra Tarte, from the University of the South Pacific (USP), opened the session by providing an overview of the history, structure and dynamics of the PIF's role in security cooperation, providing the scaffolding on which the remainder of the workshop was built. Tarte emphasised that regional and global events have frequently shaped the PIF's ability to respond to security challenges, with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic the most recent example. She argued that the PIF had not played a role in deeply integrating the region's approach to security cooperation, and that no mechanism equivalent to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum had developed in the Pacific Islands region for collectively managing

geostrategic issues and engagement. She nevertheless highlighted four roles that the PIF does play in promoting security cooperation. First is consensus-building and norm diffusion, through mobilising regional engagement on international security matters, with climate change a notable example. Second is coordinating and facilitating assistance from partner states to build the region's capacity to manage security concerns. Third is strengthening regional capacity through coordinating information-sharing to counter security threats. Finally, fourth is addressing national human and environmental security threats, as well as common regional security threats such as unexploded ordnance, nuclear contamination and criminal deportees. Importantly, although the Boe Declaration is often identified as a landmark moment in redefining security, Tarte argued that it did not represent new thinking, but instead reflected ongoing work by the PIF on non-traditional security issues. But Tarte was optimistic that the emphasis on climate change as a security challenge in the declaration could act as a catalyst for 'developing a more inclusive regional approach to addressing security threats, inclusive of non-state actors and all the major [greenhouse gas] emitters, potentially transcending geopolitical rivalries'.

Dr Anna Powles of Massey University and Dr Milla Vaha of USP then analysed how PICs exercise agency in global security cooperation using a case study of peacekeeping operations. They posed several questions, including how Pacific Island peacekeepers provide legitimacy to regional interventions (particularly in their engagement with locals); the extent to which metropolitan powers may dominate regional peacekeeping interventions; and how the experiences of Pacific Island peacekeepers who have been on international peacekeeping missions are shared, including at regional facilities such as Blackrock Peacekeeping and Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Camp located in Fiji. Powles and Vaha also considered why PICs participate in peacekeeping operations, and argued that the assumption that they do so primarily for economic reasons fails to recognise that they may also want to support regional and international security cooperation efforts in order to establish their 'moral authority', legitimacy, and influence in international politics.

During the discussion, speakers and participants reflected on the robustness of the PIF's convening power and coordinating role on regional security, particularly as many new actors are now active in the region and individual states (or groups of states, in the case of Micronesian PIF members) are reconsidering their role in the PIF, and developing new (or reinvigorating existing) regional institutions.

Recognising the importance of foregrounding a Pacific perspective in this discussion, it is intended that the resulting edited book includes a chapter by Leituala Kuiniselani Tago-Elisara from The Australian National University (ANU) and Soli Middleby from UoA on the relevance of the Boe Declaration to regional security cooperation.

Partner state approaches to security cooperation

The next two panels sought to analyse the breadth and depth of partner state cooperation and how well partner states coordinate with each other and PICs, agencies and institutions.

The first of the two panels began with James Batley from the ANU who discussed Australia's objectives in supporting security cooperation in the Pacific region. He argued Australia was attempting to be both a leader within, and partner to, the region, which generates tension between its ambitions of 'shaping the region' versus its claims to 'share interests' with the region. Batley noted that Australia had by far the deepest involvement in security cooperation of all metropolitan security partner states acting in the Pacific region, and the Australian Government is comfortable working in areas of both traditional and non-traditional security. He argued that Australia enjoyed the capacity to act both bilaterally and regionally, and considered how recent Australian initiatives under its 'Pacific Step-Up', such as the Australia Pacific Security College, Pacific Fusion Centre, and the Joint Heads of Pacific Security (JHoPS), relate to PIF security structures. Adding to that complexity, Batley noted that Australia's activities in the region are also influenced by its alliances and relationships beyond the region. He argued that differences in attitudes about climate change between Australia and the region (Batley 8/4/2021; Wallis 2021), while real, did not in fact constrain Australia's relationships and ability to pursue security agendas as much as was commonly supposed. He concluded that the complexity of security cooperation mechanisms in the Pacific region may in fact suit Australia's interests and ways of operating.

Professor Alan Tidwell from Georgetown University then discussed the US's role in security cooperation. Tidwell urged the US to develop a Pacific regional strategy that builds on both traditional and non-traditional cooperation, including moving beyond the defence interests prioritised by INDOPACOM.⁴ He highlighted that when the US considered security cooperation in the Pacific region, it was primarily seen within a geopolitical context, and conveyed through the legal structures of US global security cooperation and the existing relationships through the Compacts of Free Association with Palau, Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands — considered as part of the US's 'defense realm' rather than an area of cooperation. While the US Department of Defense works with the Department of State on security cooperation, Tidwell suggested that US activities in the Pacific region could be more cohesive, with the relationship between Tonga and the US (through the Nevada National Guard) an example of how this could occur. Tidwell also proposed that, while the US provides support to address challenges such as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and climate change, this assistance could be expanded beyond standardised programs that are provided worldwide and be tailored to PICs.

Professor Hidekazu Sakai from Kansai Gaidai University then gave an overview of Japan's interests in the Pacific region, dating back to historical legacies during World War One and Two, development support to Samoa and Fiji since the 1970s, and in more recent years in fishing, natural resources, and political support in international fora, including Japan's campaign for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. Sakai discussed the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM), a foreign policy dialogue under which Japan has met with Pacific Island states nine times since 1997, which he described as an attempt to nurture shared islander identities between PICs and Japan. In 2016, Japan announced the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy which emphasised maritime security in the region. Sakai identified that Japan is increasingly interested in the Pacific region, and in 2020 stepped up traditional security engagement, including by establishing the Japan Pacific Islands Defense Dialogue in 2021. However, he acknowledged that there are some tensions in Pacific-Japan relations, most notably the issue of Japan proposing to dump nuclear waste from its Fukushima reactor into the Pacific Ocean, and ongoing work to dispose of unexploded ordnance in the region.

In the second panel, Dr Anna Powles considered New Zealand's approach to security cooperation. Powles characterised New Zealand's cooperation in the region as being grounded in its self-identification as a Pacific state and discussed how that narrative is shaping its foreign policy. In this regard, Powles described New Zealand's shift from its 2018 'Pacific Reset' policy, which was focused on security and geopolitical concerns, to the 'Pacific Resilience' approach it announced in late 2021, which focuses on New Zealand's engagement with the Pacific through shared indigenous connections, understanding the individual needs of each state, and being a reliable and open partner state. Powles stated that this policy will play out through the priorities of climate change resilience, regenerating the region post-pandemic, and building on longstanding security cooperation relationships that New Zealand has with PICs, particularly in Polynesia. While Powles argued that New Zealand is shifting its approach based on what she characterised as 'unspecified collective interests', she noted that it is not yet clear what the New Zealand government (or PIC governments for that matter) understand these collective interests to be. Powles noted inconsistencies and a degree of incoherence across New Zealand's security activities in the Pacific and a lack of strategic clarity about how security assistance activities contribute to New Zealand's foreign policy values and interests.

Dr Denghua Zhang from the ANU outlined China's security engagement with the Pacific Islands. He observed that China has rapidly intensified its diplomatic and military relationships in the region in the last two decades. Zhang noted, however, that within Chinese scholarly literature there is limited research

on China's evolving security outlook and shared security interests with the Pacific. In the current geopolitical climate, the region and metropolitan states watched with interest as Kiribati and Solomon Islands severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 2019, and heard unsubstantiated rumours of military bases being considered in PICs. Chinese security cooperation with PICs has increased in recent years, through aid and technical training to the PNG Defence Force, and military aid to Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu (Zhang 17/8/2020); in 2021 China sent military attachés to Fiji and PNG and police advisers to Solomon Islands. Therefore, Zhang asked three key questions: what are China's security interests? How is the Pacific relevant to these interests? And how do Chinese and Pacific actors perceive security cooperation? Zhang concluded with the important insight that how engagement is received and perceived is equally important — if not more so — than how much specific partner states spend or do in the region.

Associate Professor Caroline Gravelat of the University of New Caledonia spoke about France's security cooperation in the region. Gravelat considered whether France is part of the Pacific, with the answer potentially depending on whether it is asked in Nouméa, Papeete, Mata-Utu or Paris. In this regard, she highlighted the importance of New Caledonia and French Polynesia joining the PIF in 2016. Gravelat also emphasised the level of humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) exercises and support provided by France to the broader region, as well as France's role in the Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (QUADs). However, Gravelat acknowledged that France faces a number of challenges in the region, including controversy over the timing of the third independence referendum in New Caledonia and the deteriorating relationship with Australia due to the AUKUS announcement. Accordingly, Gravelat concluded by arguing that France needs to 'reimagine its place in the Pacific region'.

During the discussion, speakers and participants alike identified the importance of considering the objectives of partner states when they engage in security assistance and cooperation, which has consequences for their willingness to prioritise the non-traditional security interests of Pacific states, compared to their preferred traditional security concerns. The extent to which partner states (and non-governmental partners, for that matter) consider local context and dynamics was also identified as important, and often dependent on having a presence in the region (through diplomatic missions or individual security and capacity-building projects).

While unintended, missing from the discussion was a Pacific perspective about how PICs and their citizens respond to partner state involvement in security cooperation. Associate Professor Tarcisius Kabutaulaka from the University of Hawai'i will be addressing this issue in his chapter in the resulting edited book.

Security cooperation to combat specific security challenges

Workshop participants then analysed specific issues that have been incorporated into the expanded concept of security articulated in the Boe Declaration.

The first panel focused on health and human security cooperation in the Pacific. Dr Roannie Ng Shiu commenced the discussion on behalf of Dr Collin Tukuitonga, both of the University of Auckland. Ng Shiu outlined the effectiveness of existing mechanisms of cooperation to address health security issues including COVID-19, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and preventable infectious diseases. They observed that health security cooperation in the region is longstanding, having been explicitly established by the 1995 Healthy Islands [Yanuca Island Declaration](#) (reinforced in 2015). Cooperation has focused on food security, health workforce development and cooperation in the health security space, and has developed into partnerships at the local, regional and global levels. Looking forward, Ng Shiu noted that, while there is interest from intergovernmental organisations in funding work to build climate resilient health systems and to improve health security in the region, there is less partner state interest in ongoing issues such as NCDs, highlighting how health security responses can be influenced by the interests of partner states.

Professor Steven Ratuva from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand spoke about human security cooperation. While the concept of human security is broad, Ratuva argued that PICs have successfully redefined and narrowed the concept to make it more manageable and to better meet local needs and context. Ratuva noted that climate change had been successfully securitised, nationally, regionally and internationally, as the primary threat to the region, not just as an environmental threat but as also affecting wellbeing, land rights, conflict, poverty and economic development. He spoke about how politics shapes the security agenda, and gave the example of the framing of climate change in states such as New Zealand as a 'climate crisis' or 'climate emergency' as having had a significant effect on the human security agenda. Ratuva then argued that climate change has been 'geopoliticised' in the context of growing strategic competition, citing the example of the China–Pacific Islands meeting on climate issues prior to the 26th meeting of the United Nations Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26). Indeed, another human security factor, COVID-19, affected PICs' ability to attend COP26. Ratuva concluded by describing how, despite the Boe Declaration framing climate change as the 'single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific', each state has its own way of securitising the issues and acts accordingly.

Professor Meg Keen from the Australia-Pacific Security College (based at the ANU) analysed the intersection between health, climate and human security cooperation within HADR operations, including the interplay between security and development.

Keen argued that platforms for coordinating HADR were largely missing in the region, as while emergency management, defence, police and environmental bodies inform and frame related issues, they are often facilitated towards different formal discussions, rarely overlapping, ultimately hindering communication and cooperation. However, Keen identified lessons that could be learnt from the regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic for improving HADR integration, particularly through the model of the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway for COVID-19, which she argued exemplified a well-integrated regional response. Based on that example, Keen argued that future security cooperation should focus on 'how we are bringing the hard and soft security sectors together and build capacity between the agencies themselves', rather than on a focus on capacity-building in individual sectors. In addition, Keen highlighted that the travel restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic had meant Pacific states had to manage emergency situations without external partner state assistance, which had created 'transformation by necessity', forcing localisation of HADR decision-making and implementation — not through architecture, but through 'practice and power' (see also Osborne et al. 17/12/2020).

The second panel, on environmental security cooperation, featured Sālā Dr George Carter from the ANU as the sole panellist, as a scheduling clash prevented Dr Transform Aqorau, CEO of iTuna Intel, founding director of Pacific Catalyst and former CEO of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement Office, from presenting on security cooperation over the oceans. However, Aqorau will be invited to contribute a chapter in the resulting edited book.

Carter, recently returned from COP26, spoke of his regional work with the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) developing a climate security workstream at the individual, community, national, regional and international levels. He also identified the multiple security threats that climate change poses to the Pacific, which he characterised not only as direct environmental vulnerabilities, but also as indirect security threats generated by climate change acting as a threat multiplier by exacerbating the impact of other security challenges (see also Steffen 18/11/2015). Carter suggested that there needs to be more analysis of the 'coping capacity' of Pacific states to combat these threats. He showed how international political impetus affects Pacific security cooperation on climate security (through funding and partner state priorities), and vice versa, flows through strong Pacific negotiation for issues like 'loss and damage' and climate declarations including through the Boe Declaration. Echoing Keen's earlier comments, Carter asserted that within the climate space, there was little cooperation or even discussion between 'hard' security players and the environmental scientists and activists either in the Pacific or at United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change conferences.

The final panel focused on security cooperation to combat transnational crime and corruption. Henrietta McNeill of ANU and UoA first spoke about border security cooperation to combat transnational crime. She provided an overview of the nascent architecture in the border security space, through the triumvirate of the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, Oceania Customs Organisation, and the Pacific Immigration Development Community. However, McNeill identified that there is potential for duplication of this architecture through newly established organisations such as JHOPs, which raises questions about the underlying motivations for creating additional fora. She also highlighted the contradiction of the key partner states to the Pacific on transnational crime — Australia, New Zealand and the US — being the main criminal deporting nations to the region, as the Pacific Transnational Crime Network has stated that criminal deportees have been a significant regional security threat for the past five years (PTCN 2016). McNeill suggested that there could be changes to the operation of security cooperation to address transnational crime post-COVID-19, as specialist regional bodies have been forced to change their modes of operation due to the pandemic — hosting online meetings and providing technical advice without the assistance of external consultants. Similarly, partner state support has become longer-term due to quarantine requirements, rather than following the short-term, fly-in-fly-out model.

Teddy Winn from James Cook University in Queensland then discussed security cooperation to combat corruption. Winn described corruption as a 'crisis of governance' and a complex non-traditional security issue. Corruption is not commonly discussed within broader regional security, outside the 2021 Forum Special Leader's Meeting, and as such, Winn argued that the Pacific 'has not clearly defined (or contextualised) the governance needs and aspirations of PICs and the expectations of external partner states' in this space. Indeed, Winn outlined how, while corruption is a global concern, there is no single approach to addressing it in the Pacific region. Winn also noted the inherent complexity of the situation in which those who make, and are expected to implement, national decisions to combat corruption are also those who may be implicated in corruption itself. Winn's presentation crystallised the difficulty in defining security, as it raised the question of where political security fits within the nexus of governance and security. It also highlighted how the regional preference — including in the PIF — for domestic non-interference can impede efforts to address problems such as corruption.

The discussion of security cooperation to respond to specific issues highlighted that, while PICs have expressed their collective intent to address these challenges, most recently through the Boe Declaration, this is frustrated by the fact that each problem requires unique responses, including differing levels of partner state engagement. Importantly, Winn called upon all speakers and participants to consider the human face of each security challenge beyond a focus on

institutions, structures and declarations. He urged those attending to identify ways in which the people facing security challenges can engage in conversations about security cooperation in the region.

The ‘accountability gap’ in the provision of security

Winn’s call to remember the human face of security raised an additional question not covered at the workshop: who is accountable to whom in the provision of security assistance? The answer to this question becomes important when the interests of partner states, PIC governments and the citizens of PICs are not aligned. As liberal democracies, Australia, New Zealand, France, the US and Japan will always be primarily accountable to their citizens and for advancing their national interest. Partner states are secondarily accountable to the governments of recipient states, and this accountability is managed (more or less effectively) through bilateral consultation, dialogue and review (OECD 2014). However, there are examples of partner states seeking a more direct line of accountability to PIC citizens, as demonstrated by the regular public surveys conducted during RAMSI (see ANU 2006), but given sensitivities over the sovereignty of recipient states, that example is exceptional. These sensitivities may go some of the way to explaining the PIF’s tentative approach to deeper regional cooperation on certain security-related issues, for example corruption. Against this background, the localisation of security assistance hastened by the travel restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic has not only illustrated how locally led assistance could be delivered in the future, but it has also served as a live test for the strengths, as well as the tensions, of a triangular system of accountability.

Conclusion

While the workshop illustrated the breadth and depth of security cooperation in the Pacific region, it also highlighted the difficulty of researching the dynamics of security cooperation in the region.

First, while speakers and participants tended to use the term ‘Pacific Islands’ to refer to the island states and territories, it is apparent that the term itself has a shifting meaning depending on context. This is pertinent when trying to determine if metropolitan partner states, Australia, New Zealand, France, Japan and the US, are members of — or external to — the region. While this definitional issue may seem primarily academic, it can have practical consequences, particularly when those larger states have varying priorities and interests to PICs. The example of Australia’s differing stance on climate change action, and the spoiling effect this is said to have had on collective climate change declarations by the PIF (see for example, Clarke 15/8/2019; Fry 2019), illustrates this dynamic. There are also questions about the robustness of the PIF’s convening power and coordinating role, which are being amplified by the planned withdrawal of the five Micronesian PIF member states. These challenges, in turn, raise existential questions about whether Pacific regionalism

is perceived either within the region, or by partners, as a good in itself, or instead primarily as a tool of leverage to advance domestic priorities.

Second, while speakers acknowledged that the concept of security is broadly understood in the region, it was unclear how much it matters the way security is defined. On the one hand, an elastic definition of security may accommodate the diversity of the region and its partner states. On the other hand, too little specificity could lead to practical difficulties when it comes to operationalising security cooperation within the PIF and other agencies.

Behind both the first and second challenges is the question: which actors have — or should have — the power to define the region and its security priorities? While partner states are increasingly active and visible in the region, the workshop highlighted how their individual policies towards the region are not always coherent and substantive, nor are they always well-coordinated.

Third, and related to these challenges, it was evident that partner states have vital geopolitical interests in traditional security, and while these reverberate in the region, PICs’ priorities are closer to the non-traditional end of the security spectrum. Even so, there is much overlap in the middle of the range (for instance, in areas such as border control and transnational crime). Yet partner states continue to provide assistance to address non-traditional security challenges, even if questions remain about the motivations behind such assistance. In this context, it was noted that there was a risk of partner states’ defence and security agencies leading engagement in the Pacific, and the need to ensure that diplomacy and development are not sidelined.

Also, prompted by the discussion at the workshop, an additional question was raised: who is accountable to whom in the provision of security assistance? This question in itself has a number of facets, namely how partner states, PICs and citizens of PICs interact, particularly in crisis situations. While COVID-19 has allowed for more localisation of security assistance, there is more to do in this area to understand the strengths and tensions of accountability in the security space.

In an attempt to answer these questions in more depth, speakers at the workshop have been invited to develop their presentations into chapters to be put forward for publication in an edited book about security cooperation in the Pacific region.

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Endnotes

1. For the purposes of this paper, we understand partner states to be independent states who provide Pacific Island countries with security assistance. Partner states of PICs include Australia, New Zealand, France, China and Japan.
2. For the purposes of this paper, Pacific Island countries (PICs) include sovereign states such as Fiji, Tonga and Tuvalu, overseas territories such as New Caledonia and French Polynesia, and freely associated states such as Palau, Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.
3. Involving a small number of states as parties to a negotiation, agreement or arrangement.
4. The United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) is a unified combatant command of the United States Armed Forces responsible for the Indo-Pacific region.

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