



Routledge Advances in International Relations and Global Politics

SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

**POLITICS, PRIORITIES, AND PATHWAYS OF THE
REGIONAL SECURITY PATCHWORK**

Edited by

Joanne Wallis, Henrietta McNeill,
James Batley and Anna Powles



Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands

Wallis, McNeill, Batley, Powles and the contributors examine the dynamics of Pacific Islands' security cooperation, analysing how it helps address regional security challenges amid the broader strategic competition between China and the United States that is increasingly playing out in the region.

Pacific Island countries do not want to become pawns in this competition, but its impacts are inescapable and are creating additional security challenges. Compounding these effects are climate change and COVID-19, both of which have intersected with existing traditional and non-traditional security challenges facing the region. In response, Pacific Island leaders have vowed to pursue greater security cooperation amongst themselves and with partner states. This book addresses partner states' interests in the region, how these interests and Pacific priorities align, and if not, what the possible consequences may be. It also analyses successful areas of security cooperation and tackles how challenges may be addressed.

Incorporating a range of perspectives from key leaders, practitioners and scholars, this is an empirically grounded analysis of security cooperation within the Pacific Islands region and by the region's major partners. A vital resource for researchers and practitioners seeking to better understand Pacific Islands' security collaboration and the inherent challenges it faces.

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Foreword

I recall the hot, bright afternoon in Honiara in the middle of 2017 when the idea of an expanded security declaration, one that captured the breadth of what ‘security’ means to Pacific people, became a calling in the hearts and minds of Pacific Leaders. As our leaders reflected, one by one, on the spirit of regional solidarity, harmony, and cooperation expressed in the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, a collective mood and sentiment became clear. In the words of then-Forum Chair and President of the Federated States of Micronesia Peter Christian, Leaders committed to ‘plant the root of unity’ their forebears had before them, to articulate a Pacific conceptualisation of security, to ensure assistance to each other in times of need, and to collaborate on the security challenges faced.

I also recall the voices I heard across our Blue Continent as we set out to ask our people what ‘security’ meant to them. Those voices spoke of the fear for food as result of changing climate and fears for personal safety in homes, communities, and cities. There were those who still feared the impacts of decades of nuclear tests and those who feared for the lives of our brothers and sisters in West Papua. I recall with a sense of gravity and significance the collective work to articulate a Pacific conceptualisation of security in the Boe Declaration which was approved by our Leaders in Nauru in 2018.

In my time as Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, through collective experiences such as this, it was clear to me how important it was for the Pacific to set its own agenda and define its own concepts. In the words of Epeli Hau’ofa (1993: 128–29):

whatever we produce must not be a version of our existing reality, which is largely a creation of imperialism: it must be different, and of our own making. We should not forget that human reality is human creation. If we fail to create our own, someone else will do it [for] us.

What was also clear during this time was how essential an efficient, effective, and coordinated regional architecture is for implementation. Those of us of the region understand the complexities of this ‘architecture’ that has evolved and grown into a myriad of regional, sub-regional, multilateral, formal and informal agencies, agreements, and arrangements.

With these short reflections, I am pleased to commend this collection, *Security Cooperation in the Pacific*, which is dedicated to exploring issues of regional security cooperation and our regional security architecture to you. It comes at a key moment for Pacific Regionalism, as we have articulated a regional agenda and are now focused on the large and complex task of collective implementation and questions of whether our regional architecture is fit-for-purpose to deliver. The collection provides important analyses of the dynamics of security cooperation so useful in exploring how we best weave together the diverse and multi-layered threads of our security architecture to meet this agenda.

The first section provides foundational analysis on *Regional security cooperation*, with Sandra Tarte describing the role of the Pacific Islands Forum, Anna Powles and Milla Vaha on the role of Pacific states in peacekeeping, Solstice Middleby and Leituala Kuiniselani Toelupe Tago on the history of the Forum security agreements, and Stewart Firth on the role of international agencies, such as the UN and IOM, within the regional architecture.

The second section provides assessments of *Partner approaches to security cooperation* with James Batley on Australia; Anna Powles on New Zealand; Alan Tidwell on the United States; Hidekazu Sakai on Japan; Caroline Gravelat on France; and Denghua Zhang on China. In contrast, at the end of this section, Tarcisius Kabutaulaka's graduate class have written a chapter on how they perceive security and security cooperation – highlighting the use of art, culture, and environment.

The third and final section focuses on *Pacific security cooperation to address specific challenges* with a wide range of topics from Steven Ratuva on human security, Sir Collin Tukuitoga, Roannie Ng Shiu and Georgia Whitta on health security and COVID-19, Meg Keen on humanitarian disaster responses; Bianca Haas, Quentin Hanich, Kamal Azmi, Kerrie Robertson, and Transform Aqorau on Ocean security and fisheries; Salā George Carter on collective climate security; Henrietta McNeill on transnational crime; and Teddy Winn on corruption.

The collection closes with Joanne Wallis and Mauaiva Maima Koro looking at the prospects for security cooperation in the Pacific Islands, asking if there is congruence, convergence, congestion, or all three.

There remains a clear gap for future research to understand better the critical role that non-state actors, including civil society, faith-based organisations, and Pacific Island citizens play in security cooperation. These stakeholders were actively engaged in developing the Boe Declaration and the 2050 Strategy and will play a key role in supporting their implementation. In commending this collection to you I also encourage this important future work so that we might better understand the role of civil society in security cooperation.

Finally, I celebrate the breadth of perspectives this collection brings through its forty contributing authors. Attention has been given to ensuring our diverse Pacific perspectives are included with authors from Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Rapa Nui, Solomon Islands, Rotuma, Fiji, Hawai'i, and Guam. Their contributions are complimented by the perspectives of the Pacific's key security partners Australia and Aotearoa, New Zealand, Japan, France, the United States, and China. I am pleased that almost half the contributing authors

are female, bringing the critical perspectives of women to matters of security and commend the book for including the perspectives of sixteen emerging graduate scholars.

Security cooperation in the Pacific Islands is not a new phenomenon, but it is undergoing a period of considerable change. While we face many challenges, we have made it clear that we are not passive recipients of security assistance but will set our own agendas.

Dame Meg Taylor

Reference

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Map of the Pacific Islands region



Figure 0.1 Map of the Pacific Islands region, including exclusive economic zones
Source: CartoGIS, the Australian National University

1 Introduction

Security cooperation in the Pacific Islands

*Joanne Wallis, Henrietta McNeill, James Batley
and Anna Powles*

In the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security, Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) leaders outlined an ‘expanded concept of security’ and committed to strengthen the ‘existing regional security architecture’. The Boe Declaration Action Plan (PIF 2019b) and 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (PIF 2022) aim to improve security responsiveness and coordination both within the region and with partners. Pacific Island countries (PICs) have sought to collectively prioritise and respond to traditional and non-traditional security challenges through global, regional and subregional cooperative mechanisms.

On the periphery of the Pacific Ocean lie metropolitan powers – the United States (US), Australia, New Zealand and, to an extent, Japan and France. These partners are increasingly engaged in strategic competition with China, which now also sees itself as a player in Pacific Islands security cooperation. Strategic competition is not a new phenomenon in the Pacific Islands, many of which were sites of bloody battles during World War II, followed by Cold War tensions. Strategic competition has again surfaced as China has sought to disrupt the post-World War II order in the Pacific Islands, in turn prompting responses from metropolitan powers that were part of, or have become associated with, that settlement.

While PICs do not want to become pawns in this increasingly geopolitical competition (Ivarature 2022), the increased interest in the Pacific region is inescapable and PICs are seeking to leverage support for their security concerns, such as climate change (Wallis and Batley 2020). For example, in 2023 PIF leaders endorsed the establishment of the Pacific Resilience Facility, which, once established in 2025, will provide much-needed climate and disaster resilience finance (PIF n.d.). They are now leveraging donor interest to secure financial pledges to the facility, with Saudi Arabia making the first pledge (US\$50 million), followed by Australia (US\$100 million), China (US\$500,000) and the US (US\$5 million) (PIF 2024). This facility re-centres Pacific climate financing and is more targeted than the global (bureaucratic and politically contentious) Green Climate Fund.

Security cooperation is defined as ‘common action between two or more states to advance a common security goal’ (Bisley 2012: 23). It is important to understand what cooperation occurs among PICs, with partners and between partners. To increase this understanding, we mapped multilateral security cooperation in the region (McNeill et al. 2021; Wallis et al. 2021). The Boe Declaration identifies an

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‘existing regional security architecture’, although the term ‘architecture’ is understood in the academic literature to describe ‘an overarching, coherent and comprehensive security structure for a geographically defined area’ (Tow and Taylor 2010: 96). Our research suggested that security cooperation in the Pacific Islands was described, rather, as a *patchwork* of bilateral, minilateral and multilateral, formal and informal agencies, agreements and arrangements, across local, national, regional and international levels (Wallis et al. 2023). This echoed Steven Ratuva’s (2019: 49) characterisation of regional security cooperation as ‘different layers of interests, thinking and activities that are intertwined in a complex web of often ragged and disjointed relationships’. The forms that security cooperation takes, and the targeting of resources devoted to security cooperation, are driven both by partners and by Pacific Island governments. The resource constraints faced by PICs mean that in many ways they rely on partners’ support, but Pacific Island governments are not passive recipients of security assistance. Through the Boe Declaration Action Plan and the review of the regional architecture mandated by the 2050 Strategy, PICs are pursuing greater ownership and more evolved forms of regional governance, even if the contours of that governance are yet to become clear.

In an effort to promote their interests in the region, the US, Australia, New Zealand, and other metropolitan powers have embarked on a range of policies: Australia implemented a ‘Pacific Step-Up’,¹ the US made a ‘Pacific Pledge’, New Zealand adopted a ‘Pacific Reset’ followed by a policy emphasising ‘Pacific Resilience’ and then a ‘Pacific Re-reset’, the United Kingdom (UK) promised a ‘Pacific Uplift’, Japan stressed its ‘Pacific Bond’, Indonesia its ‘Pacific Elevation’ and France frames the region as central to its Indo-Pacific policy. The US also held summits with Pacific leaders in Washington in 2022 and 2023, India held its third Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation in Port Moresby in 2023, Korea held the first Korea-Pacific Islands Forum Summit in 2023, and Japan held its tenth Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) in 2024.

In addition to bilateral development, security and diplomatic policies, metropolitan powers have sought to enhance their own cooperation to support the region. Under the ‘Partners in the Blue Pacific’ initiative announced in July 2022, the US, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and Japan (later joined by Germany, Canada and South Korea) pledged to work together to better coordinate their assistance, adopting Pacific-developed terminology. The US, Australia, New Zealand and France are also exploring ways to develop the longstanding Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (known as the ‘Pacific Quad’) that provides maritime domain awareness support; and Australia, New Zealand and France are looking to deepen the FRANZ Arrangement that coordinates their regional humanitarian and disaster relief. In addition, previously bilateral programs, such as Australia’s Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP),² are increasingly involving cooperative elements, incorporating both US and Japanese coastguard and shiprider agreements, and the US has cooperated with Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG) to redevelop the Lombrum naval base on Manus Island to host the new Guardian Class patrol boats being rolled out under the PMSP. In parallel, China has been tentatively developing its own multilateral security assistance programs, including the

China-Pacific Island Countries Disaster Management Cooperation Mechanism and the China-Pacific Island Countries Center for Disaster Risk Reduction Cooperation in Guangdong.

Partners' security assistance and cooperation in the Pacific Islands sits within the broader context of their deepening cooperation on security issues in the wider Indo-Pacific region and globally. While the US and Australia, and Australia and New Zealand, have been treaty allies since 1951 under the ANZUS Treaty,³ the three states have moved to expand their cooperation since 2018. Most significantly, in 2021 the US, Australia and the UK announced the AUKUS security partnership, the first pillar of which is for the US and UK to support Australia to develop nuclear-powered submarines. This announcement raised concerns in parts of the Pacific Islands region due to the legacy of historic nuclear testing by the US, UK and France which has ongoing intergenerational health and displacement impacts, and because it highlighted that strategic competition was increasing. Pacific Island countries (including Australia and New Zealand) together established the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (1985) in efforts to prevent nuclear states from testing and dumping in the region. These issues have coalesced with the AUKUS announcement, and the release of nuclear wastewater by Japan in 2023, which was opposed by the PIF and Pacific states.

The range and scale of partner security initiatives, assistance and developing multinational cooperation in the Pacific Islands region, in addition to Pacific-led initiatives, exemplify the PIF leaders' description of the region as 'crowded and complex' in the Boe Declaration. But despite the significant uptick in time and resources going into security assistance, there has been surprisingly little examination of the dynamics of security cooperation, and whether, and how, it helps to address regional security challenges. This means that several important questions have gone unanswered. For example, what are partner states' interests in the region, and how are they shaping their security assistance and cooperation with other partners? Do partners' interests and Pacific priorities align, and if not, what are the possible consequences? How are partners cooperating with one another and with PICs? What areas of security cooperation are working well and might offer lessons? And what areas of security cooperation are underdeveloped or underperforming, and how might they be improved?

This collection addresses these questions through an empirically grounded analysis of security cooperation within the Pacific Islands and by the region's major partners – Australia, New Zealand, France, the US, Japan and China. It incorporates the perspectives of academics from both Pacific Islands and metropolitan partners, reflecting the wide variety of views on security cooperation in the region. It builds on rich discussions that took place during two workshops on the theme 'Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands' held in November 2021 and November 2022, which brought together leading and emerging Pacific and international scholars working in the fields of security, development, diplomacy and peacekeeping (McNeill et al. 2023; Wallis et al. 2022).

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, we consider the drivers and practice of security cooperation in the Pacific Islands as it has evolved over recent

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decades. We then examine existing governance arrangements for security cooperation in the region and the ways in which doctrine around security cooperation has developed, with a particular focus on recent years. We conclude by providing an overview of the chapters that comprise this collection. Due to space constraints, this book focuses on contemporary security cooperation between PICs, partner states and intergovernmental organisations – there is an opportunity for future research in understanding the role that non-state actors, including civil society, faith-based organisations and Pacific Island citizens, play in security cooperation.

The practice of security cooperation in the Pacific Islands

The prominence of the Boe Declaration in discussions about regional security cooperation highlights that security is an increasingly important driver of contemporary Pacific regional cooperation, but it also tends to obscure the fact that PICs have long been cooperating to respond to security challenges (see Middleby and Tago, this volume). In response to the ‘Santo Rebellion’ by the secessionist Nagriamel Movement during Vanuatu’s transition to independence in 1980, prime minister-elect Father Walter Lini requested help from PIF members. The PNG Defence Force, with logistical support from Australia and New Zealand, responded. Urwin (2005: 14) described this as ‘the first security action in the modern, independent Pacific having any kind of regional flavour’.

A cooperative approach was also adopted to respond to the crisis in the Bougainville region of PNG that began in 1988 (Regan 1998). The 1990 Endeavour Accord dialogue between PNG and Bougainvillean leaders was attended by ni-Vanuatu observers, alongside New Zealanders and Canadians on board the HMNZS *Endeavour*. To facilitate a peace conference in Bougainville, in 1994 a South Pacific Peacekeeping Force consisting of 390 Fijians, Tongans and ni-Vanuatu and 656 Australian and New Zealand defence personnel was deployed (Breen 2016). While the peace conference was unsuccessful, the operation represented a precedent for regional cooperation; in 1997 a broader peace process supported by a regional response (led by Australia and New Zealand) began in the form of a neutral Truce Monitoring Group, which was succeeded by a Peace Monitoring Group (PMG) in 1998. Approximately 300 PMG officers were deployed at any one time, mostly Australians, although New Zealand, Fiji and Vanuatu continued to contribute (Horner 2011). Gradually reducing in size, the PMG remained in place until 2003.

From the late 1990s, hostilities between rival militant groups and internal insecurity in Solomon Islands also facilitated regional security cooperation. Initially there was a short-lived multinational police operation in 1999 comprising personnel from Fiji and Vanuatu, and funded by Australia, New Zealand and the UK. This was succeeded in 2000 by a civilian unarmed International Peace Monitoring Team (IPMT) to supplement Australia-funded peace monitors and a Cease-fire Monitoring Committee. The IPMT initially consisted of 35 Australian and 14 New Zealand military, police and civilian personnel. Police from Cook Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu later joined, as did a representative from the Commonwealth

Secretariat. Ultimately the IPMT was unable to sufficiently influence the political and security situation to warrant its continued presence, and it was withdrawn in 2002 (Breen 2016).

July 2003 saw the deployment of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) with the endorsement of the PIF. The initial deployment consisted of 330 police (including 206 Australians) who formed the Participating Police Force; Australian and New Zealand public servants, deployed as advisers or ‘in-line’ officials in government departments; and a Combined Joint Task Force of 1,800 military personnel from Australia (1,379), New Zealand (240), Fiji (121), PNG (83) and Tonga (35) (Breen 2016; Putt et al. 2018). By 2005, every PIF member was contributing personnel to RAMSI. RAMSI remained in Solomon Islands until 2017, reporting regularly to the PIF, and continues to be seen as a successful example of regional security cooperation.

In an attempt to replicate the success of RAMSI’s regional policing model, Australia announced the Pacific Policing Initiative (PPI), which was endorsed at the PIF Leaders meeting in Tonga in 2024. The PPI incorporates training and the deployment of a regional police force in times of crisis or large-scale events, with the first deployment to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Apia, Samoa in October 2024. Within the scope of the Biketawa Declaration, PIF-endorsed interventions require the request of the host nation; therefore, whether the PPI will be able to deal with crises in non-sovereign states where there is reluctance on the part of the colonial power for intervention (such as the 2024 unrest in New Caledonia) is yet to be seen. China has also undertaken its own bilateral policing partnerships with Fiji, Solomon Islands and Kiribati with limited transparency, demonstrating a difference in policing interests. Notably both Australian and Chinese police were deployed to Solomon Islands for the 2023 Pacific Games, but did not interact.

Not all security challenges have been met with effective regional cooperation. Fiji experienced two coups in 1987, another in 2000 and again in 2006. The PIF was largely silent in response to the 1987 coups, although Australia and New Zealand publicly condemned them. The PIF considered action following the 2000 coup, but as the Commonwealth and Africa Caribbean Pacific group was already involved, decided not to duplicate this effort (Urwin 2005). Fiji became a standing item on the PIF agenda after the 2006 coup, and sustained – but unsuccessful – efforts were made to engage with Fiji’s interim government.

A powerful driver of security cooperation in the Pacific Islands has been the need to protect and preserve one of the region’s primary economic assets – its tuna resources. This has been a priority since at least the 1980s, when the US was over-fishing tuna in Pacific waters and PICs pushed back, leading to the development of Pacific-led regional cooperation. The region has had significant success in fisheries and oceans governance; its fisheries management architecture is sophisticated and agile. Regional agreements, including the 1992 Niue Treaty on Cooperation in Fisheries Surveillance and Law Enforcement, the 1982 Nauru Agreement Concerning Cooperation in the Management of Fisheries of Common Interest and the 2007 Vava’u Declaration on Pacific Fisheries Resources, represent a comprehensive

framework for maritime issues which has proven particularly fruitful. Organisations created to implement these agreements, like Parties to the Nauru Agreement and the Forum Fisheries Agency, are among the most effective forms of regional fisheries management globally (Aqorau 2019; Tarai 2015; Haas et al., this volume).

The challenge of transnational crime has been an important spur to regional security cooperation, as reflected in the Honiara (1992), Aitutaki (2002) and Boe (2018) Declarations. Large oceans, unmonitored and porous borders, increased people movement, insufficient local capacity and elements of corruption have long provided opportunities for criminal networks to thrive, leading to issues such as: money laundering; document fraud; illicit drugs, weapons, wildlife and human trafficking; fisheries crime; organised criminal gang activity and, more recently, cyber-crime. There is an existing architecture of regional security cooperation to combat transnational crime, although the hive of activity brings a risk of over-saturation for under-resourced Pacific law enforcement agencies (see McNeill, this volume).

PICs have actively cooperated in international climate change negotiations, including helping to set a global 1.5-degree warming target and championing legal arguments at the International Court of Justice (see Carter, this volume). The issue of climate change, enshrined as a fundamental security challenge in the Boe Declaration, has at times left the island states at odds with their partners, particularly Australia, the US and China, none of which have been able to commit to, or meet, the aspirational targets championed by PICs (Morgan 2021; Wallis 2021). And partners have increasingly connected the issues of traditional security and climate change. In 2023, the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty was announced – a world-first bilateral agreement which provides climate mobility opportunities for 280 Tuvalu citizens to Australia annually (for any purpose or duration). In exchange, Tuvalu agreed to give Australia an effective veto over its future security and defence arrangements. While this concession was probably necessary to secure passage of the implementing legislation through the Australian Parliament, it generated a perception that Australia had taken advantage of Tuvalu's vulnerability to climate change to advance its strategic interests.

Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) has traditionally been one of the key dimensions of security cooperation in the region, with Australia and New Zealand playing the leading role (Wallis et al. 2021; Keen, this volume) and wider cooperation facilitated under the FRANZ Arrangement. The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated closure of international borders necessitated the development of locally led approaches to HADR (for instance, in Vanuatu following Cyclone Harold in April 2020, see Kenni and Wijewickrama 2020). This approach has been continued. The Pacific Community is now implementing the Pacific Humanitarian Warehousing Program (with funding from the Partners in the Blue Pacific and France), which will develop humanitarian warehousing capability in 14 PICs (and Timor-Leste) so that emergency relief supplies can be pre-positioned and used immediately following a disaster (DFAT 2023). The October 2024 South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting also endorsed the Australian-proposed Pacific Response Group, which will coordinate co-deployment of Pacific and partner personnel for HADR and create a Pacific Special Advisory Team that can rapidly deploy to plan

a disaster response (SPDMM 2024). PICs are also cooperating on HADR. In 2015, Tonga dispatched PMSP patrol boats to inaccessible areas in Vanuatu following Cyclone Pam, and the Fiji military contributed engineers to assist with the recovery and rebuild. More recently, PNG and Fiji troops assisted Australia during its 2020–21 bushfires, and Fiji similarly assisted in response to the 2022 eruption and tsunami in Tonga, alongside Australia and New Zealand (McNeill et al. 2023). There is a clear appetite to cooperate on HADR for diplomatic reasons, as well as the opportunity to strengthen defence and police relations and interoperability. Even so, there are no formal region-wide mechanisms to sustain this trend, and the Pacific Response Group is being driven by Australia, rather than by the PIF. Meanwhile, China has created parallel bilateral HADR mechanisms, suggesting that it does not intend to cooperate with metropolitan partners (Wallis and Powles 2023).

Efforts by PICs to diversify their foreign relations and reduce reliance on traditional metropolitan partners has enabled China's growing presence and ambition in the Pacific Islands since 2006. Metropolitan powers have responded by encouraging enhanced regional cooperation, and potentially integration. The US has resumed a long-lost diplomatic presence in the region and signed a defence cooperation agreement with PNG, and Australia has funded the creation of new (Australian-led) regional institutions focusing on security. While these are recent initiatives, the dynamic of broader security concerns influencing security responses in the Pacific Islands is not new. Writing in 2005, Ron Crocombe (2005: 155) argued that 'much of the shape and extent of Pacific Islands regionalism is a by-product of the perceived security and other needs and ideologies of external powers' (see also Fry 2019).

The governance of security cooperation in the Pacific

Since its establishment the PIF has played a key role in regional security cooperation. In particular, the annual PIF leaders' meeting has represented the region's highest and most authoritative policy and decision-making mechanism. While the PIF has never played an exclusive role in security cooperation, over time its centrality, its salience and its capacity have grown (Tarte, this volume).

Following the coups in Fiji in 1987, in 1988 the PIF established the Forum Regional Security Committee (FRSC) (using the title Committee on Regional Security Information Exchange until 1990) to coordinate information about the activities that security organisations were undertaking (Boxall 2005). The FRSC was subsequently tasked with specific activities in PIF declarations and communiqués, including convening high-level meetings during crises through the Biketawa Declaration (2000). This included the PIF playing a key legitimising role (under the aegis of the Biketawa Declaration) in the formation and continuation of RAMSI.

Several regional law enforcement bodies were formed or gained regional mandates in response to the 1992 Honiara Declaration on transnational crime and law enforcement cooperation, including the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) and Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC). These bodies, their subsidiaries like PICP's Pacific

Transnational Crime Coordination Centre, alongside other thematic regional organisations including the Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network, and the Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering, have enabled further security cooperation. The PICP, OCO and PIDC cooperate under a 2018 Declaration of Partnership, which in 2024 expanded to incorporate the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) (PIDC 2019). These organisations and networks (except for the FFA) do not, however, fall directly under the purview of the PIF, and instead have their own governance and membership arrangements, creating complexities in how they cooperate on shared security challenges and reflecting the overlapping nature of some elements within the security architecture.

As part of the suite of reforms introduced during the term of PIF Secretary General Dame Meg Taylor (2015–2021), the PIF created the Forum Officials Sub-Committee on Regional Security (FSRS) from the moribund FRSC that had operated until 2015. Consisting of officials and practitioners, the FSRS exists to ‘develop a Pacific Security Dialogue . . . to provide a more inclusive space for regional security discussions’ (PIF 2019a: 5). Since 2019, the FSRS has met regularly 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, one important difference is that the FSRS is attended by regional technical bodies working on security issues, including many regional agencies and law enforcement bodies. Although, as noted earlier, a number of these bodies are not PIF agencies (and their memberships are often broader than that of the forum itself), they acknowledge a role for the PIF in fostering coordination and information sharing among regional organisations and states and territories.

Other regional mechanisms remain outside both the remit of the PIF and the FSRS and of the broader inter-organisational Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) framework.⁴ These include networks such as the South Pacific Defence Ministers’ Meeting (consisting of defence ministers from Australia, New Zealand, France, Fiji, PNG, Chile and Tonga) and the Joint Heads of Pacific Security (JHoPS) (including defence, police, immigration and customs officials from Pacific and partner countries).

The evolving doctrine of security cooperation in the Pacific Islands

The Boe Declaration built on a series of binding and non-binding security-related statements made by PIF leaders over the preceding four decades which, cumulatively and collectively, can be understood as a developing corpus of doctrine on security cooperation in the region. One of the most significant of these statements, the Biketawa Declaration, acknowledged the principle of ‘non-interference in the domestic affairs of another member state’, but asserted the need, 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 gave the PIF the ‘necessary clout and diplomatic coverage’ to intervene to respond to crises (Hegarty 2005: 55), and has been invoked in the context of the International Peace Monitoring Team to Solomon Islands

(2001–2002) and subsequently RAMSI (2003–2017); the Pacific Regional Assistance Mission to Nauru from 2004 to 2009; regional responses to the 2006 coup in Fiji; the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020; and multiple election observer missions across the region from Solomon Islands in 2001 to the New Caledonian independence referendum in 2021.⁵

In the Boe Declaration, PIF leaders recognised that the Pacific Islands region was facing ‘an increasingly complex regional security environment driven by multifaceted security challenges’. To enhance regional security cooperation, the Boe Declaration stated that it would ‘improve coordination among existing security mechanisms’, ‘facilitate open dialogue and strengthened information sharing’, ‘promote regional security analysis, assessment and advice’, and ‘engage and cooperate, 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 includes human security, environmental and resource security, transnational crime and cyber security; underpinned by climate change as ‘the single greatest threat . . . to the peoples of the Pacific’.

Unlike previous regional security declarations,⁶ the Boe Declaration was accompanied by an Action Plan, designed to aid PIF members in its implementation and ‘positively and proactively shape our regional security environment’ in accordance with the strategic focus areas (PIF 2019b). Notably, the Action Plan aims to provide an entry point for strategic engagement with partners; however, less clear is what degree of coordination it supports.

The Boe Declaration also called for PIF members to develop national security strategies, and six states have adopted them so far (Samoa, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Cook Islands, Palau and New Zealand; PNG adopted a National Security Policy in 2013). These strategies and policies can demonstrate how states prioritise their security interests, and while broadly aligning to the Boe Declaration, they expand and build on the regional priorities. It is too soon to judge how closely regional commitments influence national-level policies on security, and indeed the extent to which national security strategies are being implemented in practice (through legislation, policy or budgetary allocations). These are, nevertheless, questions that will be of interest to scholars in coming years.

In their 2022 communiqué,⁷ PIF leaders endorsed the ‘2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent’, a regional ‘strategy that reinforces commitment and working together as a collective for advancing Pacific regionalism based on the Blue Pacific Narrative’⁸ (PIF 2022). They noted that the 2050 Strategy called for ‘*a flexible and responsive regional security mechanism . . . to address traditional and non-traditional security issues in our region*’. They also reaffirmed ‘the concept of regionalism and *a family first approach* to peace and security’ (italics added). This language leaves open several key questions: first, what a ‘flexible and responsive mechanism’ might look like; and second, what a ‘family first approach’ might mean in practice and who it might relate to.⁹ These questions may be answered during the ongoing Review of the Regional Architecture being conducted by the PIF Secretariat.

The interrelated nature of the non-traditional security challenges facing the region raises questions about how security should be defined for practical purposes. Critical security studies scholars have long argued for a widening and deepening of the range of issues that are considered security challenges, and consequently have acknowledged the nexus between ‘development’ and ‘security’ (Booth 2005; Krause and Williams 2015; Peoples and Vaughan-Williams 2020). But there is a gap between what is accepted in theory and what can be implemented in practice. For example, to operationalise the expanded concept of security articulated in the Boe Declaration, PIF officials are grappling with the question of how human rights, health and prosperity – all critical to human security – fit into existing regional security efforts; whether lines can (and should) be drawn between issues that would typically be classified as relating to ‘security’ or ‘development’; and what this means in practical terms for efforts to advance security in the region. For many, in the Pacific ‘security challenges are greatest where development has lagged behind’; however, geopolitical dynamics are overshadowing these issues (Koro 2023). Then PIF secretary general Dame Meg Taylor acknowledged this tension during discussions in the lead-up to the Boe Declaration, noting that ‘the security and development nexus is well known. There cannot be one without the other . . . security is an indispensable necessity for sustainable growth and development in our region’ (PIF 2018).

Chapter overviews

As the preceding discussion of regionalism and security suggests, security cooperation in the Pacific Islands is not a new phenomenon, but it is undergoing a period of considerable change, and several important questions remain unanswered. The remainder of this collection analyses the contemporary dynamics of security cooperation in the Pacific Islands to start to answer these questions and, we hope, to help set an agenda for future research.

The first four chapters focus on security cooperation at the regional level. Chapter 2, by Sandra Tarte, provides an overview of the history, structure and dynamics of the PIF’s role in security cooperation that provides the scaffolding on which the remainder of the collection builds. In Chapter 3, Solstice Middleby and Leituala Kuiniselani Toelupe Tago examine the Boe Declaration’s development through consensus and the Pacific Way, providing insights for the future of Pacific regionalism. In Chapter 4, Stewart Firth discusses the role of international agencies in the Pacific Islands, particularly cooperation between United Nations and Bretton Woods structures and Pacific Island security organisations and states. In Chapter 5, Milla Vaha and Anna Powles analyse how PICs exercise agency in global security cooperation using a case study of peacekeeping operations.

The next six chapters examine the breadth and depth of partner cooperation and how well partners coordinate with each other and PICs, agencies and institutions. In these chapters, the authors present their understanding of the perspective of each partner. This provides an understanding of the different opinions and understandings that partners can have. In Chapter 6, James Batley analyses the depth of Australia’s security cooperation and argues that it is comfortable working in areas of

both traditional and non-traditional security. In Chapter 7, Anna Powles considers New Zealand's identity and approach to security cooperation and calls for greater strategic clarity across its security assistance activities. In Chapter 8, Alan Tidwell discusses the US's role in security cooperation and calls for greater cohesiveness across US programs. In Chapter 9, Hidekazu Sakai gives an overview of Japan's interests in the Pacific Islands, noting both the nature of Japan's increased engagement and the challenges it faces. In Chapter 10, Caroline Gravelat analyses France's security cooperation in the region and calls for France to 'reimagine its place in the Pacific'. In Chapter 11, Denghua Zhang outlines China's security engagement and argues that how engagement is perceived and received is equally important, if not more so, than how much partners spend or do in the region. In Chapter 12, Tarcisius Kabutaulaka's PACS602 graduate class (William Britt III, Randizia Crisostomo, Keola Donaghy, Mizuki Hassell, Hetereki Huke, Michael Mullaney, Kalei Pember, Aya Shirayama, Taufa Setefano, John Jimione Brandon Taukāve and Bruce Ka'imī Watson) considers how PICs and Pacific peoples respond to partner involvement in security cooperation.

The final seven chapters analyse specific issues that have been incorporated into the expanded concept of security articulated in the Boe Declaration. In Chapter 13, Steven Ratuva discusses human security cooperation with a particular focus on regional and community responses to COVID-19. In Chapter 14, Georgia Whitta, Roannie Ng Shiu and Sir Collin Tukuitonga outline the effectiveness of existing mechanisms of cooperation to address health security issues, including COVID-19, non-communicable diseases and preventable infectious diseases. In Chapter 15, Meg Keen analyses the intersection between health, climate and human security cooperation within HADR, highlighting the interplay between security and development. In Chapter 16, Sālā George Carter describes how PICs have individually and as a region securitised climate security – the merging of climate change and security policies. In Chapter 17, Bianca Haas, Kamal Azmi, Kerrie Robertson, Transform Aqorau and Quentin Hanich discuss the intersecting issues of climate, human security, environmental and resource security and transnational crime in security cooperation over the oceans. In Chapter 18, Henrietta McNeill considers border security cooperation to combat transnational crime, highlighting the well-established architecture, and the duplications and contradictions when new forums are created. In Chapter 19, Teddy Winn discusses security cooperation to combat corruption, demonstrating the challenges of defining security and raising the question of where political security fits within the nexus of governance and security.

In the concluding Chapter 20, Joanne Wallis and Mauaiaivao Maima Koro consider the prospects for security cooperation in the Pacific Islands and if they are likely to display congruence, convergence or congestion in the future.

Conclusion

The chapters in this collection support our characterisation of security cooperation in the Pacific Islands as a patchwork that captures the bilateral, minilateral and multilateral, formal and informal agencies, agreements and arrangements, across

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local, national, regional and international levels working to secure the region. This illustrates the need to broaden understandings of what security cooperation means in the region, including the complexity of efforts to enhance cooperation; the value and contribution of diverse voices including non-state actors to the security debate; and the need for partners to ensure that their involvement helps, rather than hinders, efforts to secure the region.

Notes

- 1 Under the Morrison government in 2017; the Albanese government, elected in 2022, does not use the term ‘step-up’ although, as James Batley argues in this volume, it has largely continued the key directions of the Step-Up.
- 2 Previously the Pacific Patrol Boat Program.
- 3 The treaty was suspended between the US and New Zealand in 1986 after New Zealand refused to accept visits from potentially nuclear-armed American vessels.
- 4 CROP consists of the Pacific Community (SPC), Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), University of the South Pacific, Pacific Islands Development Program, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Pacific Tourism Organisation, Pacific Power Association and the Pacific Aviation Safety Office. Not all CROP members are part of the PIF architecture – for example, the FFA is, but SPC is not.
- 5 Notably, a 2024 PIF troika visit to New Caledonia to observe the security situation was not explicitly under the Biketawa Declaration. Instead, it was negotiated between the PIF, the Government of New Caledonia and the Government of France, as France had initially opposed the visit – highlighting the complexities around non-sovereign territories in the PIF when it comes to security cooperation.
- 6 While there have been no action plans for previous security declarations, there was an action plan for the Pacific Plan. There are concerns within the region that the Boe Declaration Action Plan is reminiscent of the Pacific Plan’s overly technocratic approach to implementation, and likewise does not have the required financial support for implementation.
- 7 For communiqués and summary records of forum meetings, see www.forumsec.org/category/communiques/
- 8 The Blue Pacific narrative reflects the emphasis on the ocean as a source of connectedness and interdependence. It is grounded in the philosophy of Epeli Hau’ofa’s (1994) ‘Our sea of islands’, and was first officially articulated at the 2017 PIF leaders’ meeting (PIF 2017).
- 9 While the latter appears to be a novel development in terms of regional security doctrine, the idea of a security ‘family’ can be traced back at least as far as the Biketawa Declaration.

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