

Conclusion

Regional Security Architecture in Oceania: Quo Vadis?

Carleton Cramer

The Pacific Islands region was settled thousands of years ago. Starting in the sixteenth century and continuing through the nineteenth century, European and American explorers and traders colonized the region. By the turn of the twentieth century and onset of World War I, major external powers were ceding and acquiring Pacific territories through political compromise and necessity. World War II brought global notoriety to the Pacific Islands region through many famous and bloody battles, including the Solomon Islands Campaign, the Battle of the Coral Sea, and the Marshall Islands campaign. In the decades following WW II, the British, French and Americans used various remote Pacific Island locations to conduct atomic and nuclear testing. During this same time frame, the region rejected the yoke of colonialism and pursued self-determination in various forms, from independence to compact-protectorate type arrangements.

Who then, from among the regional nation-states and the external powers with strategic interests in the region, should gather together to discuss twenty-first century security cooperation? And, just as importantly, on which security challenges should their limited time together be focused?

As was suggested in the introduction, this book incorporates authored chapters as well as findings from a week-long workshop which brought together an inclusive group of Oceania officials, non-governmental organizations, and external powers. The workshop leveraged the outcomes of the

Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Leaders Summit on the regional strategic vision held in Palau, in July 2014. It provided a timely opportunity to engage the region following participants' own assessment of the regional security architecture, and to discuss and prioritize areas where action and assistance could best be applied to enhance security governance.

No topic was off limits, including the then pending internationally monitored elections in Fiji. Many passionate discussions continued far into the evening hours. Attendees' start point was self-assessment of the effectiveness of Oceania's regional security architecture. Attendees identified key regional norms and values, as well as development challenges and opportunities to see how they shaped the regional security architecture. This effort, aided greatly by this book's authors and workshop presentations, contributed to rich workshop discussions that followed. The assessment process enabled further discussion of key questions associated with the future development and prosperity of Oceania. First, what were the required next steps for enhancing regional security architecture? Second, to the extent possible, what would be the metrics of success in enhancing the regional security architecture?

During discussions, participants identified key issues for consideration. They noted that while recognizing diverse national interests across the Pacific, attendees desire a Pacific which is peaceful, stable, and prosperous; a region in which people live according to the universal rule of law, customs and traditions, and who value inclusivity, responsibility, respect and dignity. Attendees all expressed a desire to maintain traditional values, but to also ensure that traditional practices and norms adhered with current international norms. Participants expressed concern that donor money often brings donor values that may conflict with traditional values, principles and systems. There was broad consensus that outsiders do not necessarily understand how the region works and improving the understanding of "international" outsiders on local and regional values was necessary. Finding

commonalities and similarities between traditional norms and international universal rights was identified as an important next step.

Attendees focused on “The Pacific Way” – inclusiveness, listening, consensus and non-confrontation — as a valuable means for economic development, and reconciliation and peacebuilding. Inclusiveness at village, district and national levels was identified as crucial to addressing a host of economic and political security challenges. The “Wantok” system from Melanesia was highlighted as important in that decisions made “today” do impact relationships “tomorrow.” Attendees expressed a continuing common desire for regional solidarity to be achieved through consensus in the Pacific Way and, in this regard, recognized the necessity of improved communication and accountability between national and regional stakeholders. There was candid recognition that decision making at the regional level is significantly more difficult now that there are more member nations represented.

Attendees recognized that economic interests, growth and development do in fact drive the security infrastructure, and that current mechanisms are failing to deal with these drivers. They cited problems that included uneven and growing economic gaps, taxation, transnational crime and the fundamental inability to meet requirements imposed by both trade and aid agreements. Participants also identified greater emphasis on human security and local, district and national economic planning as important links between regional security, development and sustainable growth.

The week-long workshop was important from the perspective of both “process” and product. Intimate, small-group discussions allowed for transparent, mutually respectful discussion. Difficult issues concerning the role of external powers, the regional security architecture and comprehensive security policies were discussed with candor and passion. Three broad conclusions resulted from the event:

First, there was a belief the current security architecture was capable of accommodating and reconciling potential challenges to regional stability,

including the tension between extant regional structures and sub-regional groupings, such as the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) and recently formed Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF). Participants, to include senior Pacific Islands leaders, applauded the initiative of convening a workshop on this topic at a timely juncture in regional relations. The event facilitated a conciliatory atmosphere among several regional bodies that will enable closer cooperation and coordination in future efforts.

Second, discussions highlighted the important role of larger external powers in the region and the need for greater dialogue between such powers and Pacific Island nations to enhance trust, confidence and transparency in regional security. For the United States, in particular, participants emphasized an increased diplomatic presence was more important for the Pacific Islands region than additional military activity.

Third, attendees emphasized that enhancing the development of national security processes and documents is a way to generate greater political commitment and national ownership over regional security arrangements. They also stressed that development of a robust national security policy is a crucial foundation for a resilient regional security architecture. Discussions with PIF and the UN Development Programme Pacific Centre highlighted the urgent importance of assistance to the Solomon Islands particularly in view of the current drawdown of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

Summary

Oceania represents one of the world's most diverse regions. It is an extraordinary mix of cultures, languages, peoples and countries. Most countries in this region are "young," having achieved their modern independence in the post-World War II era. Perhaps more so than any other region of the world, Oceania struggles in reconciling traditional norms with international

values driven by globalization. Issues such as overfishing and environmental degradation represent nontraditional security challenges to many countries around the world. These same challenges threaten the very survival of Oceania. Tragically, Oceania may play a key role in global norm setting for the movement of people associated with climate change.

The peoples and countries of this region are connected by the oceans. As is frequently acknowledged in many Pacific Island cultures, the ocean does not separate people, but instead, connects them. In a broader context, Oceania connects Asia with the Americas and serves as a maritime highway between East and West. The twenty-first century is being driven by important trends, all associated with the maritime domain. Maritime commerce continues to grow exponentially; giant “K Mart” ships loaded with many thousands of containers with products from around the world are a common sight. Growing sea lanes of commerce cut throughout the Pacific Islands region. More and more, countries are relying on their maritime commerce for their economic growth and prosperity of their people. Pacific Island countries are unique among the world community in that all have vast maritime territories that significantly exceed their relatively modest amount of land territory. And, in the broader Asia-Pacific region, countries are engaged in an unprecedented naval arms modernization. As noted in previous chapters, few Pacific Island nations have armed forces. In many respects, these three mega-trends are converging in the vast waters of Oceania. What happens in Oceania has global implications. Hopefully this book will help inform the discussion and contribute to a successful way forward. ¹

¹ The conclusion to this book is derived in large part from DKI APCSS staff and faculty working papers, as well as recorder notes from workshop plenary and small group discussions.