

Evolving Security Framing in the Pacific: Connecting the Local with the Regional

Prof. Meg Keen and Dr. Henry Ivarature

The recent confluence of COVID, cyclones and civic unrest in the Pacific islands has added to existing security and development challenges. The cross-sectoral and multi-jurisdictional nature of these security threats create pressures and impacts that bleed across national jurisdictions, ministerial responsibilities and levels of government. To deal with the transborder security issues and national responses, regional strategies have been used to frame security challenges related to resilience, security, and an expanded range of climate, human and transnational issues. In particular, the Blue Pacific security narrative recognizes the connectivity of the region, its valuable but vulnerable maritime resources, and the merits of coordinated action. It also acknowledges the centrality of Pacific culture and identity to security and the need to tailor action to national and community contexts and cultures.

The regional framing of security issues provides a conceptual basis for national policy action and regional coordination. To date, the framing has had a high level of continuity with respect to issues raised and capacity constraints recognized. In 1997 the Pacific Island Forum's (PIF) *Aitutaki Declaration on Regional Security Cooperation* noted that achieving regional and national security would require attention to “national disasters, transnational crime ... and economic, social and environmental policies.” It acknowledged the need for

good governance, strong coordination and better management of external threats. The attention to the security-development nexus has been echoed in other regional declarations such as the Honiara Declaration on Law Enforcement Cooperation (1992), Biketawa Declaration (2000) and the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (2018). The challenge has been translating the declaratory words into action.

The Boe Declaration is the most explicit about the range of security challenges, the primacy of climate security threats and the institutional and geopolitical challenges ahead. It explicitly takes account of the interplay between security and development with its strong focus on human and environmental security. Subtly, the Boe Declaration is a challenge to external security narratives which focus predominantly on law and order and geopolitics. By explicitly endorsing the expanded concept of security inclusive of climate, human, environment/resource, and traditional security (i.e., cybersecurity, transnational crime), it creates a regional and national platform for action that is more cognizant of human security issues and committed to integrated and multi-sectoral approaches.

Like all PIF declarations, the Boe Declaration is not legally binding on nations, but it lays the foundations for action via the Boe Declaration Action Plan overseen by the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and creates a hook for national action via the commitment of all Forum Island Countries (FICs) to produce and implement National Security Strategies (NSS). The dual regional-national commitment to action is important because it provides a coordination mechanism among countries to promote complementarity between regional – national levels of action. A few NSSs have now been produced (Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu), and several are in development (e.g., Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, and Tonga). The NSSs cover the expanded security agenda, incorporate views from extensive local consultations, and establish the institutional mechanism to better coordinate security-development agendas. They are one more

step toward a more assertive and proactive Pacific approach to security and give us insights into priorities and challenges ahead.

Outside the NSS, there are advances in security interventions that humanize and contextualize the security agenda, giving greater attention to the local dynamics affecting voice, identity and power. The current Secretary General of the PIF, Henry Puna, has in the past called for an application of “island sense”¹ when dealing with development and security issues, that is taking account of cultural and social values which are often the glue of Pacific communities and central to their security. Scholars familiar with the contested and diverse terrain of the region have also made the case for a more nuanced, localized and culturally sensitive approach to security.² Recent progress in localizing and integrating Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) responses provide insights for more inclusive and contextual security practices,³ as do advances in networked policing inclusive of customs, immigration, private and community sectors, as well as traditional leaders.⁴

Beyond national borders, Pacific leaders are working to shape the global security narrative to advance national and regional priorities. Leaders are actively challenging the minimal engagement of the Pacific in the now dominant Indo-Pacific security framing and the implications for Pacific voice and power, questioning who is setting the security agenda.⁵ There have been concerns about the efforts of

1 Puna H. 2014. PM’s speech at the second plenary meeting of the third international conference on small island developing states (SIDS), Samoa.

2 C.f. Ratuva S. 2019. *Contested Terrain: Reconceptualising Security in the Pacific*. ANU Press, Canberra.

3 Keen M, Sanderson D, Osbourne K, Deo R, Faith J and Ride A. 2021. *Putting People First: Area Based Approaches to Disaster Response in the Pacific, Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands – Regional Synthesis*. Australia Pacific Security College, ANU, Canberra. Available at: <https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ABAs-in-the-Pacific-Resilience-Report-April-2021.pdf>

4 C.f. Dinnen S and Walton G. 2021 Networked Security: Public Police, Private Security and the Changing Shape of Security Governance in PNG. Special Edition: *Perspectives on Pacific Security: Future Currents*. Development Bulletin 82. Pp 145-150; Watson D, Sousa-Santos J and Howes L. 2021. Transnational and Organised Crime in Pacific Island Countries and Territories: Police capacity to respond to security threat. Special Edition: *Perspectives on Pacific Security: Future Currents*. Development Bulletin 82. Pp 151-154. Available at: <https://pacificsecurity.net/resource/development-bulletin-82/>

5 Tuilaepa, S M. 2018. Speech by the Hon Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi on Pacific Perspectives

Western powers to contain geopolitical competition with inadequate consultations with Pacific governments.⁶ The Pacific response has been to increase their assertiveness and independence in regional and global diplomacy⁷ especially in the areas of climate and ocean security, and to diversify coalitions and networks that can advance their security concerns.

This chapter reviews the high levels of continuity in the framing of security issues in the Pacific reflected in regional declarations and selected national development strategies and the prominence given to the nexus between security and development. It examines national security strategies and policies for their insights into Pacific security priorities and institutional challenges to shaping the security agenda. Finally, we consider the issues and processes used to project Pacific regional and national security perspectives into regional and global forums and the successes and barriers. This review makes clear that the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are increasingly proactive in setting regional and national security agendas, but challenges remain with respect to rigid institutional arrangements, resource gaps and the politicization of the security agenda.

Pacific Security Themes: More Continuity than Change

Pacific security concerns have been remarkably consistent since the seventies when most PICs gained independence. A review of key regional security declarations reveals a consistent balancing of 'hard' (law and order) security issues and soft 'human' security issues. Geopolitical contestation is often framed as part of the security context which is 'crowded and complex' and presents both threats and opportunities to be managed by sovereign nations. Box 1 (see page 96) gives a snapshot of how security issues have

on the New Geostrategic Landscape. Lowy Institute, Sydney. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/speech-hon-prime-minister-tuilaepa-sailele-malielegaoi-pacific-perspectives-new>

6 Taylor M. 2018 'Keynote Address by Secretary General Meg Taylor to the 2018 State of the Pacific Conference', 8 September 2018, Canberra, Australian National University; Wallis, J. 2020. How Should Australia Respond to China's Increased Presence in the Pacific Islands? *Security Challenges*. 16(3): 47-52.

7 Fry G and Tarte S. 2015, 'The new Pacific diplomacy: An introduction', in G Fry and S Tarte (eds), *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, pp. 3-19.

consistently ranged across the ‘expanded security agenda’. The existential threat of climate change has been recognized by PICs for over two decades, as has the interplay between different types of security. Woven in amongst security declarations, speeches and policies is the consistent drive to humanize the security agenda by integrating traditional and non-traditional security, dealing with issues of voice, identity, power and location, and framing security as integral to sustainable development.

The challenge has been, and remains, the translation of these regional security declarations and policies into action. The Boe Declaration attempts to deal with this translation gap through an ambitious regional action plan and the leaders’ commitment to develop and implement NSSs. NSSs are still few, but those that have been produced by Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu reflect the Boe Declaration’s expanded concept of security and regional commitments to the broad goals, often repeated in regional declarations, of ‘sustainable development, security, resilience and prosperity’ — that is seeing security as part of a development agenda.

All national security strategies put the security-development nexus at their center and are multi-sectoral in their coverage but have yet to gain traction. There are lessons to learn from the 2013 PNG National Security Policy (PNG NSP) that preceded the Boe Declaration and subsequent NSS. While the PNG NSP clearly stated that “security enhances development whilst development entails comprehensive security” and committed the government to greater action on priority issues inclusive of law and order, corruption, human rights and gender abuses, border control and environmental disasters, what was lacking were clear responsibilities for action, adequate resourcing and supportive institutional arrangements.⁸ In a 2017 Lowy Institute analysis of security threats affecting PNG, many of these security concerns raised in the PNG NSP persisted and indeed have been raised regularly in recent reflections by PNG nationals.⁹ Despite the shortcomings, the PNG NSP set a template

8 The government of PNG. 2013. PNG National Security Policy. PNG Government, Port Moresby, p 4.

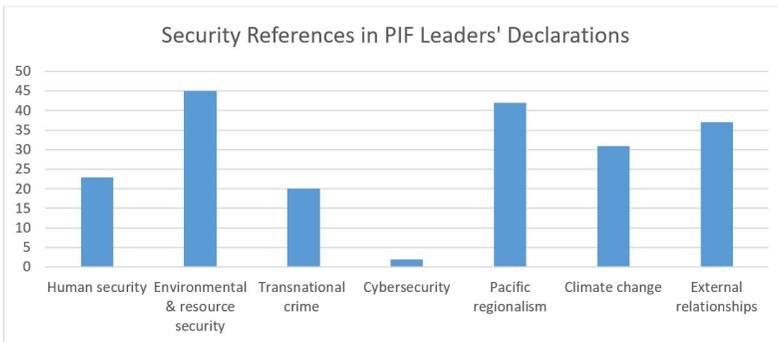
9 Dinnen, S 2017. *Internal Security in PNG: Trends and Prospects*. Lowy Institute, Sydney.

Box 1: Pacific Voices - Security Issues in PIF Leaders' Declarations

Over the last 50 years, the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Declarations have dealt with a wide range of security themes (see chart below). The most recent Declaration dealing directly with regional security, the Boe Declaration, explicitly recognizes the 'expanded concept of security', but this is not new. The Pacific security lens has always been 'expanded' and reached far beyond issues of national border protection, law and order, and geopolitics.

Climate change has been recognized as a major security challenge for over three decades. Since it was first mentioned in the 1988 PIF Leaders' Declaration, climate change has been high on the security agenda, when it was noted that "The Forum expressed concern about climatic changes in the South Pacific and their potential for serious social and economic disruption in countries of the region."

Unsurprisingly, resource and environment security have consistently been raised in Leaders' Declarations given the strong cultural associations with land and water, and thriving subsistent economies. Similarly, the desirability of collective action has also been regularly recognized, if not always translated into action. Even geopolitics and donor engagement/external relationships have figured large — but in recent times the challenges of balancing external and internal agendas have been far more assertively advanced.



New security issues are creeping into the Declarations in recognition of a globally connected and digitized world that is reaching its tentacles into the Pacific, creating development opportunities (e.g., cybersecurity and transnational crime).

Note: Only themes that had significant text were recorded in this rapid assessment, not those security issues merely in a list or just mentioned in passing.

Source: M Keen. 2021. Security through a Pacific Lens. Pacific Development Bulletin. 82: 5-11. Available at: <https://crawford.anu.edu.au/rmap/devnet/devnet/DB82-final-manuscript-23-02-21.pdf>

for nations to address the expanded security concept, give a high priority to domestic security (getting your own house in order first) and consider how best to manage the interplay between domestic and external security. It was unambiguous about the importance of a ‘people-centered’ focus and human security issues. Most subsequent NSSs have built on this foundation.

To achieve greater traction and ownership, the NSSs produced in response to the Boe Declaration have all involved extensive government and community consultation. Efforts have been made to conduct a nationally owned and negotiated process, often extending over a year and reflective of the Pacific Talanoa approach.¹⁰ For example, in the Solomon Islands, the consultation process began early in 2018 and concluded in 2019; it included at least two rounds of consultations with provinces and communities, as well as national government agencies. Those responsible for the Solomon Islands’ NSS intend it to be a ‘living document’ and to continue with community engagement throughout its implementation.

The themes covered in the NSSs are consistent with the Boe Declaration, but the nuance and context are evident. For example, the Vanuatu NSS links security and development through reference to key development policies — Vanuatu National Sustainable Development Plan, and the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals — and, to the importance of culture and valued social institutions. It endorses “our culture, traditional knowledge and Christian principles.”¹¹ Within the NSS, the role of chiefs, churches and communities in enforcing the rule of law and social cohesion is acknowledged. The Strategy also does not shy away from issues of customary land and cultural security issues. Like other NSSs, it focuses on the domestic and then projects outward, with a key objective to secure national sovereignty, assets, infrastructure and institu-

Available at: <https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/archive/png-in-2017/png-in-2017-internal-security-png-trends-prospects.html>; Ivarature, H 2021. COVID-19 Reconfiguration of human security relations between state and society: The Papua New Guinea experience, *Development Bulletin*, no. 82, pp.75-78.

10 Halapua, S. 2002. *Talanoa helps rebuild unity in Fiji*. East-West Centre, Honolulu.

11 Salwai, C. 2019. *Launching of the Vanuatu National Security Strategy*. Independence Park, Port Vila.

tions, and to convey Vanuatu's national interests globally. Work still needs to be done internally to build ownership, coordinate action, and strengthen implementation capacity, but the basis for action is set.

Regional and national security strategies nearly all acknowledge that intersectoral cooperation is hindered by weak institutional arrangements. The Samoan NSP (2018) supports a 'whole of government approach' and has established an interagency coordinating mechanism — the National Security Committee. The Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have also made similar arrangements, with Solomon Islands also advancing legislation to support implementation — concerned that relying on an executive order to underpin the NSS could create vulnerability when governments and priorities change. Inter-agency institutions have the potential to improve information flows, data sharing and external intervention coordination, as has been positively demonstrated by the HADR inter-agency coordination clusters.¹² In the case of the National Security Committees, it is too early to judge their effectiveness, but their oversight by peak government agencies with coordination capacity is an advantage. For example, Samoa's National Security Council, arguably one of the most advanced, is overseen by the Ministry of Prime Minister and Cabinet; in Vanuatu, responsibility rests with the powerful Ministry of Internal Affairs; and, in Solomon Islands, the National Security Council will be housed in the Prime Minister's Office.

External forces that can destabilize are also addressed, such as transnational crime, cyber crime and the repatriation of criminals, but largely in reference to domestic impacts on community security, safety and culture. To protect national interests from external pressures, the value of a 'rules-based international order' and collaborations to strengthen border protection are endorsed in nearly every NSS. Engagement with Pacific regional agencies is frequently affirmed, but there is less attention on how to influence the wider international institutions. Samoa invites those implementing its

¹² For an overview of the UN Cluster system see: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters/what-cluster-approach>. This approach has been used in the Pacific and coordinated through the National Disasters Management Offices. Evaluations have been positive, albeit with room for improvement, see Keen et al 2021 above.

strategy to learn from its own strong leveraging of coalition diplomacy to advance climate change and sustainable development (e.g., SAMOA Pathway regional conference), its articulation of security priorities in the Indo-Pacific, and its engagement with regional agencies.

All of these PICs face the same challenges of operationalizing the NSSs, getting over the culture of working in silos, building intelligence and capacity, and sustaining resourcing to translate words into action. In Solomon Islands, legal and institutional arrangements to support NSSs are only slowly evolving given competing development and policy challenges. In PNG, the challenge remains coordination between the different state agencies and key stakeholders. While NSSs are given political support in their initial stages, sustaining commitment in the face of changing political priorities and security policy proliferation remains a challenge, further complicated by the need to also maintain support across sectors, provincial and local jurisdictions. The NSSs are a start to articulate and advance national security priorities; making more sustained progress will benefit from learning from successful security initiatives in the region.

Moving the Domestic Security Agenda Forward

What the above overview highlights is that naming security problems is one step. The next step of taking action is much harder. While the strong interrelationship between security and development is acknowledged in regional and national policy, in practice the two often remain stubbornly separated by institutional bodies, political interests and intervention mechanisms. Security and development initiatives are largely conceptualized and implemented through the lens of state mechanisms and drivers of change which can be at odds in a region where formal institutions have limited reach and community inclusion is integral to success.¹³ The drivers of insecurity often have their roots in socio-economic relationships,

13 Osbourne J, Kenni L, Abraham S et al. 2020. *A moment in Time: COVID, Localisation and the Pacific*. DevPolicy Blog, December 17, 2020. Available at: <https://devpolicy.org/a-moment-in-time-covid-localisation-and-the-pacific-20201217/>

and thus a state-centric approach without community engagement can falter.

Local commentators point out that governments often prefer to externalize security and development issues — both blame and response — and neglect the deep socio-economic and cultural drivers of instability.¹⁴ For example, in the 2021 Solomon Islands riots, the government evoked the 2017 bilateral security treaty with Australia to access external support to quell riots across Honiara, stemming from deep-seated discontent about the recognition of China, accusations of government corruption, and anger about growing inequalities and social exclusions. The more problematic domestic drivers of instability are recognized in the Solomon Island NSS but effectively dealing with them through policy and strategies remains difficult.

Government reports following social unrest in the Solomon Islands have repeatedly highlighted human and domestic security issues related to weak central governance, corruption in government and the resource sector, land disputes, uneven economic development affecting youth opportunities and widening ethnic divisions.¹⁵ Only domestically driven processes can resolve these issues; not external fixes. The enduring solutions are local, requiring integrated efforts across the expanded security agenda and social engagement.

Localized responses to security issues can provide a deeper reflection on culture and strength-based responses. A survey of deployees to the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) which extended from 2004-2017 highlighted the value of taking better account of culture and community when dealing with

14 Aqorau, T. 2021. Solomon Islands' *Slippery Slide to Self-implosion*. DevPolicy Blog. ANU, Canberra. Available at: <https://devpolicy.org/solomon-islands-slippery-slide-to-self-implosion-20211125/>

Ride, A. 2021. *Solomon Islands Security – Blame and Breakable Gifts After the Riots*. Australian Institute of International Affairs, Canberra. <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/solomon-islands-security-blame-breakable-gifts-after-riots/>;

15 C.f. Solomon Islands government. 2009. *Commissioner of Inquiry into the April 2006 Honiara Civil Unrest in Honiara*. Available at: https://www.parliament.gov.sb/files/library%20and%20information/commission_of_inquiry/Commission_of_Inquiry.pdf

security in order to improve justice, development and governance outcomes, particularly by involving local chiefs and church leaders.¹⁶ As noted in a report on the legacy and lessons of RAMSI: “Culture matters to policing and can affect relationships between receiving and visiting forces. Perhaps there needed to be more attention to the relationship between culture, and law and order.”¹⁷ This is a theme picked up in the Solomon Islands NSS but the mechanisms to make this a reality are only slowly evolving as Pacific nations break away from the shackles of neocolonial and Western approaches to policing and law and order, and evolve more contextually appropriate approaches of community policing.

Moving the domestic security agenda forward will also require all to make room for local leadership and voice. The same RAMSI report highlighted above argued that the Pacific was ready and wanting to take a stronger role. Often it takes a crisis to make change. The strengthening of locally-led HADR occurred in response to the closed borders following COVID.¹⁸ Critical reviews of performance following cyclones noted stronger local leadership of disaster response with one evaluation claiming that institutional arrangements and capacity have been enhanced and effective; there will be ‘no turning back’.¹⁹ Strong coordinating mechanisms such as the National Disaster Management Offices, community-based response

16 Australian Government, UNDP. 2019. Access to Justice Study: Solomon Islands. Available at: <https://www.pacific.undp.org/content/pacific/en/home/library/eg/SOI-A2J-study-report.html>

17 Putt J, Dinnen S, Keen M, and Batley J. 2018. The RAMSI Legacy for Policing in the Pacific Region. Department of Pacific Affairs, ANU, Canberra. Available at: <https://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/5956/ramsi-legacy-policing-pacific-region>

18 Osbourne J, Kenni L, Abraham S et al. 2020. A moment in Time: COVID, Localisation and the Pacific. DevPolicy Blog, December 17, 2020. Available at: <https://devpolicy.org/a-moment-in-time-covid-localisation-and-the-pacific-20201217/>

Keen M, Sanderson D, Osbourne K, Deo R, Faith J and Ride A. 2021. Putting People First: Area Based Approaches to Disaster Response in the Pacific, Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands – Regional Synthesis. Australia Pacific Security College, ANU, Canberra. Available at: <https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ABAs-in-the-Pacific-Resilience-Report-April-2021.pdf>

19 Humanitarian Advisory Group. 2020. No Turning Back: Local leadership in Vanuatu’s response to Tropical Cyclone Harold. Humanitarian Horizons Practice Paper Series, VANGO and HAG, Melbourne. Available at: https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TC-Harold-Practice-Paper_final-electronic.pdf

networks, and NGO-government agencies' partnerships are making a positive difference. External interventions are becoming better aligned with local systems, with initiatives such as the Australian Humanitarian Partnership improving coordination and inclusion in the NGO sector. Domestically, strengthening resilience further will depend on ongoing enhancements of regional-national-local linkages and management systems, data sharing, and applying lessons from past disaster responses effectively to future efforts.²⁰

Learning from Regional Security Successes

Advances in localization and leadership in the Pacific are reflective of a transformation from a posture of victimhood in the face of global security pressures to one of agency and determination to shape the context and the future. Increasingly, the Pacific is taking the lead in proposing changed institutional arrangements and global actions to manage security risks of greatest concern to it. This was recently demonstrated in the strong PIF 2021 Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change²¹ that pushed for global action to affirm national sovereignty over exclusive economic zones even if land territories are lost as a result of rising sea levels from climate change — a security impact beyond the control of small island states. There has also been strong advocacy at global climate summits and the first 2017 global Ocean Summit, which Fiji co-hosted and all subsequent ones, where PICs are advancing their own security agendas.

One of the Pacific's greatest security successes in managing transboundary security threats is the collective approach to protecting and managing tuna fisheries and minimizing the damaging

20 Keen M, Sanderson D, Osborne K, Deo R, Faith J and Ride A. 2021. *Putting People First: Area-based Approaches to Disaster Response in the Pacific: Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu Regional Synthesis report*. Australia Pacific Security College, ANU, Canberra. Available at: <https://pacific-security.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ABAs-in-the-Pacific-Resilience-Report-April-2021.pdf>

21 Marinaccio J. 2022. How the Pacific Climate Diplomacy is Changing. *Asia and the Pacific Policy Forum*. January 22, 2022. Available at: <https://www.policyforum.net/how-pacific-climate-diplomacy-is-changing/>

effects of geopolitical jostling.²² The Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) and the PIF Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) leveraged a legally binding decision-making regime, strong collaboration, better surveillance/regulation and evidence-based management to impose a regionally driven rules-based order on external fishing nations operating in its waters.

Key to the success is regional-national linkages through the provision by FFA and the Pacific Community of technical assistance to member countries to implement strong fisheries policy and management, and advocate for fisheries security. Other security issues could benefit from consideration of this institutional and evidence-based approach that sparked and maintained strong political support. Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing still accounts for significant economic losses, about \$43 million per annum, but this is significantly reduced from estimates from five years ago — partially due to more accurate assessments, but also improved information sharing, regulation, management coordination and partnerships.²³ Strong regional coalitions were also key to advancing Pacific resource security priorities to the Western Pacific region, and internationally.

In the more traditional security realm, the regional Pacific Transnational Crime Network (PTCN) and the 28 national Transnational Crime Units across 20 member nations in the Pacific have been key to building capacity and information sharing. External security challenges are rising faster than the Pacific and their partners, Australia and New Zealand, can respond, and all indications are the pressures will rise as Pacific countries become not just a transit area for crime but also a destination.²⁴ Despite the rising crime trends,

22 Tarai J. 2016. The New Pacific Diplomacy and the South Pacific Tuna Treaty. In G Fry and S Tarte. *The New Pacific Diplomacy*. ANU-USP, Suva, pp 237-284; Aqorau T. 2016. *How Tuan is Shaping Regional Diplomacy*. Ibid. pp 223-236 .

23 MRAG Asia Pacific 2021. *The Quantification of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in the Pacific Island Region – a 2020 Update*. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/52a9273ae4b07fa2610392dd/t/61b7e62aa1cb747d1e6824c0/1639441975812/ZN2869+-+FFA+IUU+2020+Update+-+final.pdf>

24 UNODC 2016. *Transnational Organized Crime in the Pacific: A Threat Assessment*. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiandpacific/Publications/2016/2016.09.16_TOCTA_Pacific_web.pdf

the PTCN has made a positive difference. Greater institutional integration and information sharing has been key. Improvements are continuing. In 2018, the Pacific Island Chiefs of Police, Oceania Custom Organization, and the Pacific Immigration Development Community recently signed a Declaration of Partnership aimed at improving information sharing, interoperability and capacity across the region and within member countries. This integrated and cooperative approach has the potential to boost national capacity and combat regionally rising drug, counterfeit goods and human trafficking crimes. Importantly, it is a pivot to a more proactive orientation rather than a reactive one.

The constant challenges when considering Pacific security issues are the institutional weaknesses in managing regional and domestic security threats, ephemeral political commitment, coordination between and within scales and institutional architecture that can build capacity and responsibility to act. While much can be done domestically and regionally, security and development partnerships will be key.

The Geopolitics of Security: Opportunity or Threat?

PICs are increasingly assertive in projecting their security concerns beyond their region, but they and their partners still need to open up opportunities for greater engagement in key security dialogues affecting the region. The Boe Declaration and Blue Pacific framing remain disconnected from the externally defined Indo-Pacific security narrative — the former are driven by security-development priorities of the Pacific and the latter by countering China's rising influence in the region and the protection of the status quo among regional powers. While there are tensions and discontinuities between these security narratives, there are also opportunities for “the Pacific states to drive their agenda by leveraging the complementary security interest of major external powers in the region”²⁵

25 Tarte S. 2021. Reconciling Regional Security Narratives in the Pacific. *Regional Outlook Paper No 65*. Griffith Asia Institute, Brisbane, p 8.

These security complementarities and contrasts are briefly explored in this section.

The pursuit of a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy’ has met with some pushback from PICs who are skeptical that their interests are being included in the new framing of the region. Former Samoa Prime Minister Tuilaepa noted, “There has been a reluctance to engage in open discussions on the issue [the privileging of Indo over the Pacific] and to share information to assist us in decision making.”²⁶ The former Secretary General of the PIF, Dame Meg Taylor, also voiced similar concerns: “I find it so offensive that all of a sudden the region that we all come from is defined by people who are great military powers, who have no consideration for the peoples in the region, or our governments in the Pacific, and the lack of deep consultations”.²⁷ While these are strong markers, they leave open the possibility to advance a common security agenda, if narrative development is more inclusive.

The Pacific framing of security issues in the region, the *Blue Pacific*, could complement the Indo-Pacific security narrative with the common interests in maritime, border and sovereign security. Finding common ground has been hindered by the exclusion of Pacific island countries from important dialogues. To enhance their influence on the global stage, Pacific Island countries have formed diverse coalitions with likeminded interests, including the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Non-Aligned Movement, the UN Asia-Pacific group and G77 and niche groups such as the Coalition for High Ambition, a group of over 60 countries committed to strong climate action. Their goal is to project their security

26 Tuilaepa, S M. 2018. Speech by the Hon Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi on Pacific Perspectives on the New Geostrategic Landscape. Lowy Institute, Sydney. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/speech-hon-prime-minister-tuilaepa-sailele-malielegaoi-pacific-perspectives-new>

27 Henry Ivarature. 2021. Creating an Inclusive Indo-Pacific. Policy Forum. Canberra: Asia and Pacific Policy Forum, Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU. <https://www.policyforum.net/creating-an-inclusive-indo-pacific/>

priorities regionally and globally, and to shape the way security issues are framed and addressed.

Partnerships for security and creating a vibrant and genuine Pacific security family is still a work in progress, and requires more opportunities for the Pacific nations to contribute and shape regional security narratives and interventions. The foundations exist. There are joint maritime exercises, joint activities to protect and monitor regional fisheries, collaboration on the supply and operation of Pacific patrols and aerial surveillance, cooperation on maritime transnational crime, and much more. The difficulty is that the motivation for engagement, and thus the investments, are often driven by external power interest and finance. Since the seventies, external powers, especially Australia and New Zealand, have long seen security in the Pacific region through a lens of their own security interests.²⁸

Some shifts in how security is viewed open the door a crack for greater integration of the Pacific expanded concept of security and its preference for a strong development-security nexus. The QUAD (a strategic Indo-Pacific group composed of United States, India, Japan and Australia) is moving toward a more expanded security agenda that, although highly focused on countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. Recently it has shifted from a strongly focused traditional security agenda to activities that support regional responses to COVID and vaccine distribution, climate action and critical technologies – all greatly needed in Pacific countries. The recent QUAD Plus included representatives from New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam to consider security responses in the region to the pandemic²⁹ — PICs, however, have not (yet) been included.

Not sitting back passively, the PIF has as part of its planned Boe Declaration actions, an ambition to hold a regional security dialogue to broaden and align security thinking affecting the region. When PNG hosted the APEC meeting in Port Moresby, many PICs

28 G Fry. 2019. *Framing the Islands: Power and diplomacy in Pacific Regionalism*. ANU Press, Canberra.

29 Rajagopalan, R. 2020. *Towards a QUAD-Plus Arrangement? Indo-Pacific Analysis Briefs 2020*. Perth US-Asia Centre, Perth.

attended to demonstrate an interest in being engaged in regional dialogues affecting security. The recent announcement of the AUKUS agreement by Australia, UK and America was initially met with concern about nuclear submarines in the region, the lack of consultation and a seeming disregard for the security priorities of the region.³⁰ However, even this initiative has the potential to nurture common interests in maritime security, fisheries protection, transnational crime prevention, cyber security and a rules-based order. However, partnerships and common security understandings need relationships of trust and two-way communications — and this requires being at the table when important decisions affecting Pacific security are made.

All these initiatives have at their core a commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in an increasingly inter-connected region. China's place in the region, maintaining a 'rules-based order' and integrating Pacific security priorities into Indo-Pacific security narrative can only be resolved when all the parties affected engage in critical dialogues and are heard. The PICs are often still sitting on the margins of regional power security dialogues and interventions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined the framing of security issues in the Pacific reflected in key regional declarations, particularly the Boe Declaration and the contents of the existing NSSs, to highlight the nexus between security and development. We compared these NSSs to identify their priorities and institutional challenges in shaping and operationalizing the security agenda. Most security initiatives that have gained traction and resonance in the PICs have been adapted to local contexts, well-integrated across regional-national jurisdictions, and vested in socio-economic and political interest groups (often sub-regional groupings). The localization and contextualization of security has characterized recent security initiatives, including account of identity and culture. But capacity and institutional gaps

30 Middleby S and Powles A. 2021. AUKUS and Australia's Relations in the Pacific. *East Asia Forum*. November 4, 2021. Available at: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/11/04/aucus-and-australias-relations-in-the-pacific/>

persist and often require external support from regional agencies and development partners.

The PICs have become more assertive in their projection of development and security priorities. The Pacific's successful championing of climate and ocean action on the global stage promotes the centrality of human-environment security priorities and reflects the value of a strong Pacific voice. To project their security priorities the PICs have had to strengthen inter-agency and regional collaboration as evidenced in their efforts to combat transnational crime and influence climate and fisheries dialogues. They have also had to strengthen the capacity of national and regional institutions associated with climate, disaster, resource and crime responses.

The Blue Pacific narrative lays some common ground in relation to protecting sovereignty and strengthening a rules-based order that promotes sustainable development and creates spaces for Pacific engagement. The Pacific leaders do not reject the Indo-Pacific framing and many of its values, but they object to the lack of inclusiveness in its formulation and implementation. The Pacific islands "friends to all and enemies to none" approach to global engagement is about balancing development and security interests as all navigate the increasingly contested and crowded geopolitical space of their region. In the 'crowded space' of the Blue Pacific, nearly all players are seen by Pacific nations as development partners, rather than a security threat. The Australian Pacific Step-Up and the New Zealand Pacific Resilience are appreciated, as is their support of the Boe Declaration on Regional Security. However, the price cannot be development and security opportunities with other partners.

Operationalizing the national security strategies and enhancing national security in the Blue Pacific is going to be difficult for many reasons. The existing NSSs are in embryonic stages of operationalization. Issues of coordination between key government agencies, capacity constraints and resourcing, including the elevation of the security-development nexus to the political level will challenge the implementation of NSSs. They must overcome rigid institutional barriers and obtain sustained and strong political will and leadership across governments and, over time, deliver on their human security

aspirations. Nevertheless, NSSs are a start on the ongoing journey of building a safe, secure and resilient Blue Pacific and can be well complemented by regional and development partner support. Making progress however requires security partnerships that make space for Pacific voice and agency, and don't crowd out Pacific leadership.

