

Political Reviews

The Region in Review: International Issues and Events, 2013

NIC MACLELLAN

Melanesia in Review: Issues and Events, 2013

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Throughout the year, there was significant debate about Pacific regionalism and the future of agencies that make up the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific (CROP).

A major review of the Pacific Plan outlined new priorities for the region, while summits highlighted the growing influence of Melanesian nations and the links between climate change, disasters, and development. Pacific governments began preparing regional policies on climate, oceans, fisheries, and sustainable development to be carried onto the global stage in coming months as the United Nations (UN) declared 2014 as the International Year for Small Island States.

There was ongoing debate about Fiji's role in regional structures, at a time of increasing South-South cooperation and new aid donors challenging old paradigms in the region. With eight Pacific nations scheduled to hold national elections during 2014, the September 2013 poll in Australia—the region's largest aid, trade, and military power—began a realignment of regional relationships with the election of a conservative government under Prime Minister Tony Abbott.

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and other CROP member agencies are under pressure from all directions: donor demands, burgeoning subregional organizations, civil society critiques, and concern from some member governments that resources are not flowing to the national level.

The role and mandate of CROP

agencies was analyzed during a review of the 2005 Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Integration and Cooperation. Throughout 2013, former Papua New Guinea (PNG) Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta led a review team that visited all Forum member countries, together with associate members New Caledonia and French Polynesia. Morauta's team presented an interim report in July, briefed Forum leaders on their findings at the annual summit in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) in September, and then released their final report at year's end.

Following the 2012 Winder review of the Forum Secretariat (which was critical of the priorities and capacities of the regional organization), Morauta's team began looking at Pacific Plan priorities. The review soon broadened to a much wider debate about the future of regionalism, highlighting uncertainty about the role and mandate of the Forum Secretariat and other regional institutions.

Addressing Forum leaders in Majuro, Morauta stated: "There is a compelling argument for greater regional cooperation and integration across the Pacific. . . . However, progress in regionalism has in our opinion slowed down, and by too much." Describing a region "at the crossroads," Morauta was sharply critical of the 2005 Pacific Plan: "It is very difficult to see how the Pacific Plan or the processes surrounding it are—now—driving regional integration with the scope, pace and scale

intended in its original framing. Confidence in the Pacific Plan and some of the institutions around it has fallen to the point where some observers question their survival” (Morauta 2013, 3–4).

In the final report (Pacific Plan Review 2013), the review team presented a range of options for coming years:

- the establishment of a high-level council of past and present Forum chairs to restructure the Forum Secretariat;
- devolving more power to ministerial meetings and subregional organizations, to avoid overloading the agenda of the annual Forum leaders meeting;
- debate on the criteria for Forum membership, given the growing involvement of the US and French territories, and whether “self-determination” should still be a defining factor for full Forum membership;
- further work to articulate the concept of sustainable development;
- better coordination and management of donor support for regionalism.

Forum leaders agreed to send the review findings to the Forum Officials Committee, while Papua New Guinea will host a special leaders’ retreat in April 2014 to discuss a new framework for regional integration.

The review also highlighted the role of subregional organizations, in a year the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. The MSG Secretariat in Port Vila organized celebrations in

every Melanesian capital and a major summit in New Caledonia in June. The summit debated new initiatives on Melanesian trade, West Papua, regional peacekeeping, and labor mobility between the largest Island nations. The outgoing chair, Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama of Fiji, said the MSG was “taking bold steps to restructure the landscape of the Pacific” (Maclellan 2013c, 18).

MSG leaders received the report of an Eminent Persons Group led by former Fiji Foreign Minister Kaliopate Tavola, looking at the successes and challenges of the past and mapping priorities for the MSG’s future. At the summit, Melanesian leaders appointed Tavola as a roving MSG representative. This positions the Fijian statesman as a front-runner for the post of secretary-general of the Pacific Islands Forum, when incumbent Tuiloma Neroni Slade of Sāmoa retires at the end of his second term in 2014.

There was also a change of leadership following the summit, with Fiji handing the MSG chair to Victor Tutugoro of the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) for 2013–2015. Ironically, the incoming chair of the Polynesian Leaders Group (PLG) is French Polynesia’s President Gaston Flosse, an outspoken opponent of independence in the French Pacific territories.

Another major transition was the retirement of Jimmie Rodgers, the long-serving director-general of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). After working as deputy director for many years at the SPC’s Nabua branch in Fiji, Dr Rodgers took over the top job at SPC headquarters in Noumea for eight years. He led a

massive restructuring of the regional technical agency, with the creation of three overarching divisions for economic, human, and sustainable development. The SPC has expanded to more than six hundred staff, with sub-offices in a number of countries. Rodgers was replaced by Dr Colin Tukuitonga, a Niuean who previously worked as chief executive officer of the New Zealand Ministry for Pacific Island Affairs and as head of the SPC Public Health Division.

The incoming SPC director-general will lead a review of the agency's governance structures and promote new partnerships for the agency, including the proposed creation of new categories for associate members and observers and a bid to obtain permanent observer status at the UN General Assembly (a status already obtained by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat).

Renewed debate about regionalism comes at a time of shifting trends in trade, labor mobility, and aid delivery, but also when regional organizations are still struggling with the dilemma of Fiji's role in the region.

Most Pacific countries are reliant on Official Development Assistance, but the provision of aid is being transformed in a number of ways. Aid flows are affected by the rise of new donors, especially from Asia; the expansion of remittances and direct investment as sources of revenue; debates over aid effectiveness and the quality as well as quantity of development assistance; the link between development aid and climate financing; and the restructuring of aid delivery by donors like Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

The shifting landscape of international aid was evident at the 2011 summit on aid effectiveness in Busan, Korea. This meeting highlighted new trends in global aid governance, with the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) increasingly sidelined by the involvement of nontraditional donors and civil society organizations. The post-Busan paradigm views aid alongside other available resources for poverty reduction (such as investment and remittance flows), with an increased focus on transparency and an emphasis on South-South cooperation rather than traditional North-South donor-recipient arrangements.

Western donors in the Pacific have been stressing the importance of the Cairns Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination. After the 2009 leaders meeting in Cairns, the Forum initiated a series of thirteen peer reviews of aid management in the Islands, which were completed in 2013 with reviews of Solomon Islands (September), Cook Islands (October), and Sāmoa (November).

A range of new aid donors are operating in the Pacific, including China, south Korea, Indonesia, Israel, and United Arab Emirates, which complicates the scene for traditional donors. Even Papua New Guinea has begun to allocate small but strategic amounts of aid to other Island nations, including climate adaptation funding to Kiribati, Marshall Islands, and Tonga, and 50 million PNG kina (approximately US\$20.5 million) to assist Fiji in preparations for its 2014 elections. At the 2013 Forum leaders meeting in Majuro, PNG Prime

Minister Peter O'Neill stated that his government would introduce a special budget allocation in 2014 to fund a regional development assistance program (Maclellan 2013d).

A September resolution in the UN General Assembly, cosponsored by forty-seven nations, highlighted improved cooperation between the United Nations and Pacific regional organizations, following the 2011 visit to the Pacific Islands Forum by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon.

Australia remains the largest aid, trade, and military power in the South Pacific, but the country's September 2013 national elections opened a new era for engagement with the region. Despite bipartisan continuity on trade and security issues, the incoming conservative Coalition government under Tony Abbott is abandoning key policies adopted by Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard of the Australian Labor Party between 2007 and 2013.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop detailed new policies for the region, including normalization of relations with the Bainimarama regime in Fiji, a major restructuring and reduction of Australia's aid program, the expansion of asylum seeker detention centers in Nauru and on PNG's Manus Island, and cuts to money pledged for climate adaptation funding. At the same time, she pledged new engagement with Papua New Guinea, with renewed support for security sector reform and significant Australian investment in the country's liquefied natural gas and oil industry.

A week before the September elections, incoming Australian Treasurer Joe Hockey announced that A\$4.5 billion will be cut from planned expan-

sion of the Australian aid program over the next four years, abandoning Australia's bipartisan pledge to increase Official Development Assistance to 0.5 percent of gross national income (one Australian dollar is approximately US\$.90). In January 2014, Foreign Minister Bishop announced A\$650 million in cuts to the existing 2013–14 aid budget, affecting bilateral, regional, and global programs. The Pacific lost at least A\$64 million in direct aid, as well as funding channeled through regional and international bodies (Maclellan 2014a).

The aid cuts came as Australia followed Canada and New Zealand in closing down its independent statutory aid agency. The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) was abolished, merging its operations into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Nongovernmental organizations expressed concern that the merger means disruption of aid delivery and the loss of many experienced staff as DFAT takes over responsibility for Australia's A\$5 billion aid program.

At the November 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Small Island and Least Developed Country governments were shocked by announcements from Canada and Australia that they would not contribute funding to the new Green Climate Fund, an important global mechanism to assist with climate adaptation and mitigation (Maclellan 2013e). Australia had been cochair of the Green Climate Fund board until October, but the incoming Abbott government has moved to cut funding for international climate activities as well as to

eliminate Australia's domestic carbon tax and Climate Change Authority. (In 2012–13, Australia spent A\$74 million on global environment programs; by the end of the 2013–14 budget cuts, this amount had been reduced to zero.)

These changes will worry Pacific governments, which stress the link between climate funding, energy, and development. These themes were highlighted in March at the Pacific Energy Summit in Auckland and the May Pacific Climate Change Financing Workshop in Nadi. The workshop considered a new Pacific Climate Change Finance Assessment Framework and a case study on Nauru, to showcase the best mechanisms to access and utilize climate finance (Pasisi and others 2013a, 2013b).

Reduction of climate finance will severely impact small island states already affected by extreme weather events. In January 2013, governments launched the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance fund, a pilot program designed to guarantee post-disaster reconstruction funding for smaller states. A year later, after Category 5 Cyclone Ian devastated the Ha'apai Islands, Tonga became the first country in the region to access US\$1.27 million from the insurance fund. Cook Islands joined five other countries (Marshall Islands, Sāmoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu) in the second season of the pilot, which runs between November 2013 and October 2014 (PIFS 2013b; GFDRR 2013).

Following a regional climate summit in Nadi in July, the Pacific is leading the way as the first region in the world to fully integrate disaster risk management and climate

change into a single overarching policy framework. For many years, government and donor priorities on disaster response have been guided by two separate frameworks: the Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework for Action, and the Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change. The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and supporting donors are developing a new combined strategy, to be called the Strategy for Climate and Resilient Development in the Pacific (SRDP), to replace the existing regional policies when they expire in 2015 (Hay and Pratt 2013).

Climate policy was also a central feature of the annual Forum leaders meeting, hosted by the Marshall Islands. RMI President Christopher Loeak and Minister in Assistance Tony de Brum mobilized support for the Majuro Declaration on Climate Leadership, seeking commitments to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. Unlike his predecessor Hillary Clinton (who attended the 2012 summit in Cook Islands), US Secretary of State John Kerry did not attend the 2013 Majuro summit.

Small island states expressed their frustration at the failure of OECD countries to meet their pledges on climate finance and emissions reduction. Tuvalu Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga said: "Too much talking has been done on this issue; there is urgent need for real action on the ground" (SIS 2013). In November, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) released a report that estimates that the total climate-change cost in the Pacific will range from 2.9 percent to 12.7 percent

of annual gross domestic product by 2100 (ADB 2013).

Throughout the year, governments met to develop “island friendly” policies in the lead up to the Third Conference on Small Island Developing States, to be hosted in Sāmoa in September 2014. These policies will also be used at the UN secretary-general’s 2014 climate summit, the 2015 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations in Paris for a global climate treaty, and a summit the same year to develop new “Sustainable Development Goals” to replace the 2000–2015 Millennium Development Goals.

As part of the new sustainable development goals, governments like Solomon Islands, Palau, and Nauru are lobbying for a new global goal to protect the oceans. In February, Tokelauan politician Foua Toloa was appointed to the Global Oceans Commission, a new body created to address serious challenges facing the high seas.

Trade policy continued to dominate the regional agenda. Forum Island governments participated in free-trade negotiations with Australia and New Zealand through the expanded Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations, known as PACER-Plus. They also strengthened their role under the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA), with more countries commencing trade under this Islands-only accord. In October, Nauru ratified the PICTA Trade in Services Protocol, becoming only the second of ten countries to ratify the services agreement since it was opened for signature in August 2012.

Some Pacific governments

expressed frustration over limits placed by Australia and New Zealand on agricultural imports, with PNG Trade Minister Richard Maru stating: “My country is not interested in PACER-Plus, our focus is the MSG Trade Agreement. Our feeling at the moment is that PACER-Plus would be one sided in favour of Australia and New Zealand. We are frustrated with them. We can’t export our taro there, they won’t accept our greens. There’s nothing to be gained from a trade agreement at the moment. We cannot justify the huge amount of resources we expend on such negotiations. They are a complete waste of time” (Pareti 2013).

After ten years of negotiations and four missed deadlines, talks continued over the proposed Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the European Union (EU) and Pacific members of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (ACP).

The drawn-out EPA negotiations are souring relations with the European Union, with Island governments critical of the inequality in the Pacific-EU partnership, the bureaucracy and complexity of EU aid delivery, and EU fisheries policies that attempt to subvert the sustainability principles advocated by the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and the Parties to the Nauru Agreement. The European Centre for Development Policy and Management (ECDPM) acknowledged that “the perception exists that the EU has tried to use a trade agreement on goods and services (EPA) to put pressure on Pacific countries and the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission to obtain advantageous measures that can further European

commercial interests” (Laporte and Puig 2013, 9).

In June, the European Commission published a “Draft Report for a Comprehensive EU Fishery Strategy in the Pacific Region,” which raised concern that access to fish remains the primary EU interest in the region. The draft document recommended that no derogation of rules of origin for fisheries products be granted to any PACP country under the current EPA negotiations, unless the EU fishing industry is given increased access to island Exclusive Economic Zones. EU officials also opposed FFA policy on the Vessel Day Scheme, which has been accepted by Asian deepwater fishing nations. (The Vessel Day Scheme allocates fishing days between FFA members and has led to increased fishing license revenues for Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Tuvalu.)

EU negotiators are attempting to divide and rule, in spite of the stated commitment under the 2000 Cotonou agreement between the European Union and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific group (ACP) to promote regional integration. In July, the European Union suspended EPA negotiations after a request to introduce significant changes in PACP national laws dealing with the management of fisheries resources. There was a further impasse in negotiations in Brussels in October, with the European Union refusing to address Pacific agendas.

In December, the EU trade commissioner organized a hastily convened meeting of PACP Trade and Fisheries Ministers in Solomon Islands, but without representation from Papua New Guinea and Fiji, the only two countries that have signed interim

EPAs because of their sugar and fish exports to Europe. There was a war of words after Fiji angrily condemned this maneuvering by the European Union and the Forum Secretariat (Vuibau 2013; PIFS 2013a).

Fiji will be affected by the new EU agricultural policy announced in June to abolish sugar quotas in 2017, three years earlier than expected. Developing countries are worried that an early abolition of quotas will cause the failure of many ACP sugar industries. The European Union will also limit trade with nondemocratic regimes, which places pressure on the military-backed government in Suva. Fiji must decide before 1 October 2014 whether to ratify its signature of an Interim EPA with the European Union, as Papua New Guinea has done, or lose key trade advantages.

EU Climate Commissioner Connie Hedegaard of Denmark visited Majuro in August for the Forum leaders meeting, but her attempts to build an EU-Pacific alliance for the 2013 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations in Warsaw were undercut by these EU machinations over fisheries and trade.

As payback, Forum leaders deferred the application by Spain to become a Post-Forum Dialogue Partner, even as Cuba was granted the status. Some Forum governments were angry over aggressive EU fishing operations, such as a Spanish fishing vessel being fined US\$1 million for illegally fishing in Nauruan waters. (In contrast, Cuba has been training dozens of Islands medical personnel in Havana and works cooperatively with fellow members of the Alliance of Small Island States [AOSIS] on climate policy.)

Pacific diplomats are also working to strengthen the ACP. Fiji's former Foreign Minister Kaliopate Tavola and Sāmoa's former Finance Secretary Kolone Vaai were members of an ACP Eminent Persons Group discussing the future of the ACP Group and its relations with the European Union. After a visit by the group to the region in March, a further meeting was held in Sāmoa in October, preceding consultations in the Caribbean and Africa.

The strengthening of the PACP, with a new regional secretariat in Port Moresby, reflected additional independent diplomatic activity outside of the Pacific Islands Forum.

Island perspectives on the new regionalism were best summarized by Roch Wamytan, the New Caledonian member of the 2013 MSG Eminent Persons Group. When interviewed in Majuro in September, the Kanak leader told me that the major powers must respect the growing sense of autonomy in Island nations: "You see this across the region, especially with the Melanesians but also with the Polynesians and Micronesians. All of us want a certain autonomy and to cease constantly being under the influence of the colonial powers—or even the larger nations like Australia and New Zealand. We want to have a space where we can talk amongst ourselves without each time having to refer to the big countries, each of which have their own interests and agendas."

The two largest Melanesian nations, Papua New Guinea and Fiji, expanded their regional and international roles, campaigning for South-South engagement and advancing their own agenda on trade, decolonization,

and aid (though not always acting in the interests of their smaller island neighbors). Other countries followed suit: In April, Solomon Islands officially opened a new diplomatic mission in Havana, to support more than 100 medical students studying in the Cuban capital. In August, Solomon Islands' first resident ambassador in Malaysia presented his credentials. The following month, the Solomon Islands deputy prime minister told the UN General Assembly, "We intend to strengthen our ties with the wider Asia and Pacific region, including ASEAN [the Association of South East Asian Nations] and India" (Maelanga 2013).

While facing criticism for its economic policies, constitutional vandalism, and restraint of domestic political debate, the Bainimarama regime has been active on the regional and international stage.

Over five years, Fiji has increased the number of overseas embassies from eleven to seventeen and is seeking to expand the Pacific region's links to emerging powers in the developing world. This diplomatic dynamism has reinforced growing debate about the Forum's preeminence and the independent role of subregional institutions, including the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), the Micronesian Chief Executives meeting, and the Polynesian Leaders Group (PLG).

PLG criticism of the military regime in Fiji has been undercut by the desire of the Australian and New Zealand governments to rebuild relations with Suva, where they perceive growing political influence from China and other Asian powers. The Pacific Islands Forum Ministerial Contact Group visited Fiji in April, meeting

Minister of Foreign Affairs Ratu Inoke Kubuabola and Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum.

Suspended from Forum meetings since 2009, Fiji has attempted to create new fora for Pacific nations to hold discussions on an Island-centered agenda. This foreign policy was highlighted at the Melanesian Spearhead Group summit in New Caledonia in June and at the inaugural meeting of the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), held in Fiji in August.

This latter initiative by the Bainimarama regime, which received funding support from China, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, serves two purposes: as a mechanism for debate about sustainable development in the Islands, but also as an alternative meeting place to the Forum, perceived as dominated by Australia and New Zealand. According to University of the South Pacific academic Sandra Tarte: “The PIDF reflects a new dynamism that has characterized Pacific regionalism over the past few years and that has challenged the established donor-dominated CROP system. Within this more fluid environment Pacific states have sought to take control of regional processes and agendas (whether fisheries, trade, or security) through promoting alternative regional frameworks and alliances” (Tarte 2013, 6).

A unique feature of the PIDF is that it included governments, business, and civil society organizations on an equal footing. The inaugural meeting discussed regional definitions of sustainability and development, providing a platform for Timor-Leste President Xanana Gusmao, alongside leaders from Solomon Islands, Nauru, Kiri-

bati, and Federated States of Micronesia. (Australia and New Zealand sent observers, but the Samoan government, long critical of the Bainimarama regime, declined to attend.)

One practical outcome of the PIDF was an agreement between Bainimarama and Gusmao for members of the Fiji Volunteer Service to work in Timor-Leste in education and other sectors, with a memorandum of understanding being signed in November.

Critics of the military regime have suggested that the PIDF may not survive beyond Fiji’s reintegration into the Forum, after scheduled elections in September 2014. However, Prime Minister Bainimarama has stated that there will be no reduction of support for the PIDF: “This is a new initiative by Fiji to bolster relationships between the island countries and allow us to try to work out our problems without external interference. Fiji’s problem with the Pacific Forum is that it’s dominated by Australia and New Zealand and they largely set the agenda. They’ve got a couple of Polynesian countries in their back pockets and managed to get Fiji suspended. Fine. We’re not interested in coming back. We want a new regional structure without the Aussies and Kiwis that more reflects the concerns of Pacific Island nations. So this new body allows us to try to find solutions to our own problems, not solutions prescribed by our larger neighbours” (Bainimarama 2013a).

The Fiji government created a new PIDF Secretariat and in October granted diplomatic status to the headquarters as an international organization under the Diplomatic Privileges

and Immunities Act of 1971. This gives the PIDF rights similar to those of other UN and CROP agencies hosted in the country. It also reinforced a sense of competition with the Suva-based Forum Secretariat, which was the only major regional agency not represented at the founding PIDF meeting.

Throughout the year, Fiji served as chair of the Group of 77 (G77) plus China—the first time a Pacific Island nation has led this 132-member bloc of developing nations within the United Nations. Taking up the chairmanship in January, Bainimarama stated: “Today, South-South cooperation remains our primary focus. The exchange of resources, technology and knowledge between developing nations has increased in importance and scope, and we believe strongly in South-South cooperation as a complement to North-South cooperation” (Bainimarama 2013b).

In May, the Fiji government hosted the “G77 plus China Panel of Eminent Personalities of the South” at Natadola, to update the Development Platform for the South (Khor 2013). MSG prime ministers and a range of developing country ambassadors and experts were joined by President Evo Morales of Bolivia, who takes over as G77 chair in 2014.

Following the meeting, Bainimarama stated: “In the interests of global harmony, equity and development, we must strengthen the development commitments of North-South, South-South and triangular co-operation. . . . We have also agreed on the need to reinforce the co-ordination of developing countries in our policy and joint negotiating positions on major issues

in the international agenda” (Chaudhary 2013).

In spite of these diplomatic initiatives, it is not all smooth sailing. There are tensions within and between members of the Forum, the MSG, and the PLG over controversial topics like Fiji’s democracy, West Papua, trade, and decolonization.

MSG unity was challenged in 2013 by a complex debate over West Papua and relations with Indonesia. Trade and aid links are growing between Port Moresby, Suva, and Jakarta, but there is also significant Melanesian solidarity in favor of self-determination for the West Papuan people, who face ongoing human rights abuses by the Indonesian police and military. (At year’s end, more than seventy political prisoners were in jail in West Papua, with more than 530 arrests of pro-independence activists during 2013.)

The West Papua National Council for Liberation (WPNCCL), which has an information office in Port Vila, formally applied for membership at the MSG leaders summit in June (in line with the precedent of the FLNKS independence movement being a full MSG member in place of the Government of New Caledonia). WPNCCL leaders were formally invited to attend and address the MSG summit in Noumea, to the annoyance of Indonesia, which already has observer status. In spite of lobbying by West Papuan representatives, the MSG leaders agreed to defer the WPNCCL application until a delegation of Melanesian foreign ministers could visit Jakarta and Jayapura.

The summit revealed that Vanuatu and New Caledonia’s FLNKS are more supportive of WPNCCL membership, while Papua New Guinea and Fiji

have much closer ties to Indonesia (with the Bainimarama regime building economic and political links with the Asian power through the Non-Aligned Movement and G77). Solomon Islands has swung closer to Indonesia as well, with Prime Minister Gordon Darcy Lilo traveling to Jakarta in August on a trade mission, which the Vanuatu government perceived as an effort to undercut the foreign ministers' delegation. Vanuatu later boycotted the mission to West Papua after Indonesia transformed the trip into a trade mission and refused access to pro-independence church and civil society representatives during a brief visit to Jayapura.

Greater solidarity was shown with the Maohi self-determination movement in French Polynesia, led by Oscar Manutahi Temaru. In a major breakthrough after years of lobbying, a consensus resolution of the UN General Assembly in May reinscribed French Polynesia on the UN list of non-self-governing territories, even as Temaru lost the election for the local assembly in Tahiti.

The UN resolution, fiercely opposed by the French government and incoming French Polynesian President Gaston Flosse, was initiated by Solomon Islands, Nauru, and Tuvalu, with active support from other Island nations (Maclellan 2013b). It opens the way for greater international scrutiny of France's policies in French Polynesia: in December, the UN General Assembly decided to send a mission to French Polynesia to investigate the economic, social, and environmental impacts of thirty years of French nuclear testing.

MSG solidarity with New Cale-

donia's FLNKS provides a crucial platform for the Kanak independence movement as the French dependency moves to May 2014 congressional elections. (By a three-fifths majority, the incoming Congress can decide to proceed to a referendum on self-determination before 2018.) In its role as MSG chair, the FLNKS has an important platform for gaining international support. A month after the MSG summit, Forum Chair Sir Henry Puna of the Cook Islands led a long-delayed Forum mission to New Caledonia to review the progress of the 1998 Noumea Accord—the first official Forum visit in eight years. The United Nations sent a formal mission in March 2014 to investigate disputes over the electoral roll for the crucial May elections.

Following the postcoup collapse of the Fiji Human Rights Commission (the only one of its type in the Islands), the Asia-Pacific Forum for National Human Rights Institutions has been investigating the establishment of national human rights institutions in other Forum Island countries. After the Parliament of Samoa passed the Ombudsman (Komesina O Sulufaiga) Act of 2013, the National Human Rights Institution of Samoa was officially launched on International Human Rights Day, 10 December. The Forum Secretariat has also been promoting national consultations on human rights, with meetings held in Vanuatu, Palau, and Niue during the year.

A focus on human rights in Australia was the campaign by the Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI) community to mark the 150th anniversary of the 1863 arrival of the schooner *Don*

Juan. The vessel's landfall in Australia, carrying sixty-seven Islanders to work on the Queensland cotton plantations, was the start of the blackbirding era. By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly sixty thousand Melanesians had been coerced, kidnapped, or indentured to work in cotton fields and sugarcane farms across Queensland and northern New South Wales.

The Australian-born descendants of those Melanesian workers organized in 2013 to remember the Pacific labor trade and to assert contemporary demands. Between June and August, there were exhibitions and talks across Queensland, together with ceremonies in Port Vila in July. The anniversary year ended in November with a conference to elect a National ASSI Secretariat, which will lobby for greater recognition.

The Pacific ecumenical movement has also continued to advocate for human rights, self-determination, trade, and environmental issues. This social justice agenda was mandated by the 10th General Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), held in Honiara in March. PCC General Secretary Reverend François Pihaatae of French Polynesia has called for action on nuclear issues: "We must speak out, for if we remain silent the larger countries will be under the misconception that their testing, development and construction of nuclear weapons are acceptable. . . . That is why we will continue to call for a global ban on nuclear weapons. These weapons are no good for the Pacific and no good for the world" (ICAN 2014, 5).

Women's groups were active on

issues of security, joining other civil society organizations in May for a regional dialogue on conflict, peace, and security at the Forum Secretariat. More than two hundred delegates attended the 12th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women in Rarotonga in October, debating representation in parliament, sexual and reproductive rights, and violence in the home and community.

In July, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) celebrated its tenth anniversary in Honiara, with Forum Secretary-General Slade noting that "RAMSI stands out as an example of regional cooperation and partnership at its best" (PIFS 2013c).

RAMSI is winding down, with the removal of military forces from Solomon Islands and, beginning 1 July 2013, the transition from RAMSI's development assistance programs to bilateral agreements with Australia, New Zealand, and other donors. The only truly regional component of RAMSI, with staff from all sixteen Forum member countries, is the Participating Police Force, which will continue until 2017.

Post-RAMSI, Papua New Guinea is working with Fiji on regional peacekeeping. Military leaders from Suva and Port Moresby have agreed to pool together their forces under a new defense cooperation agreement incorporating the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and the Papua New Guinea Defence Force. The Melanesian Spearhead Group began looking at an MSG Police Formed Unit in 2011, to send police officers on international peacekeeping missions. At their June 2013 summit in New

Caledonia, this concept was expanded as MSG leaders endorsed the establishment of a Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Fiji is looking beyond traditional allies for military training and equipment. In May, Prime Minister Bainimarama traveled to China to meet Premier Li Keqiang and President Xi Jinping. He also announced talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin while in Moscow for the Rugby Sevens World Cup in June. A Fiji military delegation visited China in November, led by Minister for Defence and National Security Joketani Cokanasiga and the RFMF chief of staff, Brigadier General Mohammed Aziz. The delegation met China's Minister of National Defense General Chang Wanquan to discuss cooperation and exchanges between the RFMF and the People's Liberation Army.

Perceiving that China and other developing powers are expanding their political influence in the Islands region, the Australia–New Zealand–United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) allies have been seeking to improve their own strategic dialogue.

In May, the inaugural South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting (SPDMM) was held in Nuku'alofa. Ministers, ambassadors, and military officers from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, France, and Chile (but not Fiji) met with observers from the United States and the United Kingdom in the first of a series of annual summits (MacLellan 2013a). The same month, the Forum Secretariat and the United Nations Development Program convened a meeting in Fiji on "Security Sector Governance in the Pacific," to propose national

policies to coordinate police, customs, immigration, and defense forces.

At the SPDMM, defense ministers agreed on new regional war games to be called Exercise Povai Endeavour. The Australian government announced the extension of its Pacific Patrol Boat Program, which has provided vessels and naval advisors to Island governments since the 1980s. Under a new Pacific Maritime Security Program, aging patrol boats will be replaced after 2018. Western powers will increase maritime surveillance programs in Island exclusive economic zones through the Quadri-lateral Defence Coordination Group.

After a series of meetings to prepare the ground, the United States and New Zealand announced the formal resumption of bilateral military cooperation. Regional tours in 2010 and 2012 by former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced a revised policy on ship visits, but this was formally confirmed in October 2013 by Obama administration Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and NZ Minister of Defence Jonathan Coleman.

The decision comes nearly thirty years after the US government imposed a military embargo on New Zealand, after Wellington banned all nuclear armed and powered vessels from entering NZ waters. US and NZ agencies secretly resumed intelligence sharing in 2009, but the latest announcement opens the way for joint exercises and naval exchanges. A New Zealand warship will visit Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i, as part of the RIMPAC 2014 naval exercises, the first such visit in more than three decades.

Australia and Papua New Guinea held their inaugural bilateral Defence Ministers Meeting on 10 December, and Port Moresby will host the next regional SPDMM in 2014, a reflection of broader security coordination between Canberra, Wellington, and Port Moresby (MacLellan 2014b, 25). Just before Christmas, PNG Prime Minister O'Neill launched the country's first ever National Security Policy and an updated Defence White Paper, after increasing defense spending to 188 million kina (A\$94 million) in the 2013 PNG budget.

Regional security issues also came to the fore with the release of documents by US whistle-blower Edward Snowden, which revealed signals intelligence operations by the US National Security Agency (NSA) and affiliated agencies from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada (the so-called five eyes alliance).

Documents released by Snowden show that the NSA and its partners have monitored the phones of the leaders of Germany, France, Brazil, and Indonesia. The Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) was revealed to be monitoring the personal phones of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, his wife, and key officials.

The government of Timor-Leste has also raised concern over reports that the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) had bugged government offices in Dili during 2004 discussions on the Timor Gap Treaty, which governs maritime boundaries and oil reserves in the waters between Australia and Timor-Leste. Newspapers reported that US intelligence agencies have engaged in commercial espionage

against Brazilian and French energy and oil corporations (Coppola 2013).

Revelations over Australian intelligence operations against Indonesia and Timor-Leste have sparked concern in Pacific countries, with PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill stating: "We know this might be happening, but it would certainly be a breach of trust. Among friends, this is not necessary. If there are issues to be discussed, all they have to do is pick up the phone and give us a call, as they do on many other matters. Under our laws, it is illegal to tap phones, a serious criminal matter" (Callick 2013, 22).

American and allied agencies have also bugged trade and climate summits, including UN meetings and the G20. US agencies intercepted communications before and during the 2009 Copenhagen climate negotiations, monitoring EU, G77, and AOSIS positions, with leaked NSA documents stating: "Signals intelligence will undoubtedly play a significant role in keeping our negotiators as well informed as possible throughout the two-week event" (Gjerding and others 2014).

Former Central Intelligence Agency Director Michael Hayden has stated that, unlike the Chinese government, the United States does not use its surveillance capacity for economic purposes: "We steal these secrets to keep our citizens free and safe. We don't steal secrets to make our citizens rich" (Potter 2014, 21). However, documents from the Snowden cache directly contradict this assertion. The *New York Times* revealed that Australia's ASD had gathered information on Indonesian trade negotiations with the United States and had offered to share

this information with the US government (Risen and Poitras 2014).

In December 2013, Australian Attorney General George Brandis approved raids by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) on the lawyer who is mounting Timor-Leste's arbitration case against Australia before the International Court of Justice on disputed maritime boundaries and oil revenues. The ASIO raided the home of the senior ASIS intelligence officer who was reportedly involved in the bugging of Timor government offices in 2004, when former Foreign Minister Alexander Downer was in government. (Today, Downer's consulting company has a contract with Woodside Petroleum, the transnational corporation involved in Timor Sea oil exploration.)

The potential revelation of similar activities in the Pacific Islands may complicate relations at a crucial time for Pacific regionalism.

NIC MACLELLAN

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