

17

The ‘New Pacific Diplomacy’: An Introduction

Sandra Tarte and Greg Fry

This chapter is the introduction to another book published by ANU Press, listed below. It is republished in this collection as it is the best analysis we have of the ‘new Pacific diplomacy’, an assertion of Pacific countries’ diplomatic independence in recent years on a wide range of issues from oceans management to fisheries and climate change.

— Stewart Firth and Vijay Naidu (eds)

Sandra Tarte: Personal Journey

As an early career scholar at the University of the South Pacific (USP), I was drawn to The Australian National University for my PhD studies by its reputation in the fields of Pacific studies and international relations. It was Greg Fry who directed me to the Australia-Japan Research Centre at ANU, where I subsequently completed my PhD under the supervision of Professor Peter Drysdale. After completing my degree, I returned to my position as a lecturer in history/politics at USP. But my links with ANU continued. My PhD, ‘Japan’s Aid Diplomacy and the Pacific Islands’, was published jointly by ANU’s National Centre for Development Studies and USP’s Institute of Pacific Studies in 1998. That same year I spent part of my sabbatical with the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia program at ANU, writing an article on multilateral fisheries negotiations in the Pacific. This was later published in the *Journal of Pacific History* (Vol. 34, No. 3, 1999).

In more recent years, I have had the privilege of working at USP with a number of scholars from ANU (past and present) who have provided me with inspiration, collegiality and friendship. They include Stewart Firth, Scott MacWilliam, Greg Fry and, more recently, Matthew Allen. I am particularly proud of the collaboration with Greg that produced *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, a joint ANU/USP publication. Another recent ANU collaboration was with Matthew Dornan and Tess Newton-Cain from the Development Policy Centre at ANU, together with Wesley Morgan from USP, on green growth in the Pacific islands. I continue to contribute articles to the *East Asia Forum* blog, published by ANU.

Greg Fry: Personal Journey

I have had a very close connection with the University of the South Pacific (USP) over the last 43 years. It began in 1975 when I stayed on the USP campus as part of my field research for my master's thesis on Pacific regionalism. At this time, the campus was the vibrant centre for 'Pacific Way' activism in academia, the arts and literature, and political protest on nuclear activities. It was also the home of the new South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation working on regional cooperation on trade, law of the sea and economic development. This exciting experience sparked my interest in the study of regionalism and Pacific politics, which I then continued at The Australian National University (ANU) in teaching and research. In 1981, I jumped at the opportunity to return to USP for a short-term appointment to teach politics in the School of Social and Economic Development. Even though I had to return to my position at ANU, this experience inspired me to spend a few weeks each subsequent year at USP engaging with regional scholars. I found this to be an invaluable support for my research and teaching of Pacific politics at ANU. In 2011, I was fortunate to be able to return to USP for five years. It was a very exciting time to be at the regional university and to be with colleagues who shared my interest in regional politics. It resulted in the production of a book, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, co-edited with Sandra Tarte and jointly published by ANU Press and USP Press. It brought together a number of Pacific Island voices on the key issues in the changing regional landscape. I continue my involvement with USP as an adjunct associate professor involved in teaching postgraduate courses as required.

Tarte, S. and G. Fry 2015. The 'New Pacific Diplomacy': An Introduction. In G. Fry and S. Tarte (eds), *The New Pacific Diplomacy*. Canberra: ANU Press.

Republished with the kind permission of ANU Press.

Since 2009 there has been a fundamental shift in the way that Pacific Island states engage with regional and world politics. The region has experienced what President Anote Tong of Kiribati has aptly called a 'paradigm shift' in ideas about how Pacific diplomacy should be organised, and on what principles it should operate. Many leaders have called for a heightened Pacific voice in global affairs and a new commitment to establishing Pacific Island control of this diplomatic process. This change in thinking has been expressed in the establishment of new channels and arenas for Pacific diplomacy at the regional and global levels, and new ways of connecting the two levels through active use of intermediate diplomatic associations.

This shift to a 'new Pacific diplomacy' is as fundamental as the move by the independent Pacific Island states four decades ago to create a postcolonial diplomatic system through the establishment of the South Pacific Forum (renamed Pacific Islands Forum in 2000) (Fry 1994). Indeed, in many ways, the current activity is reminiscent of that time—in its assertive attitude, the emphasis on Pacific Island control of the diplomatic agenda, the creation of new institutions, its appeal to regional identity and its concern with negotiating global agendas that are impacting Pacific societies. It is not, in our view, too dramatic to see this as a time of transformation of the regional diplomatic culture equivalent to the move from the colonial to the postcolonial era, a time that represents a transformation of regional order.¹

This book brings together a range of analyses and perspectives on these dramatic new developments in Pacific diplomacy at sub-regional, regional and global levels, and in the key sectors of global negotiation for Pacific states: oceans management, fisheries, climate change, sustainable development, decolonisation, seabed mining and trade.² It also examines state and non-government roles in this new Pacific diplomacy. The book also focuses on the question of the significance of these new developments in negotiating global issues of key importance to the Pacific, and the implications for the future of the regional diplomatic architecture. Some of these perspectives are analyses of new developments, others are proposals that can be seen as part of the new Pacific diplomacy. Examples of the latter include the call by Cook Islands Prime Minister Henry

1 Sandra Tarte makes the detailed case for seeing the new Pacific diplomacy as constituting a shift in regional order (Tarte 2014).

2 Most of these chapters were first delivered as papers to the New Pacific Diplomacy Workshop organised by the School of Government, Development and International Affairs, the University of the South Pacific, Suva, 4–5 December 2014.

Puna to 're-imagine' the region, President Tong's appeal for the Pacific to 'chart its own course' and Ambassador Kaliopate Tavola's proposal for a Pacific-controlled Pacific Islands Forum (without Australia and New Zealand) to better meet the strategic necessities of the Pacific Island states in global diplomacy.

To create a context for considering these perspectives, this introductory chapter explores five questions. First, what do we mean by 'Pacific diplomacy'? Second, what are the expressions of the new Pacific diplomacy? Third, how significant is the new Pacific diplomacy? Fourth, how should we understand its emergence? Fifth, what are the implications of the new Pacific diplomacy for the negotiation of Pacific Island interests and for the future regional architecture?

'Pacific Diplomacy'

As employed in the following chapters, the 'Pacific' refers to the thousands of islands and island societies scattered across the Pacific Ocean, stretching from the Micronesian islands just south of Japan and east of the Philippines, south to Papua New Guinea and down the Melanesian chain of islands to New Caledonia, then east across the Polynesian Pacific to Tahiti. These societies are politically organised into 14 postcolonial states (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) and the remaining dependent territories of France (New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna and French Polynesia), Britain (Pitcairn Island), New Zealand (Tokelau) and the US (American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands). Taking into account its sea area (largely made up of 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zones of the constituent states and territories), this region is roughly the size of Africa.

By 'Pacific diplomacy', we mean the diplomacy pursued by Pacific states in global forums, or in multilateral arenas in which the Pacific bloc is negotiating with just one external power (as in the case of tuna negotiations with the US). This includes negotiations within the Pacific group to determine joint positions to be taken to global talks. It refers to their engagement in the joint negotiation of such matters as trade, sustainable development, climate change, nuclear issues, decolonisation and fisheries. We also include the diplomatic activity concerned with

establishing the diplomatic institutions in which regional diplomacy is carried out and a Pacific joint position is negotiated. Finally, we include in our definition of Pacific diplomacy the accepted principles, norms and practices that underpin regional diplomacy and might be usefully described as constituting a regional diplomatic culture.

The history of Pacific diplomacy, so defined, begins in a concerted way in the mid-1960s as the first Pacific Island states became independent from colonial rule. The new Pacific states conducted their own foreign policies, but as small island states their capacity for extensive unilateral diplomacy was limited.³ From the start, there was a commitment to regional diplomacy and joint diplomatic approaches in global forums to effect diplomatic outcomes. In this volume, Transform Aqorau refers to this as 'the diplomacy of the past, the "Pacific Way", and doing things by consensus'.

The key vehicle for this Pacific diplomacy was the South Pacific Forum. It was established partly to promote cooperation on regional ventures, but, just as importantly, also to take a Pacific voice to the world. The Pacific Island states were preoccupied with working together to advance their interests in global diplomacy as well as integrating their economies. They did so by creating a regional organisation, the South Pacific Forum. In the 1970s and 1980s, the forum was very active in expressing a Pacific diplomacy on key issues. Their successful joint diplomacy, which took place under the auspices of the forum, culminated in a series of international treaties on resource protection, environmental issues and tuna access, and prohibitions on drift-net fishing, the dumping of radioactive wastes in Pacific waters, nuclear testing and trade (Fry 1994). They also collectively achieved the reinscription of New Caledonia on the list of territories falling under the oversight of the United Nations (UN) Decolonisation Committee. These were notable achievements for joint diplomacy by the Pacific states as they took on the world's most powerful countries on issues of great concern to the national interest of those powers.

From the mid-1990s, the forum was much less active in global diplomacy. Led by an Australian and New Zealand concern with promoting regional integration and a new regional economic order along neoliberal lines, the forum became focused on regional integration (Fry 2005). This was joined by a War on Terror security agenda from 2001, focusing on countering

3 These constraints are explored in Boyce and Herr (1974).

transnational organised crime and terrorism. While there were examples of the earlier diplomacy being pursued by the forum secretariat—on trade negotiations with Europe, and with Australia and New Zealand, for example (as described by Wesley Morgan in this volume)—this had largely disappeared by 2000. By then, the forum appeared to have moved away from its founding objective of assisting Pacific states to negotiate jointly on global issues impacting the region.

The New Diplomatic System

The most dramatic expression of what we are calling the new Pacific diplomacy has been associated with Fiji's activist foreign policy since its suspension from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in 2009. The Bainimarama Government enunciated several new foreign policy principles aimed at circumventing its isolation in regional and global diplomacy: that Fiji should garner and represent a Pacific voice that could be heard in global forums; that Fiji should promote itself as the hub of the Pacific and as a leader of Pacific Island states; that it should engage in south–south cooperation in the Pacific and the wider world; that regional diplomacy and regional institutions should be firmly controlled by Pacific Island states and not constrained by metropolitan powers (especially Australia and New Zealand); and that the Pacific should be better organised to engage in global diplomacy. The Fiji Government also introduced the idea of including civil society, the private sector and dependent territories, alongside independent governments, as equal partners in a new kind of 'network diplomacy'.

Fiji expressed these ideas in a series of major initiatives: in giving leadership to a renaissance of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG); in creating the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF); and by invigorating the existing Pacific Small Island Developing States at the UN as a Pacific Island–only bloc to a point where it replaced the PIF as the main representative of the Pacific voice at the UN. These developments in Fiji's new Pacific diplomacy are described and examined in the chapters by Ambassador Mawi and Makereta Komai.

It is, however, a central premise underlying the approach of this book that it would be a mistake to see the new Pacific diplomacy as solely a Fiji phenomenon. Fiji policy and leadership has obviously been the

key catalyst, but it is important to note the wider support for these new institutions and ideas across the region as evidenced in the support for a new array of Pacific-controlled institutions.

Significantly, the new Pacific diplomacy has been expressed in the actions of the Pacific Island states since 2009 in developing a new diplomatic architecture outside the PIF system, both to conduct some important aspects of regional affairs and to represent the Pacific Islands region to the world on the key issues of concern such as climate change and fisheries management. For Pacific leaders, these moves do not represent a wholesale rejection of the PIF; rather they suggest recognition of a need for complementary forums to undertake diplomatic functions and pursue needs that can no longer be met in the PIF system.⁴ The new Pacific diplomatic system now handles the core global diplomatic needs of the Pacific Island states in relation to key issues such as trade, climate change, decolonisation, fisheries management and sustainable development. This new system has worked well to meet those needs, and is widely supported by Pacific Island states.

Pacific Small Island Developing States

One significant institutional development has been the rise of the Pacific Small Island Developing States Group (PSIDS) at the UN. Although this group had existed since the early 1990s in relation to global sustainable development negotiations in the Rio process, the PSIDS has taken on a dramatically new diplomatic role for the Pacific Island states since 2009, to the point where it has all but replaced the PIF as the primary organising forum for Pacific representations at the global level.

The PSIDS has also become the key diplomatic vehicle for Pacific participation in global southern coalitions such as the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the Group of 77. It is, for example, the main organising arena for determining and prosecuting Pacific positions on climate change mitigation in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and also in relation to the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, and the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Apia, Samoa, in 2014. It is important to

⁴ This refers to the forum itself and the other institutions in the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP), such as the Forum Fisheries Agency, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

note that while the enhancement of PSIDS was undoubtedly a Fiji-led initiative, it has been strongly supported by all Pacific Island state UN members. Fulori Manoa explores the significance of this development of the PSIDS at the UN in this volume.

Melanesian Spearhead Group

A second major expression of the new Pacific diplomacy has been the reinvigoration of the MSG and its emergence as a major forum for sub-regional integration, and for diplomacy on decolonisation. Again, although Fiji leadership provided the catalyst for its reinvigoration, it is important to note that all Melanesian countries embraced the new and deeper integration proposed as part of the new MSG since 2009. Papua New Guinean leadership was also very important in this reinvigoration. The achievements have been significant. Most prominent has been the achievement of significant free trade in goods and services, including the movement of skilled labour, which is explored by Sovaia Marawa in this volume. The MSG has been able to achieve a level of integration not yet achieved in the wider PIF grouping in relation to trade and movement of professional workers.

The Pacific Islands Development Forum

The third and perhaps most controversial element in the new regional diplomatic architecture is the PIDF, which was a Fiji-led initiative established in 2013. It developed out of the Engaging with the Pacific meetings, which Fiji organised from 2010 as a means of building ties with its Pacific neighbours following suspension from the PIF. While clearly the flagship of the Fiji Government's efforts to lead regional diplomacy after suspension from the PIF, the new kind of regional diplomacy it represented also appealed to many other Pacific leaders. This is described in the chapter by Sandra Tarte.

There were three novel elements of the PIDF that particularly seemed to capture the imagination of Pacific Island leaders. The first was that the new institution emphasised inclusivity, a connection between leaders and society, which had been lacking in the PIF. It brought together civil society groups, the private sector, international agencies and governments in a process that stressed partnerships and network diplomacy. Second is its focus on 'green growth', which seemed to offer hope of overcoming

the stalling of regional action in key areas such as climate change and sustainable development. Finally, the PIDF was motivated by the desire for self-determination. At the PIDF secretariat opening in 2014, Prime Minister Bainimarama said the Fiji-based group had a single purpose:

It is not a question of prestige or establishing yet another talkfest, it is about creating an organisation that is more attuned to our development needs as Pacific countries. It is about creating an organisation that is relatively free of interference from outsiders (Cooney 2014).

Although Prime Minister Bainimarama has said that the PIDF was not intended to compete with the PIF, he seemed to give a different impression in other statements about the organisation's purpose:

Why do we need a new body, a new framework of cooperation? Because the existing regional structure for the past four decades —the Pacific Islands Forum—is for governments only and has also come to be dominated only by a few (Pareti 2013).

Parties to the Nauru Agreement

The fourth institutional development was the establishment of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) Headquarters in 2009. The PNA represented the island states with the region's largest tuna stocks and served as a vehicle for gaining greater control over their shared resource. The tiny but effective Majuro-based secretariat has been highly successful in implementing novel ideas in fisheries management, which have translated into dramatic increases in revenue to the member countries. This development is independent of Fiji's suspension from the PIF, since Fiji is not a member of PNA, and therefore demonstrates a broader assertion of Pacific control over regionalism. The role and impact of the PNA are described in the chapters by Transform Aqorau and Jope Tarai.

New Trade Negotiation Agencies

Finally, Pacific Island states have created new Pacific-run institutions outside the PIF to negotiate trade and economic relationships with Australia, New Zealand and Europe. In the case of negotiations with Australia and New Zealand on the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus (described in the chapter by Wesley Morgan), they argued for an independent office outside the PIF to provide advice on the negotiations. The Vila-based Office of the Chief Trade Adviser

was established in 2009, despite Australian and New Zealand efforts first to oppose its creation, then to dictate who the adviser would be, and finally to sideline it. In the case of negotiations with the European Union over a regional economic partnership agreement, and in relation to developing Pacific positions to take to African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) meetings, the Pacific Island states decided in 2012 to create a Pacific ACP Office based in Port Moresby. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat had previously been the responsible agency for this function (Komai 2014).

Pacific Islands Forum

It could be argued that we are now seeing evidence of new Pacific diplomacy ideas in developments within the PIF. Dame Meg Taylor's chapter talks about inclusivity, and making the forum fit for purpose and responsive to critical reviews (allowing the leaders to make effective decisions). Significantly, the forum has also begun to redefine its mandate to include joint diplomacy, rather than just integration and cooperation as in the recent past, and has made new claims to diplomatic agendas, which it had seemingly abandoned in the previous decade. This is partly in response to the new Pacific diplomacy, and indicates the influence of the thinking and ideas shaping the new diplomacy. Whereas the new Pacific diplomacy is in many ways a response to what was seen as the limitations of the PIF (that it was elitist, statist and unable to act on key diplomatic needs such as climate change), the forum has now sought to remedy some of these areas. As Dame Meg Taylor asserts, 'The forum secretariat must engage with civil society and the private sector more routinely in its work. We need to recognise the important role that civil society plays in the regional space'.⁵ As Claire Slatter argues in this volume, the new Pacific framework goes a long way in addressing the key concerns of civil society about inclusion and openness, although she argues it is still too early to judge how substantive these moves are.

5 Address by Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Diplomacy Roundtable, School of Government, Development and International Affairs, Faculty of Business and Economics, the University of the South Pacific, 27 May 2015.

A Paradigm Shift?

Underpinning these institutional changes is a new set of ideas about how the Pacific should engage in global and regional diplomacy. The coherence and novelty of these ideas and their departure from prevailing ideas suggests that President Tong of Kiribati was prescient in calling this a paradigm shift. First and foremost of these ideas is that the Pacific should, in President Tong's words, 'chart its own course'. This is reflected in various calls for the development of an effective Pacific voice, in Prime Minister Puna's call for reimagining Oceania, and in the founding ideas of the PIDF. This call for regional self-determination is expressed in the creation of new institutions and ventures.

Second, there is the claim that the Pacific needs to engage assertively in global diplomacy in relation to key challenges impacting the region; that it should indeed aspire to global diplomatic leadership in key areas such as climate change, tuna diplomacy, and oceans management. Third, it is claimed that there should be effective representation of a genuine 'Pacific voice' in global forums and that Pacific Island states need to work together in joint diplomacy at the global level. Fourth, there is growing recognition and acceptance of the role of sub-regional groupings and initiatives, in line with the view that a 'one-region' approach need not be the best approach. As Aqorau notes in his contribution to this volume, 'Having a single region arrangement is useful for some purposes but not for others'. Chapters by Dame Meg Taylor and Tess Newton Cain also make this argument.

Fifth, there should be a capacity to participate in southern diplomatic alliances and to leverage Pacific Island positions on the global agenda through these intermediaries. Specifically, Pacific diplomatic architecture needs to be configured to provide the capacity to participate in middle level 'southern' diplomatic alliances, such as AOSIS, the ACP and Group of 77 plus China. Sixthly, the generation of the Pacific voice needs to be inclusive (of civil society, private sector and governments).

The Significance of the ‘New Pacific Diplomacy’

How then should we assess the significance of this new Pacific diplomacy? As already suggested, we argue that it represents a fundamental transformation in diplomatic ideas, institutions and practices. The transformative nature of this new paradigm and its institutional expression in a new diplomatic system is seen more clearly if we compare the current developments with other stages in the history of Pacific diplomacy. Seen in this historical context, the significance of the current changes is clearly of the order of the shift from the colonial to the postcolonial diplomatic system in 1971.

Those developments set up a regional diplomatic culture with certain assumptions about who should belong, who should speak and how diplomacy should be conducted. This prevailed until the early 1990s. In the 1990s and 2000s there was a slow unravelling of this regional diplomatic culture, and a move away from the assumptions of equality and respect for self-determination. When compared with the regional diplomatic culture that developed in the 1990s and early 2000s, which was hierarchical and disrespectful to the self-determination principle, the new Pacific diplomacy represents a new regional diplomatic culture. At the same time, because it represents the same values and principles of the original regional political settlement of 1971, it could also be represented as a restoration of the original regional diplomatic culture established by the forum in 1971 (Fry 2015). More broadly, the new Pacific diplomacy can be seen as effecting a fundamental change in the contemporary regional order, given its impact on the pattern of power and the transformation of dominant ideas and institutions (Tarte 2014).

The significance of the new Pacific diplomacy is also accentuated by the lack of attention to the joint diplomacy side of regionalism within the PIF for the last two decades, seemingly encouraged by a definition of regionalism focused on regional integration. This emphasis had overlooked that the forum was established to do both—support regional integration and represent the Pacific interests in global diplomacy. In the first two decades it was not doing well on regional integration, but it was highly successful in collective diplomacy. In the next two decades it focused more

on regional integration and less on its role of representing the region in global diplomacy. This makes the emergence of the new Pacific diplomacy, from around 2009, an even more marked development.

Finally, significance is derived from the fact that support for this new paradigm, and the new institutions, has come from across the Pacific. Thus this is not just to be seen as only Fiji-supported, and as therefore disappearing once Fiji re-enters the forum system. The PSIDS, for example, is supported by all Pacific Island states (including Samoa), and the significant MSG achievements since 2009 could only be achieved with the support of all Melanesian states and the joint leadership of Fiji and PNG. There is widespread Pacific support for the principles and objectives of the PIDE. They are not about to be wound back to the status quo ante with Fiji's return to democracy.

Why the New Pacific Diplomacy?

How then to explain this transformative development in Pacific diplomacy since the late 2000s? For many observers, the answer is Fiji. Fiji foreign policy post-2009 was the catalyst for many of the key institutional developments. Suspended from the forum, and from forum trade talks with the European Union, Fiji sought other ways of linking to the world and alternate regional arenas. It obviously had the key role in initiating the reinvigoration of the MSG and the establishment of the PIDE, and the development of the Pacific group at the UN was a Fiji initiative. However, other leaders and countries supported Fiji's initiatives and nearly all Pacific Island states signed on to these initiatives.

Other observers have emphasised China's influence or the support of other geopolitical influences as being behind these developments. As argued by Michael O'Keefe in this volume, while the heightened global interest in the Pacific, particularly from China, acted as a facilitating environment for some of these developments, the driving force is provided by Pacific agency.

The changing geopolitics of the region since 2009 have created an enabling context to promote alternative diplomatic initiatives without relying on Australian or New Zealand funding. Chinese, Russian, Indonesian and United Arab Emirates funding is important for PIDE operations, for example.

The driving force for the wider support for the new Pacific diplomacy lies outside these explanations. It lies in a shared perception of an increasing strategic necessity to develop effective diplomatic strategies to deal with key issues of concern to regional leaders around trade, fishing, climate change, and decolonisation. This has been coupled with a realisation that the PIF was not meeting this need.

There were several reasons for this. One was the involvement of Australia and New Zealand in forum deliberations, making it hard to take strong positions on climate change or trade and decolonisation when their positions were antithetical. There has been a building resentment that the forum is no longer a place where the Pacific diplomatic voice can be developed and promoted, and that the regional diplomatic culture has reverted to the kind of hierarchical diplomatic culture that the forum was established to overcome. Rather than a diplomatic forum in which Australia and New Zealand are guests at the diplomatic table of the Pacific Island states, as originally conceived, the forum is now seen as one in which the interests of Australia and New Zealand prevail, to the detriment of island interests, in engaging the global negotiations which matter to them.

The most obvious case is climate diplomacy in relation to carbon emissions targets, where the interests of Australia and New Zealand could not be more divergent from that of the island states. Indeed, in many ways climate change has become the nuclear testing issue of the 21st century. It has brought an urgency and united front to island collaboration. Where the Pacific states might in the past have tolerated some frustration with the domination of the regional agenda in the PIF by Canberra and Wellington (to pursue the War on Terror or to promote a regional neoliberal economic order), this tolerance may have reached its limit on the climate change issue.

One can see the rising anger, among the atoll states in particular, on the lack of action by the PIF in representing a joint position on this question because of the restraining influence of Australia and New Zealand on regional positions on emissions targets. For the Pacific Island states, it is simply not possible to pursue an AOSIS position on emissions targets through an organisation in which Australia and New Zealand are present and determined to water down any positions that might affect

their interests. This concern has been accentuated by the Australian Government's extreme position on the issue. Marshall Islands Foreign Minister Tony de Brum was reported in September 2014 as saying:

He and the leaders of other Pacific Island nations were bewildered by what he called 'backsliding' on climate change by Australia, which the region had considered to be its 'big brother down south'. Probably one of the most frustrating events of the past year for Pacific islanders is Australia's strange behaviour when it comes to climate change ... Island nations had watched with dismay not only the abolition of the carbon tax in Australia, but also the defunding of scientific advisory bodies ... Pacific Island nations no longer have time to debate climate change or even to engage in dialogue about how it might be mitigated—they need immediate action. Failure to act for us would mean disappearance under the sea by the turn of the century (O'Malley 2014).

A second reason is that the presence of Australia and New Zealand in the PIF creates a logistical problem for the Pacific Island states in seeking to use southern global coalitions (such as AOSIS and the G77) to leverage their joint position on key issues such as climate change. With Australia and New Zealand being full members and the main financiers of the forum, the forum is not recognised as a southern grouping by these coalitions. This unnecessarily limits the bargaining power of Pacific states.

Third, as we have seen, since the mid-1990s the forum had largely abandoned the field of joint diplomacy for a focus on regional integration. This emphasis culminated in the Pacific Plan of 2003 to 2013, which was a technocratic plan around an Australia–New Zealand agenda of pooling and integration either to secure the region in the War on Terror or to lower tariff barriers and harmonise laws in accordance with a neoliberal economic agenda. This was a far cry from the assertive Pacific voice of the 1980s dealing with the big issues confronting the region. Significantly, 'joint diplomacy', or representing a Pacific voice, no longer appeared as part of the forum's definition of regionalism and its mandate.

A fourth explanation of a region-wide commitment to the new Pacific diplomatic network was the emergence of a more vocal Pacific leadership with a commitment to engage in regional debates more like the 1970s and 1980s. This has partly been due to Fiji's commitment to overcome the isolation imposed by the forum, but just as important have been the efforts of Marshall Islands leaders and President Tong of Kiribati to give leadership in climate change diplomacy in the region, and even globally,

and the political will of the O'Neill Government in Papua New Guinea to work with Fiji in promoting the MSG, and an independent Pacific ACP secretariat.

Implications of the New Pacific Diplomacy

The new Pacific diplomacy represents an assertion of regional independence as well as a means for achieving more effective outcomes in regional and international forums. This has seen some marked successes: unprecedented financial returns from tuna access agreements as described by Transform Aqorau and Jope Tarai; reinscription of French Polynesia on the UN list of non-self-governing territories (see Nic Maclellan's chapter); the inclusion of 'stand-alone' sustainable development goals on oceans and climate change by the UN (as described by Fulori Manoa); and more coordinated advocacy on global climate policy by Pacific states (see George Carter's chapter). Meanwhile, members of the MSG continue to take significant steps towards regional integration (described in chapters by Sovaia Marawa, Wesley Morgan, and Tess Newton Cain) and the promotion of south–south cooperation. Pacific states have also successfully navigated what Dame Meg Taylor describes as 'a crowded and complex geopolitical landscape',⁶ in order to leverage recognition for their own development agenda (as evident, for example, in the broad support for the establishment of the PIDF).

These successes and achievements vindicate and validate the shifts that are underway in Pacific diplomacy, including the use of alternative, island-only groupings, and the forging of closer relationships with non-traditional partners. They also lend momentum to President Anote Tong's call to 'engage even more aggressively internationally'.⁷ Perhaps most significantly, given the current trends in Pacific regionalism, these successes can inspire greater political commitment to 'act regionally'. Ultimately, it is not frameworks or plans that matter to the leaders and their people, it is the results of regional endeavours that count.

6 Address by Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Diplomacy Roundtable, School of Government, Development and International Affairs, Faculty of Business and Economics, the University of the South Pacific, 27 May 2015.

7 Keynote Address by President of Kiribati at the Launch of the Pacific International Relations Forum of the School of Government, Development and International Affairs of the University of the South Pacific, Holiday Inn, Suva, 9 October 2012.

The transformation of the regional architecture is central to the new Pacific diplomacy, but it remains an unfinished journey. As various chapters in this volume indicate, it is by no means obvious where this journey will end. Dame Meg Taylor refers to 'a complex regional architecture where geopolitics and finance play an important part'. The influence of these factors will continue to challenge Pacific regionalism, whether or not Australia and New Zealand play a different role in the PIF in future, and whatever role the PIDF assumes in the regional system. Tensions over policy positions on issues such as decolonisation and climate change are also likely to deepen in the future.

What the contributors to this volume all point to, from their various perspectives and positions, is the way the new Pacific diplomacy is creating opportunities and avenues for island countries to influence the regional order, in line with their own interests and aspirations. This will perhaps have most impact and resonance on future efforts to shape an approach to regional integration and diplomacy that will deliver fully on the expectations of the people of the Pacific.

Organisation of the Book

The book begins with an overview vision statement by President Anote Tong of Kiribati, which expresses many of the key ideas that motivate the new Pacific diplomacy. His plea for the Pacific to 'chart its own course' reflects the central importance of the promotion of regional self-determination at the centre of the new developments. A second theme with wider resonance is that the Pacific states should pursue this in unison. There is, he argues, a need for Pacific solidarity. Third, he contends that Pacific leaders need to act from necessity and survival to confront new global forces threatening their way of life. They need to not only assert themselves 'aggressively' but to aspire to 'global leadership' in key diplomatic domains such as climate change, oceans management and sustainable development. To achieve this, they need to change their mindset away from the view that small island states are necessarily dominated by developed countries and find confidence in the fact that they are large ocean states. He both recognises and calls for a paradigm shift in Pacific diplomacy.

The importance of President Tong's vision is reflected in the recognition given to it by Australia's Foreign Minister Julie Bishop when she argued that any review of regional architecture needed to take this sentiment into account. During her visit to Papua New Guinea in December 2014, she said, 'It was time for Pacific leaders to chart their own course ... I really think it's time the Pacific leaders determine what they want for the 21st century and I'm hoping that Australia will be able to host that' (Wroe 2014).

The first section of the book focuses on the recent developments in the regional diplomatic system. These institutional developments and their underlying principles are what have caught peoples' imagination that something significant has been under way. Kaliopate Tavola's chapter presents the case for a radical restructuring of the Pacific Islands Forum without Australia and New Zealand. His considered case for an all-island state forum provides the economic and political logic for the Fiji Government position that it will only return to forum membership if Australia and New Zealand are asked to leave.

The New Pacific diplomacy was initially seen as in opposition to the Pacific Islands Forum system dominated by Australia and New Zealand. But as evident from Dame Meg Taylor's chapter, the forum is also undergoing major change consistent with many of the principles of the new Pacific diplomacy. This is recognised by Claire Slatter's critical examination of the claims surrounding the new Pacific framework, which she argues do seem to treat seriously the earlier critique of the forum in such areas as inclusion of non-government organisations (NGOs). Maureen Penjueli offers a more trenchant critique of both the forum and the PIDF (despite its claims of inclusion) based on the past difficulties of civil society to be heard in Pacific regionalism.

Sandra Tarte then introduces the most prominent expression of the new Pacific diplomacy, the Pacific Islands Development Forum. As seen by many, this is potentially a competing organisation with the Pacific Islands Forum and is to be the heart of a Fiji-led alternative regional system. Fulori Manoa demonstrates that, while less well known, the dramatic rise of the PSIDS at the United Nations since 2009 has in many ways been the major success story of the new Pacific diplomacy.

The second section focuses on Fiji's key role in the new Pacific diplomacy showing its major role as a catalyst in key developments since 2009. Ambassador Mawi provides a government perspective emphasising the south–south aspect of this new regional foreign policy, while Makereta Komai provides an analysis of the origins and implications of Fiji's new policies since 2009.

The third section deals with the geopolitical context in which the new Pacific diplomacy emerged and developed. Michael O'Keefe argues that the changing geopolitical context, including the rise of China and the entrance of new interests such as Russia and the United Arab Emirates, has provided an enabling environment for the new Pacific diplomacy but does not devalue 'the issues, trends and agendas that have shaped the evolution of a new approach to diplomacy from within the region' (O'Keefe 2015). Nicola Baker explores the dominant managerial role of Australia and New Zealand in Pacific regionalism, which is seen by many to provide the major stimulus to the development of a reactive new Pacific diplomacy. She argues that it is a mistake to lump together these two influential neighbours as if they are a joint actor or to assume that New Zealand simply follows Australia's lead.

The fourth section focuses on developments in sub-regionalism and the question of how they articulate with the broader regional diplomatic system. Tess Newton Cain explains the nature of the renaissance of the Melanesian Spearhead Group and highlights the issues provoked by its new prominence. Sovaia Marawa examines what is arguably the most impressive achievement in this recent renaissance—the negotiation of a Melanesia Free Trade Area—and why this was successful in contrast to the experience in the broader Pacific Islands region. Suzanne Lowe Gallen reviews the untold story of Micronesian diplomacy at the sub-regional level and how this complements Pacific regional diplomacy.

In the final three sections, the authors examine the key areas of contemporary Pacific diplomacy. Nicolette Goulding and George Carter introduce us to the complexity of Pacific approaches to climate diplomacy on the road to the 2015 Paris conference; Transform Aqorau and Jope Tarai examine new developments in tuna diplomacy; Wesley Morgan explores the assertive Pacific diplomacy in relation to Europe and Australia and New Zealand on trade; and Nic Maclellan examines the recent record of Pacific diplomacy on pushing for decolonisation in the case of French Polynesia and West Papua.

References

- Boyce, P. and R.A. Herr 1974. 'Microstate Diplomacy in the South Pacific'. *Australian Outlook* 28(1):24–35. doi.org/10.1080/10357717408444489
- Cooney, C. 2014. Fiji Shuns Pacific Forum Membership Unless Australia and New Zealand are Expelled. *ABC News*, 29 April. abc.net.au/news/2014-04-29/fiji-shuns-forum-membership/5418014 (accessed 23 February 2015).
- Fry, G. 1994. International Cooperation in the South Pacific: From regional integration to collective diplomacy. In W.A. Axline (ed.), *The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation*. London: Pinter Press, 136–77.
- Fry, G. 2005. Pooled Regional Governance in the Island Pacific: Lessons from history. *Pacific Economic Bulletin* 20(3):111–19.
- Fry, G. 2015. Recapturing the Spirit of 1971: Towards a New Regional Political Settlement in the Pacific. DPA Discussion Paper 2015/3. Canberra: The Australian National University.
- Komai, M. 2014. Reconfiguring Regionalism in the Pacific. *PACNEWS*, 9 April. pina.com.fj/?p=pacnews&m=read&o=137809727550b7cea62a2839b85457 (site discontinued).
- O'Keefe, M. 2015. The Strategic Context of the New Pacific Diplomacy. In G. Fry and S. Tarte (eds), *The New Pacific Diplomacy*. Canberra: ANU Press. doi.org/10.22459/NPD.12.2015.11
- O'Malley, N. 2014. Australia is a Pacific Island: It has a responsibility. *The Canberra Times*, 21 September.
- Pareti, S. 2013. Fiji Pushes for Alternative to Pacific Islands Forum. *ABC News*, 6 August. abc.net.au/news/2013-08-06/fiji-forum/4867748
- Tarte, S. 2014. Regionalism and Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands. *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies* 1(2):312–24. doi.org/10.1002/app5.27
- Wroe, D. 2014. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop Backs Summit to Plan New 'Regional Architecture' in the Pacific. *The Canberra Times*, 14 December. canberratimes.com.au/politics/federal/foreign-minister-julie-bishop-backs-summit-to-plan-new-regional-architecture-in-pacific-20141214-126wh0.html

This text is taken from *Understanding Oceania: Celebrating the University of the South Pacific and its collaboration with The Australian National University*, edited by Stewart Firth and Vijay Naidu, published 2019 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/UO.2019.17