Preface

The world is confronted with multiple issues of security challenges, and how we understand these challenges is often based on parochial prisms that serve our own political, ideological and economic interests. This self-centric framing of security is part of the challenge that we must confront. This book is an attempt to address some of these challenges by exploring how the use of multiple lenses could help enrich our understanding of the interconnected layers of security thinking and practices. Although the case studies used are from the Pacific, the broader conceptual narratives have universal resonance. In a world where security issues are linked to socioeconomic, political, ethnic, ideological and environmental issues, unpacking these connections in a way that makes analytical and policy sense is imperative.

The book is a result of data accumulated over three years of research (both field and archival), conferences, workshops and seminars. It is one of four books I have written that were funded by a New Zealand Marsden Fund research grant. Like any other book in social science, it is a kind of ‘work in progress’, in the sense that, by the time the book is published, it will already be overtaken by continuously unfolding security issues. Hence there is a temptation to update either by producing another edition or even a separate follow-up volume. But this is not the intention, at least for the time being.

Security by its very nature is contested, and the debate about regional security in the Pacific is multidimensional and reflects the transforming and precarious nature of global security. What constitutes security is subject to multiple discourses, and to privilege one set of security variables over another, as is often done by researchers and policy-makers, can be unwise given the multifarious factors that shape our security environment. The book attempts to weave together both conceptual analysis and applied narratives in a symbiotic way, where one informs and shapes the other.
It has an interdisciplinary approach and is meant to be used by academics, researchers, policy-makers, security experts, regional and international agencies, civil society organisations and the public at large.

Ultimately, it is hoped that the book will contribute to understanding some of the deeper issues of conflict that continue to fracture communities with the hope of finding lasting solutions for a peaceful Pacific and a peaceful humanity.

The book is a result of invaluable contribution by a number of people and institutions. The funding for this research was generously provided by the Marsden Fund of the Royal Society of New Zealand. This is one of the four books that benefited from the Marsden funding. I also acknowledge the support of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Canterbury and other project collaborators on Pacific regional security, including the United Nations Development Program and United Nations regional office in Fiji, Department of Pacific Affairs (The Australian National University) and other individuals and organisations who were represented in a series of conferences and seminars that were part of the Marsden project on regional security. I also acknowledge the proficient role of the anonymous reviewers and Fulbright New Zealand for providing me the opportunity in 2018 to complete parts of the manuscript while based at UCLA, Duke University and Georgetown University as a Fulbright senior fellow. My special thanks to the numerous groups and individuals around the Pacific, especially Fiji, Tonga and Solomon Islands, who participated in various direct or indirect ways in the project.

A number of individuals need special mention. My sincere thanks to Professor Stewart Firth of The Australian National University for his professional advice and contribution to editing and arranging the publication logistics. I also extend my hearty thanks to John Moriarty, who worked hard on editing the first draft, and Cathryn Game for her meticulous work on copy-editing the manuscript. Last but not least, I thank my wife Mere for her moral support on this incredible journey.