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The ‘new’ Pacific diplomacy and the transformation of regionalism

Beginning in 2009, Pacific island leaders embraced two big ideas that have had a transformative effect on contemporary Pacific regionalism. The first is that Pacific islanders should be in control of regional governance and the regional diplomatic agenda. In the words of Kiribati president Anote Tong in 2012:

I believe the Pacific is entering a new phase—a new paradigm shift where the Pacific needs to chart its own course and lead global thinking in crucial areas such as climate change, ocean governance, and sustainable development.¹

The idea that the Pacific should ‘chart its own course’ is not a new one in the long history of indigenous regionalism; it was, as we have seen, the founding principle of the SPF in 1971. The current promotion of this idea can therefore be seen as a reassertion of the key normative underpinning of the regional diplomatic culture of the 1970s, which had been suppressed in the hegemonic regionalism of the 1990s and 2000s. As in its earlier iteration, this principle has found expression in the commitment to reconfigure the regional architecture such that the

1 Anote Tong, “Charting its Own Course”: A Paradigm Shift in Pacific Diplomacy’, in Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte, eds, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, Canberra: ANU Press, 2015, pp. 21–4.

key concerns of Pacific island societies can be addressed, and policies determined, without external interference. However, in the contemporary context of a globalised world, the regional self-determination principle has also taken on new expressions. It has also been represented in a shared commitment among Pacific island leaders to developing new ways of projecting a ‘Pacific voice’ in global diplomacy, and even in exercising global leadership in some diplomatic areas such as ocean management and climate policy.

The second big idea is that Pacific regionalism should be inclusive, by welcoming Pacific civil society and private sector organisations into regional policy deliberations and agenda setting. This has been expressed not only in institutional adjustments to allow such participation, but also in constant rhetorical references to the inclusion of ‘the Pacific peoples’ more broadly. This has extended to the inclusion of dependent territories in regional deliberations as equal partners. These developments represent a major departure from the founding norm of the SPF—that the Pacific peoples should be represented by sovereign states and therefore representatives of sovereign states are the only legitimate participants at the regional diplomatic table.

As in 1971, this current paradigm shift in relation to how Pacific regionalism should be governed and how regional diplomacy should be conducted has been expressed in a series of attempts to change the regional architecture. Canberra and Wellington have viewed some of these attempts as threatening their place in Pacific regionalism. This was particularly evident in relation to Fiji’s attempts, from 2014, to remake the PIF as an island-only organisation by seeking the removal of Australia and New Zealand. Canberra and Wellington saw similar threats in relation to Fiji’s attempts to give leadership to the development of new regional organisations that included only Pacific island states (and nonstate actors). This provoked a contest between Australia and New Zealand, on the one hand, and Fiji on the other, about the future of regional governance and the desired shape of the institutional architecture. In the event, Australia and New Zealand prevailed in this contest, in the sense that Fiji did not gain the support of the other Pacific leaders to exclude Australia or New Zealand from the PIF or to support the new Fiji-initiated PIDF to the point of displacing the PIF.

This chapter develops the argument that, despite the failure of these aspects of Fiji’s regional project, the ‘new’ Pacific diplomacy has nevertheless transformed Pacific regionalism in a fundamental way. Furthermore,

it argues that the significance of this transformation is of the order of that experienced in the transition from colonial regionalism to postcolonial regionalism. It involves not only a transformed regional architecture, but also, more fundamentally, a transformation of regional diplomatic culture, on which the legitimacy of regionalism depends.

Fiji's suspension from the PIF in 2009 was a key catalyst for these developments. The suspension led Fiji to adopt a very strategic policy to develop an alternative regionalism outside the PIF network. However, to explain why some of these Fijian initiatives have had a transformative impact we need to understand the rising shared discontent with the PIF among most Pacific island leaders in the previous two decades and their predisposition to endorsing moves to create new avenues through which a 'Pacific voice' could be developed and promoted.

Growing frustration with the PIF

At the time of the establishment of the SPF, Australia and New Zealand had a tacit agreement with the Pacific island states on a regional diplomatic culture in which all member states were regarded as equal at the regional diplomatic table, but with an implicit understanding that the Pacific island states had primacy in determining the regional agenda for their region. As Ken Piddington, a New Zealand foreign ministry official and deputy director of the SPEC (the research office of the SPF), stated at the time:

[The SPF] is an exercise in partnership. Australia and New Zealand sit at the table as equals, and are not dominant partners ... It is tacitly understood that Australia and New Zealand will defer when it comes to deciding the direction which the Forum as a whole should take in asserting its role in the region.²

The 1971 political settlement between Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific island states created a form of regional governance that, for the most part, was seen as politically legitimate by most participants for the next two decades. The strength of this legitimacy was reflected in a very active period of joint diplomacy, through the SPF.

2 Piddington, *The South Pacific Bureau*, p. 5.

As we saw in previous chapters, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific island states together took on some of the world's largest powers on key issues of concern to the Pacific island states, and prevailed.

The strength of this legitimacy was also reflected in the fact that there was robust debate among the SPF members on the joint position to be taken on all of these issues. As we have seen, even after the region became more strategically important in the 'second Cold War' of the 1980s, Australia and New Zealand did not dominate the outcomes of the SPF. Although they attempted to assertively promote a particular kind of Cold War order for the region, their views did not always prevail. The outcomes reflected the robust negotiation that occurred within the SPF, and this was testimony to the legitimacy accorded to the understandings reached in 1971 about the foundation principles on which regional governance and diplomacy would be conducted.

However, after the end of the Cold War, there was a gradual unravelling of the understandings about equality and partnership that underlay this legitimacy. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Australia and New Zealand increasingly saw the agenda of the SPF (and then the PIF) as an extension of their own foreign policy, and even of their domestic policy, whether it was curbing money laundering, countering radical climate mitigation positions, promoting security harmonisation, constraining the drug trade, countering terrorism, pursuing defence surveillance, countering tax havens or promoting a neoliberal regional economic order.

In his review of the regional architecture for the PIF in 2005, based on regionwide consultation with leaders, Tony Hughes observed:

Sometimes the confrontational style of political management practised in Canberra and Wellington has intruded on the Forum and grated upon Pacific Island sensibilities. On occasion the strategic priorities of Australia and New Zealand have been too openly assumed by their representatives to be also those of the island states. From time to time such irritations have led to suggestions of a change of membership status for one or both of the two countries. Neither Australia nor New Zealand would welcome such a move ... But the idea remains in the PICT [Pacific island countries and territories] subconscious.³

3 A.V. Hughes, *Strengthening Regional Management: A Review of the Architecture for Regional Co-operation in the Pacific*, Report to the Pacific Islands Forum, Consultative Draft, 2005, available from: [gsd.spc.int/sopac/docs/RIF/06_AV%20Hughes%20Report_CONSULTATIVE_DRAFT\(1\).pdf](http://gsd.spc.int/sopac/docs/RIF/06_AV%20Hughes%20Report_CONSULTATIVE_DRAFT(1).pdf), p. 10.

For Ratu Mara of Fiji, who made the case in 1971 for the inclusion of Australia and New Zealand in the SPF, the changing role of Australia and New Zealand had become a problem by 2001, on the occasion of the forum's thirtieth anniversary:

And here I must confess to a certain sense of disappointment with our metropolitan members. They have not always been ready to show understanding of our problems. And they have sought to impose their solutions in an insensitive way, when left to ourselves we could work things out in what we have come to call the Pacific Way.⁴

The hierarchical regional diplomatic culture that developed in the SPF and then the PIF in the 1990s and 2000s made it difficult for Pacific island leaders to assert control over issues that were of great concern to them, such as tuna management, decolonisation, trade and, most of all, climate policy. We have already seen how this played out in relation to Pacific island state concerns over the forum's role in representing the Pacific's interests in trade diplomacy with Australia and New Zealand while these metropolitan countries were, at the same time, members of the forum. This conflict of interest was recognised in the formation of a new regional agency, the Office of the Chief Trade Adviser (OCTA), although its independence was questioned by some commentators who pointed to the attempts by Australia and New Zealand to 'appropriate' the new office for the promotion of their trade agenda.⁵ There was some resentment felt towards a more general skewing of the PIFS to the concerns of Australia and New Zealand through their relatively large resources giving them the ability to set agendas and draft communiqués. Roman Grynberg, a former senior trade analyst for the PIF, described the Australian and New Zealand role as tantamount to 'ownership' of the forum.⁶

The rising frustration of the Pacific leaders with the PIF's failure to adequately represent their interests in global forums was also fuelled by the view that the Forum had largely abandoned joint diplomacy in the

4 Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, *Keynote Address by H.E. Rt Hon. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Former Prime Minister and President of Fiji Islands, On the Occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the South Pacific Forum of Leaders, Yaren, Nauru, August 16, 2001*, Press Statement 6301, Suva: PIFS, 2001, available from: www.pireport.org/articles/2001/08/17/keynote-address-he-rt-hon-ratu-sir-kamisese-mara.

5 Wesley Morgan, 'Regional Trade Negotiations and the Construction of Policy Choice in the Pacific Islands Forum (1994–2014)', PhD thesis, School of Political and Social Sciences, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, October 2014, pp. 154–8.

6 Roman Grynberg, 'Who Owns the Forum?', *Fiji Times Online*, 9 March 2009.

1990s and 2000s as a priority of regionalism, preferring a preoccupation with a more inward-looking, regional integration. This emphasis was influenced heavily by Australia and New Zealand and their commitment to promoting ‘pooled regional governance’ in security and development as key regional projects. This tendency culminated in the Pacific Plan of 2005–13, which focused on regional pooling and integration, omitting collective diplomacy from its definition of regionalism and from the PIF’s mandate.

There were also new pressures from global developments in South–South cooperation, which required the Pacific to be organised as a regional Global South grouping to participate. There was a growing realisation among Pacific policymakers that ways had to be found to break out of the constraints of the PIF structure if the Pacific was to work within these Global South coalitions such as the Group of 77 (G-77) and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in projecting a ‘Pacific voice’ in global diplomacy.⁷ With Australia and New Zealand as members, the PIF did not qualify to participate in such Global South groupings.

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, there was therefore mounting frustration with the effectiveness of the PIF to meet the diplomatic needs of the island states in negotiating on key global challenges. It is important to note that this frustration did not lead to a commitment to exclude Australia and New Zealand. The comprehensive review of the Pacific Plan in 2012–13, the Morauta Review, reported on the problem of Pacific leaders feeling that they no longer had control of their regional agenda, but it also reported that this problem did not find expression in a view that Australia and New Zealand should not continue to participate as full members of the PIF:

Most of those interviewed—particularly Leaders—supported their full participation ... The consensus among the most sagacious of the Review’s interviewees was that the metropolitan countries have a uniquely important role to play in the Forum.⁸

7 Kaliopate Tavola, ‘Towards a New Pacific Diplomacy Architecture’, in Fry and Tarte, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, p. 27.

8 PIFS, *Pacific Plan Review 2013: Report to Pacific Leaders. Volume 1*, [known as the Morauta Review], Suva: PIFS, 2013, p. 79.

These frustrations did mean, however, that the Pacific leaders were ready to develop additional regional avenues outside the PIF to create a space for discussion of joint positions and to assist them in promoting a Pacific-determined agenda. They had already shown that they had such a commitment—independent of Fijian leadership—in their joint initiatives in establishing Pacific island-run regional organisations (to be examined below) to pursue shared interests in areas not adequately represented by the PIF. It also meant that they were receptive to new ideas for creating more effective diplomatic pathways to pursue their interests and to complement, but not displace, the work of the PIF.

The climate change issue as a game-changer

The key issue galvanising Pacific leaders to reframe the governance and architecture of regionalism was climate change. For over 25 years, and even before the Kyoto climate conference of 1997, the Pacific island nations have viewed the global climate change problem as a priority issue for their survival. The Pacific leaders have stressed throughout this period that, as they are 'frontline', low-lying ocean states, the issue is ultimately the survival of their countries in the face of rising sea levels and, in the meantime, the defence of their current livelihoods in the face of storm surges, intensified cyclone activity, acidification and seawater inundation of the freshwater table. For the Pacific leaders, the issue is not some future 'maybe' but a current lived reality affecting livelihoods, the survival of particular villages and islands and the forced movement of people.

In many ways, climate change has become the Pacific's nuclear testing issue of the twenty-first century;⁹ it has brought an urgency and emotional commitment to regional collaboration. Where the Pacific states might in the past have tolerated some frustration with the domination of the regional agenda by Canberra and Wellington to pursue the war on terror or to promote a regional neoliberal economic order, this tolerance reached its limit in relation to the climate change issue.

From 1997, there was rising concern, particularly among the low-lying atoll states, about the lack of action by the PIF in representing a strong joint position on this question because of the restraining influence of

9 I am grateful to Dr Nicole George, School of Political Science and International Studies, University of Queensland, for this insight.

Australia and New Zealand on regional positions on emissions targets. This was particularly evident in relation to the PIF's joint position as key global summits approached within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process. For example, in relation to the preparation of a Pacific position for the global meeting in Kyoto to discuss binding emissions targets as part of a climate protocol, Eric Shibuya argues that Australian pressure at the Rarotonga SPF meeting in 1997 resulted in a watered down position in the SPF communiqué—an outcome that did not represent the view of the Pacific island leaders:

Tuvalu's Prime Minister Bikenibeu Paeniu said that after the statement was issued, 'Australia dominates us so much in this region. For once, we would have liked to have got some respect'.¹⁰

Also speaking of the discussions about the Pacific position on climate change at the Rarotonga SPF meeting, president Kinza Clodumar of Nauru reported:

The Forum Communique which emerged at the end of the meeting was extremely bland and was painted by Australia ... as something of a victory. I would class it rather as a disaster. It is fair to say that many of the small island states were aghast at the treatment meted out to them. Nauru, however, which has a long history of negotiating with Australia ... was not all that surprised, and certainly would have preferred a different outcome—even a communique which did not include Australia.¹¹

The 2009 PIF meeting in Cairns, Queensland, represented another key point in Australian pressure to weaken the Pacific island states' position, this time in the leadup to the Copenhagen global summit on climate change. A number of Pacific leaders wanted a strong commitment to emissions targets in the communiqué but the anodyne final communiqué—following an effective veto under the consensus procedure—instead represented the position held by Australia and New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand refused to sign on to the more radical demand of the

10 Bernadette Hussein, 'The Big Retreat', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, November 1997: 11, as cited in Eric Shibuya, 'The Problems and Potential of the Pacific Islands Forum', in Jim Rolfe, ed., *The Asia-Pacific: A Region in Transition*, Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004, pp. 102–15, at p. 110.

11 Republic of Nauru, 'Speech by His Excellency, the Hon. Kinza Clodumar, MP, President of the Republic of Nauru, 23 October 1997, National Press Club, Canberra', Media release, 21 October 1997. This is also reported in *Pacific Report*, 10(20): 1.

Pacific island nations to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and this meant the Pacific went to Copenhagen without its premier regional organisation backing their position.¹²

Yasmine Ryan reports that, when a number of Pacific leaders nevertheless promoted the 1.5-degree limit at the Fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP15) in Copenhagen, Australia pressured them to change their position:

On the second last day of the conference, Tuvaluan Prime Minister Apisai Ielemia told reporters that the Australian delegation and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's office had been pressuring small islands to change their position on the temperature limit and on calls for a legally binding agreement. The Tuvaluan delegation had refused to meet with the Australians but other Pacific leaders had been told that 'they agree to the 2 degree limit and (climate change adaptation) funding will be on the table'.¹³

As the 2015 Paris global summit on climate change approached, the new Abbott Government's reactionary climate policy raised Pacific concerns about Australia's position and its potential constraining influence on the Pacific position. In 2015, the Australian Government announced an emissions target of 26–28 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, which was well below the 40–60 per cent target recommended by the Australian Climate Change Authority as necessary to keep warming below 2°C, and well short of that required to meet the 1.5-degree level supported by island states. For Tony de Brum, then foreign minister of the Marshall Islands, 'Australia's weak target is another serious blow to its international reputation'. He argued: 'If the rest of the world followed Australia's lead, the Great Barrier Reef would disappear. So would my country, and the other vulnerable atoll nations on Australia's doorstep'.¹⁴

12 Nic Maclellan, 'Pacific Leaders Contradict Cairns Climate Deal', *The Interpreter*, Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 5 October 2018; Shirley Atalagi, 'Forget Watergate, We Now Have Cairns Gate', Blog, Sydney: Greenpeace, 7 August 2009, available from: www.greenpeace.org.au/blog/forget-watergate-we-now-have-cairns-gate/; Bernard Keane, 'How We Discouraged Pacific Islands from Tough Emissions Stance', *Crikey*, 21 September 2009, available from: www.crikey.com.au/2009/09/21/leaked-document-oz-dissuaded-pacific-islands-from-tough-emissions-stance/.

13 Yasmine Ryan, 'COP15 and Pacific Island States: A Collective Voice on Climate Change', *Pacific Journalism Review*, 16(1), 2010: 193–203, at p. 198.

14 Catherine Graue, 'Marshall Islands Foreign Minister Slams Australia's "Weak" Carbon Target', *Pacific Beat*, ABC News, 11 August 2015, available from: www.abc.net.au/news/programs/pacific-beat/2015-08-11/marshall-islands-foreign-minister-slams-australias/6690570.

The Pacific leaders were also angered by the Abbott Government's efforts to actively work against a global effort to curb global warming. Of particular concern to Pacific leaders over the 2013–15 period was Australia's failure to turn up to global climate change summits, the attempt to form a Canadian–Australian global alliance to work against climate action, the cancellation of the Australian carbon emissions trading scheme, the attack on alternative energy schemes within Australia, the attempt to dismantle the Australian Climate Commission and the statement by the Government's chief business adviser that climate change was a UN 'hoax'. The last straw was prime minister Abbott's announcement that coal was 'good for humanity', and his commitment to opening new coalmines just as the Kiribati Government called for a global ban on new coalmines.¹⁵

On the eve of the 2015 PIF meeting, at which the Pacific position for the Paris conference on climate change was to be discussed, president Tong of Kiribati was reported as issuing an 'ultimatum', declaring that 'we cannot negotiate this, no matter how much aid. We cannot be bought on this one because it's about the future.'

[He] raised the prospect of either states walking out or Australia being asked to leave the forum if its two more powerful members forced a compromise on the commitment of island states to the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

He is reported as going on to say that 'we expect them, as big brothers, not bad brothers, to support us on this one because our future depends on it'.¹⁶ Tuvalu's Prime Minister, Enele Sopoaga, asserted that president Tong's sentiments were 'strongly shared by leaders of smaller island states'.¹⁷

Reflecting on Australia's actions to dilute 'the strength of previous regional declarations on climate change', Palau's national climate change coordinator, Xavier Matsutaro, said Australia's relationship with the Pacific was 'dysfunctional'. He went on to say:

15 For the sources for these claims, see Greg Fry, 'Pacific Climate Diplomacy and the Future Relevance of the Pacific Islands Forum', *Devpolicy Blog*, 4 September 2015, available from: devpolicy.org/pacific-climate-diplomacy-and-the-future-relevance-of-the-pacific-islands-forum-20150904/.

16 Michael Gordon, "We Cannot be Bought on Climate Change": Pacific Island Leader Warns Tony Abbott', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 September 2015.

17 *ibid.*

Australia is a bit of an anomaly, because on the floor [of climate summits] they're basically sometimes as far right as [US President Donald] Trump in some of their views on climate change, at one point they even denied it existed ... But then on a regional basis they've actually given a lot of support to our region ... it's like you are in a relationship and you get abused by your spouse but at the same time they feed you and clothe you and things like that ... You could say it's a bit of a dysfunctional relationship.¹⁸

Building island-run regional institutions

Into this context of rising frustration among Pacific leaders came a very determined Fiji Government, committed to developing an alternative regional system. From the time of Fiji's suspension from the PIF in 2009, the Bainimarama regime worked assiduously to reframe Pacific regionalism to serve its own national interests. As seen from Suva, Australia and New Zealand were attempting to cut off various avenues for Fiji's global and regional engagement and financial support. What Fiji needed therefore was 'survival diplomacy' to navigate this new isolation and the loss of 'old friends'. It pursued policies explicitly aimed at ensuring that Fiji was seen as the hub of the Pacific and, in global circles, as its chief spokesperson. It committed itself to the development of an effective regional architecture based on the principles of self-determination and inclusion of all Pacific island 'peoples'.¹⁹

The implementation of this regional strategy began with Fiji's hosting of a meeting open to all Pacific island states with the theme 'Engaging with the Pacific' at Natadola in July 2010. The meeting met Fiji's objectives of demonstrating that the Pacific leaders supported a continued regional dialogue with Fiji despite its suspension from the PIF, and that 'the Leaders agreed that Fiji's Strategic Framework for Change is a credible home-grown process for positioning Fiji as a modern nation and to hold true democratic elections'.²⁰ The meeting was attended by 10 of the 14

18 Kate Lyons, 'Australia's Relationship with Pacific on Climate Change "Dysfunctional" and "Abusive"', *The Guardian*, 5 September 2018.

19 Sandra Tarte, 'Fiji's Search for New Friends', *East Asia Forum*, 13 January 2011; Makereta Komai, 'Fiji's Foreign Policy and the New Pacific Diplomacy', in Fry and Tarte, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, pp. 111–21.

20 The Fijian Government, 'The Natadola Communiqué', Press release, 23 July 2010, Suva, available from: www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Center/Press-Releases/The-Natadola-Communiqu%C3%A9.aspx, paras 1, 15, 18.

Pacific island state members of the PIF (Samoa, Palau, Niue and Cook Islands were absent). The Natadola meeting also provided the opportunity for Fiji to launch an ongoing alternative regional forum based on the ‘Pacific way of *talanoa*, or frank discussion and dialogue’—a format that appealed to other leaders. The focus of the dialogue—sustainable development, climate change and the ‘green economy’—also struck a chord with other leaders. Engaging With the Pacific Leaders (EWPT) became an annual meeting.

Fiji proposed the theme of ‘A United and Distinctive PSIDS Voice’ for the third EWTP meeting, in Nadi in 2012. PSIDS referred to Pacific Small Island Developing States, thus excluding Australia and New Zealand. The leaders supported the Fijian initiative and, in an obvious reference to the PIF, ‘noted the challenges facing PSIDS in effectively addressing their common interests through existing regional and international groupings due to competing interests and differing levels of developmental needs of the members’ and ‘recognized the need for PSIDS to take a united position on issues of priority to its members at the United Nations.’²¹ They also agreed to a Fijian proposal to launch a new formal regional organisation, the PIDF, to carry forward the ideas developed in the EWTP meetings in a more organised manner.

The PIDF was launched in Nadi in August 2013. In his opening speech to the new forum, Fiji’s Interim Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama, asked:

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.²²

The strong Pacific-wide support for the Fijian initiative was indicated by the attendance of 10 of the 14 PSIDS (of the absentees, only Samoa spoke against the PIDF initiative). Reflecting a significant redrawing of the regional boundaries, Timor-Leste was also included as a participant, and Timorese prime minister Xanana Gusmão was ‘Chief Guest’. In another major departure from PIF practice, Fiji included representatives

21 The Fijian Government, ‘Engaging with the Pacific Leaders Meeting: Nadi Communiqué’, Press release, 27 August 2012, Suva, available from: www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Center/Press-Releases/ENGAGING-WITH-THE-PACIFIC-LEADERS-MEETING—NADI-C.aspx.

22 Samisoni Pareti, ‘Fiji Pushes for Alternative to Pacific Islands Forum’, *ABC News*, 6 August 2013.

of dependent territories, civil society and the private sector as equals at the diplomatic table. International development partners (including Australia and New Zealand) were also present, but only as observers.

The new organisation was heralded as pathbreaking in Pacific regionalism in its inclusivity. The *Fiji Sun* newspaper reported on its front page 'we are all Equal Now'—a reference to the equality between states and nonstate actors at the PIDF diplomatic table.²³ 'Inclusion' also extended to Pacific island administrations in dependent territories. The PIDF's agenda was a continuation of that of the EWTP meetings: a focus on green growth and sustainable development, climate change and decolonisation.²⁴ In the next few years, a number of formal steps were taken to build the PIDF as a formal regional institution: the establishment of a secretariat in Suva, a constitution with provisions for a directing council, a founding agreement and gradual recognition by global partners. The costs for the PIDF conferences were largely provided by China, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Timor-Leste. Fiji provided the headquarters and seconded staff from its foreign ministry. As we shall see, the high point of the PIDF was reached in 2015 when the annual conference played a major part in the Pacific preparation for the Paris climate conference.

A second strand of Fiji's post-suspension regional diplomatic strategy was to give leadership to the way the Pacific organised at the United Nations so that a 'distinctive Pacific voice' could be projected in global forums. In practice, this amounted to energising the already existing PSIDS grouping at the United Nations, which had been formed to 'raise funds for projects around climate change adaptation and mitigation, renewable energy and pollution'.²⁵ The PSIDS was reenergised and retasked to the point where it displaced the PIF as the preferred regional coalition for the Pacific island states at the United Nations and as the globally recognised voice for the Pacific island region. After its suspension from the PIF in 2009, Fiji had pursued a very successful 'friends to all' global strategy, aimed particularly at China, India and Russia. It joined the Non-Aligned Movement and opened new missions in major countries in each region. This resulted in global recognition for Fiji as the leading voice for the Pacific—expressed most prominently in Fiji's election to chair the G-77

23 Jyoti Pratibha, 'All Equal Now', *Fiji Sun*, 7 August 2013.

24 Sandra Tarte, 'A New Pacific Regional Voice? The Pacific Islands Development Forum', in Fry and Tarte, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, pp. 79–88.

25 Fulori Manoa, 'The New Pacific Diplomacy at the United Nations: The Rise of the PSIDS', in Fry and Tarte, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, pp. 89–98, at p. 80.

in 2010. Fiji was able to leverage this new global prominence to give leadership to a campaign to change the name of the Asian group at the United Nations to the Asia-Pacific Small Island Developing States grouping (or Asia-Pacific grouping for short).²⁶

This major recognition for the PSIDS in 2012 galvanised the Pacific island states to use the PSIDS grouping as their primary regional caucus at the United Nations rather than the PIF. By pooling their resources and bargaining power, the Pacific island states achieved the equivalent of a medium-sized mission at the United Nations. This dramatically increased the visibility and influence of the Pacific island region, and was demonstrated through significant global recognition for the PSIDS and the effective displacement of the PIF as the key Pacific grouping at the United Nations. Fiji's role as a regional hub rose with the visibility of the PSIDS and vice versa. The world's most powerful leaders—most prominently, President Xi Jinping of China and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India—began to visit Fiji from 2014.²⁷

Fiji's third major regional strategy was to use its chairmanship of the MSG from 2011 to 2013 to give leadership to a revamp of this existing organisation. The resultant expansion in its range of activities and governance councils started to make the MSG look more like the PIF in structure and function. As the MSG includes the region's largest countries in terms of land, population and economies—Fiji and Papua New Guinea—this was seen in some quarters as a major potential challenge to the primacy of the PIF. Significant achievements in regional free trade and free movement of professional workers, spurred by cooperation between Papua New Guinea and Fiji in this period, were supported by the other Melanesian states.²⁸

Fiji's leadership was very important, but the role of other Pacific leaders should not be overlooked. In each of these cases, the legitimacy of the new or reframed institutions was dependent on the support of the other Pacific leaders. Other leaders had also initiated island-run regional institutions. In 2009, the Pacific leaders demanded a new island-run

26 *ibid.*

27 'Fiji Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama Looks Forward to Visits from China and India's Leaders', *ABC News Online*, 17 November 2014.

28 Tess Newton Cain, 'The Renaissance of the Melanesian Spearhead Group', pp. 151–60, and Sovaia Marawa, 'Negotiating the Melanesia Free Trade Area', pp. 161–74, both in Fry and Tarte, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*.

trade negotiation body, the OCTA, to serve the FICs in their negotiations with Australia and New Zealand over PACER Plus. Established in Port Vila in 2010, the OCTA was fully owned by the FICS. And in 2012, Papua New Guinea's prime minister O'Neill, with the support of Solomon Islands prime minister Gordon Lilo, led an initiative to create the new Pacific members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific group (PACP) secretariat outside the PIFS so that Fiji could participate in PACP discussions relating to their relations with Europe—focused particularly on negotiation of the regional EPA.²⁹ Papua New Guinea's *The National* newspaper reported that

PNG would provide funding for the PACP to be based in Port Moresby and it would operate separately from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat ... The PACP meeting decided that the group would operate separately from the Pacific Islands Forum to ensure Fiji's inclusion.³⁰

The most significant move to create an island-run regional body outside the PIF framework was in relation to tuna fisheries. This was a move by the tuna-rich states to create an international organisation around the existing membership of the Nauru Group. Papua New Guinea led the initiative and provided the initial funds to set up the secretariat. Under the leadership of Dr Transform Aqorau, the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) quickly became a highly effective organisation, raising incomes for tuna states dramatically. This was achieved through the introduction of a Vessel Day Scheme based on the jurisdictional rights of host states. The PNA introduced a business model that did not require dependence on metropolitan funds. It has become a model of a cost-effective island-run organisation. The PNA developments occurred without Fijian membership, emphasising the fact that the 'new' Pacific diplomacy was not simply a product of Fiji's PIF suspension.³¹

29 'PM Welcomes New PACP Secretariat Formation', *Solomon Star*, 23 November 2012; 'Forum Secretariat Wrong: PM', *Fiji Sun*, 4 December 2012.

30 'PNG Offers to Provide for PACP Secretariat', *The National*, [Port Moresby], 23 November 2012, available from: www.thenational.com.pg/png-offers-to-provide-for-pacp-secretariat/.

31 Transform Aqorau, 'How Tuna is Shaping Regional Diplomacy', in Fry and Tarte, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, pp. 223–35; Sandra Tarte, 'Regionalism and Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands', *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*, 1(2), 2014: 315–18.

The contest over regional governance

By 2014—as a result of the Fiji-led institutional developments and the moves by other Pacific island leaders to form the PNA, the OCTA and PACP—there were now two regional systems. One was the established system of organisations, with the PIF at its centre, which had gradually developed over the four decades since 1971. Coordinated by the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP), this system included the PIF, the Pacific Community (formerly the SPC), the FFA, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the USP. This system was largely financed by Australia and New Zealand (for example, they finance 95 per cent of the PIFS’ core and regular budget) and each organisation within it includes Australia and New Zealand as member states.

A second grouping of new Pacific-run organisations sits outside the CROP system. It comprises the PSIDS, the PIDF, the MSG, the PNA, the OCTA, the PACP, the Micronesian Chief Executives’ Summit, the Micronesian Presidents’ Summit and the Polynesian Leaders’ Group. Though not formally, or even informally, coordinated, they have in common that they are island-driven and controlled; they do not include Australia and New Zealand as members. With the exception of the PIDF and the OCTA, they also have in common that they are not financially dependent on Australia and New Zealand or indeed any other larger, metropolitan states.

A further key distinction between these two regional ‘systems’ is that the new institutions are primarily concerned with engaging in global diplomacy and representing a Pacific voice in global arenas. The CROP system, on the other hand, had been focused in the previous two decades on regional economic integration in the security and economic arenas around an Australian–New Zealand agenda. The PIF had moved away from the globally assertive diplomacy of the 1970s and 1980s. The institutions in the new island-run system, on the other hand, were attempting to have diplomatic agency and influence at the global level on issues that mattered to the Pacific. Together, the new agencies covered key global diplomatic issues impacting the Pacific: climate policy, ocean management, trade and decolonisation.

From 2014, the question before Pacific leaders was: How would these two regional systems fit together? Would they be two competitive systems or could they fit together in a new 'patchwork' regional architecture? The view that the two systems were in competition was encouraged by Fiji's challenge, from 2014, that it would not return to the PIF unless Australia and New Zealand withdrew or were expelled. This atmosphere of contest between Fiji, on the one hand, and Australia and New Zealand, on the other, over the control of regional governance was further increased by Fiji's promotion of the PIDF as an all-island alternative to the PIF—at least as seen by Canberra and Wellington.

The most dramatic part of Fiji's regional strategy was its demand that Australia and New Zealand be excluded from the PIF as the condition for Fiji resuming its membership. In September 2013, Prime Minister Bainimarama was reported as saying:

We are not interested in going back [to the PIF] until it stops being the play thing of the Aussies and Kiwis. When it becomes a genuine expression of the will of the Pacific islanders themselves, then we will go back, then we will think about rejoining the Forum.³²

Later in 2014, following the Fiji elections in September, and the invitation to resume its membership of the PIF in October, newly reelected Prime Minister Bainimarama made clear that his demand remained: Australia and New Zealand should leave the PIF as the condition for Fiji's return.³³

For Canberra and Wellington, Fiji's demand created an issue of highest priority for their Pacific policies. Australia and New Zealand see the PIF as the main vehicle for regional management, and their own membership of the PIF as crucial to that management. As foreign minister Bishop warned in a press conference in Suva in November 2014, she was 'not going to take that [the proposed exclusion] lying down'.³⁴ In the following months, several Pacific leaders came out publicly in support of Australia and New Zealand. In November 2014, Tommy Remengesau, Jr, chair of the PIF and President of Palau, was reported as having 'stressed the continuing

32 'Fiji Says It Won't Rejoin Pacific Islands Forum Unless There Are Changes', *Radio New Zealand International News*, 13 September 2013.

33 'Fiji Will Not Return to Forum', *Pacnews*, 26 October 2014, available from: www.pina.com.fj/?p=pacnews&m=read&o=1608789720544d6db65d45a93939d3.

34 'Fijian PM Support Sydney Meet, No Talk on Pacific Islands Forum', *Pacnews*, 2 November 2014, available from: www.pina.com.fj/?p=pacnews&m=read&o=11573914165456a5c206ecc584e739.

importance of New Zealand and Australia at the regional body'.³⁵ In the same month, Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister also indicated his support for the inclusion of Australia and New Zealand:

Mr O'Neill told Radio Australia's Pacific Beat program that the structure of the Pacific Islands Forum does not need changing. 'We must make sure that we don't forget that we all live in the same region and Australia and New Zealand are very much part of that region.'³⁶

On 3 April 2015, *Radio New Zealand* reported that the 'new government in Tonga says it is opposed to moves initiated by Fiji to push New Zealand and Australia out of the Pacific Islands Forum'. The new Prime Minister of Tonga, 'Akilisi Pōhiva, was reported as saying that 'as many Tongans live in Australia and New Zealand, it would be unwise to turn around and consider Fiji's position to form a new regional organisation'.³⁷

After Bainimarama had reiterated his position in April 2015, prime minister John Key of New Zealand rejected Bainimarama's call, 'saying it is a joke' and asking, 'Where would they get the money to do anything, and the answer is nowhere'.³⁸ Samoan Prime Minister Sailele said that "John Key is right" ... and went on to say that "it's not as if any money comes from Fiji. It's the money we get from New Zealand and Australia we are using for our stuff".³⁹

By this time, it was very clear that the Fijian campaign to exclude Australia and New Zealand from the PIF had failed. Fiji's subsequent decision to participate in PIF meetings, including trade negotiations for PACER Plus, did not signal, however, that Bainimarama was dropping his ultimate demand. In May 2015, he announced:

We will continue to participate in all Forum activities at the public service, technical and ministerial levels ... As Head of Government, I will not participate in any Forum Leaders' Meeting

35 'Remengesau Stresses Pacific Forum Unity', *Radio New Zealand*, 5 November 2014.

36 'Papua New Guinea PM Peter O'Neill Dismisses Fiji's Push to Remove Australia from Pacific Islands Forum', *ABC News*, 28 November 2014, available from: www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-28/png-pm-wants-australia-to-remain-in-pacific-regional-body/5926014.

37 'Tonga Opposed to Forum Exclusions', *Radio New Zealand*, 3 April 2015, available from: www.pireport.org/articles/2015/04/06/tonga-opposed-forum-exclusions.

38 'I Can't Stand You Bainimarama: PM Tuilaepa', *Samoa Observer/Pacnews*, 19 April 2015, available from: www.pina.com.fj/?p=pacnews&m=read&o=404430711553476ec71af7e07c0b22.

39 *ibid.*

until the issue of the undue influence of Australia and New Zealand and our divergence of views is addressed ... Australia and New Zealand, PIF's major funders, are not island nations but more development partners ... This is not some ill-considered position based on resentment against Australia and New Zealand for their punitive attitude towards our reform programme that produced the first genuine democracy in Fijian history ... This is not me 'mouthing off', as the New Zealand Prime Minister so condescendingly put it.⁴⁰

The second aspect of Fiji's regional strategy, which was contested by Australia and New Zealand, was the attempt to create an island-controlled regional organisation to compete with, or even displace, the PIF. Canberra saw Fiji's efforts to reenergise the MSG, and to set up a series of meetings and functions emulating the PIF, as potentially threatening to the PIF. But the real game-changer as seen from Canberra and Wellington was when Fiji's annual EWTP meeting morphed into the creation of a new regional organisation, which excluded Australia and New Zealand, and which was seemingly supported by 10 of the 14 Pacific island states. The PIDF appealed to many island leaders who supported it with their presence over the next few years. But although they supported the PIDF for many reasons, these did not include a desire to see the new organisation displace the PIF. As Samoan newspaper editor Kalafi Moala commented:

The popular sentiment, among Pacific nations however is that PIDF does not need to replace PIF, but can be complimentary [sic] by having a different focus and being inclusive in its membership [of nonstate actors].⁴¹

Samoan Prime Minister Sailele was reported as saying the PIDF 'will never replace PIF'.⁴² The Pacific leaders had just been through a decade-long review process within the PIF and the fruits of that process were now beginning to show. In such circumstances, there was no enthusiasm to abandon the PIF for the PIDF. In an interview in November 2014, PNG prime minister O'Neill captured this widely held sentiment to uphold the PIF as the preeminent regional institution:

40 Liam Fox, 'Frank Bainimarama to Shun Pacific Island Forum over "Undue Influence" of Australia, NZ', *ABC News*, 6 May 2015.

41 Kalafi Moala, 'Regionalism Debate Becoming Contentious', Online Forum, 8 April 2015, Port Vila: Pacific Institute of Public Policy.

42 *ibid.*

We just had a review of the Pacific Plan which was adopted by the leaders in Palau. We need to start implementing some of these strategies that we are putting in place rather than talking about creating a new structure that is going to be costly and [a] duplication.⁴³

Transformation of the regional architecture

The failure of these more dramatic expressions of the ‘new’ Pacific diplomacy, and the strong reendorsement of the PIF as the preeminent regional agency for collective political leadership, should not be interpreted, however, as meaning that there is a return to the status quo ante. The new ideas and institutional developments have had a fundamentally transformative impact on the shape of the regional architecture and on the underlying norms making up the regional diplomatic culture. In relation to the shape of the regional architecture, by 2017, it was clear that a new ‘patchwork’ regional architecture (to employ Tess Newton Cain and Matthew Dornan’s useful descriptor) had emerged—an amalgam of old and new.⁴⁴ Several of these institutions were developing new roles and purposes within the overall patchwork structure. Rather than competing, separate systems, on the one hand, or a fully integrated new system, on the other, this was something in between. It is still a work in progress, but the new architecture allows the flexibility required by the Pacific leaders. It keeps Australia and New Zealand at the regional diplomatic table (and providing the bulk of the funds) in the PIF, ensuring the continued preeminence of the PIF as the key site of regional governance by Pacific leaders, while allowing alternative spaces for Pacific island-only deliberation as well as global projection of a more authentic ‘Pacific voice’.

This has not eliminated competition between regional agencies, or suspicions and jealousies, but by and large, it has settled into a cooperative system. As the same Pacific island leaders are on the governing boards of all of these organisations, whether new or old, it is not surprising that these alternative systems could merge cooperatively into a patchwork structure. This does not mean that there will not be further institutional changes as the politics of regionalism proceeds. There are, for example, significant strains between Fiji and some other island countries such as

43 ABC News, ‘Papua New Guinea PM Peter O’Neill Dismisses Fiji’s Push to Remove Australia’.

44 Matthew Dornan and Tess Newton Cain, ‘Regional Service Delivery among Pacific Island Countries: An Assessment’, *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*, 1(3), 2014: 541–60, at p. 555.

Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, which have emerged since 2016 and which are weakening the MSG.⁴⁵ We are also yet to see whether the PIDF will be accepted as having a long-term role within this new architecture.

A key aspect of this transformation is the regional and global acceptance of the PSIDS as the global diplomatic voice for the Pacific island states, displacing the PIF as the significant diplomatic actor in UN forums and global summits. The PSIDS has been recognised widely by other states seeking voting support at the United Nations, and as a coalition of Global South states it works effectively within other such coalitions as the G-77, the AOSIS and the Asia-Pacific grouping at the United Nations. The PSIDS can now point to several major diplomatic successes: the change of name of the Asia grouping at the United Nations to the Asia-Pacific grouping; the inclusion of ocean management and climate policy as SDGs and the organisation of Pacific diplomacy at the Paris climate conference. Significantly, there appears to have been acceptance of this new situation by Australia and New Zealand and by the PIFS.

Second, there has been acceptance of subregionalism as a useful alternative venue for pursuing common interests. Such efforts are no longer seen as threatening the wider regional cooperation pursued in the PIF. According to the Morauta Review:

[T]he recent establishment of new sub-regional groups in Polynesia and Micronesia, along with the success of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) in making progress on issues where it has eluded the larger Forum grouping, has been construed by some as a threat to the Pacific Plan and the Forum.

Such a conclusion, it goes on to argue, 'is a mistake'. The leaders interviewed by the Morauta Review 'saw these groupings as benefiting the regional project by illuminating both the challenges of regionalism and ways to overcome them successfully'.⁴⁶ And from within the MSG, one of its founding fathers, Sir Michael Somare, made it clear in his twenty-fifth anniversary lecture that the MSG and wider regionalism should be seen as 'mutually reinforcing'.⁴⁷

45 Gordon Nanau, 'The Melanesian Spearhead Group and Pacific Regional Co-operation', *Pacific Studies*, 39(3), 2016: 290–3, 303; and George Carter and Stewart Firth, 'The Mood in Melanesia after the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands', *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*, 3(1), 2016: 16–25, at p. 21.

46 PIFS, *Pacific Plan Review 2013*, p. 95.

47 Michael Somare, 'Melanesian Spearhead Group: The Last 25 Years', in Fry and Tarte, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, pp. 291–98.

The key to the acceptance of this transformation of the regional architecture lies in the position of the Pacific leaders other than Fiji's. They have rejected Fiji's position of excluding Australia and New Zealand but they value alternative diplomatic pathways when there is a blockage in pursuing Pacific island interests through the PIF. They all share the core principles of the new Pacific diplomacy for an assertive Pacific voice in global diplomacy. The new patchwork system therefore suits them. It makes sense also in terms of the governance of each of these institutions. They are all mainly run by the same people—the leaders of the Pacific island states. It is therefore very logical and practical for the Pacific leaders to see the PSIDS as the natural global voice and to have the PIF accept this. Australia and New Zealand have had to step back in the face of this transformation, but so has Fiji. The Pacific island leaders have prevailed in creating a more flexible and effective regional architecture, which gives them diplomatic options. They realise that there is also further work to be done in rationalising this complex system, but the transformation has been embraced.

The road to Paris

This transformation of the regional architecture and of diplomatic practice is well illustrated by the way in which the 'Pacific voice' was projected on the diplomatic road to the Paris conference on climate change in December 2015. Various island state-run forums provided an opportunity to agree on a cogent and shared climate policy agenda and strategy. Most prominent was the PIDF meeting in Suva in August of that year, although there were also other important gatherings such as the Polynesian Leaders' Meeting and the Small Islands States Grouping. The Suva meeting of the PIDF allowed two days of deliberations and consultations without the presence of Australia and New Zealand and inclusive of civil society organisations and the private sector. The Suva Declaration became the main statement of Pacific island demands and expectations going into Paris.

On the other hand, the meeting of the PIF in Port Moresby the following month produced the usual stalemate between the Pacific island nations aiming to ensure their survival and Australia and New Zealand seeking to not commit to anything that would affect their economies. What was different from previous PIF meetings, however, was the outcome. Reflecting the different positions of Australia and New Zealand, on the

one hand, and the Pacific island states, on the other, the declaration included an acknowledgement of 1.5°C as the target if survival was to be ensured and also endorsed a preferred target of 1.5°C or 2°C. The leaders agreed to disagree in Paris. This was not ideal, but it was at least a departure from the usual watering down of the communiqué to reflect the position of Australia and New Zealand.

What happened in Paris suggested not two competing regionalisms but the coming together of a complex set of institutions under one body. The Pacific found its collective voice for the first time in UNFCCC history at the Paris conference. They had shared objectives, shared strategies and tactics and organisation. They elected a spokesperson, and they generally kept to shared positions. They achieved most of their key goals and were given substantial recognition by key players. This eventuated because the Pacific operated as one patchwork system.

How did this work? The Pacific island nations all supported the PSIDS as the main diplomatic vehicle for working out strategies and tactics as the negotiations progressed day by day. The PSIDS had 'convening power'. Significantly, the PIFS supported this new joint approach even though Australia and New Zealand were not included in the meetings and the central demand of a 1.5-degree warming threshold was not shared by Australia and New Zealand. Sitting around the table were representatives of most of the agencies in the new patchwork system. Also present were NGOs. For the first time, the PIFS was openly supporting the Pacific island nation position at a UNFCCC meeting. It provided secretarial support to the PSIDS meetings. Indeed, the PIF Secretary-General, Dame Meg Taylor, came out publicly in support of the 1.5-degree threshold—an unthinkable move at previous conferences of parties. Overall, the Pacific island nations were clearly in charge of their own climate diplomacy for the first time and there was *de facto* recognition of this shift in power. Moreover, they had success in achieving most of their major diplomatic objectives.

A reformed PIF

Arguably the most transformative impact of the new Pacific diplomacy principles on the regional architecture has occurred in the PIF itself. It remains at the centre of the new patchwork system as the preeminent policy body for Pacific island leaders, together with Australia and New

Zealand. But it is a transformed PIF, having been influenced by the same big ideas—regional self-determination and inclusion—that have influenced the formation of the island-only institutions.⁴⁸ While the PIF is seen as the centre of the old Pacific regionalism, financed by Australia and New Zealand, it was already on its own journey of reform when Fiji initiated the PIDF in 2013. The 2013 Morauta Review was a response to the disenchantment of Pacific island leaders with the Pacific Plan.

Under the new, dynamic leadership of Dame Meg Taylor, reform was implemented on the basis of two key principles: control of the regional agenda by Pacific island leaders and inclusion of broader Pacific society in working for ‘Pacific peoples’. This return to the self-determination principle, which had been at the centre of the PIF’s origins, and the embrace of the inclusion principle, meant that PIF reform was very much in accord with the principles of the new Pacific diplomacy even while the organisation might have been seen (at least in Canberra) as in contest with the PIDF for the hearts and minds of Pacific leaders.

The ‘Blue Pacific’ narrative

From the outset of her tenure as PIF Secretary-General, Dame Meg, a former vice-president of the World Bank Group and former PNG ambassador, emphasised that the PIF was being reformed to better serve the Pacific island leaders and also to make a place for hearing the Pacific ‘peoples’ voice’. She based the new reform program on the findings of the Morauta Review of the Pacific Plan, which reflected a broad consultation with Pacific leaders and civil society:

One of the key issues that Sir Mekere has reiterated is who makes the decision for what happens in this region and then who takes on the responsibility. And then in his conduct of the review, it was very clear to him that a lot of the decisions that are made in this region are not made by our leaders ...

48 The case for a fundamental transformation within the PIF is also made by Helen Leslie and Kirsty Wild, ‘Post-Hegemonic Regionalism in Oceania: Examining the Development Potential of the New Framework for Pacific Regionalism’, *Pacific Review*, 31(1), 2018: 20–37; Tim Bryar and Anna Naupa, ‘The Shifting Tides of Pacific Regionalism’, *The Round Table*, 106(2), 2017: 155–64; and Meg Taylor, ‘The Future of the Pacific Islands Forum and the Framework for Pacific Regionalism’, in Fry and Tarte, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, pp. 39–47.

... it's quite revolutionary in the way you do it but other parts of the world have taken this on, setting the agenda for themselves ... and have really shifted the way developments happen in their own region.⁴⁹

Dame Meg has constantly emphasised the theme of Pacific leaders controlling their own agenda as she has promoted the new 'Framework for Pacific Regionalism'—the major recommendation of the Morauta Review:

It is through the Framework that I believe we are in the early and formative stages of what is a new era for Pacific regionalism. One that will strengthen our ability to charter our own destiny.⁵⁰

Under Dame Meg's tenure, the PIF also took on 'inclusion' as a major principle underpinning the new regionalism:

Pacific island leaders have ... recognized the need for a new inclusive and game changing approach to Pacific regionalism ... At the heart of this new approach is an emphasis on inclusive policy development and implementation ...

The Framework places strong emphasis on the fact that achieving impact requires us to work together, not just as states, but in ways that include all actors in the region. The new Pacific Regionalism has to be inclusive so that we have access to the breadth of experience and insight that exists in our people.⁵¹

There are still limitations on civil society participation and the jury is still out on whether the PIF's efforts on the inclusion agenda will earn legitimacy among the peoples of the Pacific.⁵² This nevertheless amounts to an important paradigm shift in the norms underpinning regional governance within the PIF.

49 'Donors Influence Development Decisions: Forum SG', *Pacnews*, 16 April 2015, available from: news.pngfacts.com/2015/04/donors-influence-development-decisions.html.

50 Meg Taylor, 'Keynote Address', Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) National Conference, Melbourne, 26 October 2016.

51 *ibid.*

52 Maureen Penjueli, 'Civil Society and the Political Legitimacy of Regional Institutions: An NGO Perspective', in Fry and Tarte, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, pp. 65–78; Slatter, 'The New Framework for Pacific Regionalism'.

From 2017, the assertion of the regional self-determination principle within the PIF moved to another level. Pacific leaders embraced the theme of the ‘Blue Pacific: Our Sea of Islands’ promoted by the Samoan Government at the Apia PIF meeting in September of that year. Prime Minister Sailele welcomed the delegates as ‘descendants of the continent moana, our sea of islands joined to the umbilical cord of our cultures, heritage, resources and identification as people of the Ocean’.⁵³ He went on to develop the value of adopting the ‘Blue Pacific’ as the all-embracing ‘narrative’ of Pacific regionalism pursued through the PIF:

This new narrative calls for inspired leadership by the Forum and a long-term commitment together as one Blue Continent, has the potential to define a Blue Pacific economy, ensures a sustainable, secure, resilient and peaceful Blue Pacific, as well as strengthens Blue Pacific Diplomacy to protect the value of our Ocean and peoples.⁵⁴

In their communiqué, the Pacific leaders supported Prime Minister Sailele’s proposal. They endorsed ‘the Blue Pacific identity’ as ‘the core driver of collective action’ and they ‘recognised The Blue Pacific as a new narrative that calls for ... a long-term Forum foreign policy commitment to act as one “Blue Continent”’.⁵⁵ Significantly, they ‘recognised The Blue Pacific as being about all Pacific peoples comprising our ocean of islands’.⁵⁶

This new narrative was very quickly adopted in PIF policies and communications. The new discourse had several strands. First, it was about promoting Oceanic identity and solidarity around stewardship of the ocean along the lines argued by Epele Hau’ofa in 1997 in his famous essays ‘Our Sea of Islands’ and ‘The Ocean in Us’.⁵⁷ Second, it promoted an image of solidarity and connectedness in the idea of the reclamation of an Oceanic continent, building on the concept promoted by Albert Norman in 1949.⁵⁸ Third, it is clearly talking about the assertion of regional self-determination. And finally, it is signalling an identity mainly

53 Tuilaepa Dr Sailele Malielegaoi, ‘Let Us Recapture the Essence of Our Blue Pacific’, *Samoa Observer*, 7 September 2017.

54 *ibid.*

55 PIFS, *Leaders’ Communiqué: Forty-Eighth Pacific Islands Forum*, para. 6.

56 *ibid.*, para. 7.

57 Hau’ofa, ‘Our Sea of Islands’; and Epele Hau’ofa, ‘The Ocean in Us’, *The Contemporary Pacific*, 10(2), 1998: 392–410.

58 Albert Norman, ‘The Reclamation of Oceania’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 June 1949.

among the island-state membership of the PIF. This is evident not only in the 'sea of islands' reference above, but also in Dame Meg's reference, in an August 2018 address to the USP:

The Blue Pacific narrative helps us to understand, *in our own terms, based on our unique customary values and principles*, the strategic value of our region. It guides our political conversations towards ensuring we have a strong and collective voice, a regional position and action, on issues vital to our development as a region and as the Blue Pacific continent.⁵⁹

At the forty-ninth PIF meeting in Nauru in September 2018, there were several significant indications that the diplomatic culture of the PIF was undergoing further transformation based on the principle of regional self-determination. This was clearly expressed in the theme of the meeting, which was 'Building a Strong Pacific: Our People, Our Islands, Our Will'.⁶⁰ Second, it was evident in the historic decision to change the financing of the core budget to ensure that Pacific island states control over 50 per cent.⁶¹ Third, the Pacific island states prevailed—against Australia's preferred outcome—in achieving a PIF consensus that climate change was the 'single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific' and a reaffirmation by leaders of a commitment 'to progress the implementation of the Paris Agreement'.⁶² Finally, for the first time in PIF history, the communiqué contained a declaration agreed to by FICs. Faced with Australian opposition to a proposal to have the PIF call on the United States to return to the Paris Agreement, the Pacific island leaders insisted on the inclusion of a FIC-only declaration.⁶³ Prior to this, if Australia had a contrary position, the FICs' position would have to be altered to meet Canberra's wishes or dropped from the communiqué in the name of consensus.

59 Meg Taylor, 'Introductory Remarks by Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary-General', Research Week, USP Laucala Campus, Fiji, 27 August 2018.

60 PIFS, *Leaders' Communiqué: Forty-Ninth Pacific Islands Forum*, para. 4.

61 *ibid.*, Annex 2.

62 *ibid.*, Annex 1, para. (1).

63 *ibid.*, para. 17.

Conclusion

This powerful ‘framing of the islands’ as the Blue Pacific, and the linking of this promotion of regional solidarity and Oceanic identity to Pacific island ownership of regional governance, is in many ways to be seen as a renaissance of the ideology underpinning the establishment of the SPF network in the early 1970s. This new framing of the region as solidly connected ‘large ocean states’ with strategic weight and a determination to ensure indigenous control of the regional agenda has been expressed clearly in the fundamental transformation of the regional architecture, in regional diplomacy outcomes such as climate policy, in the new conceptualisation of regional security in the Boe Declaration and in the way in which a ‘Pacific voice’ has been asserted in global forums since 2012.

The transformation of regionalism has not proceeded on the lines advocated by Fiji. The PIF has not disappeared and Australia and New Zealand are still supported by all island countries as members. But neither has regionalism reverted to the status quo ante. The Pacific island states have made it very clear that regional diplomacy—pursued through a reformed PIF and a very active PSIDS—is very much under Pacific island control on key issues such as climate policy, decolonisation, ocean management and regional security. Dialogue, debate and support from Australia and New Zealand within the PIF are valued but attempts to frustrate the pursuit of fundamental shared objectives of ‘the Blue Pacific’ are no longer tolerated. As Dame Meg warned in her address to the State of the Pacific conference in September 2018 regarding the Australian position on climate policy:

The Blue Pacific belongs to all of us and its value can only be effectively realised collectively. We cannot afford to have one or two of us acting in ways that place the wellbeing and potential of the Blue Pacific Continent at risk.⁶⁴

Since 2012, we have also seen a transformation of regionalism in relation to which Pacific islanders are included in regional diplomacy. There is a new norm concerning the interpretation of how the peoples of the Pacific should be represented. There had always been a norm of having regional

⁶⁴ Meg Taylor, ‘Keynote Address’, 2018 State of the Pacific Conference, The Australian National University, Canberra, 8 September 2018, available from: www.forumsec.org/keynote-address-by-secretary-general-meg-taylor-to-the-2018-state-of-the-pacific-conference/.

diplomacy work for the Pacific peoples, but, as interpreted from 1971 to 2012, PIF members assumed this to be taken care of by the sovereign states speaking on behalf of the people at the regional diplomatic table. What we have seen since 2012 is a transformation of this norm to one of more direct inclusion of the 'Pacific peoples'. We have seen such inclusion as a founding principle of the PIDF and declared as one of the key principles underpinning new approaches in the PIF. Ironically, we have also seen it in the inclusion of Pacific islanders from dependent territories at the top table of regional diplomacy, via membership of the PIF. The admittance of French Polynesia and New Caledonia as full members of the PIF is a dramatic departure from the longstanding principle of sovereignty as a condition of participation in the Pacific leaders' meetings. But it does fit with the new norm of inclusion of all Pacific peoples in the region, demonstrating a tension between the self-determination and inclusion norms associated with the new Pacific diplomacy.

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