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Security cooperation in the Pacific Islands: architecture, complex, community, or something else?

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Abstract

In the 2018 Boe Declaration, Pacific Islands Forum leaders recognized that the region is facing 'an increasingly complex regional security environment' and committed to 'strengthening the existing regional security architecture'. Given uncertainty about the existence and nature of this architecture, we address the question: is there a security architecture in the region, or does security cooperation take a different shape? We find that security cooperation in the Pacific Islands does not constitute a security architecture, as there is no 'overarching, coherent and comprehensive security structure for a geographically-defined area'. We also find that the region is neither a security complex nor a

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community, due to the extensive involvement of metropolitan powers and external partners. Instead, we argue that security cooperation in the Pacific Islands is best described as a patchwork of bilateral, minilateral, and multilateral, formal and informal agencies, agreements, and arrangements, across local, national, regional, and international levels

In their 2018 *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) leaders committed to 'strengthening the existing regional security architecture', which they defined as including 'regional law enforcement secretariats and regional organisations'. But the etymology of the phrase 'regional security architecture' in this context is unclear. Did it signal a collective understanding that such an architecture exists in the region, an aspiration that one could be developed, or the preferences of certain PIF members? Then Samoan Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sailele Malielegaoi had argued earlier in 2018 that 'protecting *The Blue Pacific* will require a collective security architecture that recognizes, promotes and provides security in the broadest sense of the term', suggesting that he thought that it was yet to be built (quoted in PIF, 2018). Australia, as both a PIF member and funder, implied that it already exists in its 2016 Defence White Paper, when it committed to 'strengthen[ing] the regional security architecture', which it characterized as providing Pacific Island states 'with mechanisms to discuss and agree how to respond to regional security threats' (DoD, 2016, pp. 56; 55). New Zealand similarly dedicated a large portion of its 2019 *Advancing Pacific Partnerships Defence Assessment* to 'advancing regional security architecture', which it defined as being headed by the PIF, but as including a range of both international and regional arrangements (MoD, 2019c).

Regardless of whether all PIF leaders believed that a regional security architecture does – or even should – exist in the Pacific Islands, in the 2018 Boe Declaration they recognized that the region is facing 'an increasingly complex regional security environment driven by multifaceted security challenges'. They accordingly committed to enhance regional security cooperation by adopting an 'expanded concept of security', 'identify[ing] and address[ing] emerging security challenges', 'improv[ing] coordination among existing security mechanisms', 'facilitat[ing] open dialogue and strengthened information sharing', 'promot[ing] regional security analysis, assessment and advice', and 'engag[ing] and cooperat[ing],

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where appropriate, with international organizations, partners and other relevant stakeholders'. That declaration was built on a series of security-related statements made by PIF leaders over the preceding three decades. The most significant is the 2000 Biketawa Declaration, which while acknowledging the principle of 'non-interference in the domestic affairs of another member state', asserted the need that in a 'time of crisis or in response to members' request for assistance, for action to be taken on the basis of all members of the Forum being part of the Pacific Islands extended family'. The PIF is now engaged in consultations to create a '2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent' that will constitute a 'regional strategy to protect and secure our Pacific people, place and prospects' (PIF 2021) and is expected to involve recommendations to improve the responsiveness and collaborative capacity of the region's architecture.

Against this background, in this article we draw on our mapping of security cooperation (McNeill *et al.*, 2021; Wallis *et al.*, 2021), that is, the 'common action between two or more states to advance a common security goal' (Bisley, 2012, p. 23), in the Pacific Islands to address three questions: are scholarly constructs such as 'security architecture', 'security complex', and 'security community' useful in understanding how security cooperation operates in the Pacific? Or is the Pacific *sui generis* in the way security cooperation functions? And if so, what explains this? Our mapping was based on identifying '"layers" or "levels" of collaborative security arrangements' and shared norms (Tow and Taylor, 2010, p. 96) in the region.

While the term 'regional security architecture' has emerged as a 'floating signifier' (Laclau, 2005, p. 131) to describe varying understandings of security cooperation in the Pacific and elsewhere, in the scholarly literature the term has a specific meaning: it implies that there are 'distinct mechanisms and processes to create some kind of broader entity' (Bisley, 2012, p. 24) and is not a synonym for security 'institutions' or 'arrangements' (Tow and Taylor, 2010). Instead, a regional security architecture should be: 'geographically delineated at the regional level of analysis'; 'embody a sense of coherence'; 'the product of intelligent design'; 'functionally oriented'; and 'sufficiently broad to accommodate [. . .a] "comprehensive" understandings of security' (Tow and Taylor, 2010, p. 110). As we describe, we find that security cooperation in the Pacific Islands does not constitute a security architecture in this (formal) sense, as there is no 'overarching, coherent and

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comprehensive security structure for a geographically-defined area, which facilitates the resolution of that region's policy concerns and achieves its security objectives' (Tow and Taylor, 2010, p. 96).

We therefore consider whether security cooperation in the Pacific Islands might be better characterized as a 'regional security complex', whereby 'security interdependence is normally patterned' such that 'states or other units link together sufficiently closely that their securities cannot be considered separate from each other' (Buzan *et al.*, 1998; Buzan and Wæver, 2003, pp. 4, 43–44). Accordingly, regional security complexes are typically defined by 'durable patterns of amity and enmity' (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 45). Four variables indicate whether a regional security complex exits: there is a boundary which differentiates the region from its neighbors; there is an anarchic structure, that is, the region is composed of more than two states; polarity is evident, as power is distributed amongst those states; and there is evidence of the social construction of a regional security complex through the 'security discourses and security practices of actors' creating a 'pattern of security connectedness' and interdependence (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, pp. 48, 73). While we find some evidence that the Pacific Islands is a regional security complex, we argue that this concept does not provide a satisfactory characterization of the region due to the extensive involvement of metropolitan powers and external partners.

Regional security complexes exist across a spectrum: from conflict formation (interdependence reliant on fear), through security regimes (where regional partners have agreed to reduce the threat through cooperation), to security communities which 'no longer expect or prepare to use force in their relations with each other' (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, p. 12). Therefore, we also consider whether the Pacific Islands can be characterized as a 'security community', in which states are integrated 'to the point that they have a sense of community' (Adler and Barnett, 1998, p. 3), such that they peacefully agree to disagree (Deutsch *et al.*, 1957) and avoid war (Acharya, 2000). Again, we find that, while the Pacific Islands loosely resembles a security community, this concept does not fully capture the impact of the presence of numerous metropolitan powers and external partners in the region.

After exploring notions of 'the region' and analyzing how security is understood and pursued in the Pacific Islands, we conclude by arguing

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that security cooperation in the region is best described as a *patchwork* of bilateral, minilateral, and multilateral, formal and informal agencies, agreements, and arrangements, across local, national, regional, and international levels (Wallis *et al.*, 2021). While in terms of the academic taxonomy of security arrangements outlined above, the Pacific might perhaps be best described as a quasi-security complex, our preference for the term 'patchwork' is intended as a more evocative descriptor for the way that security cooperation operates. We argue that this extant patchwork has grown organically in response to both Pacific interests and priorities, and metropolitan power and influence, over time and changing geopolitical dynamics. The patchwork descriptor echoes Steven Ratuva's (2019b, p. 49) characterization of Pacific security cooperation as 'different layers of interests, thinking and activities that are intertwined in a complex web of often ragged and disjointed relationships'. It is not necessarily intended to suggest a lack of coordination or ineffectiveness, but instead captures the diverse and multilayered components of security cooperation in the Pacific that have interacted to reflect the interests of many actors. The term also reflects that the process has led to overlaps, gaps, stretches, and tears. Our analysis focuses on the contemporary context, as scholars have already traced the development of major regional institutions and their relationships with metropolitan powers and external partners (see: Herr, 2015; Lawson, 2017; Fry, 2019).

1 What is the 'Pacific Islands' region?

While the concepts of regional security architecture, complex, and community require the existence of a bounded, delineated, and coherent *region*, the definition of 'the Pacific Islands' is contested. Security cooperation occurs within a range of different organizations and agreements, all with varying membership (see McNeill *et al.*, 2021 and Wallis *et al.*, 2021 for a mapping of these memberships). The membership of these organizations, broadly speaking, is based on history, identity, geographical proximity, more contemporary imperatives to combine resources to address issues, or on the strategic interests of either (or both) metropolitan or island states. Even during the colonial period, Pacific leaders identified that cooperation would be essential to advancing regional security and development. The first regional institution, the South Pacific

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Commission, was established by the colonial powers and continues today as the Pacific Community (SPC), with the most wide-ranging membership, including the UK and French territories. But Pacific states have since created numerous organizations with only Pacific members, such as the sub-regional Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) (with five members) and the Polynesian Leaders' Group (with eight members), or smaller situational arrangements based on working with metropolitan powers to meet identified needs, such as the Transnational Serious and Organised Crime Pacific Taskforce, which includes only Fiji, Tonga, Australia, and New Zealand. States and territories on the geographic fringes of the Pacific Islands are sometimes included in organizations, but at other times not: for example, Timor-Leste is a member of the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) and Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), holds observer status at the MSG and the PIF, but is not formally represented in any other fora. Australia and New Zealand are full members of the PIF; in contrast, other metropolitan powers in the region, including the United States, the UK, and France, are dialog partners, as is China; and while Tokelau is an associate member, other territories such as American Samoa and Guam are observers. Other organizations, such as the PIDF, actively discourage metropolitan powers, as these fora have been designed to allow Pacific Island states to meet without external involvement.

The question of which metropolitan powers are part of the region is especially problematic. In the lead-up to independence, Pacific leaders favored creating a regional organization with only island state members (Ratuva, 2019b). But they ultimately decided to include Australia and New Zealand as members of the PIF, because they concluded that this might amplify their international influence (Fry, 1991). Today Australia and New Zealand are sometimes characterized as pursuing security agendas, including extra-regionally as in the case of Australia's role in the AUKUS partnership announced in 2021, that are not shared by all Member States (although not all Pacific Island states necessarily share the same security interests and agendas). And while New Zealand has a nonself-governing territory in the region, Tokelau (in addition to the self-governing 'free association' states of Cook Islands and Niue), and increasingly frames itself as having a 'Pacific identity' (Powles, 2021), it is unclear whether that is widely accepted by the Pacific Island

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community. Indeed, to help regional structures better reflect the interests of island states, in 2018 PIF leaders agreed to realign the funding model so that 51% of assessed funding will come from island Member States from 2021 (Mayron, 2021). Fry (2019, p. 323) suggests that this represents the 'continuation of the trend of greater control of Pacific regionalism by Pacific islanders'. It also highlights how power asymmetries have facilitated metropolitan powers shaping regional cooperation. While the PIF was designed to allow the island states, Australia, and New Zealand to meet on equal footing, because they were major donors, Australia and New Zealand had 'the resources and capacity to dominate regional meetings' (Lawson, 2017, p. 219). Yet both Australia – through its 'Pacific step-up' (DFAT, 2021) – and New Zealand – through its 'Pacific Reset' and, more recently, 'Pacific Resilience' (Peters, 2018; Mahuta, 2021) policies – have made clear their intention to enhance their presence and relationships in the region. In both cases, strengthening security cooperation has been a focal point of Australia and New Zealand's engagement. For example, Australia has partnered with Fiji to develop the Blackrock Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Camp as a regional training facility.

Alongside New Zealand, other metropolitan powers hold territories in the region: the UK retains control of Pitcairn Island; France of New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna; and the United States of American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam. A US state, Hawaii, also has links to the region. The presence of the United States is enhanced by its Compacts of Free Association with Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). All three powers are seeking to enhance their relationships, with the United States making a 'Pacific Pledge' (US DoS, 2019b), the UK a 'Pacific Uplift' (UK Government, 2019), and France sees the region as key to its Indo-Pacific strategy. France is also a *de facto* member of the PIF, as New Caledonia and French Polynesia became members in 2016. Therefore, as the UK, United States, and France are primarily identified as members of other regions (such as the Western European and Others Grouping for the purposes of voting at the United Nations or their membership of regional alliances such as NATO), it is unclear whether they are also accepted by the entire Pacific Island community as *part* of the Pacific Islands. This raises questions about the

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geographical delineation and cohesiveness of the region. While a regional security complex 'may well be extensively penetrated by the global powers, but their regional dynamics nonetheless have a substantial degree of autonomy from the patterns set by the global powers' (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 4), the fact that several Pacific island states and territories have relationships with metropolitan powers that constrain their decision-making relating to their defense and security, and that metropolitan powers claim a place in the region yet identify their primary security interests as stemming from global security dynamics, underlines both that 'the region' is a slippery concept, and that – to the extent that it exists – the region does not enjoy untrammeled autonomy in the area of security.

Indonesia also claims to be part of the Pacific Islands by virtue of five of its provinces which it characterizes as ethnically and linguistically Melanesian (Papua, West Papua, Maluku, North Maluku, and East Nusa Tenggara). Minister for Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi claimed in 2015 that: 'Indonesia is home to more than 11 million Melanesians. So Indonesia is Melanesia and Melanesia is Indonesia' (quoted in PNG Post Courier, 2015). While there is skepticism about this claim, in a move that was widely regarded as political and aimed at countering support for Papuan independence, in 2011 Indonesia was given observer status at the MSG, which was upgraded to associate member status in 2015 (PNG Post Courier, 2015), and in 2019 announced its 'Pacific Elevation' strategy (Smith, 2019).

Other metropolitan powers have also become more active. Japan has adopted a 'Pacific Bond' (*Kizuna*) policy to strengthen cooperation in the region (MOFA, 2021) through the triennial Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting summits which it has hosted since 1997. India has expressed stronger strategic interests as part of the 'Act East' policy it adopted in 2014. And while China has built a diplomatic and economic presence over several decades, this has increased over the last five years, including through infrastructure investment under its 'Belt and Road Initiative' (China State Information Center, 2021)[1] and initiatives such as those announced at the inaugural China–Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting in October 2021, which included a China–

1 Pacific Island signatories to the Belt and Road Initiative are: Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

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Pacific Island Countries fisheries cooperation and development forum, a climate hub, and a reserve for emergency supplies.

2 Structural dynamics of security cooperation in the Pacific Islands

In the Pacific, metropolitan powers participate in security cooperation in differing ways, reflecting varying diplomatic and legal relationships and geographic, historical, and strategic factors, as well as their own priorities and interests. For example, Australia and New Zealand tend to participate in most multilateral security arrangements across the region, and Australia is by far the largest security assistance donor. Australia and New Zealand are also active in supporting Pacific Island states directly on core security areas, including maritime surveillance, and training and capacity building in specific security areas such as defense, policing, or immigration. The United States and France play a role in regional initiatives through their colonial and dependent territories, and as members of several regional organizations. Australia, New Zealand, France, and the United States also cooperate on air and maritime surveillance as members of the Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group; and France, Australia, and New Zealand cooperate on disaster reconnaissance and relief assistance as members of the FRANZ Arrangement. Notably, neither of these groupings includes island states as members, despite existing primarily to secure the Pacific region.

The heavy involvement of metropolitan powers in providing security assistance reflects the serious resource constraints of most island states. The resource disparity between island states and their security partners is a fundamental and defining feature of the regional security landscape in the Pacific. Even so, the Pacific Islands cannot be characterized as entirely subject to an 'overlay', whereby metropolitan powers come to 'dominate a region so heavily that the local pattern of security relations virtually ceases to operate' (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 61), as local security relations play an increasingly influential role. Moreover, theoretical descriptors such as regional security architecture, complex, or community reflect a tendency to focus on formal cooperation, which overlooks the informal practices Pacific Island states and peoples engage in to determine their security priorities, and the many differing

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security relationships between island states, metropolitan powers, and external partners, as well as the ways in which island states instrumentalize the interest and involvement of metropolitan powers and other external partners.

Metropolitan powers have also, at times, attempted to subsume the Pacific Islands within larger regions. While the term 'Asia-Pacific' had dominated descriptions of the Pacific Islands' broader region since the 1970s, Australia, the United States, Japan, and, increasingly, New Zealand, now prefer to frame their region of strategic interest as the 'Indo-Pacific' (DoD, 2020; Ardern, 2021). The Indo-Pacific is itself a contested construct and how the Pacific Islands 'fits' into this framing is unclear (Wallis and Batley, 2020). There is a tendency in much of the official discourse and commentary to either overlook the place of the Pacific Islands entirely, or to treat the island states as 'objects that can be shaped and used in various ways', rather than actors within the security environment (Sargeant, 2020, pp. 27–28). Some island leaders have reservations about the Indo-Pacific framing: the then Prime Minister of Samoa, Tuila'epa Aiono Sailele Malielegaoi (2018), stated that there was a 'real risk of privileging Indo over the Pacific'. Former Deputy Secretary-General of the PIF, Cristelle Pratt (2019), questioned the tension between the Indo-Pacific and Blue Pacific framings and argued that 'the Blue Pacific cannot and will not become an aside in this new Indo-Pacific frame'. A senior official from Vanuatu has 'observed that the Indo-Pacific framing had not been met with much enthusiasm in Vanuatu, as there was uncertainty about what it entailed and whose interests it served' (Wallis and Batley, 2020, p. 4). However, perhaps reflecting a combination of their closer ties to the United States, which has explicitly adopted the term (US DoS, 2019a), and their closer geographic proximity to potential sites of conflict in the Taiwan Strait and in the East and South China Seas, some Micronesian states, such as Palau, have used the framing as part of their efforts to engage the United States: 'we want to continue to strengthen the partnership because we believe in a free and open Indo-Pacific' (President Whipps quoted in Garamore, 2021).

There are also power asymmetries among the island states themselves and an increasing tendency toward sub-regionalism as Pacific states, have at times, concluded that their differing interests and concerns may be best pursued within smaller forums. This has seen Pacific

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states and territories identify with three geographical and cultural sub-regions: Melanesia (PNG, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, and New Caledonia); Micronesia (FSM, Palau, RMI, Kiribati, and Nauru); and Polynesia (American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Hawaii, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Wallis and Futuna). While these sub-regions are colonial constructs, they have increasingly been internalized by Pacific Islanders and instrumentalized for political purposes. Melanesian states created the MSG in 1988; Polynesian states formed the Polynesian Leaders Group (PLG) in 2011; and Micronesian states formed the Micronesian Presidents' Summit (MPS) in 1994 and the Micronesian Chief Executives Summit in 2003. The MSG is the most formal, as it was institutionalized in 2007, has a secretariat in Port Vila, and its members have agreed to create a free-trade area, a skilled-labor-movement scheme, and a regional security strategy, although none of these initiatives have yet borne fruit. With similar ambition, Nauru is providing interim secretariat services for the MPS as it seeks to formally establish a secretariat and eventually develop shared foreign policy objectives.

Despite Melanesian sub-regional cooperation being the most longstanding, there is an enduring perception that Polynesian states shape the regional agenda and discourse. The MSG formed partly in response to concerns that the PIF was dominated by its Polynesian members, and the PLG was, in turn, established in response to growing MSG influence. This has led to calls such as by Collin Beck, Permanent Secretary of the Solomon Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, that the 'regional architecture should be reformed to address the differing concerns of Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian states' (Wallis and Batley, 2020, p. 5).

The nomenclature 'South Pacific' was removed from many regional organizations in the 1990s to signal greater inclusion of Micronesian states (Herr, 2015). Even so, there remains a longstanding 'sense of detachment' from the broader region that is part self-enforced, part self-perpetuated by Micronesian states (Lowe Gallen, 2015, p. 178). Sub-regional tensions relating to longstanding concerns amongst the Micronesian states about inadequate regional representation emerged to threaten the PIF in 2021. In the lead-up to a vote for the next PIF Secretary General in February 2021, MPS Member States expected that their candidate, Gerald Zackios, would be successful due to their

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understanding that the position would rotate between the three sub-regions. After Zackios lost the vote to the Cook Islands' Henry Puna, the five Micronesian PIF Member States expressed their frustration at what they perceived as further exclusion by 'southern' island states. The MPS announced that 'there is no value in participating in an organization that does not respect established agreements, including the gentlemen's agreement on sub-regional rotation', and its members began the formal process of withdrawing from the PIF (Republic of Nauru, 2021). While negotiations are ongoing, at the time of writing there were reasons to believe that at least some, and possibly all, of the Micronesian states would not carry out their withdrawal from the PIF.

3 How is security understood in the Pacific Islands?

Another challenge to characterizing security cooperation in the Pacific Islands as a regional security architecture, complex, or community is disagreement over how security is understood. This disagreement arises partly because understandings differ depending on the definition of the region. While PIF leaders collectively securitized (Buzan and Wæver, 2003) a range of issues in the 2018 Boe Declaration, in which they articulated an 'expanded concept of security' that includes nontraditional challenges such as human security, transnational crime, cybersecurity, maritime security, environmental security, and climate security, it is unclear whether all PIF Member States are equally committed to addressing each of these challenges. The Boe Declaration commits Member States to develop national security strategies, and that process is ongoing. The strategies adopted so far (in Samoa, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and PNG's 2013 National Security Policy) echo and build on the priorities of the Boe Declaration, but each has different emphasizes to reflect their individual priorities. Given resource and capacity constraints, there is likely to be a gap between the contents of these strategies and how they are implemented, which will provide further signals of individual states' security priorities. These strategies and their implementation will also reflect the differing security challenges faced across the region: PNG is much larger than other island states and shares a land border with Indonesia; Niue is by far the least populous; some states, such as Kiribati, have large maritime domains; low-lying atolls like Tuvalu and RMI face climate change impacts more

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regularly; Melanesian states with large young urban populations face demographic challenges; some state have tumultuous political histories, such as Fiji and Solomon Islands; and some territories are seeking independence, such as the Bougainville region of PNG and New Caledonia.

The emphasis on nontraditional security concerns within the PIF's expanded concept of security reflects the increasing array of challenges that have emerged in the Pacific Islands since the late 1990s. These challenges include transnational crime, illegal migration, HIV/AIDS, natural disasters, the effects of climate change, the over-exploitation of natural resources, and domestic security issues created by political instability and conflict. But the breadth of issues that can now be classified as falling within an expanded concept of security makes efforts to address them challenging. Indeed, it may even go so far as to hollow out the value of an expanded conception. Conversations are ongoing about how the expanded concept of security articulated in the Boe Declaration can be operationalized in the region, with the Boe Declaration Action Plan (PIF, 2019b) providing a broad framework to assist Member States in the implementation of the Declaration; however, progress has been slowed by COVID-19. For example, officials are grappling with the question of how human rights, health, and prosperity – all understood to be critical to human security – fit into existing regional security efforts, whether lines can (or should) be drawn between issues that would typically be classified as relating to 'security' or 'development', and what this means in practical terms for efforts to advance security in the region. The transnational nature of many of these challenges has also generated significant security interdependence among island states and highlighted the need for substantial cooperation between them, as well as the involvement of metropolitan powers.

Security connectedness and interdependence in the Pacific Islands has not always been appreciated in scholarly analyses. When the proponents of regional security complex theory, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (2003, p. 64), initially analyzed the Pacific Islands, they concluded that the island states were 'too weak as powers to generate security interdependence on a regional level'. While they admitted that the island states had developed 'some loose regional forums', they argued that 'distance and water' prevented the Pacific Islands from becoming a regional security complex (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 136). While

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this conclusion was a product of its time, it also reflected a common external perception of the Pacific Islands as being small islands dotted in a large ocean (Tarte, 2021). This can be contrasted to the understandings of many island states and peoples, who have characterized the region as a 'sea of islands' (Hau'ofa, 1994), to highlight that, for them, the ocean unites, rather than divides, the region.

This emphasis on the ocean as a source of connectedness and interdependence has been developed by PIF Member States through the concept of the Blue Pacific, first officially articulated at the 2017 PIF leaders' meeting as 'a long-term Forum foreign policy commitment to act as one "Blue Continent"' (PIF, 2017). The 2019 PIF communique set out '*Blue Pacific Principles*', that emphasize – among other things – 'regional priorities', a 'partnership approach', and 'collective outcomes and impact' (PIF, 2019b). A key element of the Blue Pacific discourse is an identity based around 'our collective potential and our shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean' (Malielegaoi, 2018; Taylor, 2019b). This reflects ideas crystallized in the work of Tongan philosopher Epeli Hau'ofa (1994) and which had appeared in the PIF's 2014 *Framework for Pacific Regionalism* (PIF, 2014, p. 1). In this context, and with reference to the discussion of sub-regional dynamics canvassed above, the Blue Pacific concept appears to have firmly Polynesian origins, notwithstanding the fact that it is now universally accepted across the Pacific.

Another key element of the Blue Pacific narrative is that the island states should move to 'exercising stronger strategic autonomy', 'understanding…the strategic value of our region', and 'maintain[ing] our solidarity in the face of those who seek to divide us' (Taylor, 2018). This idea was reinforced by the theme of the 2018 PIF leaders' meeting: 'Building a Strong Pacific: Our People, Our Islands, Our Will'. Former PIF Secretary-General Dame Meg Taylor (2019b) emphasized that the Blue Pacific identity is intended to highlight the unique character of Pacific diplomacy and regionalism. Even before the Blue Pacific narrative emerged, there was evidence of a 'new Pacific diplomacy', with Pacific Island states acting in increasingly assertive and creative ways to pursue their interests (Fry and Tarte, 2015). Yet although the Blue Pacific narrative stresses the autonomy of the island states, it is unclear how Australia and New Zealand, which are members of the PIF, as well as France, which through its dependent territories is a *de facto* PIF member, fit within this narrative. Moreover,

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although the United States has, at times, adopted the Blue Pacific language (and sought to claim it as per the Blue Pacific Act 2021), the United States' status as a dialog partner of the PIF – equal to China's at the PIF – has caused some frustration in Washington. Both Australia and New Zealand have adopted the Blue Pacific terminology in their official discourse (DFAT, 2021; MFAT, 2021), but how the island states understand them fitting into the concept is unclear, as is what 'strategic autonomy' means in a context where several PIF Member States are in dependent relationships with metropolitan powers. Indeed, Hau'ofa did not include Australia or New Zealand in his vision of a 'sea of islands', as he described them as 'domineering, exploitative, and in possession of the gentleness and sensitivity of the proverbial bull in a china shop' (1998, p. 399).

A further complicating factor is that metropolitan powers have global interests and sets of relationships in which their Pacific Islands partners are not directly engaged, and indeed which the latter may at times think are irrelevant to, or inconsistent with, their own security interests. For example, in 2021 Australia, the United States, and the UK announced the 'AUKUS' partnership to deepen their defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (Morrison *et al.*, 2021). This announcement generated some anxiety in the Pacific Islands, with PNG Prime Minister James Marape commenting that: 'we have a very peaceful part of planet earth, we want to protect that peace and serenity... as far as securing peace is concerned, we've got no problem, but if such activities bring disharmony in the region then we have an issue' (quoted in Whiting, 2021). Vanuatu opposition leader Ralph Regenvanu (2021) similarly expressed his concern about what the partnership means for the future stability of the region. The announcement that the AUKUS partnership would include assistance for Australia to develop nuclear-powered submarines was particularly concerning for some Pacific leaders, given the problematic history of nuclear testing in the region and longstanding advocacy for a nuclear-free Pacific. As recently as 2019, PIF leaders called for the operationalization of the *Treaty of Rarotonga*, otherwise known as the *South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty*, that entered into force in 1986 and of which Australia is a signatory (PIF, 2019b).

The priority most metropolitan powers give to traditional security concerns is reflected in the Boe Declaration, in which PIF leaders

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recognized a 'dynamic geopolitical environment leading to an increasingly crowded and complex region'. But while PIF leaders acknowledged a comprehensive understanding of security, the emphasis on nontraditional security challenges in the Declaration highlights that there is, at times, 'a contest between divergent security paradigms' (Tarte, 2021, p. 1). Indeed, those national security strategies that have been published to date reference, but do not offer direct responses to, questions of geostrategic competition in their own region. Vanuatu's national security strategy (NSS) refers to growing competition for influence in the region; Solomon Islands' NSS refers to the 'geo-political power play'; and Samoa's NSS acknowledges increasing competition for influence. This reflects that Pacific states, whilst acknowledging the impact of strategic competition, do not generally identify that they face traditional security threats that warrant efforts at individual or collective self-defense (only Fiji, PNG, and Tonga have militaries and they are too small to adequately defend their territories), although those states and territories that have relationships with the United States, France, and New Zealand are provided some defense guarantees.

Even so, Pacific Island states cannot insulate themselves entirely from deepening strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific. One reason for this, although by no means the only one, is the long-standing fault line between the island states that recognize either China or Taiwan. The evidence suggests that this issue is becoming more divisive. In 2019 Beijing persuaded Solomon Islands and Kiribati to switch their diplomatic recognition to China, reducing the number of Pacific Island states that have diplomatic relations with Taiwan to four (Nauru, Palau, RMI, and Tuvalu). Competition between China and Taiwan for diplomatic recognition and the related alleged corruption of local politicians has political ramifications. Although there is no evidence that either Chinese or Taiwanese actors were actively involved inciting post-election riots in Solomon Islands and Tonga in 2006, their perceived corruption of local politicians and officials exacerbated existing grievances (Fraenkel, 2004; Allen, 2013). There are signs that competition is again heating up, with reports of a physical altercation between Chinese and Taiwanese diplomats in Fiji in October 2020 (Doherty *et al.*, 2020). In November 2021 Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands, was the site of rolling protests which morphed into riots,

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which, while primarily motivated by longstanding local dynamics (Kabutaulaka quoted in Fennell, 2021), also reflected the consequences of strategic competitors jostling for influence in the country.

Beyond the contest for diplomatic recognition, the United States and France have military bases in the Pacific Islands, which may become involved in any wider conflict should strategic competition between China and the United States and its partners escalate. Micronesia is home to US military bases and other installations, including Guam, which is colloquially referred to as the 'tip of the spear' from Second World War battles, and which is home to two bases that were elevated as strategic hubs in the US Indo-Pacific Strategy (Cagurangan and Rhowuniong, 2020). In 2021, FSM and the United States agreed to establish another military base specifically to 'neutralise China's threat' (Cagurangan, 2021). This is because China's 'second and third island chains of defense' are said to run through the Pacific Islands (Yu, 2015). Although there is no precise definition of these chains, most include the Micronesian sub-region in the second island chain, with Melanesia and part of Polynesia in the third (Erickson and Wuthnow, 2016).

While metropolitan powers such as the United States, Australia, France, and New Zealand are concerned about China's growing presence in the Pacific Islands, particularly the strategic intentions that it may have, island states and peoples do not necessarily see it in negative terms. According to former PIF Secretary General Dame Meg Taylor (2019a), 'if there is one word that might resonate amongst all Forum members when it comes to China, that word is access. Access to markets, technology, financing, infrastructure. Access to a viable future'. In contrast, Palau, which recognizes Taiwan, has resisted Chinese efforts to switch diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing despite China's 'ban' on tourism to Palau (Lyons, 2018). Indeed, island states on both sides of the geopolitical fault line have used 'tactical, shrewd and calculating approaches' to exploit strategic competition to pursue their own priorities (Ratuva, 2019a). For example, Taylor (2020) has argued that: 'perhaps the time is now right to leverage the geopolitical interests and opportunities that are available to us to advocate for and secure our maritime interests into perpetuity'. There is an element of whistling into the (increasingly stiff) wind of geostrategic competition in such statements; even so, they reflect that island states do not see themselves

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as simply the passive recipients of security assistance, but instead aim to exercise 'their agency in increasingly creative ways to play more powerful states off against each other and access benefits' (Morgan, 2020; Wallis and Batley, 2020, p. 5), including greater aid, concessional loans, military assistance, and international influence. Solomon Islands has defended its mooted security agreement with China in similarly conventional terms (Dziedzic, 2022). However, it might be argued that this agreement will, if it is pursued, simply fuel destabilizing geo-strategic competition in the region in ways that Solomon Islands did not intend, and its neighbors will not welcome. The Solomon Islands case raises the uncomfortable question: just who is leveraging whom?

4 How is security pursued in the Pacific Islands?

In addition to being geographically delineated and coherent, a regional security architecture is assumed by scholars to have been the product of intelligent design and functionally orientated. The most important regional institution responsible for security and politics in the region is the PIF, which plays a role coordinating how the island states, Australia, and New Zealand pursue security. To enhance the PIF's role, in 2019 the Forum Subcommittee on Regional Security (FSRS) was established as a revamped version of the moribund Forum Regional Security Committee that had operated until 2015. The FSRS is designed to meet regularly to:

> discuss the wide range of security issues in the region, including from the expanded concept of security under the Boe Declaration; coordinate and monitor the implementation of all Forum regional security declarations and commitments; prioritise regional security issues and advise appropriate and time-bound actions to manage the regional security environment; and keep the [Pacific Islands] Forum Officials Committee apprised of regional security issues and initiatives. (PIF, 2019a, p. 1)

Anecdotal reports suggest that the FSRS primarily operates as an information-sharing forum, but PIF officials hope that its capacity to coordinate and enable security cooperation will develop over time. If the FSRS develops into an effective coordination body, this could

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enable greater strategic security cooperation; however, there still remain many bodies outside of the FSRS which limits its reach and dilutes its authority; and thus membership, structure, and mandate should be a key question when considering the type of regional architecture required to implement the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent as well as other key statements such as the Boe Declaration. For example, the Australian-funded Pacific Fusion Centre, which intends to provide open-source intelligence assessments, capacity building, and information sharing, may also encourage greater coordination and cooperation, and is aligned with the PIF architecture through the FSRS, although it is unclear what this means in terms of processes and responsibilities. Outside of the scope of the FSRS are metropolitan-led fora for security cooperation. For example, the annual Australian-coordinated Joint Heads of Pacific Security (JHoPS) meeting is attended by heads of police, defense, immigration, and customs organizations around the Pacific and from metropolitan powers, but does not fall under the remit of the FSRS despite discussing similar issues and having similar membership. The Transnational Serious and Organised Crime Pacific Taskforce also does not fall under the remit of the FSRS, despite it addressing an area of strategic focus of the FSRS. In addition, the Australia Pacific Security College established at the Australian National University in Canberra in 2019 is intended to strengthen regional security through capacity building of, and coordination between, officials across the region, but has faced challenges posed by the limitations of movement necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) model, the PIF also maintains oversight and coordination of much of the activity in the region. CROP agencies are the SPC, the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), University of the South Pacific, Pacific Islands Development Programme, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), South Pacific Tourism Organization, Pacific Power Association, and the Pacific Aviation Safety Office. However, ruptures within these organizations, such as that seen in 2020–21 in the University of the South Pacific over allegations of corruption and tensions between the Vice Chancellor and Fijian government (which hosts the main campus and provides considerable funding to the university), highlight that regional

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cooperation is not unproblematic. Australia and New Zealand are members of these organizations and provide them with significant financial and technical support. Many also receive *ad hoc* training or technical support from other metropolitan powers and external partners. This support is coordinated by an array of fora, which raises frequent questions about whether it is well targeted, generating overlaps, and leaving gaps.

One common feature of security cooperation in the broader Indo-Pacific which is absent in the Pacific Islands region is multi-track diplomacy. Unlike Southeast Asia, where security cooperation typically includes government and track 1.5 and 2 meetings (Bisley, 2012; Kuik, 2016), the latter two are seldom conducted in or with the Pacific Islands. Although track 1.5 and 2 meetings have been organized by metropolitan powers – such as the track 1.5 meeting held prior to the Australia–New Zealand–United States Pacific Security Trilateral Dialogue that has met annually since 2018 – except for the New Zealand-hosted track 1.5 meeting in 2020, the majority have not engaged with island states or included significant Pacific representation. Multilateral diplomacy in the Pacific is largely confined to track 1 engagement, for example between political leaders, such as the PIF leaders' meetings, or the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting, attended by defense ministers from Australia, Chile, Fiji, France, New Zealand, PNG, and Tonga. Similarly, there are regional fora for high-level public servants to meet, such as the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), where the Commissioners of Police meet regularly and lead projects across the region. What is frequently absent, however, is engagement with nonofficials. The region-wide consultations for the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, to which PIF Member States invited academic and civil society organizations to contribute, were an attempt to diversify voices within the regional security debate.

Also, unlike Southeast Asia, there is no institutionalized mechanism akin to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) for the island states to 'collectively relate to external actors' on security issues (Acharya, 2000, p. 18) in the Pacific Islands. While Southeast Asian states accelerated their multilateral security cooperation 'as a response to the security and economic challenges of globalization, [and] it became a means of responding to the shifts in the regional order' (Bisley, 2019, p. 222), a similar approach is yet to emerge in the Pacific Islands, despite the

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island states facing similar dynamics. Indeed, as New Zealand's 2021 Defence Assessment stated: 'the current arrangements have built up largely organically in response to discrete events and particular interests…' and '…were not developed in anticipation of external actors seeking contradictory objectives, and may not alone be sufficient to manage future security challenges' (MoD, 2021, p. 24).

While the PIF Forum Partner Dialogue mechanism meets to facilitate dialog and engagement between metropolitan powers and external partners and PIF members about PIF priorities, it does not have the same expansive mandate as the ARF. Expanding the remit of the FSRS to include a mechanism by which Member States can engage with external partners on security matters is another avenue, but whether this is desirable (or indeed desired) is less clear. A forum like the ARF in the Pacific Islands could provide opportunities for 'greater dialogue between such powers and Pacific Island nations to enhance trust, confidence and transparency in regional security' (Cramer, 2015, pp. 163–164). Yet such a move could be frustrated by the unclear role of metropolitan powers, particularly the question of how their interests and those of external partners would be positioned relative to each other and to the island states. Given the range of different interests and diplomatic relationships across the region, there are also questions about whether island states are interested in creating such a mechanism – the fact that they have not yet done so may be indicative of this.

Another challenge to deeper multilateral security cooperation in the Pacific Islands is that the island states do not yet conceive themselves as a 'fully-fledged security community' (Batley, 2021, p. 31). As is the case in Southeast Asia, where the activism of ASEAN has been constrained by an emphasis on non-interference in domestic affairs, in the Pacific Islands this is partly because most island states only emerged from colonization relatively recently and therefore share a high level of 'sovereignty-consciousness' (Breslin and Wilson, 2015, p. 135). This, combined with limited resources, capacity, and the influence of metropolitan powers and external partners, and potentially low interest amongst island states, has limited their willingness to create formal, binding institutional structures to respond to security challenges. Although the Biketawa Declaration provided that PIF Member States could act collectively in a time of crisis, this was qualified by an

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affirmation of the principle of domestic noninterference and an emphasis on any action being taken at the request of the affected Member State.

Indeed, efforts to enhance integration within the PIF driven by Australia and New Zealand have also been met with a muted response. For example, in the early 2000s, Australia and New Zealand promoted the PIF *Pacific Plan* (PIF, 2005). Although Australia and New Zealand favored economic and market integration (Slatter, 2015), island states were more cautious (Huffer, 2006). The plan was also criticized for advocating integration initiatives that would cause island states to 'gradually relinquish sovereignty over certain areas' (Huffer, 2006, p. 158; Hameiri, 2009). When the Plan was reviewed in 2013, the review team found that there were tensions between definitions of regionalism and between the key terms 'regional cooperation' and 'regional integration' (Morauta *et al.*, 2013). The Plan was subsequently replaced by the *Framework for Pacific Regionalism*, which sought to: broaden conversations about regionalism beyond the CROP agencies, which were perceived to dominate priorities under the Pacific Plan; ensure that regional initiatives have a sound rationale; and emphasize the political dimension of regionalism, including by reducing the number of issues on the PIF leaders' meeting agenda and by providing opportunities for civil society organizations to participate in making submissions regarding what should be on the agenda (PIF, 2014). There are concerns within the region that the Boe Declaration Action Plan is reminiscent of the Pacific Plan's overly technocratic approach to implementation, and likewise does not have the required financial support for implementation.

Yet despite these moves to enhance regional cooperation centered on the PIF and CROP agencies, much security assistance continues to be provided bilaterally or minilaterally by metropolitan powers and external partners. This raises questions about which issues are prioritized, with some, such as the United Nations' Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, that are favored by donors (and Pacific women's advocacy groups) receiving little buy-in from Pacific Island states. In 2019 New Zealand partnered with Samoa to host the inaugural WPS Summit (MoD, 2019a), and launched the Pacific Defence Gender Network (MoD, 2019b). Yet there has been little action at the regional or national levels to institutionalize WPS (Bhagwan Rolls and Evans,

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2020) and the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012–15) is now outdated. Indeed, the Boe Declaration does not refer to gender inequality and gender-based violence, despite them being serious security issues in the region (although the Boe Declaration Action Plan does reference them and links them to the broader WPS agenda (PIF, 2019b)).

In contrast, when island states are interested in an issue, such as cybersecurity, assistance is enthusiastically received. For example, Australia funds and manages Cyber Safety Pasifika, which is one of the seven networks of the PICP, and which uses local police to promote cyber safety messages within communities, particularly in schools, across 18 nations. Through Cyber Safety Pasifika, the Vanuatu Police Force have established a regular radio show, Police Toktok, where they promote cyber safety messages to the wider community and have also brought in the Vanuatu National Rugby Team to present to schools (Cyber Safety Pasifika, 2021). While supported by an Australian-led project, the localized ni-Vanuatu approach reflects the many levels upon which security cooperation occurs in the Pacific Islands, from local, to national, to regional, and international levels.

Another key security issue prioritized by Pacific Island states is oceans management. A range of regional agencies, metropolitan powers, and external partners are involved in assisting with oceans management, which demonstrates the overlapping and interwoven way in which regional security organizations respond to challenges. But Beck (2020, p. 14) has characterized oceans management as 'being dealt with in silos and on a piecemeal basis; it is all over the place'. For example, the Secretary General of the PIF is also the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, responsible for championing the Pacific Ocean globally. While combining these two roles seeks to centralize work on oceans and demonstrates the importance of the issue, it is unclear whether this has been effective. SPREP also provides technical assistance on issues such as ocean ecosystems and ocean pollution and marine waste management. The FFA monitors fisheries compliance and detects Illegal Unreported and Unregulated fishing. The SPC contributes expertise on coastal management and research. And the University of the South Pacific provides education and research. Fisheries management is governed by either by the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) and their Vessel Day Scheme, or the alternative Te Vaka Moana Group.

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Notably, the PNA and Te Vaka Moana Groups operate outside the PIF framework, and yet remain 'a shining example of regional cooperation' (Pala, 2021). It has been argued that this challenges the perception that 'everything that is done in the region by Forum members, must be done under the umbrella of Forum bodies' (Aqorau, 2010 cited in Tarte, 2017). Metropolitan powers are heavily involved in this area: New Zealand, Australia, and the United States all play roles in fisheries surveillance and compliance operations through their respective naval forces. In addition, Australia's Pacific Maritime Security Program provides patrol boats to assist regional states monitor their exclusive economic zones.

Similar dynamics are evident in response to regional efforts to respond to climate change, which the Boe Declaration identified as 'the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific'. For example, SPREP is responsible for: climate change policy; information and funding distribution for projects related to mitigation and adaptation; and scientific and policy support for protecting and managing the environment and natural resources. The SPC manages the Regional Pacific Nationally Determined Contribution Hub to help members meet their Paris Agreement climate targets. Outside of these organizations, there are multiple sites of climate action. The Pacific Small Island Developing States grouping has been active in global climate negotiations, with a focus on accessing climate funding (Goulding, 2015). The High Ambition Coalition is an international negotiating coalition established by RMI and was instrumental prior to the Paris Agreement and sought to drive ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions at COP26. Pacific Island states have also long advocated for their climate ambitions, and the issue has been on the agenda of the PIF, and of sub-regional and other groups, for many years (Carter, 2015; Goulding, 2015). Climate change declarations by bodies whose membership does not include New Zealand, and especially Australia, have typically been expressed in stronger language.

Similarly, while there are several agencies, arrangements, and agreements in place to respond to transnational crime, their mandates, legitimacy, and effectiveness varies (Watson *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, although some border security and transnational crime agencies, such as the PICP, OCO, and Pacific Immigration Development Community, cooperate under a 2018 Declaration of Partnership, there are numerous

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organizations outside this partnership, the FSRS, and the CROP model, such as the JHoPS and the Transnational Serious and Organised Crime Pacific Taskforce.

The examples of fisheries management, climate change, and transnational crime highlight how, as in Southeast Asia, 'the market for regional institutions' may already be 'saturated' (Bisley, 2019, p. 223) in the Pacific Islands. Without coordination, this proliferation of agencies can create duplication, ambiguity, and at times, competition, about what security issues are priorities to address and by whom. Beck (2020, p. 14) has argued that this plethora of multifaceted regional organizations 'competing for attention and resources comes at a huge cost to Pacific countries' given the many layers of bureaucracy, and the personnel and time that each state requires to manage and engage with them. Added to this are the costs of engaging with an increasingly active range of metropolitan powers and external partners seeking to increase their involvement in the region. As in Southeast Asia, the resulting costs and complexity can disincentivize Pacific Island states from pursuing cooperative approaches to security (Bisley, 2019). These examples also suggest that, notwithstanding the normative value of the Boe Declaration and the Blue Pacific narrative, which at the rhetorical level at least have gained considerable traction including among metropolitan states, differences remain between the island states, metropolitan powers, and external partners.

5 Conclusion: patchworked security cooperation

Questions over the boundaries and coherence of the region, how security is understood, and how challenges are prioritized, suggest that the concepts of regional security architecture, complex, and community do not adequately capture the nature of security cooperation in the Pacific Islands. At best, the region could be characterized as a quasi-security complex. So, we instead argue that security cooperation in the Pacific Islands is best characterized as a patchwork of bilateral, minilateral, and multilateral, formal and informal, agencies, arrangements, and agreements across local, national, regional, and international levels. As foreshadowed, we think that the term 'patchwork' best captures that the process of weaving layers of cooperation together has meant that some security challenges, such as oceans management, climate change,

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and transnational crime, receive significant attention, while others, such as the WPS agenda, receive much less, leading to overlaps and gaps. The term also raises questions about coordination, cooperation, and at times, competition, between numerous actors at local, national, regional, and international levels, which can stretch and tear the patchwork. The term also reflects that the boundaries of the Pacific Island region are fluid, and that regional security cooperation encompasses a range of organizations and networks, not all of which have the same membership. While it is beyond the scope of this article to compare the Pacific with other regions or sub-regions, we recognize that thematic areas of security cooperation in the Caribbean, such as policing transnational crime, certainly have similarities to the Pacific (Bowling, 2010). Therefore, the term 'patchwork' may potentially explain the organic and *ad hoc* development of security cooperation in other regions which have similarly unclear and contested boundaries, and in which metropolitan powers also have an ambiguous role.

In the context of the PIF continuing to seek to enhance coordination under its 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, there are questions about whether the existing patchwork creates the best coordination and enabling environment for security provision in the Pacific Islands, or whether building a security architecture, complex, or community, is attractive or indeed viable. In all these, too, we must avoid the trap of assuming that the security interests of the PIF – qua organization – accord with those of its Member States as a whole or even of its island members. As a model for security cooperation, the patchwork offers both strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand the system is open, flexible, and – in the right circumstances – it can be responsive to the needs of Pacific Island countries and populations. On the other hand, it can lead to unnecessary duplication and to a lack of overall strategic coherence; it can also leave room for gaps to emerge.

A regional security architecture implies the presence of a planned, formal structure, and regional security complexes and communities imply a coherent region and a commonality of interests. But these characteristics do not necessarily accommodate and reconcile the breadth and diversity of the Pacific Islands, differences within and between its sub-regions, the interests of island states, the influence of metropolitan and external partners, and the varied nature of the security challenges the region faces. Instead, we argue that there may be utility in 'institutional arrangements

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built around functionally discrete objectives' (Breslin and Wilson, 2015, p. 127; Cramer, 2015). However, to ensure that these agencies, arrangements, and agreements are well coordinated, a clearer method for weaving security cooperation together in the future is needed. The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent may provide such a roadmap. Initial drafts of the Strategy suggest that there is political will to reform regional cooperation mechanisms to strengthen the implementation of regional declarations and commitments. But it is less clear how regional security arrangements will be reformed to meet these needs, or even whether a more formalized architecture, rather than the current patchwork, will be more effective to meeting the needs of all actors.

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