

# Recapturing the Spirit of 1971: Towards a New Regional Political Settlement in the Pacific



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During her visit to Suva in November 2014, Australian foreign minister, Julie Bishop, received a very warm reception to her attempts to achieve a rapprochement in Australia–Fiji relations. By the end of her visit, diplomatic, economic, and defence relations had been fully restored with the newly elected Bainimarama government (Bishop and Kubuabola 2014).

There was, however, one issue that was unresolved: that of Fiji’s reported refusal to accept the invitation to resume its membership of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) unless Australia and New Zealand ceased their membership (Pacnews 2014a).

As a way of defusing the impasse on this significant issue, and of garnering support from other Pacific leaders for Australia’s continued participation in the PIF, Foreign Minister Bishop proposed that Fiji and Australia jointly host a summit for Pacific leaders to discuss whether and how the regional architecture should be reconfigured to meet the needs of the Pacific islands states in the 21st century (Callick 2014). Her Fijian host, Prime Minister Bainimarama, accepted her proposal, and the meeting is now set for early 2015 in Sydney.

## The Sydney Conference: What Is at Stake?

For Canberra, Fiji’s dramatic demand creates an issue of the highest priority. Australia sees the PIF as the main vehicle for regional management; it sees its own membership of the PIF as crucial to that management. As Foreign Minister Bishop warned in a press conference in Suva in November, she was ‘not going to take that [Australia and New Zealand exclusion from the PIF] lying down’ (Pacnews 2014b).

However, Canberra also sees Fiji as the hub of the Pacific islands region and regards as crucial Fiji’s return to full membership in the PIF rather than remaining outside the PIF tent fostering an alternative regional institutional architecture. There is, then, a lot at stake strategically for Canberra in Fiji’s challenge on the question of regional governance.

There is no obvious solution that could satisfy both these strategic objectives. If Australia’s bid to win support for continued participation in the PIF for Australia and New Zealand succeeds, Australia risks Fiji following through on its threat not to resume its membership of the PIF.

For the Pacific island states, there are also crucial strategic stakes in the outcome of these discussions. The configuration of the regional architecture is not just about economics and efficiency; it is about regional governance — about who controls the regional agenda and how crucial issues such as Pacific positions on carbon emissions targets are to be handled and represented. While it is not likely that there will be significant support among the island states for the exclusion of Australia and New Zealand from the PIF — indeed, Prime Minister O’Neill has already made clear that Papua New Guinea would not support such a stance (ABC News 2014) — there is a longstanding and widely felt concern among Pacific leaders about the need to gain more Pacific control on issues of strategic concern.

The dialogue leading up to, and during, the Sydney conference is therefore one about the fundamentals of how the region is governed. It is about reaching a regional political settlement between Australia–New



Zealand and the island states, and *among* the island states, on a future form of regional governance that all parties view to be politically legitimate. The last such regional political settlement took place in 1971 after the struggle by the Pacific island leaders to gain control of the power structures in the South Pacific Commission and to set up their own independent regional organisation, the PIF.<sup>1</sup>

The way in which the Australian and New Zealand leaders, and the Pacific island leaders, handled this delicate transition politics from colonial to postcolonial regional governance stood the region in good stead for the next 20 years. The understandings about partnership and equality underpinning that agreement have, however, gradually come under challenge in the past 20 years, culminating in the more recent resurgence of the demands for the Pacific to 'chart its own course' and Pacific support for a new diplomatic system outside the PIF to achieve that goal (Tong 2012).

This paper develops the proposition that all parties to the Sydney conference need to recapture the spirit of cooperation and partnership that underpinned the regional political settlement of 1971. This is necessary if key opportunities and challenges in the current context are to be recognised and a productive dialogue leading to a mutually acceptable regional political settlement is to be achieved.

The first section of this paper examines three important preliminary steps for productive dialogue. The first step is to recognise that the Fiji and Australian foreign ministers have moved the discourse surrounding the upcoming summit away from the confrontational language, which initially prompted the idea of the Sydney meeting, to a new discourse which creates openings for a productive dialogue. This new discourse emphasises the need to redress power imbalances in regional governance rather than excluding Australia and New Zealand altogether. It talks of Australia and New Zealand 'stepping back', rather than being asked to leave. A second step is to recognise the nature and origins of the regional political settlement of 1971, which up until recently has provided the governing principles underpinning the regional architecture.

Thirdly, it is important to understand the rising concerns of the Pacific island states about the unravelling of this political settlement, particularly in relation to the changing interpretation of equality and partnership by Australia and New Zealand in their role within the PIF.

The second section of this paper then advances five proposals for possible ways in which Australia and New Zealand might 'stand back', and the Pacific island states might 'stand forward', in regional governance.

### Openings for Productive Dialogue

The negotiating positions of Canberra and Suva on the future of Pacific regional governance were initially expressed in uncompromising language: either Australia and New Zealand leave the PIF or Fiji does not resume its membership. This did not augur well for the possibility of a productive dialogue leading to a new regional political settlement acceptable to all stakeholders. Fortunately, however, subsequent statements by the Fiji and Australian foreign ministers have created a space for productive dialogue and compromise.

Although Fiji had made it clear, as late as October 2014, that it would only resume its membership of the PIF if Australia and New Zealand left the regional institution, the Fiji foreign minister, Inoke Kubuabola, has since denied that Fiji's position was one of being 'bent on the eviction of Australia and New Zealand from the Pacific Islands Forum' (Pratibha 2014). Rather he is reported as saying that 'regional governance of the Pacific Islands is primarily the responsibility of their island nations themselves' and it is therefore 'logical that metropolitan developed countries like Australia and New Zealand take a step back' (ibid.). This is language that allows a move away from direct confrontation over exclusion towards productive dialogue on the range of ways Australia and New Zealand might 'step back'.

The Australian foreign minister's formulation of the terms of reference for the Sydney meeting provides a further opening for productive dialogue. Although the issue she was responding to was the Fiji demand that Australia and New Zealand leave the PIF, she couched the purpose of the meeting

in terms which allows much more open-ended dialogue — that of discussing ‘the relevant regional architecture to meet the needs of the Pacific Islands’. She went on to say that ‘Pacific leaders should work out what they wanted as Pacific countries and make it relevant for the 21st century’ (Pacnews 2014b). This creates an opening for the Pacific island states to say what those needs are and for Australia and New Zealand to listen to, and acknowledge, those needs and for the meeting to be open to a broader discussion of how these needs might best be met.

Foreign Minister Bishop provided an even more important basis for effective dialogue in her comments on the proposed regional summit during her visit to Papua New Guinea in December 2014. She said ‘it was time for Pacific leaders to chart their own course ... adding that a Sydney summit early next year could set the regional architecture in place for that to happen ... I really think it’s time the Pacific leaders determine what they want for the 21st century and I’m hoping that Australia will be able to host that’ (Wroe 2014).

This opens the possibility of effective dialogue because it recognises that the underlying need of the Pacific island states is to control the regional agenda and regional decision-making so that they can deal with the issues of utmost concern to them.

This suggests that Canberra has not made the mistake of seeing the Fijian demand simply as some kind of ‘payback’ for Australia and New Zealand’s leading role in suspending Fiji’s membership of the PIF in 2009. Fiji commentator Wadan Narsey argues this case, for example, seeing the Fiji demand as creating an unnecessary ‘storm in a calm ocean’ of post-election rapprochement between Australia–New Zealand and Fiji, motivated by a desire to settle old scores (Narsey 2014). Fiji’s warm reception to Australia’s proposals to restore diplomatic and economic relations showed its preparedness to move beyond a payback mentality in its bilateral relations. The commitment to an independent Pacific regionalism run by Pacific islanders is, however, now a basic tenet of Fiji’s foreign policy, which the newly elected Bainimarama government is clearly not prepared to compromise.

The Australian foreign minister’s acknowledgement of the need for the Pacific to ‘chart its own course’ therefore appears as a positive acknowledgement of the deeper concerns underpinning the Fijian demands about the governance of the PIF. It moves the dialogue beyond the strictures of the lenses adopted by both Fiji and Australia in their tense relations in the period since the 2006 coup.

It is also a very positive sign that Foreign Minister Bishop’s language also acknowledges that this is not just a position of the Fiji government. Australia’s acknowledgement that it is a concern shared by many Pacific leaders provides an important basis for productive dialogue on a new regional political settlement around how this concern might be met.

### The Regional Political Settlement of 1971

A second key step in approaching dialogue focused on a new regional political settlement is to recognise the nature and origins of the 1971 settlement, which underpins the PIF. The regional political settlement of 1971 between the Pacific island states and Australia and New Zealand did not appear in any formal document or treaty. It was contained in tacit understandings that arose out of discussions leading up to, and during, the first forum held in Wellington in August 1971. Underpinning the legitimacy of the new regional political settlement was the acknowledgement on all sides that self-determination for the islands region should henceforth be the key principle underpinning regional governance of the island Pacific.

The creation of the PIF was the culmination of a political effort by the Pacific leaders from the mid-1960s to challenge the legitimacy of the form of regional governance established by a regional political settlement among the colonial powers meeting at the South Seas Commission Conference in Canberra in January 1947 (Australian Treaty Series 1948).<sup>2</sup> This challenge took the form of a ‘rebellion’ within the South Pacific Commission, led by Ratu Kamisese Mara of Fiji. Reflecting on these actions later, Mara commented:

... the powers seemed incapable of realising that the winds of change had at last reached the South Pacific and that we peoples of the territories were no longer going to tolerate the domination of the Commission by the Metropolitan powers. We were sick of having little to say and no authority. (Mara 1974, p. 2)

Their rebellion overturned all the key elements in the 1947 colonial regional political settlement except for one key issue — the prohibition on discussion of political issues. Their frustration with this no-politics rule led to their decision to establish an independent islands forum where anything could be discussed and where island agendas could be pursued and promoted (Mara 1972, p. 5). This frustration was particularly felt in relation to the denial of the right of the Pacific states to speak about the French nuclear testing at Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls.

The Pacific island leaders therefore took steps to create a new form of regional governance outside the South Pacific Commission. They agreed that the new organisation should be built on egalitarianism (a rejection of the hierarchy of power in the colonial system) and self-determination (expressed in the decision to only invite the independent Pacific island countries as members). There was to be no invitation extended to dependent territories or to colonial powers. A third principle was that there was to be no limitation on the discussion of political issues. The idea of creating a PIF based on these principles was discussed by the Pacific island leaders in the late 1960s, gathering pace in 1970 (Fry 1994, pp. 138–42).

The decision of the Pacific island leaders to invite Australia and New Zealand to join the PIF was a controversial one given the underlying motivation was to create an organisation that would speak for the independent Pacific island states. Ratu Mara later explained the decision thus: 'We were happy to be joined by Australia and New Zealand in the Forum ... Indeed, we wanted them for a special reason for part of the ambitious plan of the Forum ... was no less than to alter the whole balance of the terms of trade' (cited in Tarte 1985).

The Pacific island leaders initially approached the New Zealand government, which they knew to be very sympathetic to the idea of the island states creating their own organisation. For example, in December 1970, the New Zealand Minister for Maori and Island Affairs, Duncan McIntyre, stated: '... what many Islanders want and what we should encourage, is a political forum where island countries can meet on equal terms with Australia and New Zealand' (Ball 1973, p. 243). The Pacific leaders decided to ask New Zealand to host the first forum. When Australian officials became aware of these developments they asked Fiji whether Australia might attend the first forum to be held in Wellington (Doran 2004). Ratu Mara responded with an invitation for Australia to attend as an observer (Doran 2004, pp. 9–10).<sup>3</sup> Australia then countered with a request to sit at the table as a full member and Mara acceded to this.

The inclusion of Australia and New Zealand as full participants in an island-initiated forum was significantly assisted by the fact that both Canberra and Wellington had indicated strong support for the island state endeavours to create a new form of regional governance based on self-determination — both within the South Pacific Commission, and in creating an islands forum for the independent states. Australia and New Zealand accepted the underlying principles of equality and self-determination. They acted on these principles in taking a back seat in the creation of the new organisation, being careful not to dominate decisions about the form it would take. They recognised they had a partnership role to play, not the hegemonic role of the past. They also supported the Pacific opposition to French nuclear testing, the big symbol of asserting regional self-determination and a rallying issue for the new organisation.

The one aspect of the governance of the new forum that Australia did try to influence was on pressing hard for the admission of Papua New Guinea even though it was not yet independent; but the Pacific states held firm to the principle of self-determination as the admission qualification for membership, and this was ultimately accepted by Australia.



What was tacitly agreed between Australia and New Zealand and the Pacific island states was a form of regional governance in which all were equal at the table but with an implicit understanding that the island states had primacy in determining the regional agenda for the islands region. As Ken Piddington, a New Zealand foreign ministry official and deputy director of the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation, stated at the time:

[The forum] 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. (Piddington 1973, p. 5)

The attitude and behaviour of the Australian and New Zealand leaders and officials at the first few forums quickly dispelled any fear of any attempt on their part to dominate the agenda or the direction of the organisation. The islander confidence in their larger neighbours' goodwill was evident in their decision (albeit on the request of Australia) to cease, at the second forum, the separate island state caucus arrangement which had operated prior to, and during, the first forum (Doran 2004, p. 16). Moreover, by the late 1970s, Ratu Mara's wisdom of including Australia and New Zealand for purposes of changing the terms of trade was vindicated by the signing of the SPARTECA preferential trade agreement. This was a one-way preferential agreement, supported by both sides to the negotiations, which therefore did not have the controversial elements of the later PACER (Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations) Plus negotiations.

### The Rising Concerns of Pacific Island States

The 1971 settlement created a form of regional governance which, for the most part, was seen as politically legitimate for the next two decades. The strength of this legitimacy was reflected in a very active period of joint diplomacy through the PIF. 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 won. Their successful joint diplomacy, which took place under the auspices of the PIF, culminated in a series of international treaties on resource protection, environmental issues, tuna access; and prohibitions on driftnet fishing, the dumping of radioactive wastes in Pacific waters, and nuclear testing (Fry 1994). They also collectively achieved the re-inscription of New Caledonia on the list of territories falling under the oversight of the United Nations (UN) Decolonisation Committee. These were remarkable achievements for joint diplomacy by the PIF states as they took on the world's most powerful countries on issues of great concern to the national interest of those powers.

The strength of this legitimacy was also reflected in the fact that there was robust debate among the PIF members on the joint position to be taken on all of these issues. 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 forum. Although they attempted to assertively promote a particular kind of Cold War order on the region, Australia's and New Zealand's views did not prevail.<sup>4</sup> The outcomes reflected the robust negotiation that occurred within the forum; and they were testimony to the legitimacy accorded to the understandings reached in 1971 about the principles of regional governance.

However, after the end of the Cold War there was a gradual unravelling of the understandings about equality and partnership which underlay this legitimacy. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Australia and New Zealand increasingly saw the PIF agenda as an extension of their foreign policy, and even of their domestic policy, whether it be curbing money laundering, promoting security harmonisation, constraining the drug trade, countering terrorism, pursuing defence surveillance, countering tax havens, or promoting a neo-liberal regional economic order (Fry 1997, 2005, 2008).

In his review of the regional architecture for the PIF in 2005, Tony Hughes made the observation:

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 subconscious. (Hughes 2005, p. 10)

For Ratu Mara, who made the case in 1971 for the inclusion of Australia and New Zealand in the forum, the changing role of Australia and New Zealand had become untenable by 2001 on the occasion of the PIF's 30th anniversary. He said he felt a 'sense of disappointment with our metropolitan members ... that they have sought to impose their solutions in an insensitive way' (cited in Tarte 2014, p. 315).

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

One can see the rising anger, among the atoll states in particular, on the lack of action by the PIF in representing a joint position on this question because of the restraining influence of Australia and New Zealand on regional positions on emissions targets. For the Pacific island states it is simply not possible to pursue an Alliance of Small Island States position on emissions targets through an organisation where Australia and New

Zealand are present and determined to water down any positions which might affect their interests. This concern has been accentuated by the Abbott government's extreme position on the issue. Marshall Islands foreign minister, Tony de Brum, was reported in September 2014 as saying that:

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

### Embracing the New Pacific Diplomacy

I now propose five possible strategies which might be considered to meet these concerns. The first is for Australia and New Zealand to recognise that there has been a major renaissance among Pacific island leaders of the idea that Pacific islanders should control regional governance, and assert a Pacific voice in global affairs. President Anote Tong of Kiribati, for example, has asserted:

I believe the Pacific is now 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. (Tong 2012)

And for Prime Minister Henry Puna of Cook Islands:

the time is right that we take on a more concerted effort, as a region, to define ourselves on our own terms. Our collective interests are being pressured and shaped

towards a new Pacific Order — one that won't necessarily meet the expectations of others — or the perceptions of outsiders. What is important is that we choose what's best for us. We have the ability to define what is good, and we have the right to take commanding ownership of our future. (Puna 2012)

This renaissance has been significantly expressed in the actions of the Pacific island states over the past five years in developing a new diplomatic architecture outside the PIF system to conduct some important aspects of regional affairs, and to represent the Pacific islands region to the world on the key issues of concern such as climate change and fisheries management. For the Pacific leaders these moves do not represent a wholesale rejection of the PIF; rather a recognition that there is a need for complementary forums to undertake diplomatic functions and pursue needs which can no longer be met in the PIF system.

A key element for a productive dialogue on future regional governance is for all parties to embrace the valuable contribution of these new diplomatic channels, which have grown up out of strategic necessity. This is particularly the case for Australia and New Zealand, who viewed these new institutional developments through a 'Fiji' lens in the period 2009–2014. Although it is understandable that Australia and New Zealand were not kindly disposed to seeing the value of these developments while they were presented as an alternative regional system to the PIF, it is important that they now be valued in relation to the potential contribution they make to meeting the future needs of Pacific island states.

### **The Pacific Small Island Developing States Group**

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

representations at the global level. The PSIDS has also become the key diplomatic vehicle for Pacific participation in global southern coalitions such as the Alliance of Small Island States and the Group of 77. It is, for example, the main organising arena for determining and prosecuting Pacific positions on climate change mitigation in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and also in relation to the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, and the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Apia, Samoa, in 2014. It is important to note that while the enhancement of PSIDS was undoubtedly a Fiji-led initiative, it has been strongly supported by all Pacific island state UN members.<sup>5</sup>

In any new settlement on regional architecture, the PSIDS would meet the need for global diplomatic representation of a 'Pacific voice'. It has gained international recognition for this role and been recognised in the renaming of the Asia grouping as Asia–Pacific Small Island Developing States (or Asia–Pacific group in shorthand). It has the advantage of only having Third World countries in its membership and is therefore acceptable for participation in southern diplomatic coalitions at the global level, such as the Alliance of Small Island States, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77+ China, which are crucial for leveraging Pacific positions into global forums. An attempt to return to the PIF group as the representative group for the Pacific at the UN would compromise these advantages and the ability of the Pacific to chart its own course.

### **Melanesian Spearhead Group**

A second major expression of the 'new Pacific diplomacy' has been the reinvigoration of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) and its emergence as a major forum for subregional integration, and diplomacy on decolonisation. Again, although Fiji leadership provided the catalyst for its reinvigoration, it is important to note that all Melanesian countries embraced the new and deeper integration proposed as part of the new MSG since 2009. Papua New Guinea leadership was also very important in this reinvigoration. The achievements have been significant. Most prominent has been

the achievement of significant free trade in goods and services including the movement of skilled labour. The MSG has been able to achieve a level of integration not yet achieved in the wider PIF grouping in relation to trade and movement of professional workers.

The MSG needs to be valued as contributing to the Pacific-wide architecture and effort rather than being seen as threatening to it. A 2013 review on the PIF's Pacific Plan suggests that the Pacific island leaders are viewing the MSG achievements as complementary rather than competitive with the PIF:

... 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. This is a mistake. None of the Leaders interviewed had this view. Without exception, they saw these [subregional] groupings as benefiting the regional project by illuminating both the challenges of regionalism and ways to overcome them successfully. None saw the sub-regional groups as competitors to the larger Forum grouping. (Pacific Plan Review 2013, p. 95)

### Pacific Islands Development Forum

The third and most controversial element in the new regional diplomatic architecture is the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), which was a Fiji-led initiative established in 2013. It developed out of the Engaging with the Pacific meetings, which Fiji organised from 2010 as a means of building ties with its Pacific neighbours following suspension from the PIF. While clearly the flagship of the Fiji government's efforts to lead regional diplomacy after suspension from the PIF, the new kind of regional diplomacy it represented clearly appealed to many other Pacific leaders. There were three novel elements, which particularly seemed to capture the imaginations of Pacific island leaders.

The first was that the new institution emphasised inclusivity, a connection between leaders and society, which had been lacking in the PIF. It brought together civil society groups, the private

sector and international agencies and governments in a process that emphasised partnerships and network diplomacy. Second is its focus on 'green growth', which seemed to offer hope of overcoming the stalling on what was seen as non-action in key areas such as climate change and sustainable development. Finally, the PIDF was motivated by the desire for self-determination. At the PIDF secretariat opening in 2014, Prime Minister Bainimarama said the Fiji-based group had a single purpose:

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

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

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

### Parties to the Nauru Agreement

The fourth institutional development was the creation of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement in 2009. This was set up by the island states with big tuna stocks as a way of gaining greater control over their shared resource. The tiny but effective Majuro-based secretariat has been highly successful in creating novel ideas in fisheries management which have translated into dramatic increases in revenue to the member countries. Sandra Tarte reminds us this development predates the Fiji suspension from the PIF and therefore demonstrates a broader regional assertion of Pacific control over regionalism (Tarte 2014, pp. 314–16).

### New Trade Negotiation Agencies

Finally, Pacific island states have created new Pacific-run institutions outside the PIF to negotiate trade and economic relationships with Australia



and New Zealand, and with Europe. In the case of negotiations with Australia and New Zealand on PACER Plus, they argued for an independent office outside the PIF to provide advice on the negotiations. The Vila-based Office of the Chief Trade Adviser was established in 2009 against Australian and New Zealand efforts first to oppose its creation, then to dictate who the adviser would be and finally to sideline it. In the case of negotiations with the European Union over a regional economic partnership agreement, and in relation to developing Pacific positions to take to Africa Caribbean Pacific (ACP) meetings, the Pacific island states decided in 2012 to create a Pacific ACP office based in Port Moresby. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) had previously been the responsible agency for this function (Komai 2014).

Together, these developments add up to a new Pacific diplomatic system, which now handles the core global diplomatic needs of the Pacific island states in relation to key issues such as trade, climate change, decolonisation and sustainable development. This new system has worked well to meet those needs, and is widely supported by Pacific island states. It would therefore be a mistake to try to rein their valuable functions in under a PIF umbrella to try to restore the earlier status quo. They go a long way to meeting the needs of the Pacific island states to determine their own futures in global diplomacy.

Overall this suggests a system or regional architecture in which the PIF and other CROP (Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific) agencies exist as they are now, and alongside them are the PSIDS, the MSG and PIDF as key complementary agencies. These new agencies perform tasks that the PIF was either having difficulty doing or was no longer prioritising. PSIDS provides an islands-region voice at the global level and in global southern coalitions; MSG provides a model of subregional integration which can help build a more effective Pacific-wide regional integration; and PIDF provides a much-needed islands-run forum which includes civil society and the private sector in discussions

of regional policy on green growth issues. This would, however, necessarily be — to use Tess Newton Cain and Matthew Dornan's useful phrase — a 'patchwork' regional architecture (Dornan and Newton Cain 2014, p. 555). The challenge then becomes one of weaving coherence into this patchwork rather than trying to unpick the threads.

### Weaving Coherence into a 'Patchwork' Regional Architecture

It follows that a second important element for consideration in a productive dialogue on the future regional architecture is to ensure that this patchwork architecture is fit for one purpose and that parts of it are not working against other parts, either actively or inadvertently. This means assuaging the concerns of Australia and New Zealand, but also other Pacific island states, that the PIDF, and to a lesser extent MSG, are no longer seen as providing a *competing* system but rather one that *complements* the existing PIF system. It is understandable that there would be a need for clarification and reassurance over how far and in what direction Fiji intends to develop the PIDF, assuming that the PIF is appropriately reformed to meet Fiji's concerns that Australia and New Zealand need to 'stand back'.

As a discussion forum that includes civil society and private sector and which focuses on green growth issues, the PIDF fills a vacuum. However, if it develops, as earlier intended, as an alternative political summit to the PIF, and as giving a mandate to PSIDS at the global level, then this is of a very different order. Such duplication entailed in the setting up of alternative systems needs to be avoided if a regional political settlement is to be reached. This is not just to meet the concerns of Australia and New Zealand but also those of other Pacific island countries. While they might support the contributions being made by the PIDF as a regional forum for discussion with civil society and the private sector, they are unlikely to support the PIDF competing with or displacing the PIFS as the main body of Pacific regional governance (particularly if PIFS is reformed to meet island country concerns). The Pacific leaders have just been through a process

of extensive consultation on the new Framework for Pacific Regionalism and as recently as July 2014 jointly committed to its implementation under the auspices of the PIFS (PIFS 2014b).

Fiji has already indicated that it too is concerned with duplication and waste of resources and is interested in finding the best architecture to meet the needs of the Pacific. The Fiji foreign minister has argued that rationalisation of the regional architecture would be at the core of what Fiji will put forward at the Sydney meeting. He said Fiji was seeking to avoid the duplication and overlapping evident in the current set-up (Pacnews 2014c).

### Australia and New Zealand 'Stepping Back'

A third necessary element for a productive dialogue is for Australia and New Zealand to acknowledge why the Pacific might want Australia and New Zealand to 'step back' within the PIF, and the need for discussion of ways of achieving this. Foreign Minister Bishop's statement in Port Moresby in December 2014 suggests that Australia does not yet understand that there is a Pacific perception that it is the actions of Australia and New Zealand within the PIF which are seen as constraining the Pacific island states' capacity to chart their own course. In her interpretation of the undue influence which needed to be countered in a reconfiguration of regional architecture, the foreign minister focused instead on China and Taiwan:

We need more investment ... from many countries in the Pacific, but we must make sure it's in the interests of the particular Pacific islands, as opposed to some other geopolitical or strategic agenda of another country.

Pacific nations had historically been prone to influence from countries outside the region using their aid budgets to win, for example, countries' support in United Nations votes; China and Taiwan being recent examples. (Wroe 2014)

It is not such influence from countries outside the region that Pacific leaders have in mind when they talk about the Pacific charting its own

course. Central to the Pacific concerns is that the Australia–New Zealand role within the PIF has drifted a long way from the tacit understandings about the agreed principles underpinning regional governance established in 1971 at the time of the creation of the PIF.

While acknowledgement of these issues may go some way towards influencing Canberra and Wellington to step back from their dominant role in the PIF and embrace interpretations of partnership more akin to those of 1971, this cannot be relied upon. One practical reform that could be considered might therefore be to reinstate the Pacific island state caucus within the PIF. Significantly, the Wellington forum was run in a 5 + 2 format with separate caucus meetings for the Pacific island leaders both before and during the forum. This would create a space within the governance of the PIF for the Pacific islands to deliberate without the presence of Australia and New Zealand. This would allow smaller states, which are heavily dependent on Australia and New Zealand for economic assistance, to assert their positions in a way that would be difficult in the broader forum with Australia and New Zealand present.

### Increasing Pacific Financial Ownership of the PIF

A fourth possible strategy for meeting the Pacific concern to chart its own course concerns the financial arrangements of the PIF. A major problem for creating a Pacific regional architecture that engenders a feeling of Pacific ownership is the fact that the bulk of the 'main' budget (defined as including regular and core budgets, but not including the extra budget) of the PIFS is paid for by Australia and New Zealand. Based on 2013 figures, Canberra and Wellington fund 94 per cent of the core + regular budget. The Pacific island states contribute 5 per cent (Table 1).

The question of the financial arrangements underpinning the PIF, and the link to political ownership, is obviously an important element for consideration in a dialogue on how the regional architecture can be reformed to better able the

Table 1. Budget arrangements for the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2013

	2013 contributions (Fiji dollars)				Total
	Pacific island countries and territories	Per cent	Australia and New Zealand	Per cent	
Core budget	0	0	\$14 million	100	\$14 million
Regular budget	\$1 million	25.6	\$3 million	74.4	\$4 million
Total budget (core + regular)	\$1 million	5	\$17 million	94	\$18 million

Source: PIFS (2014a, 2014c).

Pacific to ‘chart its own course’. The PIF has a very special place in the regional architecture as the place where the leaders decide overall strategy. It is not an implementing agency. Its running costs can therefore be relatively modest and need not rely on donors. Indeed, because of its key role in devising strategy it should be the place least beholden to donors. The maximisation of Pacific financial control of the core and regular budget of the regional organisation charged with strategising at the highest levels has both symbolic and pragmatic implications for Pacific ownership of the regional agenda.

The financial issue was recognised as a problem for Pacific island ‘ownership’ of the PIF by the 2005 review *Strengthening Regional Management: A Review of the Architecture for Regional Co-operation in the Pacific* (the Hughes report):

There is a readily-stirred suspicion among them [the Pacific leaders and officials] that the regional paymasters use this position to call the shots on policy, even though they often fall over backwards not to appear to do so. It seems clear that Australia and New Zealand value the policy leverage that their supportive financial role gives them and regard it as money well spent. (Hughes 2005, p. 11)

The 2012 *Review of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat* (the Winder report) also recognised the importance of this issue. Unfortunately, however, the Pacific leaders have yet to consider the report’s recommendations (Dornan 2012). The report stated:

The Review Team understands the fiscal pressures on member states, but considers that the very low proportion of annual revenue contributed by member states reinforces a lack of ownership of the Secretariat by members. The Review Team understands that the regular budget contribution of members to the Forum is a fraction of the level of contribution paid to (for example) the Commonwealth Secretariat. The on-going level of commitment to and ownership of the Secretariat and its work needs to be addressed by member states. (Winder et al. 2012, p. 39)

A simple but highly effective way of having Australia and New Zealand ‘take a step back’ and for the Pacific to better ‘chart its own course’ is therefore to change the funding formula to allow a higher contribution from the larger economies of the region. For example, in relation to the core + regular budget, consideration could be given to Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand each paying 20 per cent and the other Pacific island states collectively picking up the remaining 20 per cent on a pro rata basis. In 2013 the core and regular budgets together totalled \$18 million Fiji dollars (Table 1). On this basis, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Papua New Guinea would each pay F\$3.6 million. This would enforce the founding principle of an equal partnership.

By increasing the Pacific financial stake from 5 per cent to 60 per cent of the core + regular budget of the organisation, the Pacific island states would then be in a position to more easily control the regional agenda and the PIF would be more

easily seen by others as a southern-controlled organisation by global agencies and donors. Such reforms would go some way to meeting Fiji's concerns about Australia and New Zealand being given special preference among the donors. In this scenario the Pacific would negotiate with Australia and New Zealand and other donors on extra budget contributions but from the strong position of the island states funding the core operations of the PIF. It would be, and would be seen as, a *Pacific islands* forum.

### Pacific Island Leadership within the PIF

A final suggested basis for effective dialogue on the nature of future regional governance is for the Pacific island leaders to acknowledge that the dominance of Australia and New Zealand over the PIF agenda, and on PIF outcomes, over the past 20 years has not only been due to the 'pushiness' of their larger neighbours; that the other contributing factor was the lack of political contest from the island state members of the PIF. Australia and New Zealand are only two states among 16 meeting around the table. It is worth recalling two well-known examples where Pacific island states failed to assert themselves against the positions promoted by Australia and New Zealand on issues of the highest priority.

At the August 2009 PIF in Cairns, Australian officials drafted the Pacific Leaders Call to Action on Climate Change, which was seemingly approved by all PIF leaders. Nic Maclellan, a journalist who was present at the Cairns forum, argues that 'The Call to Action largely reflected Australian policy on greenhouse gas emissions, rejecting much stronger targets advocated by a number of small island states'. A month later Pacific leaders 'contradicted the deal struck in Cairns'. They committed to the much tougher position of the Alliance of Small Island States (Maclellan 2009).

At the August 2012 Rarotonga forum the island states could have prevailed on the question of whether to endorse the call for reinscribing French Polynesia on the list of the Decolonisation Committee's list of dependent territories. Rather than contest Australia and New Zealand's pro-

France position within the PIF, the island states left the prosecution of their real position to the UN General Assembly. As Nic Maclellan reports:

a month after the Forum, without the restraining influence of Canberra and Wellington, the leaders of Samoa, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu lined up at the UN General Assembly, explicitly calling for action on decolonisation. ... In February [2013], the UN ambassadors for Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Nauru formally lodged a draft resolution at the General Assembly. (Maclellan 2013)

The final resolution, again sponsored by Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Nauru (and also supported by Vanuatu, Samoa and Timor Leste) was adopted in May 2013 after strong opposition from France.

Each of these issues could have been contested in the PIF but Pacific island state leadership was lacking at the time. The Pacific island states need to recapture the level of political agency that they had within the PIF in the 1970s and 1980s, and up until 1990. In this period the Pacific leaders contested proposals emanating from Australia and New Zealand if they disagreed with them (Fry 1993).

A telling example was the way in which the Pacific states stood up to Australia about American plans to incinerate chemical weapons on Johnston Island at the 1990 PIF in Port Vila, where this issue dominated the agenda. Australia attempted to garner island support for the incineration facility on the grounds that it was an important contribution to global disarmament and that it was safe. The island states regarded the Australian efforts, and particularly the way in which prime minister Bob Hawke sought to have his minority view dominate, as unacceptable behaviour (O'Callaghan 1990). In the communique the views of the Pacific island states prevailed over those of Australia:

The Forum felt very strongly that the facility at Johnston Atoll should not become the permanent toxic waste disposal centre of the world. They expressed their firm conviction that the facility should be closed down once the current operations had been completed and called on the United States to ensure



that no further chemical weapons or other toxic materials would be stockpiled on or destroyed at Johnston Atoll. (PIFS 1990, item 30)

Fiji has a particularly important role to play in this regard. It sees itself, and to a great extent is seen, as a key regional leader in such contexts. As it is less dependent on Australia and New Zealand economically than the other Pacific island countries it can take a more independent position. There is also a history of Fiji standing up to Australia and New Zealand in regional forums. There needs to be acknowledgement by Fiji that the PIF is the best place for such political agency, and that Fiji can best exercise its desire to give leadership to a Pacific island voice within a reformed PIF rather than outside it.

### Conclusion

Despite the unfortunate way in which the Sydney conference was announced — without consultation with other Pacific island states — it nevertheless provides an opportunity to have a productive regional dialogue on an issue whose time has come. Now that Fiji has a democratically elected government it is time to discuss ways in which the regional architecture can be reconfigured most appropriately to meet the needs of the Pacific island states.

In this paper I have outlined some areas for discussion which could lead to a productive regional settlement. They include (1) valuing the new diplomatic system which has grown up organically outside the PIF to meet strategic needs in global and regional diplomacy; (2) recognising the need to make this new diplomatic system fit coherently with a reformed PIF system rather than competing with it (that is, retaining a reformed PIF as the key seat of regional governance via the leaders' summit); (3) recognising the need for Australia and New Zealand to return to a 1971 interpretation of equality and partnership within the PIF with possible consideration of a reintroduction of the island caucus system of the first PIF; (4) consideration of changing the

financial arrangements of the PIF combined core and regular budgets to allow for a stepping forward of Pacific island states to increase their contribution from 5 per cent to 60 per cent of this budget and a stepping back of Australia and New Zealand from providing 95 per cent of this core funding (2013 figures) to 40 per cent; and (5) consideration of a return to the active Pacific islands leadership and contest of the Australia–New Zealand control of the regional agenda within the PIF. The 'standing forward' of the Pacific island states could be on the foundation of a new islands caucus, an island state majority share of the funding of the core budget, as well as Fiji's return to PIF membership, and a more active Papua New Guinea in regional affairs.

The thrust of this argument is for a model which both keeps Australia and New Zealand within the PIF and at the same time meets the concerns of the Pacific island states about 'charting their own course'. Some might see this as wanting it both ways, but the alternatives — two separate and competing regional systems, or Australia and New Zealand outside the PIF altogether — are not productive for any of the parties involved.<sup>6</sup> They also do not command sufficient political support among the Pacific island states. Doing nothing is also not a sensible option if the political legitimacy of the PIF is to be restored. It is not in a spirit of nostalgia that this paper recalls the lessons of the 1971 settlement, but rather in terms of a workable outcome that gained political legitimacy because it was built on genuine partnership and equality, and respect for self-determination.

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## Endnotes

- 1 The organisation was founded in 1971 as the South Pacific Forum; in 2000 it became the Pacific Islands Forum.
- 2 The nature of this 1947 settlement and the debate leading up to it is discussed in detail in Smith (1972).
- 3 See also footnote 51 in Doran (2004, p. 29): 'on 10 May, New Zealand transmitted a second letter from Ratu Mara in which he explained that he had neglected to mention the wish of Island leaders that New Zealand invite Australia as an observer [to the upcoming Wellington Forum]'. Doran is citing a letter from Millen (New Zealand ministry) to Moodie (Australian ministry) of 10 May 1971.
- 4 This argument is developed in detail in Fry (1993, pp. 229–35).
- 5 I am indebted to Fulori Manoa, postgraduate scholar in Diplomacy and International Affairs at the University of the South Pacific, for these insights on the role of PSIDS at the UN.
- 6 The strategic case (on behalf of the Pacific island states) for the exclusion of Australia and New Zealand from the PIF has been most persuasively argued by Kaliopate Tavola, Ambassador at Large for the MSG and former foreign minister for Fiji. He first presented these ideas in his paper 'The PIDF and the Future of Regionalism' seminar at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in September 2013 (Pareti 2013b) and later developed them in a paper 'Towards a New Regional Diplomatic Architecture' to the USP's New Pacific Diplomacy workshop in December 2014 (Tavola 2014). In his proposal, Australia and

New Zealand are excluded from the PIF but retain a special relationship with the Pacific island states; they comprise an inner circle of dialogue partners with the PIF, in an 'FIC–ANZ Contractual Arrangement'. The case for 'recasting' the PIF as an island state–only grouping and replacing Australian and New Zealand membership with a special relationship is also made by Derek Brien (2014) of the Pacific Institute of Public Policy.

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