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Re-thinking Pacific regional architecture whilst framing regional security

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The existing architecture for Pacific Regionalism, established in 1971, is the result of the inter-play of geopolitics and Pacific diplomacy relating to the newly-independent Pacific island countries and Australia and New Zealand (ANZ). Western Samoa (now Samoa) had led the way to independence in 1962. The Cook Islands was next opting for self-governing status; Nauru and Fiji became independent in 1968 and 1970 respectively. Tonga returned to full independence also in 1970. These five Pacific island countries were responsible for the break away from the SPC council with the aim of forming their own forum.



Pacific leaders at the 46th Pacific Islands Forum meeting, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea in September 2015 (Facebook/Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat)

With independence on the way, Pacific island leaders were preparing themselves in every way to take over the rein of power from their colonial masters and to determine their own political space and destiny. Their efforts to give expression to their sense of freedom were being frustrated by the domination of the SPC by the metropolitan powers. This led to what is referred to as the 'Lae Rebellion' in 1965. Such intransigence continued in 1970 and finally came to a head in 1971.

The invitation to Australia and New Zealand (ANZ) to join the new forum has remained controversial to date. However, both developed countries attended the first-ever forum when the South Pacific Forum (SPF) was established. The format of the forum meeting then was to operate two caucuses – one caucus for the Pacific island leaders and one for ANZ. The communique for that first meeting in Wellington was thus a Joint Final communique. This format was agreed to with the understanding that island leaders needed their own space and that they needed to determine their own destiny; that what they needed most was partnership and not the 'hegemonic role of the past.' The two-caucus approach however ended the following year when Australia asked for the two caucuses to merge.

The SPF became the PIF in 2000 to better reflect the wider membership of the Forum at the time. However, changes were not only limited to membership - there were major fundamental changes taking place from the early 1990s. According to Professor Greg Fry of USP, the post-Cold War policies of ANZ increasingly saw the SPF/PIF agenda as an extension of their foreign policy, and even of their domestic policy.² FICs also were diversifying their own foreign policy aligning themselves, for instance, to non-traditional partners. Fiji's 'Look North' policy is a good example. Fiji, furthermore, is also being proactive in the UN aligning itself with NAM and the Group

² See Fry, G. 2015. *Recapturing the spirit of 1971: Towards a new political settlement in the Pacific*. State Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Discussion Paper 2015/3, Australian National University, Canberra.

of 77 in the pursuit of south-south coalitions. The role of the PSIDS in the UN has consequently increased and has become very strategic.

In the pursuit of Pacific diplomacy, more and more Pacific diplomats are being active in global arenas articulating a range of issues that matter to the FICs, e.g. fisheries, climate change, undersea mining, MDGs, SDGs etc. A constant theme emanating from them is the need for an FIC-only forum to enable them to articulate a convincing and legitimate voice that is not tainted by diversionary interests of ANZ. These various articulations are being conducted outside the sponsorship of the PIFS/PIF. These changes have implications on the regional architecture and its various components.



Inaugural Pacific islands Development Forum summit, Nadi, Fiji, August 2013 (Fiji Ministry of Information)

There are other changes that are likely to have an impact on the regional architecture. These are:

- The mixed results of Pacific Regionalism itself, whether it is regional cooperation, or pooling of resources for regional services or regional market integration. The results fall far

short of expectations, and some discrepancies evident in the assessments directly point to the regional architecture as being responsible;

- The continuing incidence of instability in the region; and
- The continuing lethargy arising from the Fiji's proposal for a reconsideration of ANZ's membership of PIF presents a political imperative that will be costly for Pacific regionalism if left unresolved.

By way of possible issues for research, in the interests of bridging the policy-research nexus, I propose these three scenarios above, apart from that discussed earlier, as possible candidates for reasons of topicality, contemporaneity, and utility as regards Pacific Regionalism that is so critical for the sustainable development of all FICs.

Further research is also critical in the various scenarios below. These scenarios have emerged from various discourses around the region in the search for the most effective form of Pacific regionalism, given the poor history of our collective efforts to date. These scenarios are as follows:

- Deeper regional integration;
- Deeper regional integration on the basis of non-trade issues;
- Determine first what regional integration model we want and thence proceed to tailor-make that which is preferred;
- Enhanced regional cooperation;
- Revert to the two-caucus approach of the 1971;
- Reorient PIF from a Regional Economic Community (REC) to a

Regional Development Community (RDC);

- A 'patchwork regional architecture' as proposed by Dornan and Newton Cain in 2014; and

- Considering seriously Fiji's proposal to re-align ANZ in terms of membership of PIF.

