

## Diplomatic Exchanges in the Pacific Islands: Mapping the Networks

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### Abstract

*Given their small size and limited means, virtually all the Pacific Island Forum countries (FICs) pursue diplomatic relationships with states that are larger, more powerful and better resourced. This paper reviews the differing strategies and methods used by foreign ministries of the FICs to cope with their diplomatic limitations. Few states within the Pacific area have formal inter se relations; multi-lateral institutions loom unusually large in the FICs' diplomacy. This has led to some imaginative techniques to extend the reach of their very limited overseas representation.*

### Introduction

All Small states share the characteristic of limited capacity. This, however, is not to say they are all cast from a single mould. Indeed, there are qualitative differences even between the capabilities of small states and microstates.<sup>1</sup> These distinctions are accentuated further by other factors such as physical geography, resources and location. The island microstates of the South Pacific suffer from the most extreme of these circumstances as they attempt to manage through diplomacy an increasingly complex international and regional agenda. This paper reviews the differing strategies and methods used by the foreign ministries of Pacific Island Forum countries (FICs) to cope with their diplomatic limitations.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The concept of the microstate implies a level of state capacity below that of the traditional 'small power' and is normally related to population size. For this paper, a microstate is defined as a state with a population below 500,000.

<sup>2</sup> The Pacific Islands Forum is an association of heads of government founded in 1971 as the South Pacific Forum (but changed its name in 2000), to pursue cooperation amongst the independent and self-governing countries of the Pacific Islands region.

The Pacific Islands region has an extraordinary concentration of microstates, a factor that colours almost all aspects of the region's affairs. Smallness plus remoteness from global concentrations of populations is a political fact of life for virtually all countries of this region. While most have struggled valiantly to cope with their circumstances, not all have succeeded. Indeed, recently, the constraints imposed by small size and limited resources have led some external sceptics to characterise some FICs as 'fragile' and, even worse, others as 'failing states'. Naturally, the geo-politics of the Pacific Islands have impacted on all levels of the diplomatic relations that these Pacific Island countries seek to maintain or would wish to establish.

At the bilateral level, virtually all their extra-regional relationships are with states that are larger, more powerful and better resourced. The effective autonomy of countries subject to such disparities of power is a matter of concern, especially as the range of states with interests in the region has grown steadily over the decades. Multilateral institutions loom unusually large in the FICs' diplomacy, partially in consequence of these asymmetrical relations, but also as few states within the Pacific area have formal inter se relations. At the global level, the national constraints on most microstates have been so severe that many FICs are unable to represent their own interests directly at all. This has led to some imaginative techniques to extend the reach of their very limited overseas representation.

### The Pacific Islands Region

There is something that unites the islands of the South Pacific together in a way that seems to make sense to all observers whatever their origins. Precisely what that 'something' is, seems to defy definition. Outsiders might be forgiven for glossing over the diversity of these islands either through ignorance or pre-conditioned romanticism. Certainly, the South Pacific has long evoked emotions in outside visitors which continue to suggest the effusive advertisements of contemporary travel promoters - exotic, scenic, mystic, romantic, idyllic, captivating. Indeed, no other area of the world has been described so consistently, almost monotonously, in Western literature as 'paradise', 'Eden' and 'utopia'. The 'tourist myth', although exaggerated and frequently gauche presented, is no myth. The islands are beautiful and compelling. This view is shared not only by visiting Europeans but firmly held by the inhabitants of the islands themselves. But this does not make them of a single mould nor does a few apparently shared geographic features justify treating them in

common. According to Dr Maciu Salato, then Secretary-General of the South Pacific Commission, the Pacific Islands region would be better understood as 'unity in diversity' (*Pacific Islands Monthly* 1976: 25).

Politically, the most significant commonality would have to be the diminutive size of the countries in this region. No quarter of the globe has produced as many microstates as the Pacific Islands region. Indeed, only Fiji and Papua New Guinea (PNG) amongst the region's fourteen states and self-governing countries are not microstates.<sup>3</sup> PNG, with nearly six million people, and Fiji, with 836,000, exceed the microstate threshold of half a million population. The Solomon Islands (460,000), Vanuatu (215,000) and Samoa (182,000) are the largest of the independent microstates while Nauru (10,100), Tuvalu (9,600) and Niue (1,600) are the smallest (SPC, 2005).<sup>4</sup> All of the eight remaining territories will be microstates if they should progress to independence.<sup>5</sup> The all too evident limitations of liliputian insularity were a source of concern to the international community as the winds of change began to stir in the region in the early 1960s. Despite the concerns over the capacity of Pacific microstates to meet the obligations of statehood, the international commitment to decolonisation proved even stronger. Three particular limitations were, and remain considerations with regard to the national capacity of South Pacific microstates to service their obligations to the international community. These are:

- 1) the high levels of dependence on the international system for support to maintain their sovereignty;
- 2) the extreme levels of vulnerability; and
- 3) the comprehensive asymmetry of their external relations.

The small populations and dispersed geography of most countries not only prevent the achievement of economies of scale, they actually impose diseconomies on these states in seeking to meet the normal claims of the

citizens for goods and services. If these diseconomies are not absorbed by the state, medical services, education, sanitation and the like could not be provided at the levels expected elsewhere. Similarly the same geographic and demographic factors make the South Pacific polities vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters to a magnitude scarcely measurable on the scale of most other countries. A single cyclone can wreck havoc on one or more national economies in the South Pacific, which so overstretch their internal resilience that only external assistance enables the state to cope. This level of vulnerability is not an inherent characteristic of larger states. Smallness is also a political fact of life for most countries of the region, requiring them to develop their external relationships with states that are larger, more powerful and better resourced than they are.

Superficially, many Pacific Islands appear to share a similitude that seems to invite stereotyping them as all alike. This generalisation is not altogether unfair as the sea, the reef, and the coconut have helped to create parallels everywhere across the Pacific. Nonetheless, on closer inspection, the similarities quickly resolve themselves into the diversity of which Salato spoke. This applies to the physical characteristics of the islands as well as to the cultural diversity of their human inhabitants. The physical features of the Pacific Islands range from low lying atolls with vast central lagoons (such as those typical of Polynesia and Micronesia), to raised atolls with no lagoons (such as Nauru and Niue), stretching to the volcanic islands (Samoa), and to the continental islands with landforms stretching from beaches to glaciated mountains (such as New Guinea). While most occur in archipelagos, there are three that stand alone politically - Guam, Nauru and Niue. Socially, the many thousands of islands in this region are grouped into three broad ethno-geographic areas - Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia - and into 22 political entities whose contemporary boundaries were drawn sometimes by tradition but more often by colonial accident (or design).

### **Pacific Microstate Bilateral Diplomacy**

Perhaps the single most noteworthy feature of Pacific Islands' bilateral diplomacy is the near absence of inter se relations amongst the regional states. This is remarkable only in that their contacts with their regional neighbours are extraordinarily rich but it would be even more startling, of course, if they devoted their tightly constrained diplomatic resources servicing these connections. As it is, despite their substantial multilateral regional relationships, only a very small number of member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum (FICs) have sent a resident diplo-

<sup>3</sup> The Pacific Islands Forum member states comprise: Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. French Polynesia and New Caledonia enjoy an associated membership with the Forum.

<sup>4</sup> The Secretariat of the Pacific Community *Pocket Statistical Summary* (available online [http://www.spc.int/prism/publications/SPS\\_Final.pdf](http://www.spc.int/prism/publications/SPS_Final.pdf)) is a useful and current compendium of Pacific Islands' information including population.

<sup>5</sup> These are: American Samoa, French Polynesia, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, New Caledonia, Pitcairn Islands, Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna. French Polynesia (250,000) and New Caledonia (237,000) are the largest of the non-self-governing territories with Tokelau (1,500) and Pitcairn (52) the smallest. These territories and the FICs make up the Islands' membership of the Pacific Community.

matic mission to a fellow FIC. Papua New Guinea is the one Forum member to have multiple missions within the region with resident missions in Honiara and Suva. Both Fiji and the Solomon Islands have reciprocated the relationship with Papua New Guinea by sending a resident mission to Port Moresby. These two arrangements are the only such mutual relationship amongst the FICs.

By contrast, Suva is the host to the largest number of non-reciprocated FIC missions in the region with resident representation from the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Tuvalu. This unusual circumstance arises not so much as to service a high level of bilateral relations between Fiji and these fellow FIC states but rather to meet economically a variety of other diplomatic needs of the sending states. Fiji is a transportation and communications hub for the South Pacific and, therefore, has emerged as a diplomatic entrepôt in the Pacific Islands region. Representation in Suva allows these smaller states to enjoy access to a wider range of diplomatic contacts, UN and regional agencies as well as to conduct agents-general services for the sending Government.

The second salient feature of the FICs' bilateral diplomacy is the importance of the former metropolises as the core reciprocal relation. The majority of FICs maintain resident missions in the capitals of their former administering powers. And in all these cases the relationship is reciprocal. The Cook Islands, Niue, and Samoa have high commissions in Wellington; all the independent former American trust territories - FSM, Marshalls and Palau - have embassies in Washington; Fiji has had a high commission in London, and PNG has one in Canberra. However, given their greater resources it is scarcely surprising that the former metropolises have been unable or unwillingly to respond in kind. The United Kingdom carried on non-reciprocated relationships with Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu but announced in December 2004 that it would withdraw its missions from all but the Solomon Islands (ABC, 2004). Australia had maintained a high commission in Nauru until 1997. In September 2001, Australia opened a consulate-general in Nauru largely to service the 'Pacific Solution' refugee centres on the island. Nauru has not reciprocated, keeping its consulate-general in Melbourne, where its primary financial interests were located. Tuvalu is the only complete exception, never sending a resident mission to the UK and the UK never having a mission in Tuvalu. Table 1 provides a summary of FIC missions abroad.

A third characteristic of the FICs' bilateral diplomacy is the heavy use of mechanisms to minimise the costs of maintaining missions abroad while maximising the returns. Cross accreditation is a common technique

**Table 1: FIC Missions Abroad**

FIC\to	Australia	NZ	PRC	Japan	UK	US	UN	EU
Cooks		✓						
Fiji <sup>1</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
FSM <sup>2</sup>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Kiribati <sup>3</sup>								
Marshalls <sup>4</sup>				✓		✓		
Nauru <sup>5</sup>							✓	
Niue		✓						
Palau <sup>6</sup>				✓		✓	✓	
PNG <sup>7</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Samoa	✓	✓					✓	✓
Solomons <sup>8</sup>	✓						✓	✓
Tonga					✓		✓	
Tuvalu							✓	
Vanuatu			✓				✓	✓

Notes: 1. Missions also to India, Malaysia, and PNG; 2. Mission also to Fiji; 3. Mission also to Fiji; 4. Missions also to Fiji and Taiwan; 5. Missions also to Fiji and Taiwan; 6. Missions also to Philippines and Taiwan; 7. Missions to Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and the Solomons; and 8. Missions also to PNG and Taiwan.

of maintaining a number of bilateral relationships without opening separate embassies for each relationship. It is not only the small who find this a useful arrangement, even great powers find the mechanism a satisfactory means of servicing representational interests across such a far-flung region of microstates. The UK opted for this approach when it withdrew its resident missions from three regional states and cross-accredited its High Commissioner in Fiji to these states. The US did this as well when it withdrew its ambassador in Honiara. Another tactic used episodically by Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands was that of a 'roving ambassador' - a mission head resident in the home country but accredited to a number of states abroad. The FIC microstates appear to use, disproportionately, consular missions to cover relations that would normally be reserved for an embassy. Nauru's Melbourne consulate-general may be the most spectacular example of this, but others, such as the Cooks Islands, Kiribati and Tonga, have relied heavily on consular arrangements to supplement their limited bilateral relationships. Significantly, a very large percentage of these consular missions are honorary only, being staffed by citizens of the receiving country.

Beyond the bilateral relationships described above, the range of missions sent abroad or hosted at home depends on the array of factors that

might be expected to be important – the resources and interests of the FIC and the aims of the external power. Thus, as might be expected, the two largest FICs - PNG and Fiji - have the largest range of overseas missions and host the largest number of resident foreign missions. After this general observation, the range of missions to the FICs serves as a useful indicator of the range and depth of contemporary external interests in the Pacific Islands. Australia and New Zealand, with nine missions each, clearly have the greatest engagement with their fellow members of the Pacific Islands Forum. This comment is slightly skewed by New Zealand's missions to its two freely associated states – the Cook Islands and Niue - but then Australia sent a high commission to tiny Nauru for much the same historic reasons. China, Japan, the US, and Taiwan each have six resident missions in the 14 FICs but there are qualifications on three of these. China may have more than it 'needs' but its rivalry with Taiwan has encouraged it to maintain resident missions where it can, for the same reasons as Taiwan maintains resident missions in all states where it has diplomatic relations. The US reduced the number of its embassies after the end of Cold War. The United Kingdom also cut back its missions significantly since 2004, primarily as a cost cutting measure, and in the belief that its colonial obligations are essentially over. Table 2 provides a summary of other country missions in FICs.

Related to minimising the costs of bilateral diplomacy has been the use of missions to multilateral organisations to enable the sending state to participate both in the international forum as well as secure opportunities

**Table 2: Missions to the FICs**

FIC/from	Australia	NZ	PRC	Japan	UK	US	Taiwan	EC
Cooks		✓						
Fiji	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
FSM	✓		✓	✓		✓		
Kiribati <sup>1</sup>	✓	✓					✓	
Marshalls				✓		✓	✓	
Nauru	✓						✓	
Niue		✓						
Palau				✓		✓	✓	
PNG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Samoa	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Solomons	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Tonga	✓	✓	✓					
Tuvalu							✓	
Vanuatu	✓	✓	✓					

Note: 1. Cuba opened a resident mission in Kiribati in 2006 headed by a Chargé, with the Ambassador accredited from Manila. Ostensibly, the mission is to service the needs of the 20 Cuban doctors sent as aid to Kiribati.

for low cost bilateral connections. While extending the diplomatic reach of the FICs, perhaps more importantly, these missions put the FICs at the centre of important aid networks. The permanent missions to the United Nations are key exemplar of this tactic. Ten of the FICs have permanent missions in New York to enable them to service both aid and political objectives through the UN system.<sup>6</sup> The second major multilateral node for the FICs is located in Brussels to service relations with the European Commission (EC) as well as to maintain relations with individual EU member states.<sup>7</sup> These substantial multilateral vehicles are primarily important for adding scope to the national interests of the participating states. In this regard, they reinforce traditional diplomatic aims and tactics and so are quite distinguishable from the complex intricacies of the uniquely multilateral diplomacy of the Pacific Islands regional system.

### Pacific Islands Regional Diplomacy

Regional identification has been a factor in the foreign affairs impacting of the Pacific Islands at least since the end of WW II (Herr 1994). Formal diplomatic relations did not figure prominently amongst the Island countries in the vanguard of the evolution of Pacific Islands' regionalism. There were many reasons for this but, as discussed below, one consideration was the desire to retain the dependencies within the regional family so that differences in sovereign status were overlooked whenever possible. Thus, regional arrangements have often included a mix of international actors ranging from states and self-governing countries to a variety of dependencies and non-governmental organisations without clear differentiation of responsibilities. As a result, the external affairs departments in the Pacific Islands have not played the central coordinating role in these relationships that might have been expected elsewhere.

Regional organisations, thus, have provided the primary mechanisms for cooperating on, harmonising and coordinating regional policies across the Pacific Islands for 60 years with the establishment of the South Pacific Commission (SPC) in 1947.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the Pacific Islands Forum has been the primary political association for the Pacific Islands for nearly two-thirds of this period. Formally, it is not an inter-governmental

<sup>6</sup> These are FSM, Fiji, Nauru, Palau, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

<sup>7</sup> Fiji, PNG, Samoa, and Solomon Islands have resident missions in Brussels while Vanuatu is opening one in September 2007.

<sup>8</sup> The SPC played a substantial political role in the development of the regional system but this began to fade significantly from the late 1970s.

organisation (IGO) although it has often been described as one even by insiders. However, the Forum has lacked a treaty to give it international legal personality. Belatedly, the 2005 Forum drafted such a treaty but even two years later this instrument has not entered into force. The Forum's authority derives from the fact that, like the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings, it is a summit meeting of the region's prime ministers and presidents. Australia and New Zealand have been members of the Forum since its establishment in 1971 and remain its only non-Islands members. Meanwhile, the number of FICs has grown from the original five to the present 14.<sup>9</sup> The annual Forum meetings are critical for setting the regional agenda, in addition to directing and overseeing the activities of a significant family of agencies which operate under the aegis of the Forum or report to it.

The Forum does have an institutional component but its relationship to the slightly infelicitously named Forum Secretariat (ForSec) is not quite as it might appear. ForSec began life with its own treaty in 1972 under the appellation of the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation (SPEC) as a type of regional OECD to support the development aims of its members. SPEC's terms of reference were not extended to include servicing some of the Forum's secretariat needs until 1975. This ad hoc administrative responsibility was ultimately recognised in 1988 with a change in the organisation's name. Despite some reservations about enlarging the number of regional IGOs, the Forum found itself in a dilemma in 1979 when its members wanted to take advantage of the progress made by the United Nations Third Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III). To avoid putting the SPEC at risk in this speculative international environment, the South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) was established as an independent IGO. The FFA, like SPEC, reported to the Forum but was entirely independent of SPEC. The South Pacific Applied Geo-Science Commission (SOPAC) was added to cover non-living marine resources in 1984 but not directly as a Forum-related agency initially, although it has become one since. Whether *south-pacific.travel*, formerly known as the South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO), is genuinely an IGO has been open to some question. It claims a hybrid membership of member states and tourism organisations. It has a somewhat similarly indirect linkage to the Forum as that of SOPAC.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The initial five FICs were the Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, Tonga and Western Samoa (now Samoa).

<sup>10</sup> The entire question of inter-agency relationships is under reconsideration through the Regional Institutional Review as part of the Pacific Plan process discussed below.

Another regional arrangement centres on the Pacific Community. Known as the South Pacific Commission (SPC) until 1998, the SPC was founded as a purely technical organisation. Consequently its founding members, all colonial powers,<sup>11</sup> resisted playing a political role in regional affairs. Efforts by the growing Islands membership of the Commission to extend its mandate to include political debate were abandoned after a significant setback in 1970. The result was that the Forum was established the following year to meet the wishes of the independent states for a regional political round-table. The SPC's survival as an effective regional organisation has depended on critical diplomatic resources that it alone was able to secure for the Pacific Islands. The SPC defined the region in a way that the Forum was unwilling to change. It enabled the dependent territories, three permanent members of the UN Security Council who were SPC member states (Britain, France and the US), and interested non-regional observers to continue to meet together to contribute to the regional agenda. The SPC also protected the Forum from much of the political controversy that frequently attaches itself to the delivery of development services. Although not connected with the SPC now, the South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) has a membership (through the inclusion of dependencies) and a functional work program much closer to that of the SPC than to the Forum due to an earlier close relationship.

The diversification of regional organisations over nearly fifty years created a requirement to avoid duplication and demarcation disputes amongst the burgeoning number of multilateral fora. Initially, this produced a sustained, but ultimately fruitless, campaign by the FICs for a single regional organisation (SRO). This would have seen Britain, France and the US expelled from the regional system but at the cost of their funding and the participation of their dependencies in the SRO. As the 12 year intra-regional contest ground to a realisation that the FICs did not really want the consequences of an SRO themselves, other avenues began to be considered. Reform of the Forum could not surmount this impasse but it did yield one important diplomatic development. A 1987 report tabled by the Forum's Committee on Regional Institutional Arrangements (CRIA) borrowed the concept of 'dialogue partnerships' from ASEAN to enable interested extra-regional states to engage the Forum as a body. Dialogue partners were to be invited to attend post-Forum meetings with

<sup>11</sup> The founding members of the SPC were Australia, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the US and the UK. The Netherlands left the organisation in 1962 while Western Samoa joined as the first Pacific Island member in 1965.

elements of the Forum from 1989 to discuss issues of mutual relevance. Initially six governments - Canada, China, France, Great Britain, Japan and the US - were so designated.<sup>12</sup> This gave the Forum the political equivalent of the SPC's observer corps and significantly enhanced the diplomatic reach of the Forum as a regional actor.

A second significant CRIA proposal, implemented in 1988 by the Forum after approval by other regional bodies, effectively ended the long running SRO campaign. It established a South Pacific Organisations Co-ordinating Committee (SPOCC) to rationalise the relations amongst the regional bodies to ensure less competitiveness and greater efficiencies. By consensus, from 1996, ForSec chaired SPOCC's annual meetings, adding substantially to the Forum's coordinating role in the region. It was renamed the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) in 1999. A key feature of CROP, and undoubtedly a hold-over from the temporising of the SRO issue, was the inclusion of a range of agencies that were not formally the equal of the regional IGOs in legal status. These now include the Fiji School of Medicine, Pacific Island Development Program (PIDP), the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA), and the University of the South Pacific (USP) as CROP agencies although they are not formally IGOs; Table 3 provides a list of CROP members. Their inclusion is symptomatic of the internal ambiguity of the regional states on the issue of sovereignty. They value highly their own sovereignty but are pragmatic enough to attempt to manage their external interests by whatever mechanisms that come to hand.

The strength and range of the regional system has emerged as of critical importance in recent years as a means of addressing the increasing extra-regional concern of the Pacific Islands. Strengthening the capacity of many regional states to meet the ramping up of international expectations for heightened state responsibility in the post-9/11 environment, the Forum has taken the lead on this issue by using its privileged position in CROP to direct a renewed effort to deepen regional integration through what is known as the 'Pacific Plan'.<sup>13</sup> This was proposed in 2004 and endorsed by the Forum at its 2005 annual meeting.

<sup>12</sup> Since 1989, the European Union, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, India and Thailand have also been designated dialogue partners. Taiwan has enjoyed a dialogue relationship with the Forum leaders since 1993 but not as a 'partner'. The dialogue meeting takes place at a different site and the Forum does not engage as an entity; FICs participate on an individual basis if they wish.

<sup>13</sup> The Plan's details can be viewed at: <http://www.pacificplan.org/tiki-page.php?pageName=HomePage>.

<b>Table 3: Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP)</b>		
<i>Inter-Governmental Organisation</i>	Year Est	Headquarters
Pacific Community (South Pacific Commission)	1947	Noumea
Forum Secretariat (formerly SPEG)	1972	Suva
Forum Fisheries Agency	1979	Honiara
South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission	1972/1984	Suva
South Pacific Regional Environment Program	1989	Apia
South Pacific Tourism Organisation	1991	Suva
<i>Non-Governmental Organisations</i>		
Pacific Island Development Program	1980	Honolulu
University of the South Pacific	1968	Suva
Fiji School of Medicine	1885/1961	Suva
South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment	1980	Suva

In its ambitious essence, the Pacific Plan is intended to build on the expertise of regional institutions and their members to play a more substantial role in assisting the weaker FICs to cope with the greater demands in the exercise of sovereignty. The Plan may well help the FICs to better meet their international obligations and exploit better their opportunities. However, if it is to succeed, the Plan will have to address the internal bureaucratic fragility of many of these states. The limited state capacities of the smaller/weaker FICs make them essentially consumers, and not producers, of regional benefits but they need to be able to use the improved outputs of regional diplomacy much better than they do now.

### **Internal Linkages and the Management of External Affairs**

There are a number of factors that have compelled the FICs, especially the smaller ones, to rely less on their external affairs departments and to engage with their external environment more broadly through other governmental departments, than is the case with larger states elsewhere. Typically the foreign affairs department is disproportionately small, particularly with regard to the support services, at home. The SPC and other regional agencies deal directly with the responsible line agency in member countries and even convene regular ministerial meetings to gauge regional priorities and to approach external donors. 'Corridor diplomacy' at significant regional meetings, has long been a major outlet for small states and territories without the resources to maintain the range of contacts that they can access at meetings such as the South Pacific Conference.

Such considerations would not matter, perhaps, if the individual states were able to enforce a discipline on themselves that coordinated the inputs their representatives made at these disparate regional convocations and integrated the outputs that resulted on their return home. However, this capacity is often lacking. It is not unknown for a government to pursue contradictory objectives at different regional meetings, thus giving confusing views to external observers as to the country's national aims and interests. Anecdotal evidence suggests that few FICs actually have institutionalised bureaucratic mechanisms for integrating holistically the range of external interests into a coherently applied governmental policy.

The complicated management of contemporary Pacific Islands' regional diplomacy begins with the central role played by prime ministers as foreign policy-makers through their roles in the Pacific Islands Forum. The extent of issues addressed at Forum meetings can span the gamut of governmental responsibilities and so have to be disseminated to a large number of departments beyond that of the PM's department and department of foreign affairs. It is equally important that policy decisions made at ministerial meetings on health, education, trade, finance, and the like, also be fully assimilated into government policy. Yet weak institutional infrastructure and personal ambitions as well as professional skill deficiencies can make this difficult in many small countries. Such problems will become more severe if the Pacific Plan starts to impose greater obligations on FICs to implement the outputs of regional diplomacy more effectively. Just a couple of well-documented cases can help to make this point (Herr 2006).

The recent International Whaling Commission (IWC) meetings illustrate some of these policy inconsistencies that can arise from the fractured foreign affairs decision-making processes within many FICs. Australia, New Zealand and the FICs, through both SPREP and the Forum, had committed themselves repeatedly to the pursuit of a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary since 1998. This proposal was advanced and enthusiastically endorsed by Australia and New Zealand who regularly took it fruitlessly to the IWC for acceptance. A significant impediment to the success of the South Pacific Whale Sanctuary at the IWC has been the resistance of a number of FICs to maintain regional commitment to this initiative. This circumstance can be attributed in part to the different political levels that are represented at the Forum and at meetings such as the IWC. It is also a consequence of the personal opportunism of the delegates to these meetings, being confident that there will be minimal repercussions on their return home.

Japan has long been accused of buying votes in the IWC by paying

for the participation costs of a number of small, aid-dependent states. At the 2005 IWC meeting in Korea, this group of states included five FICs - Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. At one time or another, these five voted against the regional position or against Australian and New Zealand's initiatives to prevent a return to commercial whaling or using 'scientific' whaling to supply commercial markets. This was despite promises prior to the IWC's Ulsan meeting from FIC states that they would support Australia when Senator Ian Campbell, Australia's Environment Minister, went through the region earlier in the month seeking this assurance (Johnson, 2005).

At one level it could be argued that if Japan is buying the sovereign rights of small developing states to participate in international decision-making as stakeholders in the whaling issue-area, it is nothing new. However, there are real problems with the apparent opportunism of those FICs that participated in the IWC meetings. In this case, assisting Japan is not just a question of very small and economically weak states seeking financial advantage at the expense of a virtually non-existent national interest in whaling. The benefit of national interest is clearly disturbing confidence in the utility of the regional system for achieving collective objectives even when these are agreed at the highest level as in the Pacific Plan. In the case of whaling, it is clear that the Island representatives exercising their diplomatic independence felt that their interests (and perhaps those of their country) were better served by honouring agreements with Japan than maintaining pledges to Australia, or indeed, fellow FICs. It is doubtful that they considered their votes as seriously challenging the regional system or damaging to their long-term relations with Australia and New Zealand.

Tuvalu provided an instance of the domestic tensions that could arise from the dragons' rivalry. These tensions reached a political boiling point in August 2004 when the then Prime Minister, Saufatu Sopo'anga, was defeated by a vote of no confidence. It was generally believed that the primary reason for his ouster was that he accepted a visit to Beijing without first informing his cabinet. Sopo'anga's trip to the PRC angered the opposition and some of his colleagues because his Government was endangering Tuvalu's development assistance relationship with Taipei. This included the recent commissioning of a relatively expensive state building in Funafuti, the capital, which was funded entirely by Taiwan. However, the Chinese ambassador to Fiji, Cai Jinbiao suggested the cause may have had nothing to do with the visit to Beijing but more a case of internal instability within a very small parliament (*Islands Business* 2004). Taiwan's association with Tuvalu has not been without its more

impartial external critics. For example, the international watchdog, Transparency International, recently attacked Taiwanese aid practices in Tuvalu for encouraging corruption especially amongst the tiny country's political elite. Transparency International alleged that travel to Taiwan was a priority for senior Tuvaluan officials. 'One of the attractions', the NGO claimed, 'is that in addition to their fairly high local allowances paid before their trips, Taiwan has a policy of paying out generous American dollars personally to their visitors' (*PACNEWS Digest* 2004).

Similar points can be, and have been, made with regard to other aspects of the orderly operation of the international state system – offshore financial centres, ship registrations, passport controls and the like. Good governance is important to the FICs to preserve their internal stability and access to avenues of external assistance. Perhaps even more vital to the region's microstates in the maintenance of their sovereignty, is good international governance. Helping to maintain an effective and orderly system of managing international exchanges should advantage all states, especially the weak and vulnerable. The benefit to the Pacific Island states of supporting well maintained international regimes regulating banking, shipping, diplomatic contacts and the like is that they can participate more safely and cheaply than would be the case if these mechanisms did not exist. However, the benefits can appear remote and less rewarding than opportunistic behaviour – especially if their exceptionalism is perceived to be so minor as to not disturb the overall effectiveness of the regime.

## Conclusion

Managing their foreign affairs has certainly become more demanding for the FICs over the past two decades. Adapting to new foreign policy challenges has been fraught with enormous difficulties. Traditional bilateral ties have been generally supportive but these are hugely asymmetrical. Because the region's external supporters have adapted more quickly and completely to the global changes since the end of the Cold War and the instability of the post-9/11 international environment, some of the older more established bilateral relationships have become less predictable for the FICs. The advent of new actors from Asia have broadened the bilateral contacts for some FICs but these new associations have also added some complications to bilateral relations as well, such as in the diplomacy rivalry between China and Taiwan.

Fortunately for the FICs, they have helped to develop a regional system that has the capacity to moderate the demands of the broader interna-

tional community. This may well assist them to cope better than they would alone. Certainly the asymmetries of power in their bilateral relationships make it abundantly clear that there are real risks on depending on this level of diplomacy alone. However, the protection of a regional response to these challenges is not without its risks. The Pacific Plan makes significant demands on the internal coherence and commitment of the FICs if it is to deliver the full extent of the benefits it promises. Not least of these challenges will be the development of better mechanisms to translate the management of the FIC's external affairs into effective domestic policy. This may well involve greater foreign policy adaptation than the FICs have managed in recent decades.

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