

Security was the key concern for the region in the year 2000 in the wake of coups in Fiji and the Solomon Islands, burgeoning demands for independence in West Papua, and continuing efforts to find a lasting political settlement on Bougainville. These political and security crises are examined individually. The timeliness and efficacy of the response by Australia, the regional heavyweight, and by the Forum is then assessed. Finally a broad comparison of regional crises is undertaken to ascertain whether any trends are emerging with respect to the role of ethnicity and other factors in causing conflict, as well as to illuminate ways to deter the resort to illegal means, including violence, to achieve political ends. First, however, is an update on efforts to promote environmental dimensions of security, notably the coordinated management of regional fisheries and the latest outcome in international efforts to combat climate change.

The negotiation process known as the Multilateral High Level Conference for Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks was launched in 1997 and concluded with a convention open to signature on 5 September 2000 after its seventh and final session in Honolulu. All sixteen Forum Fisheries Committee members attended, as did France and the French territories and the eight distant-water fishing nations. The quest to adopt the convention by consensus proved impossible and it was finally put to a vote with 19 in favor, 2 against (Japan and South Korea),

and 3 abstentions (China, France, and Tonga). It was subsequently signed by 11 states and ratified by Fiji.

Japan, in particular, was dissatisfied with numerous aspects of the final draft, including the boundaries of the convention area and decision-making procedures that Japan considered discriminatory against the minority, namely Asian distant-water fishing nations. In the end a compromise formula was adopted in which chambers of Forum and non-Forum members of the proposed commission would each need to support a decision by a three-fourths majority in order for it to pass. This would provide decisions with sufficient clout to implement them but also prevent individual countries from exercising veto power. To address widely held concerns that France would secure more votes for itself by virtue of its three territories, it was decided that separate rules of procedure be drawn up to specify the extent of participation by overseas territories.

Finalizing the convention is a major step in formalizing cooperation between the Pacific Islands and distant-water fishing nations over sustainable fisheries management. However, it is just the beginning of a long and challenging process to implement the agreement. In the short term, decisions must be reached on the location of the permanent headquarters of the commission. Entry into force then requires ratification by 3 distant-water fishing nations and 7 coastal states, or, if after three years enough distant-water fishing nations have not ratified,

with 12 ratifications. Realistically, the convention will not work without the majority of the distant-water fishing nations supporting it, and northeast Asian participation still remains doubtful. Financing the commission is also a vexed issue, as those distant-water fishing nations that ratify are loath to bear a disproportionate burden. Compliance and enforcement provisions constitute one of the biggest tasks for the future commission, especially with respect to those that do not ratify. Equally demanding is the commission's crucial role in determining how to allocate fishing opportunities and how to accommodate the entry of new distant-water fishing nations.

Notwithstanding the challenges facing implementation, the Convention for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks is a remarkable achievement. "It includes the large interlocking EEZs of the Pacific Islands, as well as vast stretches of high seas. . . . opportunities [have been] created through the convention to manage and conserve the highly valuable, as well as highly migratory, fish stocks of the western and central Pacific. The convention also provides a framework and forum for the resolution of conflicts between the fishing nations and coastal states of the region. . . . the convention is an important step towards fulfilling the legally prescribed, yet politically fraught, duty to cooperate" as laid down by the United Nations (Tarte 2000b).

News on the environment was not all positive for the Pacific Islands, with a disappointing setback in efforts to combat global warming. In November, after two weeks of intense negotiations in the Hague, the Sixth Confer-

ence of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) suspended talks without reaching agreement on ways to operationalize the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. In Kyoto, developed countries had committed themselves to greenhouse-gas reductions averaging 5.2 percent from the base year of 1990 by 2012 (see von Strokirch 1998). The conference made progress toward outlining a package of financial support and technology transfer to help developing countries contribute to global action on climate change. But the key political issues—including an international emissions trading system, a "clean development mechanism," the rules for counting emissions reductions from carbon "sinks," and a compliance regime—could not be resolved (UNFCCC, 2000).

The talks failed due to a deadlock between the European Union (EU) and the United States–led umbrella group comprising Australia, Canada, and Japan over how to translate the principles of the 1997 protocol into action. In particular they disagreed over the definition of carbon sinks, such as greenhouse-gas-absorbing trees, and the extent to which countries could use these to offset their greenhouse-gas emissions. The umbrella group wanted the definition of sinks broadened and also sought to expand the scope for countries to purchase the unused emission rights or carbon credits of other countries. The European Union strongly opposed both these moves because they amounted to loopholes that would allow developed countries to avoid honoring their stated commitments to real cuts in emissions (*Australian*, 27, 28 Nov 2000).

Although the United States had agreed to emission cuts in Kyoto, in the intervening period it has evidently realized the enormity of the challenge to meet that obligation. United States participation in the UN framework convention is crucial, because it emits almost a quarter of global greenhouse gases despite having only 4 percent of the world's population. The conference has agreed to resume talks in mid-2001, but agreement may be harder to reach in view of the election of the conservative Bush administration in the United States. Despite the best efforts of intergovernmental organizations such as the Forum and the Alliance of Small Island States and nongovernment organizations that lobbied hard for a meaningful outcome in the Hague, the immediate outlook is somewhat bleak.

Pacific Island states are among the world's nations most vulnerable to extreme weather events. A new report by the World Bank describes the impacts as including loss of coastal infrastructure and land, more intense cyclones and droughts, failure of subsistence crops and coastal fisheries, losses in coral reefs, and the spread of malaria and dengue fever. Many of these trends are already in evidence. The study identified and recommended a series of "adaptation strategies" for the Pacific Islands to offset the impact of global warming. These could include better management of natural resources, disease vector control, and improved spatial planning. In the absence of adaptation the report estimated that the high island of Viti Levu in Fiji could incur damages of US\$23–52 million a year by 2050, equivalent to 2–4 percent of Fiji's

current gross domestic product. However, the World Bank recognized that the microstates require financial assistance in implementing these strategies and has called on the international community to act urgently to help countries on the receiving end of climate change (World Bank, 2000).

Despite the long-term significance of economic and environmental dimensions of security, these were completely overshadowed by the security crises that erupted in the year 2000. Fiji was in turmoil after the government's overthrow in a coup on 19 May, exactly one year after the election of the People's Coalition government. The initial tactics bore similarities to the May 1987 coup, as armed men stormed parliament and took the government hostage. The rhetoric of the coup-makers was heavily laced with references to Fijian nationalism. However, this time the usurper was not a soldier, nor was he a person of any chiefly or political status. George Speight was a failed businessman who bore a grudge against the government for sacking him from his directorship of a major timber firm and for charging him with corruption. Moreover, this seizure of power featured a higher level of intimidation and violence in the wider community and in parliament. The hostage crisis dragged on for fifty-six days as Speight and his men issued threats against their captives unless their demands were met. Although several army personnel assisted Speight, the armed forces as a whole were not involved in the coup. Nevertheless, they seemed unable to prevent the ensuing public disorder, which had serious consequences as mobs

took to the streets on the first day, looting and burning shops in the capital, Suva.

Just as in 1987, this coup ousted a legitimate, broadly representative government. The 1999 elections were held under the auspices of the 1997 constitution, which itself was the product of extensive public consultation, and endorsed by the Great Council of Chiefs and both houses of parliament. Once again it was a government dominated by the Labor Party, with substantial Indo-Fijian participation in the cabinet line-up. However, this time a significant difference in the eyes of many indigenous Fijians was that the prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, was an Indo-Fijian. Chaudhry, a former trade union leader, had begun to implement ambitious reforms. In doing so, he was perceived by some as being arrogant and insensitive to indigenous Fijian concerns, particularly with regard to the process of issuing or renewing native land leases. Fijian nationalists began to mount a series of peaceful protests against Chaudhry's government, including a three-thousand-strong march that was underway as the coup took place.

Despite the democratic credentials of the Chaudhry government and the unlawful behavior of the hostage takers, within a week President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and the Great Council of Chiefs had caved in to most of Speight's demands. They evidently concurred with his view that the 1997 constitution was flawed and a new one, more sensitive to indigenous Fijian concerns, was needed. Chaudhry's government was asked to resign and Speight's men were to be granted

amnesty for their actions. Emboldened by his power, Speight rejected the offer made by the Great Council of Chiefs and upped the ante with further demands, including the resignation of Ratu Mara and the appointment of a new president and a government designated by Speight. As the internal security situation worsened, the army asked the president to stand aside, abrogated the constitution, and declared martial law on 29 May. The hostages were finally released on 13 July, but only after the Great Council of Chiefs had endorsed Speight's choice for president, Ratu Josefa Iloilo, the former vice-president. The new president then appointed an interim administration led by Laisenia Qarase (*PNB*, July 2000, 2).

After his appointment in July, Qarase quickly developed a blueprint to implement affirmative action policies for indigenous Fijians. He also proposed that a new constitution secure Fijian paramountcy in politics and reserve the heads of state and government for indigenous Fijians. A Constitution Review Commission was set up to consult with the public and develop a draft constitution. In a landmark ruling on 15 November, High Court Judge Anthony Gates ruled that the military had no right to appoint the interim administration, which is therefore illegal, and that the 1997 constitution had not been abrogated. He added that all those elected in the Chaudhry government were still members of parliament. The interim government's appeal on this decision will be heard in February 2001. There are fears that the interim administration could ignore the final court ruling on the purported grounds of pro-

moting national security. In its final word on the subject in 2000, the Qarase administration promised it would hold a democratic election by March 2002 (*PNB*, Jan 2001, 10–11).

Events in the latter half of 2000 demonstrated that the general climate of insecurity did not end with the hostage drama. Speight and his men had been granted amnesty for acts committed during the crisis on the proviso that they lay down their arms and show due respect for the law. Instead, they continued to foment unrest after the hostage release, prompting the military to launch a raid on 27 July and arrest the militants. They were charged with treason and imprisoned, though some of the military personnel were later released. (It remains to be seen when or even whether a trial for Speight and the ringleaders will be held.) The violence did not end there, as recently freed Speight supporters within the military launched an act of mutiny at the barracks on 2 November that was quickly put down by the Fiji Military Forces. Eight soldiers were killed and scores injured in an incident that put paid to any hopes of a speedy return to law and order. In the rural areas Indo-Fijians were subjected to looting, damage to homes and shops, and other acts of terror by Fijians sympathetic to Speight's rhetoric on Fijian rights and the use of force to reclaim them. The military finally lifted roadblocks and the all-night curfew in Suva on 15 December, based on their conviction that stability had returned to Fiji. Nevertheless, the Emergency Security Decree was to remain in place until further notice.

In what was touted by the media

as a copycat phenomenon, the conflict in the Solomon Islands culminated in a coup of sorts on 5 June. The Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) and Malaitan members of the Royal Solomon Islands Police ousted the government of Bartholomew Ulufa'alu. The parliament subsequently elected a new government led by Manasseh Sogavare. The crisis had its origins in longstanding ethnic tensions that turned violent in late 1998. Frustration with the failure of successive governments to address the concerns of Guadalcanal Islanders prompted youths to take up arms against immigrants from the island of Malaita. People of Guadalcanal resented Malaitans for alienating land and for dominating commerce and government jobs, particularly in and around Honiara. By late 1999 the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) had forced some 20,000 Malaitans to flee Guadalcanal. Repeated confrontations between the movement and the police throughout 1999 left several IFM militants dead (*Kabutaulaka* 2000a, 5–7).

Two peace accords negotiated by the government with the help of a Commonwealth envoy had collapsed by late 1999, in part because the cash-strapped government was unable to meet demands from both sides for financial compensation. Malaitan militants then formed the Malaita Eagle Force and in January raided a police station for guns to fight the Isatabu Freedom Movement. Their aims were to seek compensation for loss of property and killings of Malaitans and to ensure protection of remaining Malaitan interests in Honiara, which became a Malaitan enclave. After the government's overthrow in June,

fighting between the two groups in Honiara intensified, with the police unable to prevent the descent into lawlessness. Many police sided with the militants. On 2 August a ceasefire was brokered but it was not honored due to bad faith on both sides. By the end of the year it was estimated that over 100 people had died as a result of the conflict.

On 15 October the two warring parties signed the Townsville Peace Agreement after six days of negotiations hosted by Australia and facilitated with the help of New Zealand. The agreement covered a wide range of sensitive and complex issues, including national security and war claims, loss of lives and property, political and socioeconomic issues, reconciliation, peace monitoring, and a declaration of peace and harmony. The question of amnesty was controversial, because militants sought immunity from prosecution for violence and other crimes perpetrated during the conflict. Ultimately it was agreed that amnesty would be granted if the conditions of the agreement were met. Within a specified time the militants undertook to disband roadblocks and bunkers; return their weapons; and to locate, identify, and allow relatives to retrieve the remains of victims. The two parties also agreed to renounce violence and settle their differences peacefully with respect for the rule of law. As a consequence of the agreement unarmed Australian and New Zealand police arrived in November to monitor the peace and supervise the disarmament process (Kabutaulaka 2000b, 4–5).

Significantly, the Townsville Peace Agreement went beyond the paramete-

ters of the original Malaita-Guadalcanal dispute by advocating a more decentralized political system in the Solomon Islands to give provinces greater autonomy, notably in terms of their control over natural resources. An earlier national peace conference held in late August had also emphasized the need for changes to the system of government to redress grievances over the poor distribution of resources between different provinces, between the central government and provinces, and between rural and urban areas. More equitable development across the nation was seen to be a way of deterring mass migration (especially to the capital) which had been a key contributing factor to the two-year ethnic conflict. In addition, the alienation of land from traditional owners and the extent of compensation for its loss have been major issues that must be addressed. Both the agreement and the peace conference also highlighted the need for a restructuring of the police, with a view to producing a neutral and professional police force (*PNB*, Sept 2000, 4–5).

The conflict in the Solomon Islands is a result of long-standing grievances based on socioeconomic disparities between ethnic groups. Such grievances were compounded by the poor economic management of successive governments and their failure to address the root causes of disputes. Yet the government's past lack of action is understandable insofar as issues involving the redistribution of land, jobs, and wealth are hardly amenable to a quick or cheap fix and must be subject to protracted negotiations between all stakeholders. The provision of compensation is further

stymied by the nation's parlous economic situation and the government's continuing cash-flow problem. Australia has signaled a preparedness to partly finance a solution provided the terms of the peace agreement are fulfilled. There is considerable goodwill in the Solomon Islands to make the peace process work, especially among nongovernment organizations. However, at the close of 2000 roughly half the weapons had not been surrendered, despite the expiration of the amnesty. The peace remains tenuous until this minimal condition is met.

The initial regional response to the rapidly unfolding crises in Fiji and the Solomon Islands was widely perceived as weak and ineffectual, and perhaps complicated because the Forum secretariat is based in Suva. In contrast to the Forum's inaction, the Commonwealth sent its secretary general, Don McKinnon, to lobby for the release of the captive government. Once the hostages had been freed, Australia, New Zealand, other Commonwealth countries, and the European Union cranked up diplomatic pressure and rhetoric about the need for a speedy restoration of constitutional democracy in Fiji, the holding of democratic elections, and for Speight and his men to be held to account for their actions. The Commonwealth formed a Ministerial Action Group, which sent a mission to Fiji and later appointed a special envoy to continue their campaign to restore democracy and promote national unity there. The European Union and the Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific group also sent a fact-finding mission to Fiji and the Solomon Islands. A final decision on sanctions had not been made by the end of the year.

Soon after the hostage crisis was over, Australia and New Zealand jointly developed and instituted a series of what have been termed "smart sanctions" against Fiji. These were targeted to damage the regime rather than inflict additional pain on the poor, who were already suffering from the economic fallout of the coup. Australia recalled its high commissioner, terminated non-humanitarian aid (which equaled 30 percent of the aid program), suspended military cooperation, and banned sporting contacts. Cooperation under the Australia-Fiji Trade and Economic Relations Agreement was also suspended, but Australia continued assistance to the Fiji clothing industry under the transitional SPARTECA-TCF scheme once the interim government agreed to hold elections in March 2002. That assistance would also be jeopardized if the interim government disregarded a decision by the Fiji courts that the 1997 constitution still stands (Downer 2000).

In the year under review many regional media commentators and politicians began to question the future role and viability of both the Pacific Islands Forum and the Melanesian Spearhead Group if they proved incapable of coordinating strategies to resolve regional conflicts. The main activity on the part of the Forum was a flurry of meetings throughout the year to discuss better ways of coordinating effective regional responses to political and security crises. In the first instance, an academic was commissioned by the Forum Secretariat to analyze the nature and causes of internal conflicts in regional nations and to make recommendations on ways in which the Forum could pre-

vent conflict breaking out or, failing that, play a timely role in brokering peace.

In his report, Ron Crocombe concluded that “the main instances of overt conflict in the past twenty years have involved a combination of ethnic tensions (whether among Pacific Islanders or between Islanders and immigrants), land disputes, economic disparities and a lack of confidence in government’s ability or willingness to solve the problems.” He maintained that economic problems and poor quality governance are frequently the trigger for ethnic tensions and land disputes. Overall, he argued that these issues merit more attention well before a security breakdown occurs, but governments tend to avoid addressing them directly because they are politically “sensitive,” while potential solutions are complex and slow to produce results. Crocombe observed that there was usually little scope for preventive diplomacy in internal conflicts because governments to date have been reluctant to invite external involvement until after a conflict has erupted. Apart from supporting long-term national efforts to improve social welfare and equity, he therefore emphasized the scope for the Forum to facilitate conflict resolution (Crocombe, 2000).

The Forum Regional Security Committee met in Port Vila from 13 to 15 July and accepted many of Crocombe’s assessments. They also developed numerous practical recommendations for conflict resolution and forwarded them for consideration at the annual Forum heads of government meeting. Forum economic ministers also met from 24 to 25 July, in Niue, where discussions included calls

for greater community consultation on economic reform, the institution of policies to minimize economic disparities, and attention to unresolved land issues. All of these measures were proposed with the aim of preventing political unrest of the kind recently witnessed in the region. The Forum Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting was held in Apia from 10 to 11 August to discuss assistance for post-conflict resolution efforts and economic recovery in Fiji and the Solomon Islands. The meeting also considered ways to augment the 1997 Aitutaki Declaration by the adoption of guidelines and mechanisms to act on requests for assistance in a crisis where Forum principles have been violated. Like the Forum Regional Security Committee, the foreign ministers recommended to the Forum meeting that leaders commit themselves to a number of fundamental principles and courses of action with respect to regional security (PIF 2000).

In a speech in September, Forum Secretary General Noel Levi presented a synthesis of the collective views of Forum members on regional conflicts that deplored the use of force to bring about change in governments, sought the restoration of constitutional democracy, asked the international community to respond in ways that did not penalize innocent victims—including other Forum countries that use Fiji and the Solomon Islands as transshipment ports—and expressed a desire to support the efforts of Fiji and the Solomon Islands in returning to democratic government and normalcy through close cooperation and consultation. Nevertheless, he maintained that the Forum should “essentially leave it to Fiji and the Solomon

Islands to resolve their crises.” This last point was reinforced later in the speech, when Levi concluded that the Forum’s “strength lies in its consensus decision making philosophy and its non-interference in members’ internal domestic affairs principle” (Levi 2000, paragraphs 11, 20). This approach has the merit of constraining bigger powers like Australia from imposing their agenda; however, the ASEAN experience has shown that consensus and noninterference foster a reluctance to address sensitive issues and thereby hinder multilateral security initiatives.

By the time heads of government met at the annual Forum, held in Tarawa 27 to 30 October, a tenuous peace had been established in the Solomon Islands thanks to the Townsville agreement. Regional leaders therefore restricted themselves to congratulating parties to the agreement and urging the international and regional communities “to give the peace process every encouragement including by contributing to Solomon Islands’ urgent security, rehabilitation and development needs” (PIF 2000). By contrast, in Fiji the situation was far from being resolved satisfactorily. Deposed Prime Minister Chaudhry had earlier pleaded with the Commonwealth, and by extension the international community, not to recognize the interim government, which he identified as being not only illegitimate, but as promoting a racist and undemocratic agenda (Chaudhry 2000). Tupeni Baba made a similar appeal to the Forum and asked members to collectively lobby for reinstatement of the 1997 constitution and formation of a government of national

unity comprising parties from across the political spectrum (Baba 2000). Instead, in the Forum’s final communiqué, leaders “welcomed the effort and commitment to date by the Fiji interim government to return the country to constitutional democracy.” This limited statement was not accompanied by any inducements or sanctions to exert influence on the interim government of Fiji.

After being absent from the previous two Forums, Australian Prime Minister John Howard evidently considered the deterioration in regional security warranted his input at the Tarawa Forum. Australia presented a series of proposals with respect to regional security, including a major extension of the Pacific Patrol Boat program. Australia also tabled a proposal to restrict the possession and build-up of arms in the Pacific and recommended that a task force be established to draft national weapons control legislation. Significantly, Australia called for closer cooperation with the Commonwealth Secretariat, which, in keeping with Australia’s own policy, had been more assertive than the Forum in pressing for the restoration of democracy in Fiji. The Commonwealth has a staged process for suspending the participation of members if they violate democratic principles. Fiji’s membership lapsed after the 1987 coups because it became a republic, and it was not readmitted until 1997 following the adoption of a democratic constitution. After the 2000 coup it was suspended from the Commonwealth Council. It is likely Australia wanted to see similar procedures introduced in the Forum, but Melanesian resistance,

including fierce lobbying by Fiji, ensured this did not eventuate (*PNB*, Nov 2000, 1–3).

Leaders at the Forum acknowledged the urgent need to address the fundamental causes of political instability in the region—identified by Crocombe as ethnic tension, inequity, poor governance, and land disputes—though they added “the erosion of cultural values” as another contributing factor. They also sought the development of long-term peace-building programs in the region to address potential threats to security and called on the Commonwealth and the United Nations to assist in this regard, but the nature of such programs was unspecified. In recognition of the broader need for a mechanism to respond in a timely and effective fashion to future political and security crises in the region, leaders adopted the Biketawa Declaration, which was the culmination of reports and recommendations made during the year by Crocombe, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Forum Regional Security Committee, the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting, and the Forum Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting, and was a framework strongly advocated by Australia.

The key guiding principles of the Biketawa Declaration include commitments to good governance; liberty of the individual; democratic processes that reflect national and local circumstances; equitable economic, social, and cultural development; and protecting indigenous rights, values, and traditions. (The last item was added at the urging of Fiji.) On the one hand this was an uncontroversial statement reaffirming principles the

Forum has expounded many times in the recent past. Yet it also represents the continuing and uneasy juxtaposition of democracy and human rights with the cultural relativist qualification that these are subject to interpretation and modification in keeping with indigenous perspectives. This will always constitute a tension in the outlook and deliberations of Forum members, especially between Australia–New Zealand and the Forum island countries. There is a widely held reluctance among Islanders to emphasize the upholding of democracy at any cost because it is perceived as potentially detrimental to indigenous rights, particularly in countries with major immigrant communities. For this reason it was difficult to coordinate strong regional condemnation, much less collective sanctions, in response to successive coups in Fiji.

In addition, the Biketawa Declaration outlined courses of action to be pursued in response to an impending or actual crisis in a member nation. In consultation with the Forum chair, the secretary general would assess the situation and consult national authorities and Forum foreign ministers. The secretary general would then undertake one or more actions to resolve a crisis: prepare a statement by Forum members, create a ministerial action group, mount a fact-finding mission, convene an eminent persons group, provide third-party mediation, support conflict resolution mechanisms, convene a meeting of the Forum Regional Security Committee, or ministers, and, if all of these fail, convene a special meeting of Forum leaders to consider unspecified “targeted measures.” In effect, the Forum proposed a pro-

cess for responding to crises in member nations very similar to that of the Commonwealth, the United Nations, and the Africa Caribbean Pacific group of the European Union, although the Forum's plan does not include explicit reference to punitive sanctions. Whether the Forum plans to duplicate actions by other regional or international organizations, whether it seeks to supplant them, or, if not, how an approach could be coordinated among such entities with respect to conflict resolution, remains unknown.

The deteriorating security situation in Melanesia was not restricted to Fiji and the Solomon Islands. In an impassioned gesture defying political reality, indigenous West Papuans issued a declaration of independence at their Second Papuan People's Congress held from 29 May to 4 June in the territorial capital of Jayapura in West Papua (Irian Jaya). It was forty years since the first congress had declared independence at the time of Dutch decolonization. Attended by 3,000 people, the congress in 2000 included Melanesian participants from all over the territory as well as representatives from the central government and provincial administration, Papuan leaders living in exile, and supporters of the guerrilla-based Free Papua Movement (OPM). The congress emphatically rejected the 1962 New York Agreement made by Indonesia, the Netherlands, and the United Nations and the subsequent dubious referendum known as the 1969 Act of Free Choice that sealed their fate as a province of Indonesia. They asked that the United Nations review the legitimacy of these historic processes

and reinstate West Papua as a non-self-governing territory on the agenda of the UN Decolonization Committee.

In discussions of the preferred political status to be pursued, West Papuans at the congress were unanimously opposed to autonomy or any form of continued association with Indonesia. Radical groups called for immediate independence and the establishment of a provisional government in exile, whereas the moderate majority favored gradual moves toward independence through peaceful negotiation with Indonesia and international mediation. The voices of moderation won out for the time being and they predominated in the Presidium Council, which represents the nationalist movement and lobbies for its aims. The congress chose symbols for the new state, including "My Land Papua" as the national anthem, the mambruk bird as an emblem, "New Guinea Golden" as the name of a new currency, and the Morning Star as the official flag (*PNB*, June 2000, 1-2).

West Papuans were inspired and emboldened because the post-Suharto Indonesian government had allowed East Timor to exercise its right to self-determination in a UN-monitored referendum and ultimately respected the outcome, which set the territory on a transition to independence. They were given further cause for hope by newly elected President Abdurrahman Wahid, who chose to welcome the new millennium in their territory by making two unprecedented concessions: recognizing the name Papua and allowing the nationalist Morning Star flag to be flown alongside the Indonesian one. In keeping with his belief in

human rights, Wahid demonstrated a willingness to allow public debate in West Papua over their future political status within the Republic of Indonesia. He therefore gave his approval for the congress to take place. At this point Jakarta's policy of reform, tolerance, and cooperation toward West Papua began to unravel.

Wahid rejected the congress's declaration of independence saying it was not in line with understandings he had reached with the Presidium over the scope and outcome of the proceedings. Wahid then proposed to Indonesia's national parliament that West Papua be granted autonomy but not independence, and this policy was adopted by the assembly (MPR) on 8 August. However, Wahid's overall liberal approach was not shared or supported by other elements of his government, such as Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri and, perhaps more important, the armed forces (TNI). They were no doubt of the view that any concessions to the nationalists would merely encourage demands for independence, and this perception was to some extent vindicated. Whereas West Papuans saw the final outcome in East Timor as a welcome precedent, the military and other Indonesian nationalists saw it as the first crack in Indonesia's territorial integrity—one they did not want repeated in West Papua, Aceh, or anywhere else.

Indonesia's national interest in retaining West Papua is clear. The province accounts for almost one quarter of Indonesia's land mass and is three and a half times bigger than Java, which is home to 60 percent of the national population. It is rich in natural resources, including vast tracts

of timber. The Freeport mine, which boasts the world's largest reserves of copper, earned \$330 million in tax revenue for Jakarta in 1999 alone. The territory also hosts 900,000 transmigrants from elsewhere in Indonesia, who now constitute nearly half the population of 2.2 million. The same reasons explain the West Papuans' determination to cut their ties with Indonesia, as they have experienced political, social, and economic marginalization in their own land.

The armed forces' response to the Papuan declaration of independence was to increase their military presence in the latter half of the year. Normally several thousand military personnel are based in West Papua. In August, directly after Indonesia's rejection of independence, an additional 6,500 were sent to the territory, and later police mobile brigades were dispatched from Jakarta. A new naval base for 3,000 marines is also planned for West Papua. Most ominously, the armed forces are supporting the creation of anti-independence militia in West Papua, such as *Satgas Merah Putih* (Red and white task force). This development is alarming from a human rights perspective, as TNI-armed anti-independence militia in East Timor engaged in a campaign of terror during 1999, causing the death of at least a thousand people and the flight of over 200,000 refugees. Pro-independence activists have formed their own militia, *Satgas Papua*, while OPM guerrillas have been reorganizing and training, albeit with very few arms (PNB, Aug 2000, 12).

By October the military was hardening its position that a separatist movement could not be tolerated in

the territory, and they reinstated the ban on the Morning Star flag thereby provoking massive unrest and sporadic violence by West Papuans. On the eve of 1 December, when West Papuans were to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of their unilateral independence declaration, the military cracked down on the nationalists. Four leading members of the Presidium Council were arrested on charges of subversion, including the chairman, Theys Eluay, while a fifth was arrested a few days later. For the first time since the climate of reform began in 1998, the right to hold political rallies was denied. Detention of the leaders, who were advocates of a peaceful campaign for independence, prompted a backlash against Indonesian authorities and settler communities by West Papuan militants. As the month progressed the authorities banned independence organizations, shut down their offices, and arrested hundreds of militants; more people were shot for raising the banned flag. There were unconfirmed reports of deaths in custody. By the end of the year scores of people had been killed on both sides of the ethnic divide.

Less than a year after his unprecedented political concessions to West Papua were announced, President Wahid visited the territory again to redraw the bounds of the permissible. He claimed that freedom of speech would continue but action would be taken against any attempts to declare independence. On 31 December he announced a significant new decentralization policy. Not only West Papua, but all of Indonesia's provinces would be granted self-rule and so allowed to retain a far greater share of the profits

from the exploitation of natural resources. The central government would retain control over areas such as defense and foreign affairs and would take a 40 percent share of provincial tax revenues. Clearly this is an attempt to pacify Indonesia's restive far-flung provinces and keep the republic intact, yet international agencies have warned that the momentous policy shift is hasty and ill prepared (*Australian*, 1 Jan 2001, 9).

The sea change in the international community's attitude to East Timor's struggle for self-determination in 1999 fueled hope in West Papua that their nationalist campaign might also receive foreign support. By the end of 2000 they had met with a mixed and somewhat disappointing response. West Papuans looked to Australia, because not only had it championed East Timor's right to a UN referendum, but it also led peacekeeping forces in the conflict-ravaged territory. However, Australia did not view the West Papuan situation as comparable to that of East Timor, and instead maintained that the territory should remain an integral part of Indonesia. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer attempted to justify his country's policy by arguing, "This is not a time in history when we should be starting to redraw the colonial boundaries . . . and to redraw those boundaries now would cause enormous instability. I believe many, many people would lose their lives in a situation like that" (quoted on ABC Radio, PIR, 20 Dec 2000). Papua New Guinea's policy echoed that of Australia, despite its ethnic affinity with fellow Melanesians in West Papua. Australia was keen to repair relations with Indone-

sia after the diplomatic rift over East Timor, while Papua New Guinea was not prepared to risk border tensions with its giant neighbor.

There were signs of solidarity from some Pacific microstates, however, as first Nauru, then Vanuatu and Tuvalu declared their support for the West Papuan right to self-determination. Vanuatu's Prime Minister Barak Sope went so far as to raise the issue at the UN summit in September, where he condemned the United Nations actions in the 1960s as a "mockery to the fundamental principles on human rights and self-determination" (*PNB*, Oct 2000, 1). West Papuans emphasized their historic association with the Pacific Islands, having participated in the founding of regional bodies such as the South Pacific Commission and the Pacific Council of Churches before Indonesia's takeover in the 1960s severed such links. A West Papuan delegation met with Forum leaders during their annual meeting where they did attract some support as reflected in a media statement by President Tito of Kiribati who said, "Personally I have great sympathy for the cause of the West Papuan people, just on the basis of culture alone" (*PNB*, Nov 2000, 6-7).

The Forum's final communiqué on West Papua was a milestone, as it was the first time leaders had issued a statement on the territory. They expressed concern about recent violence and loss of life in West Papua and called on all parties to resolve their differences peacefully with respect for human rights, but stopped short of giving any support for West Papuan self-determination. The statement represented a compromise

between those island leaders who support West Papuan aspirations for independence and those, like Australia, who would rather not have had it on the agenda.

In Bougainville the peace has held since the ceasefire commenced in 1998 but the search for a lasting political settlement continued to be stalled by the fundamental differences over Bougainville's ultimate political status between the central government in Port Moresby and the Bougainville People's Congress (BPC). In December 1999 the congress had presented the government with a submission outlining their preferred framework for a transition to autonomy and later independence. The government then countered in March with their own framework to develop autonomy, which the congress rejected as full of inconsistencies and backtracking on earlier commitments. Most important, the congress argued that Papua New Guinea, with Australia's support, is resisting a transitional process leading to independence. Moreover, the congress maintained that Papua New Guinea was not fulfilling obligations to withdraw military forces from the island; rather, garrisons in Buka and Buin had been strengthened (*PNB*, March 2000, 1).

Leaders from both sides hailed a breakthrough as a result of talks held in September. The Bougainville People's Congress welcomed the government's agreement to consider constitutional changes that would allow a referendum to take place, an organic law on autonomy, and provisions for Bougainville to adopt its own constitution. For its part, the PNG side emphasized the need for a plan on

weapons disposal to be implemented before the proposed bills on autonomy or a referendum could become law. The Bougainville Revolutionary Army's continuing response was that they refuse to surrender arms until all the remaining political issues are resolved, notably a clear commitment to a deferred referendum. Despite signs of progress, Papua New Guinea was still sending conflicting signals. On the one hand government negotiators (at these and earlier talks) had seemingly agreed to a process that would allow a referendum to eventually take place on Bougainville's political status. On the other, just prior to the talks Prime Minister Mekere Morauta had publicly announced his opposition to secession or a referendum (*PNB*, Sept 2000, 1).

It appears that Port Moresby's resistance to a referendum prevailed, with no movement by the central government on the key issues by the end of the year. The parliament then went into recess until July 2001 to avoid a no-confidence vote against the government, thus removing any opportunity to legislate on Bougainville's future in the short term. This points to a related obstacle to reaching a political settlement, namely the frequent changes in government in Papua New Guinea. In another setback, Sir Michael Somare, the minister for Bougainville, was sacked by the prime minister on 19 December over internal political differences. As principal government negotiator, and a person generally held in high regard by the people of Bougainville, Somare's dismissal diminished prospects for continuity and progress in the peace talks. The final negotiations for the year, due to

resume on 27 December, were postponed until January (*Australian*, 20 Dec 2000, 7). In view of ongoing negotiations and in keeping with the principle of noninterference, Bougainville was not mentioned in the annual communiqué by Forum leaders.

As the review of recent conflicts and Forum deliberations suggests, there has been a profound shift in notions of regional security over the past fifty years. In the aftermath of World War Two, many Pacific Island territories were recovering from hostile occupation and from the use of their land and seas for devastating battles. This experience was to reinforce the message conveyed by the west that the principal threat to security was posed by hostile foreign powers, notably communist states during the cold war. As a result of such traditional security preoccupations, focusing on military threats and the global strategic balance, in the Pacific Islands as elsewhere, other important dimensions of human security were neglected. (Indeed, in this context, western powers endeavored to persuade Pacific Islanders that hosting nuclear tests would ultimately enhance their security.) For an extended period, the Pacific Islands and their metropolitan overseers were also preoccupied with the practicalities of decolonization and the institution of democratic forms of government. As the cold war waned, former colonial powers reinvented as aid donors began to emphasize economic development and good governance as the key to security in the region. Unfortunately, by this time, colonial legacies and other long-term socioeconomic trends had already laid the seeds for contemporary conflicts.

Ostensibly, all the principal political and security crises in the Pacific can be explained and understood as ethnic conflicts. In the 1980s, violence flared in New Caledonia due to the conflict between the indigenous Kanak and the immigrant French settler communities. In West Papua, as in New Caledonia, ethnonationalism is exacerbated because the immigrants' presence and privileges are underwritten by a colonial power. In Fiji in 1987, and to a lesser extent in 2000, widespread indigenous support for the coups could be explained by a belief that the immigrant Indian community threatened indigenous Fijian interests. Although the ten-year war in Bougainville was between Melanesians, it could also be construed as an ethnic conflict, given the ethnonationalist ideology of the secessionists who see themselves as ethnically distinct from the rest of Papua New Guineans. Similarly, the conflict in the Solomon Islands was between fellow Melanesians, but the two warring sides ethnically identified with their respective islands of origin, Malaita and Guadalcanal.

Nevertheless, to identify the recent conflicts as inevitable clashes of ethnicity is simplistic and offers little by way of a solution. In the conflicts to date, the sheer numerical weight of immigrants alone could have been enough to cause concern on the part of the original inhabitants. However, ethnonationalism was in all cases mobilized and aggravated by long-standing grievances over perceived and actual political, social, and economic disparities, both within and between ethnic groups, and by disputes over the alienation or lease of

land. An exclusive focus on ethnicity fosters the misleading conclusion that future conflicts will be restricted to territories with substantial immigrant communities. Yet ethnically uniform microstates are also vulnerable to political unrest provoked by a range of socioeconomic and political concerns unless governments take timely preventative action. No island community is immune to the ramifications of urban drift and globalization. For that reason, as the following analysis suggests, it does not follow that political and security problems will be restricted to Melanesia.

In New Caledonia the Kanaks were shifted from the most fertile land onto reserves where they were left to pursue a marginal "traditional" lifestyle. By contrast, the French settlers established lucrative ranches or nickel mines, or dominated the modern economy of the capital. The British adopted a similar policy in Fiji, with the supposedly benevolent aim of preserving Fijian culture. The end result was a dichotomy "between a cash-and-skills poor though land-rich indigenous minority and a land-poor though cash-and-skills-rich migrant majority" (Tarte, personal communication 2001). In the Solomon Islands a combination of colonial policy and wartime basing decisions saw Guadalcanal attract a massive influx of people from Malaita. They displaced the traditional landowners and came to dominate in commerce and politics, not to mention the police force. In terms of colonial legacies, two cases were affected adversely by the arbitrary borders drawn up by colonial powers. West Papua and Bougainville had both sought independence prior

to their incorporation into Indonesia and Papua New Guinea respectively. Their ethnonationalist predisposition was later revived and reinforced, in large part by the capital's exploitation of their natural resources and despoliation of the environment. Once again, their grievances were compounded by the arrival of skilled immigrants who dominated the modern economy.

This brief overview demonstrates that socioeconomic marginalization, albeit of varying kinds and degrees, was a major factor in producing the resentment that in these cases was directed against the "other" ethnic group. (Although in Fiji, conflict is increasingly manifest between groups within the indigenous community.) Such practical grievances, complex and deep rooted as they are, can be addressed by national governments with the support of aid donors and of the regional and international community. However, such efforts will need to go well beyond or even require rethinking of recent aid donor preoccupations with eliminating patron-client practices, slashing the public sector, promoting free markets, privatization, and the like. Recent discussions at the Forum and the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting indicate an awareness of the need for new approaches, including greater public consultation over economic policies and more attention to insulating communities from the repercussions of globalization and economic reform.

Due to sensitive cultural connotations, addressing the grievances of traditional landowners and current occupants of land poses an even greater public policy challenge. In Fiji, majority indigenous land ownership is pro-

ected under the existing constitution and a political solution has more to do with education about such rights and the negotiation of policies to enable the productive use of the land by citizens of all ethnic groups. In cases where the land was alienated one or more generations ago, solutions can only be achieved through government consultation with all stakeholders. This may include compensation either to the traditional landowners or to the current occupants if some of the land is returned. Given the parlous state of many island economies and government finances, claims for financial compensation cannot be too ambitious if they are to be realized at all. Notwithstanding the time and cost involved in achieving such solutions, once other social and economic problems are ameliorated and ethnic tensions calmed, the land issue could become less volatile and more amenable to a peaceful settlement.

In all the conflicts to date, concerns also relate to a sense of marginalization from political decision-making. This too could be practically addressed throughout the Pacific Islands with civic education and greater participation at local government and grassroots levels. New Caledonia, West Papua, Bougainville, and the Solomon Islands are also exploring various forms of political and economic decentralization as a means of satisfying local desires for greater autonomy. Nevertheless, it is clear that indigenous people in the French and Indonesian territories, and even in Bougainville, conceive of autonomy as merely a stage in the long-term transition to independence. Despite

the view in Paris, Jakarta, and Port Moresby (and, generally speaking, Canberra) that colonial boundaries should not be redrawn to produce ever more microstates, it is unlikely the indigenous people of these territories will be satisfied until they have engaged in an act of self-determination on their political status. Denying this option could well ensure continuing political instability and further recourse to violence.

While acknowledging indigenous concerns over the influence of other ethnic groups, democracy is arguably the best existing system of governance for balancing competing interests and thereby ensuring the protection of minorities and cultural diversity. With regard to the erosion of traditional culture, globalization poses more of a challenge than the continuation of multicultural societies. Apart from being unrealistic, the alternatives of disenfranchising nonindigenous communities or expecting them to leave after generations of residence would disregard basic human rights. Moreover from a pragmatic perspective, any government that saw fit to institute such racist policies would have to contend with the enduring consequences of civil unrest, economic downturn, and diplomatic isolation.

The longer-term grievances described here have been greatly exacerbated by the recourse to terror and violence during these internal conflicts. Certainly the proposal flagged at the Forum to limit weapons in the community may reduce the scale of violence in future conflicts. But given the theft of weapons from security forces in Fiji and the Solomon Islands, not to mention the involvement of army

and police personnel in perpetrating violence, there are grounds for limiting the weapons available to the state as well. Crocombe has also pointed to the need to promote greater integrity on the part of state authorities, not just the security forces but also the judiciary and politicians. For if they do not set an example by respecting the rule of law, this can hardly be expected of the wider citizenry. In the short term all parties to the conflicts will need to lay down arms and commit themselves to a process of genuine reconciliation before interethnic relations can return to a semblance of normality. Regional peace monitors and mediators can facilitate this process. Only then can attention turn to the main tasks of rebuilding trust and envisioning a more inclusive national identity.

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